

Matthew 6:25-35

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[0 : 00] So thank you. Thank you for your welcome. Thank you to Paul and to the elders who are just tremendous friends in Christ.! Let's pray as we come to this particular portion of the Lord's Word.

Father, our prayer is with the psalmist, personally and corporately.

Open my eyes that I might behold wondrous things out of your Lord. Thank you Lord that the Holy Spirit who you have made your home with us, Lord is the same one who brings things out of your Word to encourage us and to direct us, to comfort us, sometimes to rebuke us. Lord, but always to love us and to guide us into all truth.

So Father, we pray that you would use your Word in our hearts this morning. In Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. I don't know about you, I've always appreciated the creativity of what people write on church signs.

You know, the signs outside of churches. From the rural church sign, again across this one, marauding sheep will be our fate if you do not close this gate.

[1 : 22] To the disturbingly ambiguous church sign, we love hurting people. And of course the well known and pleasantly threatening, don't allow worry to kill you, let the church help.

Which brings us to the topic of this morning sermon. We worry, don't we? As Paul was saying, it is a basic part of our fallen nature. Why do we worry? We worry because in the face of something we cannot control, which is the future.

We worry because it seems like we are doing something at least. We are like hamsters on the hamster wheel of life. It will do us no good and likely quite some harm to worry, to get up again into the hamster wheel of worry.

That is where we go. We worry. And as we come to this passage, we can notice something else, I think a tremendous encouragement. The Lord Jesus, who presumably had all kinds of things to speak about, to human beings about, addresses this issue of worry.

If you think about that, worry which consumes none of God's time and attention. It isn't in his nature to worry. And yet it consumes so much of ours.

[2 : 40] The answer to the question, does God care about what you are going through, when you read texts like this, is plainly yes, he does. So three times here, knowing us, he says to us, do not worry.

And why should we not worry? Well, this has been a repeated reassurance of the Sermon on the Mount. Our church has been working through this in Virginia, but you will know it. This is the reassurance.

You have a Father in Heaven who loves you, who knows you, who knows your situation, and he means for you to trust him. So that's the basic message here. Trust your Father in Heaven.

It applies all the way through the Bible that we should remember this. So what reasons do we have to trust him? Well, three reasons and one thing that the Lord gives us to do instead of worrying.

So if you would turn again please to our passage from Matthew 6, it would be helpful. It will be open in front of you. Matthew 6, 25 through 34.

[3 : 47] Three reasons that we have to trust our Heavenly Father and something to do instead of worrying. First, trust your Father because you matter to him more than birds.

25 through 26. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. It's not life more than food, and the body more than clothing.

Our Lord in the immediate context here has been talking about money and the way that people use reputation and even religious piety to give them their value. And now he's telling them not to worry

about their stuff.

It's funny, it's not just a first century issue, isn't it? Don't reduce your life, Jesus is saying to people in the 21st century also, to simply the business of getting food and acquiring clothing and other items.

After all, it would be a very strange person who, when you ask them to show you what they value most in life, takes you to their fridge and says, these pork chops mean more to me than anything else I have.

[4 : 59] Or took you to their wardrobe and say, you know, my life wouldn't be living, worth living, without these trousers. No, life, your life, the life that God has given you, full of worship and friends and family and nature and exercise and sport and art and good endeavours, all God's abundant kindnesses to you cannot be maintained through a prism of worry.

Our Lord is telling us, don't focus all your emotional attention on having to get and to keep those things. Your Father knows what you need, hold on to him.

So look at the birds, Jesus says. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

I was out at my mum's on Thursday. She's known in our family as the Francis of Assisi of West Watford. There isn't a creature that comes within the bounds of the Hertfordshire countryside that she hasn't had a desire to feed and to clothe and to rescue.

It's one of her gifts. And I was going into the back garden with her and I was shocked to see all of these wood pigeons, maybe a dozen of them, perched menacingly on her roof, waiting and watching, ready to strike.

[6 : 20] It was like a scene from Alfred Hitchcock. And my mother produces from her pocket peanuts or seeds for the birds and they all of them compliantly fly down to her feet for lunch.

It was touching and illustrative considering our text this morning. But Jesus' point here is not that we should just sit back like the well-kept birds of my mother's and give up the necessary activity of bringing in what he has provided.

After all, we do see birds, don't we? Busy at their work. Even at my mother's. They're busy collecting berries. They're finding food. They're drinking water and bathing. And God is caring for them indirectly. That's the picture here. He makes provision for them as he makes provision for us to work for what he will then provide.

And what birds don't do, Jesus says, is sow a crop or harvest it or store it in barns. They don't put away food for future use.

They don't appear to spend much time worrying about storage and future consumption. Squirrels do that, but they're creatures of less faith and honour who don't get a mention in the Bible.

[7 : 33] So, the birds do this, the implication is because even in their activity, they're trusting their Creator implicitly.

So, the encouragement here from our Lord is as you buy food, as you cook meals, as you buy clothing, as you look for significant relationships, because that's every bit as important as food, as you pray, as you're tempted to worry. The Lord's encouragement is to stop making this disconnection between his care for the natural world and his care for you.

If your heavenly Father provides for birds, well then how much more will he care for you? And does he do so? Yes, he does. Secondly, trust your Father, because in Christ you are more beautiful to him than flowers.

And here is our world's magnificent series of pictures. Verse 27, which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life?

It's image here is a little bit confusing. Commentators will tell you this, it's a bit of an odd phrase to translate. It's odd because in the original language it can mean either making yourself taller by about 18 inches or making your life longer by about 60 minutes.

[8 : 55] Both are possible, so the likely translation here is metaphorical. Who thinks that by worrying he can add a single cubit to this span of life? And we know now, of course, that worrying will actually shorten your life.

People who are given to chronic worrying, apart from all the maladies it might bring, doctors think it may take at least a decade off your life. So if it's a longer life or a healthier body you want, worrying is not the way to go.

And why are you anxious about clothing, Jesus asks, consider the lilies of the field. The flowers here are described to you, see here, as lilies of the field, which recalls one of the sayings in Isaiah 35, the desert will rejoice and blossom like a lily.

I've never been to Israel, some of you I'm sure have, but I hear this is one of the wonders still in Israel, is to see the desert bloom suddenly and in a vast scale into radiant colour.

The desert is rejoicing with flowers, Isaiah says, because it is preparing to see the glory of the Lord.

[10:19] The flowers, Jesus reminds the crowds. Consider the flowers. After all, such glorious flowers don't put much work at putting on their finery.

They don't pick out in the mornings the right colours and then spend time dyeing them. They don't spend hours at the spinning wheel constructing their petals. And yet, as simple as they are, not even Solomon, in all his glory, was arranged like one of these.

Verse 30, But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you?

This is the splendour of the Lord. Consider this, his beauty, which is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the majesty of our God, whose glory is shown at the cross.

It's a picture of beauty and of value in Jesus that we can barely guess at. And yet we are told it is applied to his church, his bride, which is one of the first hints here.

[11:28] So in Isaiah 53, in Psalm 103, it's really a picture of his great grace and mercy to us. That garment that we wear, which is his beauty given to us.

And of course, what is true of his provision for clothing, is true of all of the other ways in which we look for shelter. For those of you who worry about your retirement, for those of you who worry how you're going to make the bills this week, for those of you who worry about protection from illness. And all of these things, we are told, you are covered in the beauty of God's mercy. You matter more to him than flowers, even such beautiful flowers.

So this is an eternal shelter and garment, which even these temporary flowers point to, something God provides for which we cannot work. They are a gift.

Thirdly, trust your Father because you are family to him, and others are not. Verses 31 to 32.

Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear.

[12:40] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. Jesus' command here, notice, is a firm prohibition, because he knows us.

Don't worry, he says. He says it three times. Don't worry. Don't worry. But it's not the prohibition of someone telling you, just stop it. It's if someone telling you, just stop it, will ever address the underlying cause of worrying.

No, this is a prohibition made by someone who is drawing you towards them, embracing you, bringing you closer. Like a father or a mother clutching a child to themselves, or friends hugging in a time of crisis.

That's the way that Jesus is using these, how much more arguments, which are inherently saying, it's better here with me than it is out there on your own.

And so you notice he makes the contrast, he doesn't, with the Gentiles, and with the world in which the church mixes and works. These, these Gentiles, these others, right, the crowd that we used to run with, they're the kind of people we know so well, right, they're our society, our world, our neighbours, our friends, who spend their lives seeking after all these things, which is surely the temptation daily for the church too.

[14:04] And they seek after these things to make them happy. And I suppose it doesn't have to be material things. It could be something that somebody has told himself or herself, this is what I need for me to be happy.

If my children are happy, it could be something that you're worrying about even this morning. Or if I reach that next rung on the ladder at work, well, then I'll be happy.

Or if I get married, or if I have children, or if I live to a ripe old age with my grandchildren, well, then I'll be happy. Or just the common idea, if I don't worry about this, I have no one else looking out for me.

But notice, for those for whom God has placed his love on us, in Jesus Christ, those things don't need to be true. Cast your cares upon him, says Peter, because he cares for you.

And I think one of the difficulties for us in evangelicalism is we agree to that intellectually, but we don't really believe it. This doesn't come automatically.

[15:18] Martin Luther always saw this worry as the opportunity to preach the gospel to himself. I love his letters. He wrote this letter to his friend Jerome Weller in June of 1530.

And he was talking to his friend in the letter about how to counter the devil during times of depression, fear, and anxiety. He writes, when the devil throws our sins up to us and declares that we deserve death and hell, we ought to speak thus to him.

I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? For I know one who suffered and made satisfaction in my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Where he is, there I shall be also. That was his daily answer to worry. Worry. We don't need to do it. Because we have all of these provisions in the Lord that we will but believe us. Believe it. Loves us. So finally, what should we do instead of worrying?

[16:19] Well, these last verses, 33 to 34 here. Trust your Father, because this is his plan for you. I think even in the context of the worry that Jesus knew would assail us daily, he wants us, despite that, to make the habit of trusting him because of common sense and because a sense of the gospel should dominate.

Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. This is common sense, isn't it? I heard John Stott speak on this a number of years ago about just the absolute illogic of worry.

The worry that we commit ourselves to daily that makes no sense at all. This is common sense, he says. If you are worrying today about what will happen tomorrow and it doesn't happen, well, then you're worried once for nothing.

And if you're worrying today about what will happen tomorrow and it does happen, well, you have worried twice instead of once. In either case, your worrying has doubled your trouble.

It's the wrong focus and the wrong activity, so quit worrying. It's a waste of time, if nothing else. Instead, Jesus says, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

[17:40] And all these things, and he means all of the things, right, that we're given to worry about, will be added to you. The battle against worry isn't a one-undone proposition.

It's a daily education in the life of a Christian. And again, I have found that this is one of the ways in which the enemy gets at me. Say, oh, you're still dealing with that. That's so basic, constable.

That's 101 stuff, worry. And yet it's not. The point of such temptations is that we should face them with the gospel and with the promises of Jesus, not pretend to ourselves that we are something we're not.

I think of Martha with Jesus in Luke 10. She's stressed out. She's got a strong sense of hospitality and duty. And Jesus tells her, you're worried.

You're upset, Martha, about many things, but only one thing is necessary. All this other stuff, it will come and it will go. You just need one thing, Martha.

[18:48] Martha, I am that one thing. You likely haven't heard of the 19th century missionary, Alan Gardner. In 1851, after almost 20 years of frustration at mission work, failure in trying to get to the mission field, and when he did, really no fruit, he was finally on his way to what looked like an open door that God was going to bless.

An entirely new territory, right down at the base of South America. But at the last, he was shipwrecked on the way before he could get there, he and his companions, at the very end of the world, Tierra del Fuego.

And he and his companions waited on a beach there for rescue, and they waited, and they waited, but nobody ever came. And Alan Gardner died on that remote beach.

His life, to all intents and purposes, from an outside point of view, frustration and abject failure. However, when they discovered his body, they found his journal next to him.

And on its final page, he'd written from Psalm 34, the young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord do not no good thing.

[20:10] And underneath it, he wrote, I'm overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God. No bitterness, no regret, and no matter what had happened, no worry.

Because at the end of a life of loss and frustration, all he has, what was, what couldn't be taken from him, his one thing. If all the world had forgotten him, he mattered to Jesus.

And if he saw any beauty in his life, he found it only at the end by gazing at the beauty of Christ and his extraordinary blossoming glory on the cross.

And as far as he was from everyone else that this was his safety, that the Father had made him part of his family. And as I was reading this, and I hope that you can see it too, don't you see that's true for you and me?

But no matter what we fail at, no matter what we struggle with, no matter how little it seems we've accomplished, you matter to your heavenly Father.

[21 : 22] And in that is the hope. We're vulnerable creatures, we're prone to worry, yes, if it was up to you and me and what we could do for ourselves, there would obviously be no hope.

And in that case, like the world, we would have every cause to worry. But this is the point, right? You are not. You matter to him.

You have a heavenly Father who knows you and who knows all of your situations. He's not oblivious to them. If you're staring at that gas bill this morning, well, he knows that.

If you're worried about one of your children after a phone call yesterday, he knows that. If you're worried about a matter of illness, he knows that and he cares for you.

He's able to provide for you. You have a Father in heaven who knows you, who loves you. So the Lord Jesus here is reminding you there is nothing you can do to make him love you more or to make yourself more secure.

[22 : 30] There is no need to worry. You are utterly safe in him. So trust your Father. Si' first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

Let's pray. Amen. Thank you.