

Sermon 39, Worry: The Opposite of Faith, Matthew 6:26-34

Hence anything whatever that is sought for the sake of something else, is doubtless inferior to that for the sake of which it is sought; and therefore that is first for the sake of which you seek such a thing, not the thing which you seek for the sake of that other. And for this reason, if we seek the gospel and the kingdom of God for the sake of food, we place food first, and the kingdom of God last; so that if food were not to fail us, we would not seek the kingdom of God: this is to seek food first, and then the kingdom of God. But if we seek food for this end, that we may gain the kingdom of God, we do what is said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." — Augustine

our Lord does not disapprove of it, when one looks after such things in the ordinary way that men do; but only when one enlists as a soldier of God for the sake of such things, so that in what he does he fixes his eye not on the kingdom of God, but on the acquisition of such things. — Augustine

“There are many, who in large issues appear to be endowed with at least a tolerable degree of faith, but who panic at the risk of a shortage in ordinary provisions.” — Calvin *in loc.*

“If we accept the revelation of Jesus Christ that God is our Father and that we can never think of anything He will forget, worry becomes impossible.”--Oswald Chambers

Thomas Aquinas' Outline of Matthew 6:19-34

- I. Do Not Place Your End in Earthly and Unneeded Treasures, vv. 19-24
- II. Do Not Place Your End in Acquiring Necessities, vv. 25-34
 - A. Jesus Forbids Anxieties for Present Necessities, vv. 25-33
 1. Jesus' Main Point: Do Not Worry, v. 25a
 - a) God Commands Proper Forethought, Expressed by Diligent Work
 - b) Four Ways Worry Can Be Sinful
 - (1) When it Takes Temporal Goods as the Last End, Prov. 11:7
 - (2) When it Excessively Pursues Temporal Goods, Eccl. 2:26
 - (3) When the Soul Thinks too much about Temporal Things, 1 Co. 7:28
 - (4) When it Involves Fear and Desperation, 1 Sam. 9:20
 2. Jesus Proves His Point, vv. 25b-33
 - a) The One Who Gave the Greater Things Will Give the Lesser Ones, v. 25b-c
 - b) The One Who Provides for Lesser Things Will Also Provide for Greater Ones, vv. 26-30
 - c) Only Unbelievers Worry, vv. 31-33
 - (1) Worry Is the Error of Unbelievers, v. 32a
 - (2) God's Provision Is the Antidote to Worry, v. 32b

(3) Believers Seek God's Kingdom, Not Mammon's Provision,
v. 33

(a) Believers Seek Complete Subjection to God as End
and Reward

(b) Believers Seek God's Righteousness and Their Own

(c) God Rewards Those Who Seek Him

B. Jesus Forbids Anxieties for Future Necessities, v. 34

1. His Command: Don't Worry About the Future

2. His Explanation: The Present Has Enough Problems

Dan Doriani's Outline of Matthew 6:25-34

- I. Command 1: Do Not Worry About Your Life, v. 25a
 - A. Reason 1: Life Is More than Food and Clothes, v. 25b
 - B. Reason 2: God Cares for the Lower Creation — the Birds; You Are More Valuable than They, v. 26
 - C. Reason 3: Worry Changes Nothing, v. 27
 - D. Reason 4: God Cares for the Lower Creation — Even Lilies and Grass, Short-Lived as they Are; We Are More Valuable, as Even Men of Little Faith Should Know, vv. 28-30
- II. Command 2: Do Not Worry About What You Will Eat, Drink, and Wear, v. 31
 - A. Reason 5: The Pagans (Sensibly) Chase these Things, but Since Your Father Knows Your Needs, You Need Not Chase Them, v. 32
- III. Command 3: Seek First God's Kingdom and His Righteousness, v. 33a
 - A. Reason 6: All the Things the Gentiles Chase Will Be Given to You, vv. 33b-34
- IV. Command 4: Therefore, Do Not Worry, v. 34

My Outline

- I. Don't Worry, Because God Provides, vv. 25-30
 - A. The Nature of Worry: An Excessive Focus on What Could Go Wrong
 - B. The Reasons Not to Worry
 - 1. God Has Already Given Greater Things than Food and Clothes, v. 25b
 - 2. God Cares for Lesser Things than You, v. 26
 - 3. God (Not Worry) Determines the Length of Your Life, v. 27
 - 4. God Adorns Short-Lived Plants; Much More Will He Adorn You, vv. 28-30c
 - C. The Antidote to Worry: Faith in God, v. 30d
- II. Don't Worry, Because You Are Not a Gentile, v. 31-32
 - A. Fatherless Gentiles Live for Food, Drink, and Clothes, v. 31
 - B. Your Father Knows Your Needs, v. 32

- III. Live for God's Kingdom Instead of Worrying About Earthly Goods, v. 33
 - A. The Kingdom Is God's Rule
 - B. The Kingdom Is the Goal of Our Existence
 - C. God Rewards Kingdom-Seekers with Earth's Blessings Too, v. 33b
- IV. Therefore, Do Not Worry About the Future, v. 34
 - A. Let Tomorrow Worry About Itself, v. 34a
 - B. Today's Troubles Are Enough, v. 34b

Proposition: God's children can trust Him: if you simply believe God, then you will not worry!

As you might remember, I have said more than once during this sermon series, "I haven't seen anyone in the congregation commit the sin Jesus is addressing here — at least not in the specific way He's addressing it." But more than one of you has privately confessed to me that you are a champion worrier. Brothers and sisters, we at Harvest need this text, and we need it badly. It speaks to all of us right where we are. We are a bunch of worriers who dwell in the midst of a larger bunch of worriers. A few weeks ago, the *Wall Street Journal* reported,

Nationwide, 17% of college students were diagnosed with or treated for anxiety problems during the past year, and 13.9% were diagnosed with or treated for depression, according to a [spring 2016 survey of 95,761 students](#) by the American College Health Association. That is up from 11.6% for anxiety and 10.7% for depression in [the spring 2011 survey](#).¹

Did you hear that? Almost a fifth of college students in this country have medical-grade anxiety problems, and the number has been rising at 8% annually. If this keeps up, then in 2039 every American college student will have an anxiety disorder!

What does Jesus Christ have to say about anxiety? Don't do it. But though He commands us 3 times to not be anxious, He doesn't stop there. He provides us with abundant reasons that will nourish our faith and keep us from anxious thoughts and worries. The point of this whole section, and what I hope to communicate to you this morning, is this: God's children can trust Him, and if you are a child of God, you need not worry. Believe God, and He will take care of you! If you're not a child of God, then you should be worried — not worried about food and clothing, but about your long-term destiny. What will happen to you when you die? Jesus invites everyone who doesn't know Him to trust Him. That is the cure for anxiety about this life, and the one to come.

I. Don't Worry, Because God Provides, vv. 25-30

The first point to be seen in these verses is that we need not worry, because God provides. In fact, more than that, we see a direct command not to worry. Because you can't serve God and

¹ <http://www.wsj.com/articles/students-flood-college-mental-health-centers-1476120902>

money, then stop worrying about money and the things it can buy. Jesus categorically forbids worrying about what we will eat, drink, or wear. Does that mean that we are allowed to worry about whether an asteroid will strike the earth, or whether our children will get into a good college, or whether the Dow will fall 15 points tomorrow? No! Jesus isn't providing an exhaustive list of things we are not allowed to worry about, and then saying, "But go ahead and worry about anything that's not on this list." That's not the point at all. Rather, Jesus is saying, "Don't worry about anything! As the Son of God, I forbid you to worry."

That's right. Worry is against the law. Worry is a sin in God's sight, just like murder and adultery and cheating on your taxes. Do you believe that?

A. The Nature of Worry: An Excessive Focus on What Could Go Wrong

But here's the difficulty: we use "worry" in two senses, as indeed the original language of this passage did. When you say, "Pastor, there are no hymnals in the front row," and I say, "Don't worry about it," what do I mean? I mean forget it. Don't take any action. Simply let it all go. Either we don't need hymnals in the front row, or for reasons I don't have time to explain it's already been taken care of.

But say we take our children in to get weighed and find that they are significantly below where they ought to be. Alexa gets very distraught over whether the children are gaining weight fast enough, and I say, "Dear, don't worry like this!" What do I mean in this case? Forget all about it? Don't concern yourself in the slightest degree with whether the children are growing like they should? Of course not! As parents, it is our job to make sure that the babies are growing correctly, and if they are not thriving, we need to learn the reason why and correct the problem.

"Worry" is properly used in both senses — both the sense of "legitimate concern about x" and "thinking about x way too much, in a sinful and Godless fashion."

Which is Jesus using here? Is He telling us that to think, "I'll have a salad for lunch" is wicked because it's taking thought? Obviously not. What's wicked is to think, "What if these salads have salmonella in them? Who will I have to take care of my children when I'm dead and gone, killed by salmonella poisoning?" I know some of you tend to think like this. We human beings can easily have a sleepless night worrying about who would be the best person to name as custodian of our children after we die by swallowing a toothpick or being in an airplane crash. That is the kind of worry Jesus forbids — anything which falls under the heading of "an excessive focus on what could go wrong." I daresay that every one of us already knows by experience what sinful worry is and what appropriate forethought is.

B. The Reasons Not to Worry

Well, Jesus gives us four consecutive reasons not to worry. These are really arguments proving that worry is superfluous, unnecessary, something the Christian need not indulge in.

1. God Has Already Given Greater Things than Food and Clothes, v. 25b

The first reason not to worry is that God has already provided us with life and bodies. Did you ask for life? Did you do something good to impress God, who then proceeded to reward you with

life? Of course not! God gave you this life, this body, free gratis. You did nothing to deserve it; you didn't ask for it. You simply got it.

Now we understand instinctively that life is more important than food and the body more important than clothing. Imagine giving God a pair of designer jeans, or an Italian suit. He doesn't have a body. He can't wear such things! Clothing is only important because of the body. Food is only important as a means of sustaining life. If God gave you both life and body, surely it is far less for Him to give you food and clothing for them.

2. God Cares for Lesser Things than You, v. 26

But in the second place, birds are less valuable than you. God thinks you're more important than a bird. By the way, this is why we consider it to be morally acceptable to displace birds and other wildlife for the sake of human activity. Is it legitimate to take the bird into account? Of course. But it is completely illegitimate to say that it is just as valuable as a human being. Not all human enterprises are as valuable as human beings, of course. But many human enterprises are specifically undertaken in order to help human beings have food, water, clothing, housing, and infrastructure. Let's beware that we don't overlook Jesus' clear statement that human beings are more valuable to God than birds are.

But back to Jesus' main point: birds don't use any of the ways of storing for the future that humans have. But God feeds them without that infrastructure. If God feeds a bird, won't He feed you?

Don't take this passage as a warning against storing food or planting crops. It's nothing of the sort. Birds work for their food; they do not sit on a telephone wire and have food fall from Heaven into their mouths. We too must work for our food — and yet it is our working for our food that God makes use of to feed us, just as He makes use of the birds' work to feed them.

3. God (Not Worry) Determines the Length of Your Life, v. 27

Some older English versions have a reference to height here, but really, Jesus is talking about whether you can lengthen your life by worry. The answer, as we all know, is "of course not." Prudent foresight can preserve your life; staying up all night to think about whether there might a burglar creeping across your back porch won't. Ultimately, Jesus is implying, it is God who determines how long your life is. Don't worry; trust God, the giver of life!

4. God Adorns Short-Lived Plants; Much More Will He Adorn You, vv. 28-30c

Well, Jesus goes on to talk once more about plants, and explain how God adorns them. Clothing is not as much a luxury item to us as it was in Jesus' day. But in 1st-century Palestine, people likely had one or two suits of clothes — not 25, or 100, as most of us probably own. We don't worry about whether we will have clothing; if worst comes to worst, a t-shirt is pretty easy to pick up. But in Jesus' day, it was at least possible that the shirt on your back was your only piece of clothing.

Nonetheless, Jesus tells us to look at the flowers and see how beautiful they are. Consider that it is God Himself who clothes them, and that Solomon, the richest man in history, couldn't be any better dressed than the wildflowers by the roadside.

Lilies don't work hard to get where they are; God simply takes care of them. Can't you trust Him for your clothing?

C. The Antidote to Worry: Faith in God, v. 30d

Indeed, it is this theme of faith in God that Jesus pursues all through this section. If you really trusted God, then you wouldn't need to worry. You wouldn't worry, because you would know how trustworthy He is! Only those with little faith worry. Those with lots of faith, Jesus implies, see no need for worry.

So how do you get lots of faith? Is it by trying really hard to believe? No, not at all. Rather, you get more faith by learning more about who God is and how trustworthy He is. That's where faith comes from. Do you have only a little faith? Then study God. Learn about Him. Talk to Him. Find out how trustworthy He is, and your faith will grow by leaps and bounds — and worry will proportionally diminish.

II. Don't Worry, Because You Are Not a Gentile, v. 31-32

A. Fatherless Gentiles Live for Food, Drink, and Clothes, v. 31

Well, Jesus repeats Himself: don't worry! This is the kind of worry that comes to expression in your words. Not just mental worry, but verbal worry is off-limits to the Christian. Why? Because that's how fatherless Gentiles behave!

Who are the "Gentiles"? Non-Jews! But Jesus isn't speaking in ethnic terms here; He's speaking in religious terms. "Gentiles" are anyone who does not know God. Gentiles are anyone who is outside the church, outside the community of faith. That's who "Gentiles" are.

Take a look at the typical magazine rack, whether at the grocery store, the convenience store, or the library. Is a large proportion of it devoted to food, drink, and clothing, or what? Yes, to this day the people who don't know God are obsessed with these three things. But Jesus tells us not to worry about those things.

B. Your Father Knows Your Needs, v. 32

Instead, He says, we need to trust that the Father knows our needs. He said this already, back in v. 8. Do you believe this? Do you trust your Father?

Jesus doesn't say what the Father will do. But think about this, earthly fathers. If you know that your child is genuinely hungry, do you say, "Oh well; I don't care. What's that to me?" Of course not! You provide for your child. And so with our Heavenly Father. The fact that He knows our needs means that He will provide our needs.

Now, some Christians have starved to death. Does that call this promise into question? No. When God knows that we no longer need to live, He will let us die. Sometimes (not very often) He lets His people die of starvation. He never promised that we would not physically die; all He promises is that He will take care of us as long as He needs our services here on Earth. So trust your Father, who knows your needs!

III. Live for God's Kingdom Instead of Worrying About Earthly Goods, v. 33

So one antidote to worry is faith — believing that God will provide. A second antidote to worry is trust in your Heavenly Father, knowing that He loves to give good gifts to His children. Here Jesus gives a third antidote to worry: move your goal. Stop living as if the accumulation of stuff, or physical health and fitness, or freedom from pain is your goal. It shouldn't be! Your goal has to be the Kingdom of God.

A. The Kingdom Is God's Rule

We talked a long time ago, at the beginning of chapter 5, about what the Kingdom of God is. At that time, here's what I said about the Kingdom of God:

The Kingdom of God is already here, and it is still coming. It is dynamic, not territorial; it is a reign, not a place. It is Christ's dominion over those whom He has won back from Satan, and it is a dominion that will be exercised over the entire world one day.

Theologians call it the "mediatorial kingdom" or "mediatorial dominion" of Jesus. It is not only internal, whereby Jesus rules hearts; it is external, whereby He rules lives, and even institutional, whereby He rules the visible church. Does the church belong to the poor in spirit? Yes. Does the rule of Jesus over actions and hearts belong to the poor in spirit? Yes, in two ways: they submit to that rule as kingdom citizens, and they will someday exercise that rule as kingdom possessors. How do I know? Because Daniel says so: "And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Dan 7:27 ESV). What will this look like? I have no idea. But I know that it will happen, because Jesus has promised it.²

Jesus tells us that the solution to worry is to long for the Kingdom. If you seek Jesus' rule, then you will be free from worry. Why? In one sense, because you're trusting your heavenly Father to fulfill His promise that Jesus will reign. In another sense, because you're handing the car keys of your life over to God and saying, "God, I don't have to be responsible for my ultimate destiny any more. You're in charge; take me where you want to go."

B. The Kingdom Is the Goal of Our Existence

But furthermore, we exist for the Kingdom. God created us to glorify Him; God created us to be His subjects, His servants, and His friends. What is a Kingdom without people? Nothing. In this county, Gillette throws its weight around, while Wright has to be content with the leftovers. Why is that? Because Gillette has 15 times as many people as Wright does. In our nation at large, New York and Los Angeles have outsize influence. Nobody wants Orlando bagels, or Seattle films. No! We want New York bagels and Hollywood films. Why? Because those places are big and influential and well-known. When I was in the U.K., people asked where I was from. When I said "Colorado," many asked where that was. I related this anecdote to a college friend from San

² Sermon 3, point III.

Diego, and he said, “When I go abroad, I say I’m from San Diego, and everyone knows exactly where that is!”

A kingdom without subjects is not a kingdom at all. God made you for His Kingdom. You exist to be part of this community that God is building for Himself by rescuing human beings from Satan’s dominion and bringing them under His dominion. God wants you to be part of His Kingdom.

Do you really think that you were made to own fast cars, a big house, and an even bigger TV? That you exist in order to be a consumer? If that’s how you think, then your life will be full of worry and stress. But if you recognize that you were made for God’s Kingdom, then you can relax. You can get rid of unhealthy, unhelpful worry. You can trust that God has it all under control. This doesn’t mean that you should just kick back and never work again. God commands us to work; His Kingdom is a Kingdom of hard-working people. But it is also a Kingdom of rest. He shows that by commanding us to work 6 days and rest 1. He shows that by promising us an eternal Sabbath rest. And He shows that by promising that with the Kingdom Earth’s blessings come along too.

C. God Rewards Kingdom-Seekers with Earth’s Blessings Too, v. 33b

Will striving for the things of Earth guarantee that you get them? No. But seeking the Kingdom does guarantee that God will add to you Earth’s other blessings. Do you need food, clothing, and drink? Of course. God knows that. And He promises to provide it for everyone who seeks His Kingdom.

IV. Therefore, Do Not Worry About the Future, v. 34

So don’t worry about the future, says Jesus. The fact that God provides, that He is your Father and therefore committed to providing for you, and your King and therefore equally committed to providing for you, should free you from all worry about the present. It should also free you from worry about the future.

A. Let Tomorrow Worry About Itself, v. 34a

Let tomorrow worry about itself! In other words, if worrying needs to happen, God will make sure it happens. You don’t need to worry. You don’t need to obsess over what could go wrong tomorrow. Alien invasions are not something you need to worry about. How you’ll pay for daycare if your spouse gets a flesh-eating bacterium is not something you need to worry about. Trust God for now, and for always.

B. Today’s Troubles Are Enough, v. 34b

Why? Because today’s troubles are enough. Jesus knows this. He lived with us, as one of us. The old spiritual declares, “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen.” But Jesus does know it. And He declares that the troubles are too much for us. We don’t need to worry about the next 8,000 days, or the next 4,000, or the next 10. Today has enough troubles of its own.

Can you trust this Jesus? He knows where you live. He knows where I live. And He promises that He and His Father will take care of us. Believe Him. Faith is the supreme antidote to worry. So trust God, really trust Him, and your worries will disappear. Amen.