

**Do Not Worry**  
*Sermon on the Mount*  
By Andrew Wilson

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Good morning. It's really good to be with you remotely. I'm sorry I can't be there in person by either in the warehouse or in the theater. It's really good to be with you even if just on video and we're going to be doing the last in our series on the Sermon on the Mount this morning and if you have a Bible, we're going to be in Matthew 6, Matthew 6, and over the last few weeks we've been in a series on the Sermon on the Mount which is Jesus' sort of epoch-defining speech at the start of his ministry. He said, "This is how the kingdom of God is going to look. This is what the world will be like when God becomes King, and this is my manifesto of the kingdom of God," if you like. And we've been looking at that a bit at a time. We've done it in a slightly funny order so you may have gotten a little bit lost at times in the process but today we're going to be doing the last section of that which we're going to be looking at in Matthew 6:25-34 which is, in my view, one of the most well-known and yet also least understood and least applied passages in the Bible. A lot of people will have heard this stuff, sometimes people if you're not a Christian you may have heard it, but it's actually very difficult to put into practice in normal life and it's a bit, it's just so timely in the context of Christmas and the run-up to all that's the world going crazy over the next couple of weeks, buying things, worrying about things and actually there's a passage about anxiety and possessions and trusting God that we're going to be looking at in the course of this morning's message and it's just such a helpful passage because what it says is so relevant to all of us. If we're followers of Jesus, then we will want in our house to do what Jesus said, but even if we're not followers of Jesus, we're probably going to struggle many of us with anxiety. So if you're someone who you're not a disciple of Jesus at the moment but there are chances are you may well struggle with anxiety about what you will eat and what you will drink and what you will wear and understanding how you're going to have possessions in the future and understanding how that anxiety affects your life and how to respond to it wisely is a really important issue for a good many people who aren't even Christians, and for those of us who are, of course, is significant because Jesus talked about it.

And what happens is, you see, anxiety is like a manifestation of what happens when we become our own god. You see, so if you have a god that you pray to and you trust to provide you with everything, then the responsibility for providing for you rests on his shoulders, not on yours. But as soon as you make yourself your own god, as soon as you become the provider responsible for your needs and your family's needs, anxiety shoots through the roof because you are now the buck stops with you, and put differently,

anxiety is what happens when you pray to yourself. It's basically praying to you. It's, "I am turning over in my head how I am going to resolve this challenge in my life." And that means that in a secular culture like ours, anxiety is a huge problem and it's a much bigger problem than it probably would have been 500 years ago when people had a lot less stuff but they had less to worry about because they trusted a divine being who was going to provide and care for them. In our culture, that's less true so people worry more and that means that the passage we're going to read now is hugely relevant.

So let's read Matthew 6:25-34. This is Jesus speaking,

25 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. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 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, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Now Jesus in a nutshell in this passage, there's a lot of great stuff in here, but in a nutshell Jesus is really telling us not to do three things and then he's telling us to do three things instead, and then he's telling us three things God does. He tells us three things we shouldn't do, three things we should do instead, and then three things that God does which is the underpinning for all the things we're to do, and that probably needs explaining in a bit more detail so we're going to do that, but it's going to be a shorter talk than normal, by the way, so just in another 15 minutes or so just looking at these three things that we're told not to do, told to do, and that God does.

And the three things that Jesus tells us not to do might sound a little bit familiar from having read the passage. The first one in verse 25, do not be anxious; the second one in verse 31, do not be anxious; and the third one in verse 34, do not be anxious. So three times in this passage Jesus says do not be anxious and they're the only things he tells us not to do. Don't worry. Do not worry. Don't worry. Can you hear me at the back? It's that kind of he's really trying to ram home this point, and although that might sound not very helpful and a bit obviously repetitious, the purpose of it is for Jesus to ram home quite how significant it is that you've heard him on this point. Anxiety and trusting your Father

are incompatible. If you are anxious, it reveals, it's not just a problem in itself, it reveals a lack of trust in your Father, and if you trust your Father fully, anxiety gets squeezed out and becomes impossible. So Jesus is trying by repeating it three times to show how much it matters. Don't worry. Don't worry. Don't worry.

Now that for many of us we think, "Well, yeah, obviously I don't want to worry. It's not something to enjoy and lying awake at night going, oh, I'm loving being anxious." I know it can sound therefore like a not very helpful piece of advice, and if that's all Jesus had done, just made a big deal of it and then not told us what to do instead, it would be pretty challenging to respond with any kind of practical wisdom to what he said. But that's not all he does. He says don't worry, don't worry, don't worry, but then gives us three things to do instead which in doing them will make anxiety difficult, if not impossible, and that's the next thing we're going to look at. So the three things not to do are very simple: don't be anxious, don't be anxious, don't be anxious. But what do you do instead? If your mind is tending to anxiety as many of us find, a lot more people struggle with anxiety today, a lot more people taking various medications for it, going on courses for it, experiencing therapy for it, how do you fight it? How do you respond? What do you put in its place? And there's three things Jesus tells us we should do instead of anxiety and here are those three things.

The first one is he tells us to look, verse 26, right? So he said don't be anxious, verse 25. Verse 26, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" Jesus is saying don't be anxious, look. That's the first contrast he wants to draw, looking at the world around you and seeing what God is doing every day on behalf of that which he has made is enormously liberating from anxiety. Jesus is saying, "I want you just to look. I want you to see what it is the Father does all the time, all around you he is doing it every time you tread on a blade of grass, you are standing on something that God has provided for, fashioned, cared for, created with good intentions and with good purposes, and you need to look at a lot of that stuff. You need to be aware of what the Father is doing in the ordinary things of everyday life."

There are 8.7 million species of living creature, that's excluding bacteria and the things you can't really see. So 8.7 million living basically plants and animals and God feeds them all. This is Jesus, Jesus isn't in quite in that number but he's saying, "Just look," right? He's saying this, by the way, not in a warehouse or a theater, he's saying it on a hillside in Galilee where people can see physical grass and physical plants and physical birds flying overhead and he's saying, "Just look around. Look at all that my Father has made and as you reflect on those things and see God providing for them and caring for them and giving them enough and governing the world in which they live and their circle and span of life, as you look at them, you will find your confidence in the sovereignty and the provision and the care of God as a Father for you will increase."

I was in America a couple of weeks ago, as some of you know, and I was in San Diego for two conferences and I don't know what you know about San Diego but one of the

only things I knew before I went there was that there was a really great zoo, a kind of world famous San Diego Zoo they all call it, and it kind of is. So I thought I was one morning when I thought I just need a bit of a break from all of these academic papers, so I went up the road to the zoo and just explored and had a look at these creatures and it was astonishing to just see creature after creature, to look at creature after creature that the Lord God has made, that my Father has made and provided for, and all of the diversity he's created. And I was going over this sort of Skyfari, they call it, this sort of big cable car that goes over the whole zoo. It's a huge place, and as you're riding over it, you're just looking out and you can see plants and trees and things mostly because the animals are under the trees. And then I looked down and I could just see this gorilla who was just sitting down at ground level, it was just looking up at me like this and I was looking down at him and I thought, we do have an awful lot in common here, and as I stared at him, I was just struck in this sort of worshipful moment, "Look at what my Father has created. Look at what he's done." And then a couple of few minutes later, I landed on the far side, I went to see the polar bears and I ended up being the guy which is a great privilege, who had the polar bear suddenly appear and swim over and be about a foot away from me through a glass sheet. Then I walked down the hill and I went and had the same experience with a tiger, which I'm a big fan of because normally the interesting animals in zoos were asleep all the time, lions, tigers, you know, they're all boring and asleep, but on this occasion the tiger again two feet away. And as I was just looking at creature after creature, you know, rhinos and hippos and giraffes and all these things, just looking at the things that the Father has made lifts anxiety from you as you begin not just going to the zoo but actually staring at what God does all the time and thinking God has done this, he has done this, he has done this, is a great antidote to being concerned about what he hasn't done or hasn't done or hasn't done.

So Jesus would say, "Look, don't worry. Look at the things my Father does all the time, whether it's in your life but actually often in the lives of other creatures he's made. Look. Take your eyes off the things he hasn't done and start looking at the things he has done." That's the first thing he tells us to do, look. The second thing he tells us to do is to consider, right? Verse 28, "why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these, 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, O you of little faith?" So he's told them to look, just look at them, just notice what God is doing, but he now tells us to consider them and by that I take him to mean, "I want you to think through the ramifications of the fact that this thing which is so temporary and so basic is being cared for and conclude from that that he will also care for you far much more abundantly because you are worth much more than it is." I think that's what he means by "consider." He's saying don't just look at them, just, oh, great, a tiger, a gorilla, a blade of grass, whatever it might be, no, consider the implications, consider the theology of there being a gorilla or a seagull who is provided for by God. The theology implication is God cares more about you than he does about this because you're made in the image of God and it isn't, therefore if he clothes and if he feeds that, he will certainly also look after you. Consider that. Consider the grass and the plants.

So if you struggle with anxiety, learning to expound creation is helpful, learning to actually be outside and looking at what God's made beginning to consider the theological implications, the things we can deduce about God from the world around us is really important. If you're an anxious person, learning to look at whatever it might be, the washed up jellyfish or the moths or the gorillas or whatever they might be, I don't know, you might not see gorillas in your daily life, most of us probably don't, but as you're just looking at these creatures God has made, don't just see them and think, "Yeah, that's nice," but consider the implications of the fact that God having created and sustained them will far more than those things having created you will sustain you and give you what you need, "O you of little faith." He's trying to wake us up. "Come on, wake up to the reality of how much more you are worth to my Father than that is!"

The Bible doesn't have perhaps our modern political correctness about all creatures being equally valuable in God's sight. Human beings are worth far far more than those other things, far more than grass, far more than, they didn't say gorillas but it's implied, far more than sparrows, far more than all of these creatures. Human beings are the apex, the pinnacle, the high point of God's creation and God says, "You need to know how much more valuable you are than they are so that when you see them being provided for, you will know that you are going to be provided for as well." The person sitting next to you right now, the person to either side of you just for a moment, they are worth infinitely more than any of the other creatures in God's creation because they're humans and they bear God's image and as a result God will care for them.

So don't be anxious, don't be anxious, don't be anxious, instead look, consider, and then finally seek. Verse 33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." So Jesus is not just wanting us just to simply walk around outside looking at the world and absorb the goodness of it. He's also not saying, "I want you just to sit there in a state of zen-like contentment, just not desiring anything, not wanting anything and just going I will be happy with everything I have now and empty my mind of all desire." He's not getting us to do that. He says, "I do want you to desire things. I want you to seek things. I just don't want you to seek the things you're seeking now. You are spending your time, your mental energy seeking after clothes and food and drink. Those things the Father will provide. What I want you to give your attention to, those things are his area of responsibility but your area of responsibility, the things you are to seek are the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and when you do, all this stuff will be added to you as well." You're supposed to be seeking the kingdom of God and God's righteousness so in the situation where you experience a lack, a shortfall, a deficiency, whatever it is, instead of saying, "I don't know how this is going to... I'd better solve this problem. I'd better fix all this." Obviously there is a place for us playing our part, working in a job and making sure that we have enough and all of those things, of course those things are valid but the issue of having anxiety is that our worry, our concern is not to be funneled into the things of the world but instead to say how now might the kingdom of God and the righteousness of God come through this situation.

So if I am lacking finance for such and such, instead of focusing on such and such I say I focus on how is it then that God is going to bring his kingdom and his righteousness in

and through this situation. How do I honor God? How do I see the rule of God come in my life? It may well mean praying immediately for this deficiency to be met but in the meantime while it's not been met yet, there may be many ways in which God wants us and will allow us to honor him and demonstrate the rule of God in our lives and his righteousness in and through the deficiency while saying, "Father, it's your responsibility to fix this need. My responsibility is to pursue your kingdom and your righteousness." And when we do, not only will we glorify God in the deficiency or the lack but we will also find that all of these things are added to us as well.

That's Jesus' statement. Don't be anxious, don't be anxious, don't be anxious, instead look, consider and seek. So he's told us three things not to do and he's told us three things to do instead undergirding both of those and this is where we will finish is the three things God does. It's the goodness of God the Father that undergirds both our lack of anxiety and the things we do instead. So here's the three things Jesus says God does in this passage. Firstly, he feeds in verse 26, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." That's the first active verb used of God, right? God feeds them. God feeds the birds and he will feed you.

Now obviously the main meaning of that in this passage is God feeds the birds with physical food in the same way he will feed you with physical food. But there's another layer to this, I think, when you stand back and look at this from the point of view of the gospel. You see there is something that God feeds us with that is a far higher level than that which he feeds the birds with. He does, birds get food, we get food, but there's a kind of food Jesus gives that is totally different, that's far more permanent and lasting and satisfying actually than the earthly food that people are clamoring for and that the animals get. He feeds us with himself. He feeds us with his own body. He says, "I am not just, Moses," he says in John, "Moses gave you manna from heaven, I am going to give you the bread of life. I am the bread of life and you're going to feed on me, and when you do, you'll never grow hungry." It's not like the seagulls getting their little chip and it's not like you getting your snacks or your meals, it's actually a deeper lasting, more satisfying food and in a moment we're going to break bread together as a church community just to feed again on the bread of life, on the good food that God has given us in Jesus, reconciling us to God by giving us himself.

The second thing God is said to do, he feeds, in verse 30 he clothes, "if God so clothes the grass of the field, how much more will he clothe you." And I'd say the same thing here, the immediate meaning is obviously God clothes the grass and he will clothe you, he will give you physical clothing, but behind that again I think there's another layer of the clothing of God for his people that is far far higher than he gives the grass or the seagulls or the gorillas. There's a clothing in the righteousness of Christ that he gives us. He says, "I am not just going to give you the physical clothing you need, I'm going to give you the spiritual clothing as well. I'm going to wrap you up in my righteousness. I'm going to protect you and preserve you and give my love to you and set my affection on you and make you stand in the right before me, and as I do that, you're going to receive the full blessings of being clothed like Christ in front of God. You are clothed not just physically but spiritually as well. You are far more valuable than birds. There's a clothing

that I'm giving you that I never gave them." And God gives us the clothing that the plants never receive, the righteousness in his Son and, again, as we break bread we're just going to celebrate, "You have given me righteous clothes, Father God. Thank you."

So God feeds, God clothes, and then, thirdly and lastly, God knows, verse 32. God knows. This is the grounds, this is the goodness of God is the grounds for not being anxious and for looking, considering and seeking God's kingdom. God knows, verse 32, "the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all." God is not ignorant of what you need, he's not ignorant to your desperation, he's not ignorant to the cries of your heart that some of you have been uttering this week, "I need this." God isn't deaf to that. It's not like he didn't know about it. God, your heavenly Father, knows your needs and that's the basis for praying the way we do. Jesus says, he's already said it in this series, hasn't he? We looked earlier in this chapter, Matthew 6, a few weeks back, don't heap up phrases like the Gentiles do. God knows what you need so he will give you those things when it's the right time for you to have them.

When God revealed himself to Abraham, I often think about this, Abraham is about to sacrifice his son Isaac and then just as he's about to do it, he finds a ram nearby and he names the place "the Lord will provide," because he's provided a ram for Abraham to sacrifice instead of Isaac. It's a difficult story in several ways but the thing that often strikes me about it is that the ram was already there when Abraham was preparing to kill his son. The ram was in the thicket already. Abraham didn't even realize yet that he needed provision but God had already put provision there nearby so that he could have it when he needed it and that's the way God provides for his children. In fact, even our English word "provide" is made up of "pro," meaning before, and "vides" meaning sees. God sees before. He's aware before we are what we need and he puts provision in place that we may not even need at the time God puts it there but later on in the story we're get to see, "I need this, God," and he says, "I was wondering when you'd ask. Here is that provision that I'm giving to you." God's knowledge is such that his provision anticipates our needs rather than simply responding to them.

So all the things that you're anxious about this week, next month, next year, God knows. He already knows where the provision will come from. God knows. Don't be anxious. Don't be anxious. Don't be anxious. Look. Consider. Seek. And that's because God feeds, God clothes and God knows. We're going to break bread now and the band will come out but I just want to pray for you as they do and we'll celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

*Heavenly Father, thank you so much that you are a God who sees, that you are a God who knows, that you are a God who feeds your people and your creation with good things, with your Son most of all for us, and thank you that you're a God who clothes us in your righteousness as well as in the physical stuff we have. Thank you that there's very very few people in this country and probably in this room as well who are in such physical need that they don't have enough food or clothing today but thank you, Lord, that even more than those things, even where those things aren't necessarily true, you have provided us with the thing that never grows old, from which we will never grow*

*hungry, from which we will never grow thirsty. You have given us Jesus and we are so thankful for that this Christmas as at all times. We praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.*