

FOOD, SHELTER, PANDEMICS, AND FEAR
MATTHEW 6:25-34

We know that as believers we should not be afraid. But when the World Health Organization classifies the Coronavirus as a pandemic and virtually every major sports league suspends its games, including championship series, universities move to online only classes, school districts extend spring breaks, and at least two states and the city of FW are recommending or even banning gatherings larger than 250 people, and the stock market has massive falls that precipitate mandatory stoppages in trading, then you think, “like a runaway truck bearing down on me, maybe I really *should* be afraid...”

If you worry (and maybe you aren’t worried about Coronavirus, but you are worried about your next paycheck, or your children, or an economic crisis, or the election in the fall, or your upcoming visit to a medical specialist to talk about a mysterious problem) — Jesus has a word for you in **Matthew 6:25-34**. In fact, this passage complements the passage that preceded it. In **6:19-24**, Christ addressed the rich who were tempted to trust in their wealth; in this passage, Christ addresses the disciples who were tempted to doubt their God.

DO NOT WORRY...BUT PURSUE CHRIST AND CHRISTLIKENESS.

Why is that statement true? Why should we not be anxious? Hear Jesus’ words. He gives us eight reasons why we should not engage in worried thinking (and those reasons also tell us *how* we are able not to worry)...

Premise: Do Not Be Anxious

How to Approach This Passage

1. Do Not Be Anxious Because Life is More than **BODILY** Needs (v. 25)
2. Do Not Be Anxious Because You Are More **VALUABLE** than God-Fed Birds (vv. 26)
3. Do Not Be Anxious Because Anxiety Accomplishes **NOTHING** (v. 27)
4. Do Not Be Anxious Because Anxiety is **UNBELIEF** (vv. 28-30)
5. Do Not Be Anxious Because Anxiety is **UNBECOMING** (vv. 31-32a)
6. Do Not Be Anxious Because Your **FATHER** Knows Your Need (v. 32b)
7. Do Not Be Anxious Because There is One Great **PRIORITY** in Life (v. 33)
8. Do Not Be Anxious Because God Will Give You What You **NEED** — Today *and* Tomorrow (v. 34)

DO NOT WORRY...BUT PURSUE CHRIST AND CHRISTLIKENESS.

PREMISE: *Do not be worried* is a 3-fold command (vv. 25, 31, 34), so it is the passage's central message.

- ✓ *do not be worried* = to think about something to the point that it distracts one from other things.
- The sin is not in thinking about situation (Lk. 16:1-13); the sin is being *consumed* with the circumstance to the point we are distracted from God-given purposes.

DEFINITION: "Worry is the sin of distrusting the promise and providence of God...Worry is the opposite of contentment, which should be a believer's normal and consistent state of mind...(Phil. 4:11-12; cf. 1 Tim. 6:6-8). A Christian's contentment is found in God, and only in God — in His ownership, control, and provision of everything we possess and will ever need." [MacArthur]

- Here's the problem: worry is a sin because it demonstrates distrust in God and an over-dependence on myself ("I am responsible; I'll do it").

"Of course, many people *like* to worry, like the guy who has the plaque in his office, 'If you can keep your head when all around are losing theirs, it is obvious you that you don't understand the situation.'"

- ✓ That Jesus says this 3x means that it is a *very* real temptation — in fact, **Do not** means "Stop being anxious" (they already *are* anxious). There is a line between careful thought and planning and worry, and too often too many of us cross that line and excuse it as "stewardship..."
- ✓ That Jesus says this 3x means that it is a *very* real command — and all God's resources are available.
- ✓ It is possible to eliminate worry. How?

HOW TO APPROACH THIS PASSAGE —

- ✓ **Examine yourself:** Jesus asks questions 8 questions in this passage — these questions invite self-examination. Is this the condition of *your* heart?
- ✓ **Renew your mind:** the reason we worry is that our minds are not conformed to Christ. What Jesus gives in this passage is a new way of thinking about God and life that will change the way we live.
- ✓ **Meditate on God:** As we proceed, notice the various references to the character and person of God. To combat worry, have a true and great view of God and His person. One person said it well on Twitter this week: "Our panic around this virus and other matters of real alarm stems from the fact that we have no control, no known measure to fully protect ourselves. I want to remind you that it's okay to feel not in-control when the one who loves you most is in total control."

1. Do Not Be Anxious Because Life is More than **BODILY** Needs (v. 25)

- When Jesus says **for your life** in v. 25 he defines it as **food** and **clothing** — sustenance and protection
 - ✓ In vv. 19-24 Jesus addressed those who worried by wanting more of what they already had.
 - ✓ In vv. 25-34 Jesus addressed those who worried by wanting “enough” of what they didn’t have.
 - ✓ Both kinds of worry are sin — worry from affluence and worry from deprivation (Prov. 30:8-9).
 - ✓ Both betray a false priority that says food and clothing is the focus of our existence.
 - ✓ Remember the circumstance of those living in Palestine at that time:

“Most of the people in the ancient world lived like members of the third world today. Laborers were paid every day because they needed the money to live the next day. The government gave them no security. They had no safety net. Some estimate that the average citizen in Palestine paid at least forty percent of his wages in taxes. Times may be hard today, but they were concrete tough then. Yet to people then and now, Jesus said, ‘Don’t worry.’” [Robinson]

- ✓ When Jesus says, **do not be worried about your life** He makes us understand that worry is ultimately a fear of death — if I don’t get this **food...clothing**, I’ll die! But life is more than food and clothing; there is a greater worry:

Luke 12:4-5 “I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!”

- ✓ This fear about life and death is what is being revealed in the current panic — “if I don’t get this hand sanitizer/case of water/ bottle of bleach...” I will die!”
 - People who reject God are having their fear of death exposed.
 - Many years ago I was on a flight talking to a “Jewish atheist.” He as adamant in his rejection of God...We were about to land when the pilot suddenly turned the nose up and gave it full power. My atheist friend became quiet. The pilot eventually explained that the visibility was too low to land and we were diverted. I asked my atheist friend if he was ok. “No.” “I noticed you got quiet.” “I was praying.” “To whom were you praying? I thought you were an atheist?” “To anyone who would listen...” A small “trial” exposed his fear about death. And we are observing a world that is not ready to die and terrified to die. They do not realize that life is more than this world and the food and clothing they have — until they are faced with possibility of death.
- ✓ **Jesus’ Q** in v. 25 — **Is not food...** is designed to expose our belief system and our values. We do what we do (fear and anxiety) because we want what we want (food and clothing) because we believe what we believe (life is temporal and not eternal and I don’t need to worry about eternity). Pandemics expose the folly of the belief system that food and clothing are ultimate.

2. Do Not Be Anxious Because You Are More VALUABLE than God-Fed Birds (vv. 26)

- **Look** = “Be attentive, consider.” Draw out theological implication and application of what you see in the world around you. Instead of thinking about problems, think about the birds...
 - ✓ **do not sow** = they gather food, but they aren’t involved in any kind of farming process, like we are. God feeds them; *He has not abandoned them and they do not worry*. I have a dog and cat that nag and beg for food; but they aren’t worried about it.
 - ✓ Jesus is *not* saying, “Don’t work for your food, God will provide.” He is not saying that we don’t have to be responsible. He is *not* saying that we should not plan and prepare and work. “What Jesus forbids is neither thought, nor forethought, but anxious thought.”
 - ✓ What Jesus’ hearers and we are to think of was the work of **your heavenly Father**. He is not the Father of birds. God is *creator* of birds, not Father. He *is our* Father — and that gives us **worth**.

It is fundamental to remember, “no bird is created in the image of God or recreated in the image of Christ. No bird was ever promised heirship with Jesus Christ throughout all eternity. No bird has a place prepared for him in heaven. And if God gives and sustains life for birds, will He not take care of us who are His children and who have been given all those glorious promises?” [MacArthur, 422.]

- ✓ **are you not more...** expects, “YES!” If He cares for the lesser, will He not care for the greater?
- ✓ **This Q** Jesus asks examines what we value and whether we believe God values us as His children. Not only do we go to Him as “Daddy” (**Rom. 8:15**), but He also comes to us as “Daddy” (**Mt. 7:9-11**).
- ✓ If He does the greater (giving life), will He not do the lesser (giving clothes)? YES! (**Rom. 8:32**)

3. Do Not Be Anxious Because Anxiety Accomplishes NOTHING (v. 27)

- **who...can add a single hour...** = Expects the answer, “No one!”
- **hour** = lit., “cubit” — a physical measurement of about 18 inches. Who can add any height to his body (requiring added time) or length to his lifespan? No one. Worry never adds length or substance to life.
- God holds the exact moment of our birth and death in his hands. We need to be wise (**Ps. 90:12**), but we understand that the exact timeline of our lives is controlled by the Lord. That doesn’t mean we won’t get sick and won’t die. Unless we are raptured, we *will* die. But it does mean that as followers of Christ we don’t need to be anxious about our death and don’t need to act as if we are sovereign over our lives.

- **Ps. 31:15** *My times are in Thy hand; Deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.*
- **Ps. 139:16** *“Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.” [Psalm 139:16]*
- **Eccl. 9:9** *Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.*

“Most of us worry because of our pride. We think we ought to be big enough to handle any situation that comes, and we are too proud to ask for God’s help. We think we ought to be able to accept and bear everything by ourselves. That is not what the Word of God demands. The Word of God asks us to recognize our inability and to transfer any burdens to One who is able.” [Pentecost]

- ✓ **Jesus’ Q** addresses the desire for control: “Am I supposing that I am sovereign, or am I willing to trust the only One who *is* sovereign?” The anxiousness we see around us is an indication that people realize that they are not in control of their lives and they don’t know where to turn.
- ✓ **PRINCIPLE:** Don’t desire and worry over things as if your desires and your anxiety will enhance and lengthen life. Anxiety cannot deliver what it promises to give.

4. Do Not Be Anxious Because Anxiety is **UNBELIEF** (vv. 28-30)

- This is the center section in the paragraph and it is the key to understanding the passage.
- **Why are you worried about clothing** not only asks *if* we are worried, but addresses the motive of our fears: what is compelling your anxiety about your covering, protection, and safety? What do you want?
- **Observe** = Don’t look at your problems, but look at the **flowers** (like the birds in v. 26). That is, *really* look — meditate, contemplate, and change your thinking (and actions). Two points:
 - ✓ If God provides for short-lived grass, He will provide for His eternal children!
 - ✓ If God gives beautiful clothes to flowers, He’ll give clothes to His children.
 - ✓ Why do we not really **observe** (and act)? The end of **v. 30** (key to this passage) tells us —
- Anxiety and worry exist because we have **little** (weak) **faith** in God. We don’t believe His promises.
 - ✓ Remember, Jesus is speaking to believing disciples (**5:1**), not unbelievers. Had faith, but weak.
 - ✓ Let’s call worry what it is — Worry is unbelief in a sovereign God. It is a failing faith. It is, as one commentator put it, “infidelity.”
 - ✓ Anxiety exists because faith is weak. Better than worry is to say like the father of the demon-possessed boy — “I do believe — help my unbelief” (Mk. 9:24).
 - ✓ The antidote to fear is not to give us what we are coveting and desiring. Because worry is unbelief and sin, the antidote and prescription is confession. Specifically, we need to confess unbelief and lack of trust in God who is good. We have believed God isn’t good...
 - ✓ **So Jesus asks the question** — “will God clothe you...?” It’s a question about trust. Do we believe and trust that God will care for us? Do we believe what we say we believe?
 - ✓ Here is the irony — these people are worried that they won’t have what they need; and Jesus says there *is* something they don’t have — but it’s not what they are worried about.
 - ✓ I do not want to minimize this circumstance, but these tests are good for us, because they expose our hearts and what we really believe. And they are regular. This is not the first or last pandemic:

- HIV/AIDS in the 1980s (36 million deaths since 1981)
- Flu pandemic of 1968 (1 million deaths)
- Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 (50 million deaths)
- Bubonic Plague in 14th Century (75 – 200 million deaths)
- And hurricanes and tornadoes and floods and tsunamis and financial crises (falling stock markets) and divorces and all manner of abuses and cancer and Y2K and car accidents. All these things are designed (at least in part) to test us and reveal to us what our belief system really is. And the Lord would use these days to correct and strengthen our faith.
- Listen to what Thomas Watson has said about believing God in trials: “In case of the loss of dear friends, a wife, or child, or husband, let us rest satisfied in God's wisdom. God takes away these, because he would have more of our love; he breaks these crutches, that we may live more upon him by faith. God would have us learn to go without crutches.”
- Our anxiety reveals the crutches we are leaning on instead of leaning on God. God would have us believe in Him. Do I trust Him to take care of me? Do I believe He cares and that He is capable?

5. Do Not Be Anxious Because Anxiety is UNBECOMING (vv. 31-32a)

- **Do not be anxious** has the force, “Stop being anxious.”
 - ✓ The fact that that Jesus makes this a command means that anxiety is not something that happens to us that we cannot control. It means that anxiety is inside us and can be controlled (6:21; 15:18-19).
 - ✓ **The three Qs that Jesus asks**, get to the heart of our hearts — “am I willing to obey Christ and control what I meditate on so that my emotions are controlled?” “Am I willing to believe the truth in this moment and at 2:00 a.m. when I wake up with anxiety?” Are my thots consistent with my faith?
- Notice also that Jesus also tells us *why* we shouldn't be anxious — **Gentiles eagerly seek** = i.e., unbelievers prioritize food, clothing and worry over them. So, when we worry for those things we are not substantively different than unbelievers — and that's a problem (*sin*). Every time I worry, I am living like the unregenerated. We underestimate what worry is. It's godless, anti-godly living.
 - ✓ When he worries, the unbeliever does the only thing he knows to do — self-reliance and worry is his only way out; but that's not true of a believer in Christ.
 - It is inconsistent to worry and also affirm the sovereignty of God. *Something is amiss in our hearts when we speak sovereign trust and yet also cultivate worry.*
 - Faith in Christ means we don't live like the world when we are facing trouble. In fact, that is our very testimony to the unbelievers (**Gentiles**) around us.
 - When Jesus asks the questions in v. 31 about food, drink, and clothing, He does not mean that we shouldn't act with wisdom, discernment, and planning (cf. **Js. 4:15**).

- We would not say that you shouldn't take precautions against Coronavirus any more than we would say, "don't use a fire extinguisher and don't call the fire department and don't leave the building when your house is on fire." But we would also say, "Make plans from godly faith and for godly purposes" (Mt. 6:20). When we do that, we won't be in distress when trials inevitably come.
- ✓ We do well to consider that God may be orchestrating the difficult circumstances of our lives for the very purpose of demonstrating His grace & sufficiency to our unbelieving families.

6. Do Not Be Anxious Because Your **FATHER** Knows Your Need (v. 32b)

- **your heavenly Father** = We are part of God's family! ("Father" = 17x in Mt. 5-7; cf. 7:7-11)
- Don't worry because you have something the world does not have — a caring **heavenly Father!**
 - ✓ He is fully aware (**knows**) absolutely everything we need — nothing escapes His notice and care. And He does not forget! He is not dependent on sticky notes to trigger His memory.
 - ✓ When we worry, we act like God is uninformed, incapable, and uncaring. This passage affirms the exact opposite — He is able (vv. 29-30), He is informed (v. 32), and He cares (v. 26). Trust Him.
 - ✓ We know we are our Father's children (you have His name; Rev. 22:4) and He won't fail!

"Have courage for the great sorrows in life and patience for the small ones. And sleep when you have finished your daily task; go to sleep in peace. God is awake!" [Victor Hugo]

7. Do Not Be Anxious Because There is Only One Great **PRIORITY** in Life (v. 33)

- The truth in this verse is the replacement to worry and anxiety (put off-put on) — instead of cultivating sinful worry, be preoccupied with Christ.
 - ✓ When Jesus says, **seek...** He means pursue w/ unceasing quest, like a hungry hunter pursuing birds.
 - ✓ **seek first** speaks to the priority of our pursuit. Above everything else we should be seeking God's kingdom (6:10) & God's righteousness (5:6).
 - ✓ It's ok to have a job and be a dad and have investments and go to the doctor; but the heart and center of our lives is Christ and Him only. We want Him. We live for Him.
- It is ironic and sad that we worry over physical needs but are unconcerned spiritual priorities.
 - ✓ Do you need something to occupy your mind? Be consumed with Christ (Col. 3:1-2). Too many of us are too earthly minded to be of any heavenly good. We want so much what this world gives that we are losing what Heaven offers. And the hopelessness and panic that we are seeing in people is an indicator that they are terrified of losing their earthly possessions and have no concept of what it means to have heavenly treasures.

- ✓ The Coronavirus and plunging stock market are testing our hearts — is my health and my portfolio first and central in my life, or is Christ central?
 - ✓ And the Coronavirus is giving us a tremendous opportunity to speak the gospel to despairing, questioning people. It happened to me on Subway on Thursday: “You’re a preacher, aren’t you?” “Yes.” “What do you think about the Coronavirus?” “I think it is exposing men’s hearts and that they are hopeless and that they have a vacuum in their lives that can’t be satisfied without Jesus.” And Raye Jeanne had similar interactions with weeping people at Kroger and Braums.
 - ✓ People around us (maybe even some of us) have been living without Christ at the center of our lives and when the things that *are* at the center of our lives are threatened, we will become fearful.
- So Jesus says to seek ***His kingdom*** — to anticipate, pray for, and share gospel in anticipation of the coming of His literal, 1000-year millennial reign on earth.
 - ✓ To seek His kingdom is to live as if He is now king on the earth.
 - ✓ To seek His kingdom is to willingly submit myself to His authority NOW.
 - ✓ To seek His kingdom is to live for serving Him and seeing people come to know Him as King.
 - If you are an unbeliever in Jesus Christ, you may be overwhelmed by worry.
 - That is because you are living by your own authority for your own purposes. Enslaved to self.
 - The only way out of that enslavement (and the punishment that comes from it) is to believe that Jesus Christ, a real man and real God, really lived and really died and really was resurrected to pay a penalty for sin that you cannot pay.
 - To believe in Jesus Christ is to live wanting the King of kingdom and righteousness He gives
 - This is the one great priority in life. What we all need is not a job or meal, but Christ.
- Similarly, to seek ***His righteousness*** means submitting to what He says is righteous; I want to do what He says is right — I want His will. To seek His righteousness is to seek His priorities for all of our lives.
 - The result of seeking spiritual needs is that ***all these things will be added....*** That is, the Father will care for us (His spiritual children) and give us what we *need* (though not necessarily what we *want*).
 - ✓ That doesn’t mean I won’t die. Everyone *does* die (death is one out of one). And sometimes believers starve, or die of exposure, or are martyred. That doesn’t mean God doesn’t care.
 - ✓ When we God withholds some of these things and we eventually die it means God has given us the greatest good (Phil. 1:21; 2 Tim. 4:18).
 - ✓ Our priority must be the working of Christ’s righteousness in our hearts more than a meal...

8. Do Not Be Anxious Because God Will Give You What You NEED – Today *and* Tomorrow (v. 34)

- **Tomorrow** = the concerns for the future (and there will be future problems).
- **tomorrow will care for itself** = i.e., be anxious for itself; cf. Prov. 27:1 — “Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.”
 - ✓ Don’t anticipate tomorrow’s problems; you aren’t smart enough to know what problems will come.
 - ✓ **each day...** means there is difficulty today and there is also more trouble coming. So don’t add to today’s burden by worrying about tomorrow’s burden. God will provide each day what we need for that day. There will be a problem tomorrow, and tomorrow God will be sufficient for you.
 - ✓ Do not hear in this message, “If you are a believer in Jesus, you are safe; nothing bad will happen.” Hard and troublesome things *will* happen.
 - ✓ In C. S. Lewis’ book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, one of the children in Narnia asks Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about the Lion, Aslan:

“Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver. “If there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or just plain silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the king, I tell you.”

- ✓ If by safety we mean that we will never have problems and burdens and trials in this life, then God is not safe, for He *will* use those things to sanctify us and drive us to Him (Rom. 8:28-29). But if by “safe” we mean that we are secure in His love for us and that we can take refuge in Him and find comfort in Him, then, yes, friend, He is immeasurably safe. Our salvation is secure in Him. We are secure in Him. And we are eternally and irrevocably loved by Him, when we are in Christ.
- ✓ If you are in Christ, you are loved by Christ, secure in Christ, and safe in Christ. In your trouble today, He will give you what you need, and in your trouble tomorrow, He will give you what you need again.

“What does your anxiety do? It doesn’t empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but it empties today of its strength. It does not allow you to escape the evil, but it renders you unfit to cope with it when it comes.”

CONCLUSION: Is it really possible to stop worrying on the basis of these truths?

We're familiar with **1 Pt. 5:7** — “casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.” But we forget that Peter was a worrier — he worried about many things:

- ✓ Walking to Jesus on the water he looked at the waves and became so worried he began to sink.
- ✓ He was worried that Jesus might not pay taxes (Matt. 17:24ff.).
- ✓ He was worried about who might betray Jesus (John 13:24).
- ✓ He was worried that Jesus might have to suffer and so rebuked Him (Matt. 16:22)
- ✓ He worried about Jesus' death, so he sought to defend Him with a sword (John 18:10).
- ✓ But he learned that Jesus was able not only to take care of Himself but that Jesus was also able to take care of Peter.

SUMMARY: At the beginning of this message, I mentioned that Jesus asked eight questions in this passage to examine our hearts. Have you been letting Him examine you this morning? Listen to the questions again:

1. Are you living for temporal pleasures and earthly priorities (v. 25)?
2. Are you remembering your value to the Lord (v. 26)?
3. Are you supposing sovereignty for yourself (v. 27)?
4. What is your motive for your worry (v. 28)?
5. Is your worry an indication of your lack of trust in the Lord (v. 30)?
6. Are you willing to obey the Lord with your emotions (v. 31)?

In God's grace, God has given us, in the Coronavirus, an opportunity to examine our hearts — what we want, what we desire, and what we believe will satisfy. Don't be anxious. Pursue Christ. Make Him what you live for and pursue His righteousness.