

Matthew 6:25 - Don't Be Anxious - Part 2

We return again this morning to Jesus's teaching on anxiety. Just to recap: what God wants for us as followers of Jesus is that we live worry-free lives. God does not want us to be anxious. No parent wants their children to live in constant worry.

Through faith in Jesus, God has adopted us into his family and as our loving Father he promises to take care of us. He's already taken care of our biggest need in life: the need for forgiveness of our sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to our account. And if he's done, that he'll surely take care of our earthly needs of food and water and clothing. When you drill down worry to its most basic level, usually underlying much of it is a fear that our basic needs won't be taken care of. Jesus says God will take care of those needs too.

And one of the greatest ways that the gospel is shown through our lives is that we live by faith that our Father will take care of us no matter the situation.

I mentioned last week that Jesus doesn't just tell us to stop worrying and move on - though he does command us to not worry. But he actually gives us a list of reasons we shouldn't worry.

First, we saw that there is more to life than food and clothing. Because our hearts are to be set on heavenly realities - where Christ is - we shouldn't get too bogged down in concern about food and clothing.

Second, Jesus said we look to the birds: that God sovereignty feeds the smallest bird - and really every animal - and he will take care of us as well. If God feeds the birds, we can be sure he will feed us.

Jesus also mentioned (4th) that we shouldn't worry because it does absolutely nothing to help our situation. Worrying will not cause clothes to appear magically on our doorstep or food to fall from heaven. It does nothing to add even an hour to our life.

Fifth, Jesus said don't worry because of the flowers. If you recall this was the clothing version of the bird illustration. If God clothes the flowers even greater than Solomon, he will clothe us as well. Even though we might not have the clothes we want, God has given us the clothes we need.

Those were the first 5 reasons Jesus gave us not to worry.

Before we look at the second half of this passage, let me just address something really quick because I think we need to deal with that here. And that is this question: Is Jesus promising unconditional feeding and clothing for all Christians? Does this mean God's people will never starve to death? Does it mean they will always have clothes?

Let me just state the obvious: There will be rare exceptions. There will be times when God in his wisdom withholds food and clothing from his people.

Because we're not southern baptist many of us have never heard of Lottie Moon. Lottie Moon was a very short woman - she was 4'3" - who was a missionary to China in the late 1800s during constant bouts of plague and famine. She eventually died in 1912 of effects of starvation at the age of 72 - she was only 50lbs. Part of the reason she died was because she kept giving her food and money away to people around her. She knew what she doing. She knew the risk she was taking.

The SBC takes a special offering every Christmas called the Lottie Moon Christmas offering. And in the 120 years since that began around \$1.5 billion has been raised and every dime of that money goes directly to missionaries in the field. Her death - tragic as it was - was strategically used by God to further the cause of the gospel around the world.

Obviously not every believer who dies of starvation has that same legacy. But we can know that our life is not our own and whatever end God has for us we can face with certainty that he will be glorified as a result. And we can say along with the author of Hebrews that we will gladly join Jesus outside the camp and endure the reproach he endured for his glory (**Heb. 13:13**).

I say all that to say this: It is the rarest exception of people who claim the name of Jesus who have ever starved or ever gone without clothing. And those - I'm convinced - are given a special grace of God to declare the gospel in spite of these things without anxiety or worry.

So these promises still stand. These promises of God's provision are still the bedrock for our peace in the fight against anxiety.

This is probably a good segway back into our passage because Jesus continues on with reasons to not be anxious.

6) The sixth reason to not be anxious is that anxiety is contrary to faith. **Read 30**

So again as you're taking notes, we're on Jesus's 6th reason to not be anxious and it's that anxiety is rooted in unbelief. And what I'm keying in on is Jesus's words at the very end of the verse: Oh you of little faith.

Again he's talking to this crowd of people who he knows are often filled with anxiety and worry. And he knows at the root most all of that is the question of whether or not God will provide for their needs. Remember that a couple of months ago we talked about root sins and fruit sins? Fruit sins are the sins that we see and root sins are the sins underlying those sins? Well, here, Jesus makes clear that one of the root sins of worry is unbelief. It's lack of faith. It's doubting that God will provide in the way he has said he will provide.

This is often the rebuke Jesus gives to his disciples. **Look** over at **8:23-27**. It's the same issue. The root of worry and anxiety is faithlessness, it's unbelief.

Now, just for context, chapters 8 and 9 of Matthew are just one big long list of all the miracles that Jesus does. You can just read the paragraph headings to get an idea of what Jesus has done. Jesus reached out and touched a leper and healed him. In the OT you never touched a leper - you could get the disease yourself. But Jesus overcame the power of leprosy by the power of the Spirit.

Jesus healed the Centurion's servant. He spent a whole evening casting out demons and healing sick people including Peter's wife's mother. They've seen Jesus do non-stop miracles for days on end. This is on top of all the other miracles he's done. And now they're in a boat and the storm is raging. And despite all the amazing miracles they've seen, they still have very little faith. **Read 23-27**

Now, remember, several of these guys were fishermen by trade. They'd been on the water many times and seen many storms and yet it seems as though all of them were afraid. They were worried and filled with anxiety. And Jesus is saying, "Guys, what are you anxious about? Exactly what bad thing are you afraid of happening while I'm in the boat?! What scenario is in your mind that's causing you to fear?"

They've got God in the boat with them and they are still worried. They are still filled with anxiety over their lives. But who created the water particles that they are afraid of? Who created the trees that were cut to make the boat? Who causes the wind to blow? God. And he's the one in the boat trying to get a little sleep because even while he needs rest as a human, he has the entire universe in precise order as God.

All the other times this phrase "O you of little faith" is used it all deals with the same reality: that worry and anxiety are fueled by doubt.

In **Matt 14:31** it's Peter who was walking on the water to Jesus but saw the waves and doubted.

In **Matt 16:8** Jesus tells the disciples to beware of the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees. But the disciples think he's talking about bread and they get worried that they won't have anything to eat. So Jesus rebukes them because literally the miracle he did just prior to that was feed 4,000 men plus women and children. He'd fed the 5,000 plus men and women before that. They're missing his point because they're worried about bread. Jesus makes bread. But they were so worried about bread that they missed Jesus bigger warning which was don't be a hypocrite like the scribes and Pharisees.

Unbelief and anxiety go hand in hand. So what do we do about that?

1) Pray. Pray that the Lord would help your unbelief.

2) Ask yourself, what's the real reason for anxiety in your heart? Is there a promise of God you're not believing? Is there a sin you're hanging on to? What's the root cause? Often this takes some serious searching to figure out what it is.

3) What would it look like if you really believed those promises of God? How would you live your life differently? Then go live your life that way.

Walking by faith doesn't always mean the feelings inside go away right away. But it does mean our lives begin to look like what Jesus calls us to.

7) We don't need to worry because God knows our needs. **Read 31-32**

So Jesus says we don't need to go around concerning ourselves with what we're going to eat or drink or wear because our Father already knows what we need. What Jesus is doing here is actually getting very personal with God.

We've seen God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers and because we're more important than them he will feed and clothe us too. We've seen the logical reality that worrying doesn't actually accomplish anything. But here makes our relationship with the Father very personal. God knows us.

When we are filled with anxiety, God knows that we're filled with anxiety. When we are struggling to believe God, he knows that. Our Father isn't clueless. Our Father isn't some distant God far away busy with trying to keep creation together. No, he knows us intimately and personally. This isn't just informational knowledge that Jesus is getting at. God isn't looking at his Excel spreadsheet going "Yep, it's the first of the month and right on time John needs food." No, God knows when we need food and clothing because he knows us and loves us personally.

Now, there's a couple of important things to make note of in these couple verses. First of all, he's not saying that it's sin to wake up in the morning and ask ourselves "what am I wearing today" or go into the kitchen and ask "what am I eating today?" That's not what he's getting at.

Notice that word at the beginning of **Vs. 31**: "saying." The idea is that someone is constantly asking these questions because they are filled with anxiety and worry about basic provisions. Jesus is saying, don't constantly worry yourself about basic provisions. It's not like worrying about these things is going to twist God's arm and get him to do what we want him to do. We're not little kids who can somehow manipulate our heavenly Father by throwing on the worry guilt trip.

Actually, Jesus mentioned this earlier in the chapter. Look back at **6:7-8. Read**

So most of you know how this works with kids. First they'll ask you like a million times for something. Please, please, please, please. They'll go on and on in trying to justify what they want. Maybe if they just keep talking you'll cave and give it to them. Then if you say no they'll pout and stomp and get all passive aggressive. Jesus is saying that none of those tactics work on God.

Stop heaping up empty, meaningless phrases in your prayers. Stop pouting about what you do or do not have. Why? Because God knows us intimately and personally.

Maybe the reason you don't have what you think you need is because God wants to teach you to trust him. Have you ever starved to death? Obviously not. Have you ever gone around naked...not by choice? No. Has God provided for you this whole time? Yes he has. And he does so because he knows you and loves you. Trust him.

Jesus says it's the Gentiles who go around panicking about their clothes and food. Some of you have Gentiles, some of you have pagans. It's the same idea. It's those people who are not the covenant people of God. They are often filled with anxiety because their gods don't hear, don't see, don't act, don't know anything. They're false gods. And when you serve a false god you have no security and no hope. Maybe you're trusting in fate or karma or your own skill or ingenuity or whatever.

Jesus is saying that when we worry, functionally, we're acting like Gentiles, like pagans. It's as though we're rejecting the God of the universe who lovingly gives us everything we need and instead we're acting as though we worship an idol made of wood or stone. The pagans don't have a Heavenly Father they can look to and take comfort in that they will be provided for.

And you know what the irony is? God is so gracious he takes care of them anyway. Remember he causes the rain to fall and the sun to shine on the just and unjust? God takes care of unbelievers too, they just don't acknowledge it or know it.

But when we worry, we're acting just like them. Jesus says don't do that. Know that our Father loves us and knows us and will always give us exactly what we need.

8) We don't need to worry because we have better things to do. Read 33

So what Jesus is doing here is redirecting his disciples. He's switched gears a little from telling them not to worry and why not to worry, to telling them what to do. It's like having a little kid who's bored and doing all this stuff they shouldn't. You could keep telling them what not to do - and that does have an affect. But at some point it's more helpful to tell them what **to do**. "Go play outside!" That's what Jesus is doing.

Don't worry about physical needs; which doesn't accomplish anything except to reveal our own lack of faith. Instead, focus on these 2 other things. If we occupy ourselves with these things everything will fall into place. What are the two things we need to focus on? We seek the Kingdom of God and we seek his righteousness.

What do those mean? Well, first, I think we need to point out that whatever they mean, Jesus is careful to make sure we don't go from worrying about one thing to worrying about another thing. He doesn't say "stop worrying about food and clothing and start worry about the Kingdom." He doesn't say that. Why? Because worry is a sin. And actually even the word he uses for seeking the Kingdom is a different word than he uses for Gentiles seeking all these basic needs. He's making a fundamental contrast: his disciples are not to be worried about anything.

The word he uses - seek - is the idea of earnestly pursuing something. To desire it and to find it out. I mean, think of the game hide-and-seek. What are the kids doing? They're eagerly trying to find each other. It's not panic or fear, at least not usually. It's pursuit. And it's pursuit without worry because they know eventually they're going to find the other kids.

That's actually the same kind of seeking - concern, we could say - that Jesus's disciples are to have. We're not worried about the Kingdom or righteousness, but we are pursuing them knowing that ultimately they will be complete realities.

And not only do we seek God's Kingdom and his righteousness, we seek these first. The Kingdom and his righteousness are to be our top priorities in life. These are the things that are to take up our mind and consume us and be the undying motivation for all that we do.

Our jobs and our portfolio are not our top priority. Our kid's education and athletic pursuits are not our top priority. Clothes, food, water, basic needs, video games, summer job, exercise, relationships - those are all secondary.

Seeking the Kingdom and his righteousness is our first and greatest priority. This is what should be on our mind constantly. This is what we're trying to figure out. So what are they?

Seeking the Kingdom is big picture, seeking righteousness is more individual and personal. The big picture aspect is seeking the Kingdom. In general, the whole trajectory of our lives should be Kingdom oriented.

So let me give you an analogy. In recent years there's been a push to have an "America First" policy. My point isn't to endorse this or critique it, just to use it as an analogy. America first means that - big picture - most everything we do should benefit America before it benefits any other country. As a nation and as citizens, we should do everything to prioritize American interests. This means buying American goods over foreign things. Investing in American companies rather than foreign ones. Writing tax policy to favor America, keeping foreign relations tilted toward America - everything. The big picture idea is that everything we're doing is to the good of America.

Jesus says his followers should actually have a Kingdom-of-God-first policy. That's literally what he's saying. That is, everything we do is seeking to understand what the Kingdom is all about and seeking to advance and proclaim the Kingdom.

So everything you do in life can be evaluated through the filter of "am I seeking to understand and advance the Kingdom?" How I drive my car, how I conduct myself at the grocery store, the music I listen to, how I treat neighbors, what I post on Facebook, how I raise my kids."

Normally we would say: Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, do all to what? The glory of God. Well, God gains glory when we seek to understand what he wants and proclaim who he is. We want in the Kingdom, sure. But we also want others in the Kingdom, and we want those who are already in the Kingdom to joyfully realize how this Kingdom affects all their lives as well.

Abraham Kuyper: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!"

Look around when you're driving home. All that is Jesus's! He made it, he owns it, whether people realize it or not. And as subjects in his Kingdom we show people his Kingship by living always as though our King is right here.

That's the big-picture Kingdom-of-God-first policy. And that's what we need to seek out. How do we know the Kingdom and show the Kingdom more and more.

The second thing that should occupy our lives is his righteousness. **Read 33**

What does that mean? Well, remember, in Matthew's gospel righteousness is not the same kind of concept that we see in Paul's writings. In Paul's writings righteousness usually refers to our standing before God. Either we are righteous because God has declared righteous through faith alone in Jesus alone. Or we are unrighteous because we have not believed in Jesus's death and resurrection to forgive our sins and wash us clean.

But what Jesus is talking about here, we usually call personal righteousness. Personal holiness. Yes, big picture our lives should revolve around the Kingdom of God. But personally - in secret - we should be seeking righteousness as God defines it. Not just external righteousness, but pleasing God with our hearts. That's what Jesus has been getting at in the whole sermon. Yes, outwardly we should please God, but what about inwardly? Are we making peace, showing mercy, not retaliating, not lusting? Because that's what should consume the followers of Jesus. This is the personal aspect of what he's called us to.

So in the military there are 2 aspects of any battle. There's the overall strategy of warfare. What units go where, who attacks what position, how the forces all work together to win. How to unfold the whole battle plan in the right order to win.

But there's also the personal readiness of every soldier. Every ground soldier needs to be in the best shape. Every pilot needs to personally know their aircraft and their routes and rules of engagement. Intelligence units need to double and triple check every detail. Recon has to have the latest maps and routes. You need the big picture of the whole war, and you need the personal aspect of each individual.

That's what Jesus is getting at. If you're focused all day every day on personal holiness - the righteousness that God is calling you to, not just in action but also in your heart - and you're focused on how to advance the Kingdom big picture in every area of your life there won't even be time to worry.

If we're seeking those things first, our lives will actually be filled with purpose and eternal reward - and, wonder of wonders! - we'll still get fed and clothed. Our lives won't be filled with anxiety or worry. They'll be filled with purpose.

9) Final reason not to worry - God will never tempt us beyond what we are able. **Read 34**

Of all of the sayings in the SOTM, this one sound the most like a slogan you'd find on a refrigerator magnet."

"God will never give us more than we can handle."

"Worry often gives a small thing a big shadow"

"Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, only today of its joy."

We've got a picture in our entry that says "The will of God will never take you where the grace of God will not protect you." And I always want to put a little asterisk behind that that says "Unless God would get more glory in your persecution, sickness or death, then protection should be redefined to eternal protection"...but that doesn't sound as catchy.

But this is more than just a slogan. This is the summary of the whole matter.

The life of following Jesus doesn't get easier and easier as time goes on. Jesus doesn't say don't worry because life gets better. He actually says each day is going to have trouble enough. Everything we could possibly worry about will always be just a night's sleep away.

But even then we don't worry. Why? Because although each day is filled with temptation to worry, each day is also filled with bread and clothing.

Remember when Paul said:

1 Cor. 10:13: No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

That's basically what Jesus is saying here. No tomorrow ever came that had more troubles than what God can provide for. No tomorrow ever came and God forgot about us.

I've had some pretty bad tomorrows in life. Tomorrows I didn't ever want to wake up to. You know who was still there, on his throne, providing for me? God. Giving me enough bread and enough clothing to be reminded that he loves me and always will.

Pray