

Worry or Worship 4-25-04

Matthew 6:25-34 (NIV)

²⁵"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

In this chapter from the Sermon on the Mount, we have seen how important it is to lay up our treasure in heaven. When we act to gain recognition from man, or treasures on earth, we are acting in a shortsighted way. Jesus tells us, "Don't do that! Instead have the foresight to invest in eternity." This is so different from the way most people see the world. Faith enables us to do things that really matter, things that last forever. We can share the generous spirit of God in our attitudes and actions toward others.

That is where the passage picks up today. "Therefore" – because of all this, because living for God is the life that is richly blessed, because God is our Father who cares for us, because our hearts should be set on heaven and not this earth, "*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life...*" Then Jesus goes on to tell of the chief concerns of people of His day, food, drink and clothing. Life was a chore in Jesus' day. One could labor all day and only earn enough food to fill his stomach for the day. In some cities you had to pay to draw water from the city cistern. Clothing was extremely expensive. A tear in a cloak would have to be mended and lived with for years. It was quite a natural thing to be concerned about these things, and yet, Jesus gives His followers another negative command. He had just insisted that they not lay up treasure on earth. That was quite a challenge, but now He is telling them to not worry about the essentials of life. He is challenging us to go even deeper. It is one thing to not live for worldly things, but it is an even deeper walk to not be concerned with the daily necessities of life, trusting God to be our Father who provides our needs. He first challenged them with the extras. Now He is challenging them with the necessities!

We manifest this same concern as that of people in Jesus' day. Though we are not as worried about our food and clothing, we do busy ourselves getting more so that we are secure in our abundance. They were worried over having the essentials of

life; we are worried about maintaining our abundant ways. Though they were satisfied with much less, the issue is the same. We can be as fearful of not having the finances to meet our needs. We've replaced the concern over food and clothes with the concern for our cell phone bill, car and mortgage payments, and rising gasoline prices.

Jesus points us to His Father's provision in nature. In our class in Romans, we have seen how the character of God can be seen in nature. (Romans 1:20) Jesus observed it, and we would do well to take time and consider it. He pointed to the birds and the flowers. Do the birds go hungry? Are the flowers poorly dressed? If God cares enough to provide for these humble creations, surely He will provide for you. It doesn't mean that we are to be lazy and unemployed. (2 Thessalonians 3:10) It does mean that if we do the work God has provided, we will have our needs met.

We often get caught up in the false idea that busyness means value, productivity and security. We even mistake it for importance. The comedian Lily Tomlin once joked, "The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win you're still a rat." In other words, if fighting to get ahead is all that life is about, we aren't much more than an animal. Human life must be about more than amassing worldly goods.

The Desert Fathers (a protest movement against worldliness in the early church) spoke of busyness as "moral laziness." Busy-ness can also be an addictive drug, which is why its victims are increasingly referred to as "workaholics." Busyness acts to repress our inner fears and personal anxieties, as we scramble to achieve an enviable image to display to others. We become "outward" people, obsessed with how we appear, rather than "inward" people, reflecting on the meaning of our lives. Some struggle for the possession of goods, while others are driven to secure the respect of men through their position and influence.

The Psalmist wrote, ²*In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat-- for he grants sleep to those he loves.* Psalms 127:2 (NIV)

I used to push myself as hard and as long as I could, thinking that if it was going to get done, I had to do it. Experience taught me a valuable lesson. If God wants it done, He will see it is done with or without me. Of course we should give God our very best; He deserves nothing less. But at the same time, we must realize that the world is in God's hands. If I do my best and don't get something done, the sun will still come up tomorrow. God's redemptive work in the world will continue. His love for me won't be diminished. So what am I working myself into a tizzy for? Maybe I should just resign as overseer of the world. Do I think God can handle it without me?

It took many situations in which there was no possible way I could get done everything I believed God wanted me to do to realize this truth. Let go and let God. Do what you can, but realize that ultimately it is up to the Sovereign hand of God.

Every child of God should live in the leisure that marked the life of Christ. He simply obeyed the Father, one command at a time. The only hint of worry or concern we ever see was in the Garden. It was a concern over separation from the Father, not of the cares of daily life or direction.

Commented [notes1]: ²⁰There are things about him that people cannot see--his eternal power and all the things that make him God. But since the beginning of the world those things have been easy to understand by what God has made. So people have no excuse for the bad things they do.
Romans 1:20 (NCV)

Commented [notes2]: ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."
2 Thessalonians 3:10 (NIV)

Imagine Jesus without a total faith in the Father's sovereignty. He might say something like, "Come on guys, hurry! I've only got three years to get this message out and everyone's eternity depends on it. Can you jog to the next town? Maybe we could all learn to ride horses, what do you think? Take very good notes Matthew, because you might forget an important line that will affect your future Gospel. Time's a wastin' – shake a leg." That is just so out of place with the Jesus who had time to bless little children, deal with each individual's illness, and patiently answer misguided questions.

"In Our Daily Bread, Philip Parham tells the story of a rich industrialist who was disturbed to find a fisherman sitting lazily beside his boat.

"Why aren't you out there fishing?" he asked.

"Because I've caught enough fish for today," said the fisherman.

"Why don't you catch more fish than you need?" the rich man asked.

"What would I do with them?"

"You could earn more money," came the impatient reply, "and buy a better boat so you could go deeper and catch more fish. You could purchase nylon nets, catch even more fish, and make more money. Soon you'd have a fleet of boats and be rich like me."

The fisherman asked, "Then what would I do?"

"You could sit down and enjoy life," said the industrialist.

"What do you think I'm doing now?" the fisherman replied.¹

Enjoyment of life can be found moment by moment as we rest in God's provision.

Jesus said the cares and concerns of life could distract us from what life is about. Listen to His words. ³⁴*"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. Luke 21:34 (NIV)*

Jesus was referring to the last days. It could also be applied to our personal last day. People don't always know when death will knock at their door. Focusing on the wrong things will cause us to come to the end of our life unprepared for eternity.

The Apostle Paul wrote, *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."*

Philippians 4:6 (NIV),

Don't get caught up with worry about anything. Trust in God. Give it to Him in prayer. Instead of worry, which in fact is doubting that our Father will care for us, Paul tells us to take the concern to God along with your thanks for all His goodness in your life. Jesus saw the Father as Someone who is just waiting for us to express our need so that He could meet it. Once we have laid that need before Him, then we can rest assured that our Father will show us what to do or provide an answer. Peter gives us the same instruction in 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV), *"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."*

The life of Jesus demonstrated an unhurried, fearless trust in the Father. We saw it in the beginning of His prayer. "Our Father in heaven..." When He prayed, He knew He was addressing the One who was in the position to care for all His needs. He had

an understanding of His heavenly Father that was always expressed in His trust that the daily details of life would come together.

*"A careful look at the gospels shows that Jesus seldom accepted the questions posed to him. He exposed them as coming from the house of fear. ... To none of these questions did Jesus give a direct answer. He gently put them aside as questions emerging from false worries. They were raised out of concern for prestige, influence, power, and control. They did not belong to the house of God. Therefore Jesus always transformed the question by his answer, He made the question new--and only then worthy of his response."*¹

Jesus' life, His thinking and attitude were always one of worship. Worship will lay worry before God in simple childlike faith. Worship can't worry because it is focused on an all-sufficient God who loves as a Father. Ruth Graham wrote, *"I [have] learned that worship and worry cannot live in the same heart: they are mutually exclusive."*¹ When we find ourselves worrying, we must realize we are not worshipping. When we worry, we have fallen for a perception of God that is far less than who He truly is. We have fallen for the false idea that if something is going to be, it is up to me. Our lack of faith in all that God is puts us in impossible situations with insufficient resources. That should cause anyone to be worried, but Jesus is telling us that we are not to be like that.

In contrast to the world, Jesus' life on earth always exemplified complete trust and faith in His heavenly Father. That is what was behind His quiet confidence, His peaceful nature, and His calm assurance. (Isaiah 32:17) He knew that there is never anything to fear. That is why He could confidently say, ³¹*So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'* ³²*For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.* Unbelievers run after the necessities of life. When we focus our life on physical needs, we have joined the ranks of unbelievers who have no faith in a loving heavenly Father. Our life becomes one busy running pursuit of trying to obtain things we think we need.

Commented [notes8]: ¹⁷The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.
Isaiah 32:17 (NIV)

An African proverb says "Lord Jesus, make my heart sit down." The Psalmist wrote, "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalms 46:10) To make our heart sit down, to be still is often just what we need to go from fretting about what we cannot do to resting in who God is.

Commented [notes9]: ¹⁰"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."
Psalms 46:10 (NIV)

So, if we are not to fear, not to worry about our needs, what should we be doing? Jesus said to them and to us today, *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* Jesus is telling us that our first priority in life should be God's kingdom and righteousness. God's kingdom is the reign of God in the lives of His subjects. If He is reigning in our heart, we will be walking in His will, making godly choices, being a godly example in our world. We will seek the same for others, for that is seeking His kingdom.

Commented [notes10]: ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)

Then, we are to seek His righteousness. Jesus did not say to seek our own righteousness, but the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21) That is only found

in a relationship with Jesus Christ. (Romans 3:21-24) It is only in Him that we have the righteousness of God. Jesus is telling us to seek first a relationship with God through Him more than any other thing in life and follows it with a promise. If we do, the necessities of life will be provided. We just need to get our priorities straight. So often in life, the pressures of the moment can get our focus off what is truly important. The urgency before us shifts our focus and we climb down into that pit of worry. Jesus is telling us that as long as we keep our priority to be in relationship with Him, we can trust that our need will be met in God's perfect time.

Commented [notes11]: ²¹But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.
²²This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,
²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
²⁴and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.
Romans 3:21-24 (NIV)

Jesus ends this chapter by saying, *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."* Considering what Jesus has said about the character and nature of God, considering His promise when we keep His kingdom and righteousness first, we can refuse to worry about tomorrow. Corrie ten Boom wrote, *"Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength."* Worry distracts us from who God is and what He has for us at the moment. How many times we could have been the light and love of God to someone, but we were wrapped up in our little worries that would soon prove to be unnecessary?

I like to remind myself that worrying about the past won't change it. Worrying about the present is not going to resolve anything, and when I worry about the future, I am usually worrying about something that will never occur. It is a waste of the precious time we have on earth, and worse yet, it is denying the wonderful Fatherly character of God.

Remember Mad Magazine? Alfred E. Newman always said, "What, me worry?" because he was a fool who lived only for pleasure. He was not worried about the consequences of his actions. The Christian says, "What, me worry?" because he knows that in seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness all our needs will be provided by our loving Father. (Philippians 4:19) We worship God for who He is, and our concerns vanish in His all-sufficiency.

Commented [notes13]: ¹⁹And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:19 (NIV)

After we studied the Lord's prayer, one of our seasonal guests, Rich Johnson, suggested beginning prayer time with that prayer. I've begun doing that, and found that by recognizing that God is our Father at the helm of the universe in heaven ("Our Father in heaven...") many of my worries are vanquished before I get to asking for our daily needs. Worship causes worry to be seen as what it is, a lack of faith in the loving holy attributes of our Father. Will you see God for who He is, taking time to be still before Him each day, and walk in the holy leisure of the Spirit of God? It's the best solution for stress. It will lower your blood pressure. But best of all, it will make you a better example of the life of Christ.

Lord Jesus, make our hearts sit down, that we might be able to see the needs around us and live in your holy leisure.