

Week 16 – Don't Worry, Be Trusting – Matthew 6:25-34

Scripture Reading: 1Peter 5:6-11 (page 1017)

Introduction

Back in 1988 a little song hit the airwaves and became a worldwide sensation

Written by American musician Bobby **McFerrin**, it was the first *a cappella* song ever to hit the *Billboard Hot 100* chart

The song began:

Here's a little song I wrote; you might want to sing it note for note; don't worry, be happy

Don't Worry; Be Happy was one of those songs that would get stuck inside your head causing you to mentally sing it all day when you heard it

And you couldn't help but hear it because it was literally everywhere for a while

It's a very catchy, fun song but its message is rather simplistic

In fact, comedian George **Carlin** said the song's message "was exactly the kind of mindless philosophy that Americans would respond to"

After all, if all we had to do was "be happy" none of us would worry

Unfortunately, it's not quite that easy – but, as we'll see today, we can live lives that are free from anxiety

Otherwise, Jesus would not have commanded his followers to "not be anxious" as he does in the passage before us

I've titled this morning's message "Don't Worry, Be Trusting" because that really is the key to ridding ourselves from the anxiety that Jesus is talking about in our passage

If ever there were a passage of the Bible that could be written directly to us today, this is it

2020 has been a year for the history books for sure

If dealing with a largely politicized pandemic, a presidential election, riots, incivility, and our nation being on the verge of a hot civil war all at the same time aren't enough to cause you to be concerned; you're a better person than I am

Please join me in Matthew 6 and follow along as I read verses 25-34 [**Matthew 6:25-34**]

"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? 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? And 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. 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? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Before we start to dig into the passage I want to give you a warning

The Bible is filled with truths that, when spoken in terms that are too absolute, can cause more harm than good

And this is one of those passages

Consider how a sermon on this passage that very strongly and bluntly tells how worrying reveals the sin of doubting God might be received by three different people –

Consider how the man who never worries and who just floats through life completely unconcerned about anything while at the same time being totally irresponsible and unreliable will likely hear such a sermon

He'll likely hear vindication of his lifestyle and his lack of concern and as support for his lack of industry

But also consider the person who becomes anxious over even a hint of trouble that might happen

The kind of person who frets himself into having an ulcer not just over tomorrow but over how he is ever going to be able to retire in 40 years on the basis of a downturn in the stock market today

He'll likely hear this passage as a stern rebuke – and, ironically, will likely begin to worry that he has sinfully been denying God by his tendency to worry

Now consider the young Christian man who is known for his integrity and faithful service to the Lord

One morning, he wakes up to find his wife unable to move her right side and unable to speak

And the doctors find that she has an inoperable brain tumor that will in time take her life and he will be left to raise their two small children alone – but of course he'll have to watch her suffer and steadily decline as the medical bills pile up before that day comes

He will likely hear a sermon that tells him that worrying reveals a sinful lack of trust in God as an affront

And he will likely come to the conclusion that what Jesus teaches is impossible and he might even turn away from God if that's what God expects

I bring all of this up to simply say this:

Be careful with passages like this to understand your audience and to take into account where each person is coming from so as to not do more damage than good

Be sure to look to the whole counsel of God's Word and balance your presentation accordingly

I will endeavor to do that today as we proceed

If you're taking notes, we will first look at **Two Types of Worry** – that's Roman numeral one

Then we will consider **What Sinful Anxiety Reveals** and, lastly, we will see **The Solution for Sinful Anxiety**

As the examples I used above show, there are more than one kind of worry so let's look at that issue first

I. Two Types of "Worry"

My next statement might seem somewhat surprising given the passage before us but I want you to consider it nonetheless

There is a sense in which worry is a good thing, but even more than that, its absence is, biblically speaking, irresponsible

We would more likely refer to this good type of worry as "concern"

A. Concern

And concern is good when it serves as the impetus to a follower of Christ to be faithful and useful in the Lord's service

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about the wisdom of being married and trying to serve the Lord he wrote in **1Corinthians 7:32-34** that it would be better to not be married so one can focus on the things of the Lord

And he used the terms "anxious" and "anxiety" to express what we would understand to be legitimate concerns whether they were concerns for a wife or husband or concern for the things of the Lord

Then in 2Corinthians 11 Paul wrote about all the hardships he had faced as an apostle and then he wrote in **2Corinthians 11:28-29** – *And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?*

Paul clearly was concerned for the people in the churches that he had founded

And as we saw when we looked at the Beatitudes Christ-followers should be concerned about sin

There is a great deal for the Christ-follower to be rightly concerned about

But notice that none of those things is a purely self-directed concern – they are God-directed and the result of looking at things from God’s perspective

They result in the desire for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven

So the absence of this kind of “worry” would be irresponsible and would result in a failure to honor and obey God

Perhaps the most insidious forms of worry are those which can be made to appear to be legitimate concerns but actually are self-centered worry in disguise

Because, as **Jeremiah 17:9** tells us *“the heart is deceitful above all things”*

We are prone to deceive ourselves and our motives are suspect so we need to be careful that we don’t try to shelter illegitimate worry under the umbrella of legitimate concern

So, how can we tell the difference?

Is there some sort of test we can apply to see if a particular worry is legitimate or not?

For that, let’s turn our attention to the second kind of worry – sinful anxiety – and see what Jesus prohibits here

B. Sinful Anxiety

To be “anxious” or to be filled with anxiety is harmful to us and it is what Jesus prohibits here in this passage

According to Webster’s 1913 Dictionary, anxiety is a state of restlessness and agitation caused by concern about something which disturbs the mind and keeps it in a state of painful uneasiness

And Jesus gives three illustrations of the kinds of things people of his day tended to be anxious about: food, clothing, and prolonged life

We’re rather fortunate as most of us don’t tend to worry too much about our next meal or if we will have adequate clothing – in that, we’re more fortunate than much of the world even now

But when it comes to the last illustration about being concerned about prolonging life, we see that worry all around us today as a result of the coronavirus – and, sadly, that anxiety has invaded our church family to some extent

In each of these illustrations, Jesus uses an implicit *a fortiori* argument which takes the form of “If this is true, then how much more is that true?” as it argues from the greater to the lesser

We see examples of this type of argument throughout the Bible and in this case Jesus uses the example of God’s care for the birds and the grass of the field saying that if God cares for them won’t he also care for you

Because, obviously, we are more valuable to God than birds or grass

Another well-known *a fortiori* argument is found in **Romans 8:32** which says:

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

That is to say, since God already gave us his very best gift, why would we think he won’t also give us lesser gifts?

And that really gets to the crux of the matter and reveals why this type of worry is sinful

So let’s take a look at the three things sinful anxiety reveals about us as believers

II. What Sinful Anxiety Reveals

First of all, the type of worry that Jesus prohibits his followers from engaging in reveals a lack of trust in God

A. A Lack of Trust

For the believer, most, if not all, anxiety indicates a serious lack of confidence in God

We tend to think of anxiety as a disease when it is actually a symptom of the disease of having little faith or little trust in God

And it comes into our lives when we doubt God's ability or his goodness and wonder if he is able to handle our concerns or if he really cares enough to bother with them

Falling prey to sinful anxiety also reveals a lack of knowledge

B. A Lack of Knowledge

In verse 32 [**Matthew 6:32**] when Jesus says that Gentiles seek after all these things he actually means pagans seek them His original audience would have readily understood that

What Jesus means is, when we allow ourselves to worry in this way, we reveal that we have the same knowledge of God as a pagan does and we should know better

Pagans tend to view God as a being or a collection of beings who are rather capricious or vindictive and who therefore must be placated by the acts of man in order for them to be benevolent in return

Or they believe, as the deists do, that God is impersonal and simply watching his universe unfold being unable or unwilling to intervene in it in any way

And there are those who view the world as a closed, mechanical system with no God whatsoever and for them the world is a system that simply runs according to observed scientific laws

But those who study and understand the Bible know that the universe does proceed along according to regular and predictable laws but only because God constantly exercises his sovereignty over it so that no part operates independently of God

And, as Christ-followers we should know and experience God as our heavenly Father and anticipate his goodness toward us

The third thing Jesus says sinful anxiety reveals is a wrong focus

C. A Wrong Focus

When problems loom up before us our focus tends to be on the problems

And when all we can see are the problems and difficulties around us we can forget all about God

We can forget that God has mapped out our lives from beginning to end and that there are no accidents in his plan

And we can forget that God knows and cares for each of us individually – that he knows who we are and what we need

Scottish theologian Sinclair **Ferguson** put it like this in one of his sermons –

Your life is in the hands of your Father. He has designed it. He knows the end of it from the beginning. He plans each step of the way to fulfill his purpose for you and through you. You will have all you need to fulfill that purpose and when that is accomplished, you will be taken home to be with him. Why worry when he has your life in his hands? Your worry is a sign that you do not adequately know him, or that you do not trust him, or have not yet yielded to him as you ought.

The secret of freedom from anxiety is freedom from ourselves and abandonment of our own plans. But that spirit emerges in our lives only when our minds are filled with the knowledge that our Father can be trusted implicitly to supply everything we need.

The question for every believer who is tempted to worry is “Do you trust God to handle your situation properly?”

When we forget that God cares for us or we doubt his knowledge of our situation or his ability to act on our behalf or his care for us – in other words, when we forget who God is and how much he values us – we can begin to think we must act on our own behalf

And that's when we can begin to suffer sinful anxiety

A sinful anxiety that has its genesis not only in a faith in God that is too small but a faith that has the wrong object as we shift to having faith in ourselves believing that, if our problem is to be solved it will be up to us to solve it

Jesus commands his followers to not be anxious which can seem to be difficult if not impossible

But he also shows us the solution for sinful anxiety – let's turn to that now

III. The Solution for Sinful Anxiety

One of the truly remarkable things I have discovered about God in his Word is that he never tells us not to do something without also telling us what to do instead

See, God knows how he made us and he knows we can only do or think about one thing at a time

So he never tells us to stop doing or thinking one thing without providing us with its replacement

A. Reflect on Who God Is

And the first thing we see in these verses to replace sinful anxiety is that Jesus tells us to reflect on who God is

We've already briefly touched on the examples Jesus used to make his point regarding God's provision but let's consider them a little further

Jesus says in verse 26 [**Matthew 6:26**] that his followers should consider his Father's provision for the birds of the air

And how even though they don't engage in farming God still provides them with food

And in verse 28 [**Matthew 6:28**] he says to consider the lilies of the field and how God clothes them even though they don't engage in the textile arts

Again, this is an *a fortiori* argument that says if God does this for them he will certainly care for us and that just as God is not ignorant or insensitive to the needs of the birds or of the grass of the fields he knows us, sees our needs, and cares

The apostle Paul writes in **Philippians 4:19**

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Just how extensive are God's riches in glory? He owns it all!

Then look at verse 27 [**Matthew 6:27**] which we just skipped over

And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is **Psalms 139:16** which says –

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

That verse tells us that God has ordained the number of our days and that he did so before we were ever born

Think about the significance of that truth

You are immortal until that number of days is reached – there is nothing that can cut short what God has ordained

You will not die even one second before God has planned and you cannot linger one second longer – God has determined the length of your life and has written it down in his book and worrying won't change that

And if he has determined the number of your days it's only logical that he also knows the contents of those days and that you are never going to face anything that God doesn't know about

Worry will undoubtedly affect the quality of your days but it's not going to affect the quantity – God controls that

God knows you; he loves you; he sees your needs; and he will provide whatever you need

B. Seek God's Kingdom

The second thing Jesus says we must do to combat our tendency to be gripped by sinful anxiety is to seek God's kingdom

Look with me at verse 33 [**Matthew 6:33**]

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

The word "seek" is a present imperative which means we must be on an unceasing quest to see God's kingdom established

Nothing about this is passive or indifferent – Jesus says we must be active and aggressive and to strive for God's kingdom with everything we have

When we do that we can be sure that God will provide us with everything we need – that's God's part of the bargain

There are some realities we need to understand regarding this promise though

First, this promise is only for those who are God's true children and not meant for all mankind

Only those who have accepted Christ can truly be seeking God's kingdom

Second, notice that Jesus promises that our needs will be provided and he specifies food, drink, and clothing

God does not promise to fulfill our wants or to give us whatever we desire

While it's true that God often blesses us well beyond our needs and he often provides us with far more than the essentials, it's the essentials that are being promised here

Third, there are times when Christ-followers are made to suffer for righteousness' sake and some faithful believers have died from starvation and exposure

But their martyrdom in no way diminishes this promise even as they are called upon to suffer in such a way for the advancement of the kingdom – and God is under no obligation to explain to us why he sometimes works as he does

Conclusion

In the final analysis, Jesus tells his followers to not be anxious about one very specific thing, *life*

And yet this life is exactly what so often weighs heavy upon us

As we close this morning we come to verse 34 [**Matthew 6:34**] and in this verse Jesus turns from reasoning from a theological sense to simply giving his followers a pragmatic reason not to worry too much

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Jesus wraps us his teaching with the third "therefore" in this section of his sermon and it seems like he recognized that in spite of all that he has said, his followers are still going to worry to some degree

So he says, just limit your worrying to the concerns of today

Again, this doesn't preclude planning for tomorrow any more than relying on God to fulfill our needs precludes working for a living – after all, even the birds don't just sit around with their mouths open once they have matured

And, as we saw recently, God wants us to come to him daily with our needs and to ask him for his daily provision

But each day has enough trouble of its own so worry about one day at a time

And know that just as each day has its own trouble each day comes with its own measure of God's grace

God is still on his throne and he has not abandoned his children so – Don't worry; be trusting

Let's pray