

(Jeff Sherwood - Lesson 1 - 8.04.25) **Worry Free Living**
Jesus as the Crossroads of Worry
Matthew 6:25-34

Nothing so typifies the average American as worry. We worry about the price of gas, the rise in taxes, the utility bill, our health, the church, the children, the traffic, the moral decline of the culture, and what food will they discover next that causes cancer. Since worry is so normal and common for us and since the Bible has something to say about not worrying I thought it would be helpful for us to look at Scripture through the words of Jesus, Paul and Peter. Let's begin with a definition.

I. Definition of Worry

The NT word translated “worry, or anxious” is *μεριμνάω* – *merimnao*. It's a combination of 2 smaller words, *merizo*, meaning “to divide” and *nous*, meaning “the mind”. In other words a person who is worried suffers from a divided mind, or as James states “a double mind which is unstable” (James 1:8) leaving him distracted and disquieted. If you look at Webster's Collegiate Dictionary worry is defined as – *to choke, strangle, to harass by tearing, biting or snapping especially at the throat*. We could say then that worry strangles or chokes out life. It chokes out the joy of living, peace of mind, contentment, the energy needed to work, and the ability to relax. It gives us fear, uneasiness, sleeplessness, ulcers, leads to judgmentalism and a critical spirit.

Before I go any further I need to note the difference between worry and concern, because the same word translated “worry” is also translated “concern” in Phil. 2:20 and 1 Cor. 12:25. In these verses the word means to “care for, to look out for, to provide for”. It is proper to be concerned for your own spiritual well-being as well as how others in the body of Christ are doing. Our concern causes us to reach out and meet needs – physical, emotional, social and spiritual. Worry on the other hand is excessive concern that clouds our thinking and chokes out joy as well as causing ulcers, loss of sleep and fear.

How can we tell when the legitimate concerns of life have become sinful worries? Here are three practical guidelines. You are probably well into worry ...

1. When the thing you are concerned about is the first thing you think about in the morning and the last thing you think about at night.
2. When you find yourself thinking about it during every spare moment.
3. When you find yourself bringing it up in every conversation you have.

The key word is “excessive”. Worry happens when we are so concerned about the problems of life that we can think of nothing else. It is an all-consuming feeling of uncertainty and fear.

We all know the Bible has one thing to say about this kind of excessive worry and that can be summed up in one word – “Don't”. Therefore we all stop worrying, right?

My goal is not to tell you to “stop it” but to give you practical steps, activities and processes to enable you to live without excessive worry to give you the tools to live a worry free life – not unconcerned but worry free. This morning we will look at what Jesus had to say in Matt. 6.

II. Jesus Says Don't Matt.6:25-34

Three times in this paragraph Jesus tells us “Do not be anxious; don't worry” – 25, 31, 34. This is not a series of mild suggestions but commands. “Do not”, in other words “Stop it!” What is it that we are not to worry about according to Jesus? Stop worrying about your life in terms of length, legacy and success (v. 25a); stop worrying about your needs in terms of eat, drink and wear (v. 25b); and stop worrying about tomorrow (v. 34) in terms of the recession, unemployment, housing market or some natural disaster.

Jesus is not telling us to be unprepared or not to have a plan or to be lazy. What he is telling us is that we are not to over analyze, be fixated upon or consumed with concern about life and the things in it. If your concern about the political situation in America or the economy causes you to stop enjoying life and praising God then it has become a worry and not a concern.

There are a number of “do nots” in Scripture – do not lie, do not worship other gods, do not slander and so forth. Why does God tell us “do not”? God only tells us “no” to the things that are wrong – meaning they are sinful or detrimental to our well-being and our testimony. Worry is sin. First, because it displaces God in your life. When you commit the sin of worry, you are living as though God does not exist or if he does exist, he doesn't care to help. You are then living as if you can solve the problem yourself. Second, it's sin because it distracts you from the things that really matter in life. For as long as you're worrying you can't do anything else. Worry paralyzes you, makes you indecisive and strangles your mind.

Therefore Jesus says “Don't worry!” Of course, once we know what Jesus says we all stop worrying, right? Isn't knowledge alone enough to deter us from worry? Isn't the command of Jesus sufficient to enable us to stop worrying? NOT. Even though we know that worry is a sin and that in our better moments we do not want to be worriers, we need more than information or commands. What we need is a solution, an alternative. That is exactly what we find here in Matt. 6 as Jesus gives us 4 things to do as alternatives to worry. If we intentionally apply these 4 principles then we are on the road to worry free living.

III. Jesus Says Do...

A. Store Up Treasure in Heaven Matt. 6:19-21

Please note that Jesus is not banning possessions or planning for the future – remember the ant is praised for storing food in the summer for the winter. What he forbids is the selfish accumulation of goods for oneself. Note the phrase “for yourselves”.

Why is selfish accumulation forbidden? Is it because having stuff is sinful? Of course not – see 1 Tim. 6:17. It's forbidden because accumulation of stuff for oneself leads to worry. Instead of earthly treasure store up heavenly treasure, first because heavenly treasure is eternal and permanent (v. 20). Precautionary measures to protect it are unnecessary. It needs no insurance cover. It is indestructible. Therefore, Jesus seems to be saying to us, ‘If it's a safe investment you're after, nothing could be safer than this

Second your heart follows your treasure (v. 21). Your treasure determines the condition of your

heart – earthly heart or heavenly heart. Is it one focused only on this life or on the life to come? Note how Paul states it in Col. 3:1-4. Note also Heb. 11:8-10. The significant question then is what is heavenly treasure? Wouldn't you like it, if Jesus gave you a list?

The context will help immensely. Return to the beginning of chapter 6 verse 1. Here Jesus tells us to do the right thing because it is right, not so you get something out of it or be noticed by others. What then are the right things we are to do? 6:2-4 - give joyfully and secretly; 6:5-14 - pray meaningfully to your heavenly Father; 6:18 - fast to honor God not be seen by others.

Think of the Lord's Prayer – Honor his name, Serve his kingdom and Do his will – specifically by forgiving those who have wronged you. So first then heavenly treasure is about God and what honors him.

What honors God? Such things as these: the development of Christlike character (since all we can take with us to heaven is ourselves); the increase of faith, hope, and love, all of which (Paul said) 'abide'; growth in the knowledge of Christ whom one day we shall see face to face; the active endeavor (by prayer and witness) to introduce others to Christ, so that they too may inherit eternal life; and the use of our money for Christian causes, which is the only investment whose dividends are everlasting. It's being a person of integrity, keeping your marriage vows, keeping your word, involving yourself in the lives of people.

There are only two things that last forever – God's word and God's people, so if you want a sure investment, invest in them. Simply put, when you are busy serving others and growing spiritually, you don't have time to worry and your mind is on the right things. Your heart will follow that treasure and your burdens will be lighter. Worry fades as you store up heavenly treasure.

B. Secure Yourself in His Care Matt. 6:26-30

God cares for the birds by providing food for them. You are more valuable to God than the birds therefore God cares for you and will provide food for you (vv. 26-27). Think of it like this: the birds are God's creatures while we are God's children.

Does that mean we will never miss a meal? No. Does that mean we will always have food on the table and in the refrigerator? No. Does that mean we will never go hungry? No. Does that mean we will never end up in the hospital? That we will never get cancer? That all our dreams will come true? No. What it means is that God has promised to take care of us so there is no need to worry about it. Rest in his care. Be secure in his care. Count on God to be true to his character. He cares.

God cares for the flowers clothing them with great beauty even though they last only a day or two (vv. 28-30). You are more precious to God than flowers, lasting for eternity, therefore God cares for you. He will clothe you, even if it is not with the latest fashion. God cares for you.

Lamentations 3:22-23: *The lovingkindness of the Lord never ceases, his compassions never fail; they are new every morning. Great is his faithfulness.* Be secure in God's faithful care. He keeps his promises.

C. Seek His Kingdom and Righteousness First Matt. 6:33

God's kingdom is where he rules and his righteousness is his character and his way to do things. So to seek God's kingdom and righteousness is to submit to his authority, trust his character and do his will. Life is about our relationship to God.

Everyone is ambitious to be or to do something. In the end there are only 2 kinds of ambition: one can be ambitious for oneself or one can be ambitious for God. It is not that we are to avoid any ambition for ourselves but rather that we are to be more ambitious for God. He comes first.

Such a desire will start with ourselves, until every single department of our life—home, marriage and family, personal morality, professional life and business ethics, bank balance, tax returns, lifestyle, citizenship—is joyfully and freely submissive to Christ.

One of the ways to think about worry is to see it as a bad habit. A bad habit ends when it is replaced by a good habit. We don't simply stop worrying unless we replace the thinking with something else. Jesus tells us that the proper replacement is "a magnificent obsession with the Kingdom of God". Knowing and doing the will of God.

You could start each day with a simple prayer: *Today is yours Lord. Today is about your kingdom agenda. Help me to see that as the most significant thought in my mind. My desire today is your will and your righteousness. Turn my heart toward my heavenly home.*

D. Savor Today Matt. 6:34

In the best sense of the word "live in the moment". Make the most of today. Sw: *Refuse, yes refuse to allow tomorrow's worries to drain into today's lake.* Don't contaminate today by corrupting it with tomorrow's troubles. Do what you have to do today and maybe (surprise) it may make a difference in the world you wake up to tomorrow.

Failure to live one day at a time means that we spoil all of life. God divided life into bite size chunks called days. Trying to chew off more than one at a time can choke us. Heb. 3:7-15 particularly note vv. 7, 13-15.

Conclusion

It's one thing to know that worry is sinful, to know that the bible commands us to stop and quite another thing to actually stop worrying. Here in our text this morning Jesus has not only told us to stop it but has also given us 4 habits to replace the habit of worry.

1. Store up treasure in heaven
2. Secure yourself in God's care
3. Seek his kingdom first
4. Savor today. In the words of Solomon in Ecc. 5:18-20 – enjoy life.

Those habits put you on the road to worry free living.