

I invite you to open your bibles this morning, to today's scripture text, which can be found in the book of Matthew, the 6th chapter, verses 25-34. As we continue in our series revealing Christ's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. Our Lord Jesus, in today's scripture, gives us a lesson of faith; combining prudence, forethought, and serenity. Revealing the principle of provision.

Our Fathers Word, (Mt 6:25-34)

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? 26 Look 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? 27 Who 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. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If 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? 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. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you! Jesus commands us. What an amazing promise from our amazing King. As we discovered a few weeks ago, our Father in heaven is approachable and as his children, we can ask him for what we need, and He will give it to us. We can trust, or have faith that what he tells us here will happen, all these things will be given to you.

In today's scripture text Jesus strikes at the tendency to *center our lives* around the basic necessities of life; food, and clothes. Doing this will cause us to miss out on life's real meaning. Obsessing over acquiring things that God will gladly provide us, when asked, providing we remain within his grace by continually seeking him, faithfully believing in Jesus, in Love, prayer, and service. We must not miss life's real meaning by making our lives about acquiring food, clothes, and basic necessities.

The problem is not so much what we eat and wear *today*, but what we shall eat and wear ten, twenty, or thirty years from now. This worry, this anxiety about the future is sin in our Lord's view, because it denies the love, wisdom, and power of God in our lives. It pushes away his providential care of grace by making ourselves self-reliant for these needs.

It denies *the love of God* by implying that He doesn't care for us. It denies *his wisdom* by *implying* that He doesn't know what He is doing. It denies His power by implying that He isn't able to provide our needs.

This type of worry causes us to devote the majority of our energy, our finest energy, to making sure we will have enough to live on. Then, before we know it, our lives have passed, and we have missed the central purpose for which we were made.

God did not create us in His image with no higher destiny than that we should consume food. We are here to love, worship, and serve Him and to represent His interests here on His earth. Our bodies are intended to be servants, not our masters.

In this passage, Christ is concerned about our thoughts, about the danger, of worldliness in us. As people that are laying up treasures here on earth. Dangers of living to get what we can, and to hold onto all that we get. He is concerned about the human condition of anxiety in acquiring these things. About our continual habit to worry, our undue care about what we need and what we should have for our survival. This type of anxiety, this type of worrying demonstrates a lack of faith in God.

A hardening of our hearts occurs when our faith in God fails. We need to believe in the power of God. We must not allow our faith to waiver; the evidence that we have *come to share in Christ*, is that we are *united to him in saving faith*, that we **hold** that confidence **firm to the end**. Perseverance in faith is necessary for the gifts of God's grace and salvation. When we are truly converted, the heart is changed so that now, life is lived by faith.

Gal 2:20-21

20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

So, the most basic battle of our life is the battle to believe in the living God, and not to allow our heart to become an evil heart of unbelief. Because if unbelief in the living God gets the upper hand in our life, then the result can be a hardening of our hearts that makes us unwilling to serve him, unwilling to repent and thus cuts us off from the grace of God. Cutting us off from the provision of God.

Now this will not happen to those who are truly in Christ. Those who are truly born of God take the battle seriously, and draw on the power of God to fight it, and win it with persevering faith. That is what God promises. “He who calls you is faithful and he will do it” 1 Th 5:23-24 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

The truth is, that beneath our battle against evil in our heart is the battle against unbelief. Unbelief is the root of evil and the essence of evil. All our sin grows out of unbelief in the living God and what he has said to us in Scripture.

Now today’s text illustrates this with a specific evil condition of heart, namely, worry, anxiety.

Stop for a moment and think how many different sinful actions and attitudes come from anxiety. Anxiety about finances can give rise to coveting and greed and hoarding and stealing. Anxiety about succeeding at some task can make you irritable and abrupt and surly. Anxiety about relationships can make you withdrawn and indifferent and uncaring about other people.

Anxiety about how someone will respond to you can make you cover over the truth and lie about things. So, if anxiety could be conquered, a lot of sins would be overcome.

Many years ago, I recall a time when I had reached a crossroad in my career life. My abundance of fear and anxiety in my job had practically paralyzed me. It practically made me ineffective for my employer, and it was pulling me away from serving God. I was trying to force my success in my vocation through my own efforts, through my own plans, and through my own needs. I had lost focus what God was doing in my life, and through my life. I was putting myself first, and missing the truth that God was using me right where I was. Right there, *in* my daily job.

The greatest truth I have come to realize personally, my witness to you, is that by my Christian identity, first and foremost, my purpose is to serve God. That there can be a unity during your work week, and in your Christian service, that *defines* your purpose, and *that* is to *serve* God.

That by living in the kingdom of God and seeing him in all things, by seeking his righteousness through Jesus Christ, by engaging in this service, by seeking God in all things, through prayer, through thought, through word, and through deed, God continues to provide all your needs in every way. Several amazing vocational developments in my life have proven to me that as long as I serve God, He continues to provide everything I need. As long as I am a good steward of his grace *to all* that he places on my life path, by sharing His love, by sharing His grace, by sharing His comfort, He will provide what I require physically, emotionally, professionally, in all areas of my life what only he can produce.

No amount of effort or planning I could muster could ever produce what he has provided to me, and what he will continue to provide to me. *Because, I serve him.* *Your vocation* needs to become *your mission*. Serve him. God will provide.

Most people engaging in their life or vocation, are overcome by fear and anxiety. They worry about every move they make. They worry about the action, they worry about the outcome, they worry about the future. But we must have a realization that when we serve God in all that we do, the purpose, the peace, the blessings, the provisions, will be there because God tells us that he will provide.

So what is the cure of worry? To answer that we go to our Lord Jesus's words in today's scripture text in Matthew 6. In these 10 verses Jesus sets out seven different arguments and defenses against worry.

He begins by telling us that God gave us life, and, if God gave us life, surely, we can trust him for the lesser things that we need. If God gave us bodies, surely, we can trust him for clothes. If God, who gave us a gift that is beyond price, that is, life. Surely, we can be certain that such a giver would not be mean, stingy, careless, and forgetful about much less costly gifts. So, we must realize that, if God gave us life, we can trust him for the things which are necessary to support life.

Then Jesus goes on to speak about the birds. There is no worry in their lives, no attempt to pile up goods for an unforeseen and unforeseeable future; and yet their lives go on. I'm sure we could all agree with the Jewish Rabbi Simeon, who was fascinated by the way in which animals live. "In my life," he said, "I have never seen a horse as a dryer of figs, or a lion as a porter, or a fox as a merchant, yet they are all nourished without worry.

If they, who are created to serve me, are nourished without worry, how much more will I, who am created to serve my Maker, be nourished without worry; but I have corrupted my ways and so I have impaired my substance.” The point that Jesus is making is not that the birds do not work; it has been said that no one works harder than the average sparrow to make a living; the point he is making is that they *do not worry*. There is *not* to be found in them man’s straining, to see a future which he cannot see, and man’s seeking to find security in things stored up and accumulated against the future.

In verse 27, Jesus goes on to prove that worry in any event, is useless. The verse can be interpreted two ways. It can mean that no one, by worrying can add a cubit to his height; but a cubit is eighteen inches, and no one surely would ever desire to add eighteen inches to their height. It can mean that no one can, by worrying, add the shortest space to their life. It is Jesus’s argument that worry is pointless anyway.

Jesus goes on to speak about the flowers, and he speaks about them as one who loved them. The lilies of the field were the scarlet poppies. They bloomed for *one day* on the hillsides of Palestine; and yet, in their brief life they were clothed with a beauty which surpassed the beauty of the robes of kings. When they died they were used for nothing better than burning. The point is this. The Palestinian oven was made of clay. It was like a clay boxset on bricks over the fire. When it was desired to raise the temperature of it especially quickly, some handfuls of dried grasses and wild flowers were flung inside the oven and set alight. The flowers had but one day of life; and then they were set alight to help a woman to heat an oven when she was baking in a hurry; and yet, God clothes them with a beauty which is

beyond man's power to imitate. If God gives such beauty to a short-lived flower, how much more will he care for man? Surely the generosity which is so lavish to the flower of a day will not be forgetful of man, the crown creation.

Jesus goes on to advance a very fundamental argument against worry. Worry, he says, is characteristic of a heathen, and not of one who knows what God is like. Worry is essentially distrust of God. Such a distrust may be understandable in a heathen who believes in a jealous, unpredictable god; but is beyond comprehension in one who has learned to call God by the name of Father. The Christian cannot worry because he believes in the love of God.

Jesus then goes on to show us two ways in which to defeat worry. The first is to seek first, to concentrate upon, the Kingdom of God. We have seen that to be in the Kingdom of God and to do the will of God is one and the same thing. As we read in our Lord's prayer in Mt 6:10 **10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.** If we concentrate on the doing of, and the acceptance of, God's will is the way to defeat worry. We know how in our lives a great love can drive out every other concern. Such a love can inspire a person's work, intensify their study, purify their life, dominate their whole being. It was Jesus' conviction that worry is banished when God becomes the dominating power of our lives.

Lastly, Jesus says that worry can be defeated when we acquire the art of living one day at a time. The Jews had a saying, "Do not worry over tomorrow's evils, for you know not what today will bring forth. Perhaps tomorrow you will not be alive, and you will have worried for a world which will not be yours." If each day is lived as it comes, if each task is done as it appears, then the sum of all the days is bound to be good.

It is Jesus' advice that we should handle the demands of each day as it comes, without worrying about the unknown future and the things which may never happen.

So let's see if we can gather up Jesus' arguments against worry. Worry is needless, useless, and even actively injurious. Worry cannot affect the past, for the past is the past. The past is the past. It isn't that we should dissociate ourselves from the past; but we should use our past as a spur and a guide for better action in the future, and not as something about which we brood until we have worried ourselves into a paralysis of action.

Equally, worry about the future is useless. Worry about the future is wasted effort, and the future of reality is seldom as bad as the future of our fears.

But worry is worse than useless; it is often actively injurious. Two typical diseases of modern life are the stomach ulcer and the coronary thrombosis, and in many cases both are the result of worry. It is a medical fact that he who laughs most lives longest. The worry which wears out the mind wears out the body along with it. Worry affects a person's judgement, lessens their powers of decision, and renders them progressively incapable of dealing with life. Let us give our very best to every situation – we cannot give more -- and let us leave the rest to God.

Worry is blind. Worry refuses to learn the lesson of nature. Jesus bids us to look at the birds, and see the bounty which is behind nature, and trust the love that lies behind that bounty. There was a psalmist who cheered himself with the memory of history: "o my God" he cried, "my soul is cast down within me." Then he goes on: "Therefore I remember thee, from the land of Jordan, and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar" (Psalm 42: 6)

When he was up against it, he comforted himself with the memory of what God had done. The person who feeds their heart on the record of what God has done in the past will never worry about the future. Worry refuses to learn the lesson of *life*. We are still alive and our heads are still above water; and yet if someone had told us that we would have to go through what we have actually gone through, we would have said that it was impossible. The lesson of life is that somehow we have been enabled to bear the unbearable and to do the undoable and to pass the breaking-point, and not to break. The lesson of life is that worry is unnecessary.

Worry is essentially nonreligious. Worry is not caused by external circumstances. In the same circumstances one person can be absolutely serene, and another person can be worried to death. Both worry and serenity come, not from circumstances, but from the heart.

Hear this quote from Tauler, a German mystic. One day, Tauler met a beggar, "God give you a good day, my friend." Tauler said. "I thank God" said the beggar, "I am never had a bad one." Tauler, in amazement said, "What do you mean?" "Well," said the beggar, "when it is fine, I thank God; when it rains, I thank God; when I have plenty, I thank God; when I am hungry, I thank God; and since God's will is to my will, and whatever pleases him pleases me, why should I say I am unhappy when I am not?" Tauler looked at the man in astonishment. "Who are you?" He asked. "I am a king," said the beggar. "Where is your kingdom?" asked Tauler. "In my heart, with Christ."

Isiah said it long ago; "Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusts in thee" (Isi 26:3)

There may be greater sins than worry, but very certainly there is no more disabling sin. “Take no anxious thought for the morrow” – that is the commandment of Jesus, and it is the way, not only to peace, not only to power, but to the provision of our Father in heaven.

Gracious God,

We thank you so much for your Son, our Lord Jesus,

Who so tenderly cares for our every need as our shepherd.

Who feeds us your word, your wisdom, your truth.

We take such comfort in knowing that you have created us,

And that you will provide us with all that we require in life.

Forgive us Father when we have lost our faith and trust in you,

When we have allowed the tides of life to sweep us into worry,

We ask that you give us the strength, and give us the power over

this worry so that we may continue to serve you in joy, and peace.

May we give up our burden of worry to you, and be found pleasing and acceptable to your call.

Bless us now Lord we pray, as your humble servants

Amen.

