

“Winning Over Worry” Part 1

Matthew 6:25-34

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I preached a sermon on Matthew 6:19-24, you cannot serve God and money. The next Sunday, December 10, the sermon was “Judge Not,” from Matthew 7:1-6. I expected someone, probably someone’s, would ask, “Paster Dan, what about the end of Chapter 6, verses 25-34? Why are you skipping that passage on worry?” Maybe some of you were thinking that, but no one said a word.

Now, I had no intention of skipping Matthew 6:24-34. However, as I was and about ¾ done with a sermon on worry and anxiety, I believe the Lord helped me realize this is not quite what the people of Chisholm Baptist need to hear. I decided, okay, I will skip this passage and topic for now, and come back to it after I’ve had a bit more time to prayerfully ponder what to communicate to you dear folks of Chisholm Baptist.

So, that brings us to today. Take 2 of my sermon on Matthew 6:25-34 as Jesus addresses the topic of worry and anxiety. What was wrong with take 1? Well, this video might help explain: Bob Newhart, “Stop It.”

Okay folks, the first edition of this sermon, the one you will not hear, essentially said, “Stop it!” If you are worrying about things, “Stop it.” If you are struggling with anxiety, “Stop it.”

Now, there is some wisdom in what Bob Newhart was telling that woman, and there certainly was plenty of wisdom in the first version of this sermon, but I believe it was incomplete. It focused on the fact we should not worry, which is true, but didn’t really address the complexities we often have to deal with in our real-life struggles with worry and anxiety.

For example, this was how I had planned to start the sermon. Mickey Rivers was a former outfielder for the New York Yankees and a few other baseball teams. He once said, “Ain’t no sense worrying about things you got control over, because if you got control over them, there ain’t no sense worrying. And there ain’t no sense worrying about things you got no control over, because if you got no control over them, ain’t no sense worrying.”

Oh, I think Mickey was basically right. It doesn’t really make sense to worry. Yet, rarely does someone worry because he/she feels logically compelled to do so. Rather, it often seems like an instinctive or emotional reaction to various life situations. It is a reaction many would say they don’t really have control over.

I suspect most of you would agree that it is not a good thing to worry. I also suspect you would prefer not to worry, not just because it is wrong to do but because it involves unpleasant emotions. Yet, my guess is that most folks in this room have spent some time, even this past week, worrying.

Why do I believe that? Well, it is a very common thing to do. We are a nation of worriers. We worry about our health, about our job, about our finances, about our appearance, about what our peers think, about what the weather will be, and about whether the pastor will quit on time so you can get home in time to watch the game. And worrying can be addictive. You might be a little concerned about a particular situation but if you let it, that worry can grow and grow, and become a gigantic obsession that paralyzes you.

“But Pastor Dan, Christians don’t really worry, do they?” John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church said, “I could no more worry than I could curse or swear.” But most Christians even if they don’t curse or swear, do plenty of worrying, and I suspect, Mr. Wesley did as well, though he didn’t want to call it that.

I know I can be very good at worrying. I remember when I got my lab work done for my annual physical in August. I was anxious about what those results would be. Would my PSA or blood sugar or cholesterol numbers be high? In other words, I was feeling fine, but still worrying about my health.

Folks, most of us need help in “winning over worry,” in overcoming the anxieties with which we struggle. We need God to help us. Fortunately, He does that in our text this morning. As I said, we are in Matthew 6:25-34. Let’s pause and pray that God would use His word to enable us to begin

to find freedom from the anxieties and fears with which we struggle and to win over worry.

Matthew 6:25a Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, not about your body, what you will wear. This exhortation is repeated in **Matthew 6:31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?”**

That is from the ESV. The NIV and NLT says, “Do not worry about your life.” The KJV says, “Take no thought of your life.” They are all appropriate translations of the Greek word “me-rim’-nao,” which means worry, anxiety, fear, or concern. Yet, and this is true in Greek, English or probably in any language, the meaning of a word is determined not by a dictionary, but by context. For example, in **Philippians 2:20** speaking of Timothy, the apostle Paul writes, “**I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare.**” Genuine merimnao, genuine anxiety for your welfare.

Folks, it is good to be concerned about the welfare of others. There are certainly other things in life for which it is good to be concerned. But there is a sinful concern which flows out of a lack of faith, a lack of trust in the Lord. Jesus calls it worry (NIV) or anxiety (ESV). Now, though Jesus and the New Testament do not distinguish between those two words, worry, and anxiety, modern psychology and medicine often do. To put it very simply, they tend to view “worry” as thinking about situations, while “anxiety “ refers to a physical condition results from that worry.

Here is one description: “When we worry, we will mentally turn a problem over in our minds. We may do so over and over, but we are thinking. Anxiety is often a collection of physical symptoms. A dry mouth, racing mind, pounding heart, sweaty palms, upset stomach, clenched muscles and even panic attacks. Often this type of anxiety is a result of worry or fear.

So, the word “anxiety” can be used in at least three different ways. First, there is appropriate anxiety or concern. These are no sinful thoughts or feelings but are actually honoring to the Lord. Second, there is the anxiety or worry that Jesus talks about in our passage today. These are thoughts reflecting a lack of trust in the Lord, and

thus they are sinful thoughts. This is why Jesus tells us not to be anxious or worried. And third, the word “anxiety” is used to describe a physical reaction that often is a result of the second type of anxiety. For example, you may be so worried and stressed about an upcoming history test that you end up with an upset stomach. It is not a sin to have an upset stomach. I don’t think anyone would choose that. However, it is possible, even likely, that the worrying you were doing about the test is what Jesus prohibits, and thus is wrong or sinful.

When Jesus says, in verse 25 and 31, do not be anxious, He is talking about that second type of anxiety, where we are choosing to worry, to keep thinking about what might happen in a particular situation or circumstance. That’s what Jesus says we are not to do.

Okay, let’s go back to the text. Jesus’ specific instruction is that we should not worry about how we will obtain some necessities of life food, drink, clothing. This is closely related to the previous section in verses 19-24, where Jesus warns of the folly of materialism, of striving to attain wealth.

He anticipates some will say, “But Jesus, I didn’t try to accumulate money and stuff. My concern is I might not have enough to live.” But the Lord Jesus says, don’t worry about it. And His command not to worry really applies to all aspects of life. In **Matthew 6:34a** He says, “**Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.**”

In this paragraph, Jesus gives us three reasons why we should not worry.

#1 - Worry reflects a lack of trust in the Lord. Matthew 6:25a Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? There are more important things in life than meeting our physical needs. Yes, those things certainly matter, but we are human beings, not animals.

To be concerned only about physical needs and neglect spiritual needs, is to act like an animal acts. Jesus says, Gentiles, people who are spiritually ignorant, act that way. **Matthew 6:32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.** If a Christian is worried about having

enough material things, it probably indicates he/she is focusing too much on those things. And there are more important things in life.

Refusing to trust our heavenly Father to meet our needs is really an insult to Him. If your 6-year-old says to his teacher, "I am worried my mom won't give me anything for supper tonight," it reflects badly on you as a parent. And assuming you feed your children every evening, you would probably be a little irritated with your child for saying something like that.

When we, as God's children, worry about whether we will have enough food, clothing, or shelter, it does not reflect much confidence in Him. It is an insult to the Lord when we, as His children, refuse to trust Him. Worry is just not something Christians should do.

#2 – Worry is unnecessary. Jesus uses two object lessons from the natural world to make this point. *Matthew 6:26,28-30* 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 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?

Friends, if God takes care of birds and flowers, He will certainly take care of us. We don't need to worry. Jesus reminds us there is much we can learn from observing nature. "Look at the birds of air."

Martin Luther comments, "*The Lord is making the birds our teachers. It is a great and last disgrace to us that a sparrow should become a theologian and preacher to wisest of men. Every day the nightingale preaches a most excellent sermon.*"

I like this little poem. *Said the robin to the sparrow, "I would like to know, why these anxious human beings rush about and worry so." Said the sparrow to the robin, "Friend, I think it must be, that they have no heavenly Father such as cares for you and me."*

Friends, look at the birds once in a while. Watch the ducks and geese as they migrate South, utilizing the incredible instincts God had given them. If the Lord takes care of them, He will certainly take care of you. There is no need to worry.

#3 – Jesus says worry is unproductive. *Matthew 6:27* And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? It doesn't do any good to be anxious or worry. Worrying doesn't prevent bad things from happening or make good things happen. As someone said, "Worriers spend a lot of time shoveling smoke." Or I like this one: "Worry is like a rocking chair. It will give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere."

Yet, there are a lot of people who spend a lot of time worrying. One of the most foolish ways that people waste time is by worrying about very improbable or catastrophic events, that "*might happen.*" Winston Churchill often told the story of an old man who said on his deathbed, "I've had a lot of trouble in my life, most of which never happened."

Jesus says, ***Matthew 6:34a* "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself."** Worrying about what might occur tomorrow is an unproductive use of time.

Okay, that is what Jesus says. Now, I want to address three possible misunderstandings of His teaching we should avoid.

#1 – Even though we should not worry, we should still work and plan to meet our needs. Some people say, "Hey, I don't need a job. God will take care of me. Consider the birds of the air and lilies of the field." However, ***2 Thessalonians 3:10* For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.** Now Jesus is talking about someone capable of working, but the point is clear: just sitting back or even praying the Lord will provide your daily needs is not how you demonstrate trust in God.

Remember, those birds that God takes care of still build nests and gather food. In Proverbs 6, the Lord commends the ant who plans ahead and stores food for the winter. Yes, the Lord will care for His children. We don't need to worry. But we

experience His care as we fulfill the responsibilities He gives us, plan and work. That is how we can meet our material needs, support our family members and help those who struggle. Jesus' words are not a call to laziness and irresponsibility.

#2 – Even though we should not worry, we should still have appropriate concern or *merimnao*. I already mentioned the concern Timothy had for the Christians in Philippi.

In **Philippians 2:20**, the apostle Paul says, “**I have no one else like him (like Timothy) who will show genuine concern for your welfare.**” Genuine *merimnao*. This concern motivated Timothy to prayer and acts of love, but it also meant he was often thinking about the welfare of the Philippian Christians. He was not *worried* about them, but he was *concerned*.

Another example of appropriate concern is Paul himself. Describing his ministry **2 Corinthians 11:28** **And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety (my merimnao) for all the churches.** Paul was certainly praying for the first century Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Since he was often separated by many miles from these folks, he could do little to help them other than write letters of encouragement and admonition. But he still experienced “*daily pressure*” from his concern.

That was the price of love. When you love someone, you cannot be disinterested or apathetic about the wellbeing of that person. Even though your “caring” or concern may be emotionally painful, even though your “caring” may not provide any practical benefit for the other person, it is that attitude you have toward those you love. Trusting God, believing He will care for another person, doesn't mean you stop caring.

Let's say your first grader is supposed to get off the bus in front of your house tomorrow afternoon, but she doesn't. She is not on the bus. Being a Christian who trusts the Lord, you think, I am sure my daughter is fine. God is watching over her and she will be home eventually.” That's the proper reaction, right? No, that is not an appropriate parental response. It reflects a reckless faith where someone avoids God-given

responsibilities and claims to “just trust God.”

Now, this is very different from the mom who spends day after day worrying about whether her first-grade daughter is safe when she is at school, or night after night worrying whether the first-grade daughter is safe sleeping in her bed. It is appropriate to be concerned that we are fulfilling the responsibilities the Lord has given us. Of course, if we are too “concerned,” if we are worrying it can inhibit us from fulfilling those responsibilities.

Any type of concern that keeps you from sleeping at night probably makes it harder for you to do what you are supposed to be doing. We always need to be careful that appropriate concern doesn't become the sinful anxiety or worry about which Jesus warns us.

#3 – Even though Jesus says we don't have to worry because God is caring for us, life will still include troubles and trials. A person who thinks, “God is taking care of me, nothing bad can ever happen to me,” is sadly mistaken. Consider again those lilies in the field that God so magnificently clothes. They may be cut down or, here in Minnesota, freeze. Jesus tells us that not one sparrow falls to the ground apart from the Father's will. Yet, those sparrows eventually all fall to the ground. In fact, the average lifespan of both lilies and sparrows is relatively short.

Jesus affirms that we will experience hard times when he says, Matthew 6:34b “Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” Or as NIV says, each day has enough trouble of its own.” As Christians, our freedom from anxiety is not due to some guaranteed freedom from trials and tragedies. Rather, it is because we are confident that even though God permits us to suffer, as our loving Father, He will always use these situations for our ultimate good.

So, we should not worry or be anxious because we should be trusting God, it is unnecessary, and it is unproductive. We must remember that though we are free from the need to worry, we are not free from the responsibilities of work and being concerned about others. Nor does the reality that God cares for us mean we won't experience trouble in life.

But...how does this text help us to win over worry, to avoid the wrong king of anxiety? Well, let me mention six things... next Sunday. But let's spend the next seven days praising God for how He cares for us.