

## **Why So Anxious? (Matthew 6:25-34)**

Good morning everyone and happy new year. I hope you all had a pleasant holiday season.

Before we dive into today's message, please join me in prayer.

### **Prayer**

So we find ourselves at the beginning of another year. It might just be me but does anyone else find it curious how “new beginnings” are so important to us? I sit back and I consider the cycles of time I track in my own life. Each day begins anew with fresh opportunities and refreshed ambition toward goals. If there is anything I couldn't get done in my days, there's always next week, a fresh start to re-orient on my personal and professional to-do items. It's okay if I don't hit it all because next month, I can set new priorities and really get to it. Now I find myself at the beginning of a new year. This is a clean slate. This year's the year. I'm finally going to turn things around, get my life together, and have a banner year. I'm ready to do it.....starting tomorrow.....or maybe next week.....but definitely this month....probably. Does any of this seem familiar? And if things aren't going according to plan, no worries....you have a birthday coming up, right? That makes sense. Of course I'm making light of procrastination which is something I struggle with myself. I'm bad at keeping my resolutions and achieving higher level goals in life. These things have been known to stress me out.

This is a season of resolutions and goal setting. With that comes added stress and anxiety around the goals we set if we are unrealistic about results and timelines or are too rigid in our personal expectations. Breaking habits and making life changes are among the most difficult of tasks a person can take on. Add then the pressure of continual failure to attain personal goals or the relentless approach of looming self-imposed deadlines and what was meant to be a self-improvement undertaking can turn and have a negative impact on one's personal wellbeing. Such things are usually in addition to the everyday concerns of life that we all face. Our jobs and all the pressures that accompany them. Our finances. Our households, the maintenance of and concern for all who dwell therein. Additionally, there are social pressures of all kinds not just in

our immediate circle of influence but over a wider cast area via technology and social media. When I was young, I never gave a second thought to friends and family that lived in far-off places. They weren't around. Today I have no excuse not to maintain connections. So then, there is an expectation from many to do just that. More pressure.

My point is that it's a lot. It's enough to drive a person crazy. For many, it does just that. I myself have experienced a variety of side effects stemming from anxiety; heart palpitations, eye ticks, restless sleep, and the like. Data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health shows a steady rise in anxiety among adults between the years of 2008 and 2018. And that was before the pandemic. Those numbers are markedly increased over the past 2 years.

My hope this morning is to encourage you all, as you consider the year ahead and perhaps make resolutions of your own, to the end that you not be anxious, adding undue troubles to life but rather, rest on the promises of God found in His word.

Now, our Lord has much to say about these things. Be it hardship, daily stresses, tribulations and persecution, the Word tells us how we ought to conduct ourselves and provides encouragement to the believer so that come what may, through all things, we may have peace.

Today I want to focus on the words of our Lord Jesus recorded in Matthew Chapter 6 verses 25 through 34. I Invite you to turn there in your bibles and read along with me.

*Mat 6:25 "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?"*

*Mat 6:26 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?"*

*Mat 6:27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"*

*Mat 6:28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,*

*Mat 6:29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

*Mat 6:30 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?*

*Mat 6:31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'*

*Mat 6:32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.*

*Mat 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

*Mat 6:34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

Now the context of Matthew chapter 6 is the Sermon on the Mount. In chapter 5 our Lord lays out the beatitudes and illuminates sin as being a condition of the heart vs merely our outward actions. In chapter 6 the teaching continues through several topics. The portion of scripture we are considering this morning starts off in verse 25 with the word, "therefore". What's the saying?... *when you see "therefore" you have to ask what is it there for...* or something like that. This is a word of transition related to a previously expressed thought. In light of what has been previously stated, now consider this. In this case, our Lord had just drawn distinction between investment in the things of this world vs heavenly things. Preoccupation with striving after riches in this world as opposed to the storing up of riches in the kingdom of God. In verses 19 and 20 we read,

*"<sup>19</sup>Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup>but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."*

Just before our "therefore" in verse 25 he says,

*"<sup>24</sup>No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."*

Jesus is encouraging His audience to break from their dependence on money, or the material things of the world, and to focus on the spiritual. There is where peace is to be found. It is in the light of this statement that we then read in verse 25,

*“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life”*

God’s people are not meant to have worldly anxiety. Jesus provides examples in the very same verse.

*“...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?”*

Now it would be a mistake for us to assume that He is speaking here of ONLY nourishment and clothing. Jesus says as much when He says, *“Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”* There is both worldly application and spiritual application. Consider when Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness to satisfy his mortal hunger, His response was that *“man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”*, alluding to a greater sustenance that is needed to have life. Still more, in John’s gospel, wherein Christ as identified as the Word of God, Jesus says of Himself, *“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger.”* We are to extend the application to more than what is plainly stated. Not just what we will eat and drink but how we come to possess it. Not just our clothing but all our material goods and our spiritual provision as well.

I read a statistic that said 54% of all Americans live paycheck to paycheck. All it takes is to miss a single paycheck, maybe from a family emergency, health issues, etc... and so many can be easily thrown into financial hardship. In such times, people seek relief, however they can get it and as soon as possible. The mind becomes singularly focused. Tunnel vision takes hold of people and anxiety sets in. How am I going to pay for groceries? How are we going to pay for little Billy’s prescription? How are we going to pay our mortgage? The list of potential anxiety inducing concerns is limitless. It’s in this anxiety that we find the crux of the matter....lack of faith. We’ll come back to that truth shortly. First, understand that the temptation to associate our experience of trials and hardship in life with our value in the eyes of God and his care for us is very strong and a most deceptive lie of the enemy. Allow me to emphasize this point by

stating it again in another way. Your experience of troublesome times, hardships, pain, and death are not tied to God's love of you as His adopted child. The outworking of all things is for your eventual good and the glory of God. Now, understanding human propensity to associate God's love for us with the trials of our lives, Jesus seeks to highlight the value of man over and against the rest creation in our next verses. Starting at verse 26:

*“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?”*

Here Jesus point to the birds of the air as an example. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns. Now sowing and reaping and gathering food for keeping is human activity. These are some of the methods through which God provides for mankind. Knowledge of these things has been given to man. Some would look at this verse and say, “See, we don't need to strive and toil for our nourishment because God will find a way to make sure we have the food we need. Look at the birds. They don't do those things and he still provides for them.” They say this to mean that, with faith, there is no need to strive after nourishment, God will magically provide for us. If I did nothing at all, food would find it's way to me. This is a dangerous misunderstanding of God's providence and a perversion of what faith is. Remember that Jesus asked, *“Is not life more than food..”* There is a spiritual lesson here. The birds don't have all that we have been given; all the tools and knowledge for farming, hunting, and gathering, yet God provides food for them by His providence through the manner established for them. Now these birds are presented as being of little value compared to us but we were just told that God has great consideration for them. Hence the rhetorical question, *“Are you not of more value than they?”* The answer is meant to be obvious. Yes, we are of more value than the birds. God will provide food for us in so much greater ways. The food He provides gives eternal life.

Now the need for physical nourishment is a life and death issue. If we don't eat or drink, we die. That fact is why people resort quickly to first anxiety, then dismay, then desperation. And when faced with the possibility of death, many will abandon their convictions of faith in God and revert to self-reliance as the means for their sustainment. **I** will do whatever **I** must do to survive and when **I've** done it, it will have been by **my** doing. This idea of striving after the keeping of one's own life prompts Jesus's next statement in verse 27.

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

The implications of what is being said here are truly humbling. We are talking about our God, the God of all creation, who orders all things, and who knows the end from the beginning. And Jesus, the one speaking these humbling words is *“before all things, and in him all things hold together.”* (Col. 1:17) You do not have your life but by the grace of God to have given it and sustain it and on the day that your life in the flesh should end, it was always going to end. Being set then, who can add a single hour to his life? Can your worry and toil change the will of God? Here then is the exercise of our faith, that we worry not in our doing but do all things giving glory to God, trusting that come what may, God’s purpose for those who love Him is good and that he works all things to that end, and that end is not to be realized in this mortal flesh among the kingdoms of man. The writer of Ecclesiastes understands the vanity of worry in the heart but would call it vexation. Ecclesiastes 2:22:

*“What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? <sup>23</sup> For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.”*

These dejecting statements are then immediately followed with:

*“There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, <sup>25</sup> for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?”*

This may seem contradicting, but you see, the toil will always be there. The work is going to get done. It is fundamental to our existence that we toil and labor all the days of our life. The difference among men then is in the heart and in the mindset with which they toil. The one who knows the Lord and puts their trust in Him are able to face all things, menial and disastrous, with a sense of peace that only the Lord can give. Job, after Satan’s first round of attacks, speaks with wisdom when he says in chapter 1 verse 21,

*“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”*

And again after Satan attacks his health when he says in chapter 2 verse 10,

*“...Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?”*

## PAUSE

Getting back to Matthew 6, Jesus provides another example for our consideration of God's provision. Starting at verse 28 and 29:

*“And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

How are we to understand this? What does it have to do with our provision? Flowers don't wear clothes, but Jesus seems to indicate that they are arrayed, or clothed, with intention. What does this have to do with the clothes we wear? Is it a commentary on beauty found in nature? Some people would say that what is being said here is that nature has a beauty provided from God that not even the richest of persons dressed in the finest of clothes can compare to. That may be true but what does that have to do with him providing us with clothes to wear? If we have faith, is He going to give us the newest fashions with the shiniest bling for us to wear? I don't think so. Remember that earlier in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was drawing a distinction between seeking the things of this world and the things of heaven. There is a spiritual application to all that is being said. Let's continue in verse 30:

*“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?”*

Again, minimizing the value of the grass against the value of man, just as he did with the birds, Jesus is providing assurance to His hearers that they too will be clothed by God who provides. Now I'm going to sidetrack for a moment and have you recall an exchange between Jesus and His disciples that is recorded in Matthew chapter 13 verses 10 and 11.

*“Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” <sup>11</sup> And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given*

Jesus often spoke with words that conveyed a spiritual truth. We are meant to seek after and discern that spiritual truth in what He has to say. You might say there is a plainly read understanding and a spiritual understanding. Keeping that in mind, consider again what Jesus is

saying back in Matthew 6 about the grass and the flowers and seek to understand the veiled revelation contained therein. Can you identify the gospel message in what he is saying?

*“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”*

Like the grass of the field that is alive today and tomorrow thrown into the oven, so too is natural man alive one day only to be thrown into the fire the next because of sin. Contained in this truth is the revelation of our need for a savior; our need to have our sin covered, covered with a righteousness that is not our own. Therefore, being of much more value than the flowers, God will clothe us himself, as he does them, but with the righteousness of Christ, providing through him the ultimate provision we need so as not to be thrown into the fire.

Some of you may say, “Whoa preacher....where do you get all that from? It seems pretty plain that Jesus is speaking of our material provision.” To which I say that we must examine all scripture against the light of the Gospel. I don’t claim to have perfect understanding of all scripture and there is always room for gracious disagreement among siblings in Christ but let’s parse this out. The example Jesus provides is of Solomon. Solomon reigned over Israel during the pinnacle of their national strength, unified and very wealthy. At his height, the opulence of his household and the luxury with which he clothed himself would have been unmatched in all the world. It is his example that is compared to the lilies and described as inferior to them. So then what are we to think of the statement, “will He not much more clothe you?” How many people in the world go without clothing continually? Far too many, I’m sure. How many believers in the world suffer similarly? God knows. Which of you is clothed more luxuriously than Solomon? There is more. Scripture uses the imagery of having dirty robes removed and having clean white raiment provided by God to communicate the idea of having our sin removed and being clothed in the righteousness of God. One might also include the promise of God to clothe us in immortality at our promised glorification for all of it is included in the promise of eternal life. It is the spiritual food and the spiritual covering that we need and ought to concern ourselves with. Only with that proper orientation can the material concerns of this world be put in their right place that we might experience the peace of God.

Jesus then encourages His hearers to exercise faith. Verses 31 and 32:



*“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’<sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.*

This is a return to what I’ll term, the practical application for Jesus’s hearers. His words have so much more meaning than may appear at the surface but still serve to address the idea of worrisome preoccupation with the things of this world. The people of the world who do not know God have no basis for personal security apart from their own toiling. We, on the other hand, have the promises of God given to us in His word and a keen understanding of the cosmic order of all things. We know that this world is not all there is to reality. We know that a great day of judgment awaits all of mankind and that for His people, those who place their faith in the finished work of Christ, an eternity in His Kingdom, in His presence, awaits us. Jesus reminds us of this Kingdom with His command in verse 33:

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

This is not a call to believe a prosperity gospel. No promises are made that you will receive health, wealth, and prosperity because of your Christian faith or participation in the body of Christ. On the contrary, God’s word is explicit that ours is to be an existence in this world as humble sojourners amid darkness, temptation, various trials, and even persecution. Ours is to be a life of daily dying to ourselves and giving glory to God. Seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Do not seek the things of this world and your own righteousness for you have none to offer apart from Christ. Only by being covered in Christ’s righteousness do we enter the Kingdom of God and therein receive all the provisions and blessings our heavenly father has to add to us.

*“THEREFORE...”* verse 34:

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

**PAUSE**

So, we're at the beginning of a new year. Each of you is looking ahead in your own life, trying to best discern what may come, planning for the reaching of personal, professional, and spiritual goals. They may be small, or they may be great. Whatever the case, I exhort each of you to not be anxious and to hold loosely to your plans and cling tightly to the Lord lest, when things don't go as you may hope, you fall into despair.

For those of you who don't know, I work in homebuilding. Our company has many relationships with laborers, suppliers, manufacturers, etc. As is common in business, we take time at the end of the year to plan for the next. Now our industry has been wracked with supply chain issues caused by the pandemic and an unexpected homebuilding boom. Recently, I sat down with one of our major suppliers to discuss the next year and in no uncertain terms, he made it clear that he expects the troubles that have been experienced in the past 2 years to, in some cases, worsen, but generally, to continue through the foreseeable future. How shall I react to that? I could be a fatalist, throwing up my hands in preemptive defeat saying, "What does it matter anyway!" but that's not who I am. No. I'll diligently plan as best I can for the coming year, setting realistic goals and hedging for what I have no control over. In all things though, in my planning and my doing, I will do it as to the Lord, trusting in Him fully since I have no illusions that I may know His intention and purpose. Whatever He has for me, be it worldly success or the utter destruction of my flesh, I know that he "*works all things according to the counsel of his will*" and that He has promised us an inheritance that is laid up for us "*until we acquire possession of it,<sup>le</sup> to the praise of his glory.*" (Eph. 1:11&14) So too you, trust in the Lord always. Don't be anxious. He holds us in His hands. Through us He works in the world, so let us be faithful and diligent in all that we do, shining forth His light in us to the rest of the world around us.

## **Prayer**