

Matthew 6:25-34

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[0 : 00] At the beginning of the week, I was pondering on a text or theme for the sermon this evening.

Those of you who are part of the congregation will know that over these past, I guess, three or four months, we've been working through a series, Women in Genesis. And well, we finished that a couple of weeks ago, and we haven't begun a new series.

And so it wasn't immediately obvious, well, what would I do this evening? And so as I was thinking about it, obviously one thing that was dominating the panorama for me and for us as a family was the big wedding on Friday, where our son Samuel got married to Mari.

And so that was very much on my mind, and I thought, well, maybe some kind of wedding-related theme, which really would have been quite self-indulgent, but nonetheless, that was in my mind.

And yeah, that's right.

I'm not sure what you said, Ariel, but I'm sure it was very wise. So yeah, that was, I thought, you know, some wedding-related theme. Now, this is where there's a little twist that's maybe just a little bit concerning, because as I was thinking about some wedding-related theme, the thought that came to my mind was worry and stress.

[1 : 17] So I don't know how that connection happened, but it did. And so I thought, well, yeah, that's always relevant. It's always something we need to think about, because it's so real, I think, for all of us.

In lesser or greater measure, we tend to worry. We tend to be anxious. And there are plenty reasons to worry. There are plenty reasons to be anxious for all of us.

As I say, for some, perhaps more than others, depending on the circumstances that God determines and sometimes can be very confusing for us to understand. So it's always something that we need to be mindful of and be reminded of what God has to say to us on the subject.

And so I want to spend a little time thinking about this passage that we've read concerning this theme or this reality of worry or anxiety. It was interesting, even this morning, obviously I had in my mind that this is what I was going to be preaching on this evening.

And then in the passage this morning, those of you here this morning may remember that as Andy was reading the passage there in Ecclesiastes, there was this very striking phrase or sentence in it, banish anxiety from your heart.

[2 : 28] A very strong language we find there in the Old Testament on this matter, banish anxiety from your heart. Well, anyway, this was in my mind. I was giving some thought to it in the course of the week at different points.

And then last night we got back from Edinburgh. So the wedding was on Friday. And then yesterday afternoon we made our way back to Aberdeen. And I sat in front of the TV because I was pretty shattered and watched some crickets.

Now I get a lot of grief from my sons because I do like a game of cricket, 2020 or One Day International. And I just take the grief. You know, I take the mockery and just carry on watching because I enjoy it.

So I don't really care if they don't. And the match yesterday was between West Indies and New Zealand. It's the Cricket World Cup. And it really was a cracking match. And most of you are thinking, what is he on about?

But some of you, I hope, are kind of, this is resonating. And maybe somebody watched and said, yes, it was a cracking match. I don't know. Maybe. Maybe just one person. Now, because it was the West Indies, I presume it's because it was the West Indies.

[3 : 35] But over the loudspeaker, the song that kept booming out was Bob Marley's classic, Don't Worry About a Thing, Because Every Little Thing is Going to Be All Right. I'm not going to burst into song.

Don't worry. But you must be familiar with that, even if you're not familiar with cricket. Don't worry about a thing, because every little thing is going to be all right. Now, it's a catchy lyric, but I think you'd agree with me that it's just a little inane and vacuous.

Don't worry about a thing, because every little thing is going to be all right. You see, it's all very well urging others not to worry. But to do so, we need to give solid and truthful reasons not to worry. It's not enough just to say to somebody, don't worry. It's of not much help to say to somebody, purely on the basis of wishful thinking, everything will be fine, because we know that everything isn't always fine.

It's simply not true that every little thing is going to be all right. Indeed, some of the big things aren't all right. Some of the big things mess up and cause grief and pain, and things don't work out all right at all.

[4 : 48] And so, to be encouraged not to worry on the basis of this very flimsy and vacuous promise isn't of much help, really, to anybody. But Jesus tackles the reality of worry and anxiety in a much more grounded way.

And we want to spend a little time considering what Jesus has to say on the subject in the Sermon on the Mount, the passage that we read, as recorded by Matthew there in chapter 6 of Matthew's Gospel.

Now, in this part of the sermon, Jesus has been instructing His disciples about their attitude to material possessions. We're kind of jumping into the middle of a sermon. And in this part of the sermon, that's the subject matter.

So, you see from verse 19 through to verse 24, He's speaking about treasures in heaven, contrasting the value of treasures in heaven to material treasures on earth. And He's really moving on to continue dealing with this matter of material possessions as He tackles this matter of the anxiety and the worry that sometimes accompanies our obsession with the material and the temporary and the passing.

What I want to do is hear what Jesus says. Listen to the instruction that Jesus gives in this regard, in this matter of worry and anxiety.

[6 : 15] And the way in which we'll do it is we'll see how Jesus gives us one don't, one prohibition, but then He grounds that prohibition in six reasons.

So, there's a prohibition, then there's six reasons, and then there's an exhortation to do something instead of. So, something we're not to do, six reasons why we need not do it, and then He finishes by giving an alternative or giving us what we ought to do rather than that which He is forbidding.

So, one don't, six whys, and one do. What's the don't? Well, I think it's pretty obvious we've kind of introduced it. It's do not worry. There in verse 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, and He goes on.

But the prohibition is clear enough, do not worry. And then this little section of the sermon closes with this same prohibition. We see that in verse 34, therefore do not worry about tomorrow.

And obviously, that's following all the reasons that He's given. So, He begins by saying, don't do this. He gives all these reasons that we're going to see in a moment, and then you can have the therefore. In the light of all these reasons, He reinforces or repeats the command, the prohibition, therefore do not worry about tomorrow.

[7 : 40] Now, the command is simple to understand. There's nothing complicated in the language that Jesus uses. We can understand what He's saying.

Do not worry. But of course, the fact that it's easy to understand doesn't in itself make it easy to obey. And maybe just before we move on to the reasons that He gives, which will help us obey the command or the prohibition, just notice a couple of things to highlight about this, this don't, do not worry.

The first thing that I've really already said, but I want to explicitly state, is that Jesus is commanding. You know, this isn't some piece of life advice, you know, from some, you know, life guru saying, well, my advice to you would be to live your life in this way, or maybe you need to think more positively about this.

No, this is Jesus, the eternal Son of God, commanding His disciples. It's not advice. It's not good counsel. It is a command. Do not worry.

And as a command from Jesus, to disobey the command is sinful. And although I think many of us have maybe been told this, and we've seen it for ourselves, we've read it for ourselves, I think we still find it quite difficult to get our heads around this idea that to worry, certainly in the manner that Jesus is contemplating, isn't just unhelpful.

[9 : 12] It's not just unwise, but it's sinful. It's disobedience. There is a command, do not worry. And when you disobey a command, well, what's that?

It's sin. Sin is any want of conformity unto the commands of God. And some of you may, I think it was the ladies' Bible or book club.

I think that's what it was. It may have been the Bible study. I know at one point you were going through a book by Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*. And one of the ones that he identifies is this, the sin of worry and of being anxious about those things that we ought not to be anxious about. So, that's the first thing, just to make explicit, that Jesus is commanding. The second thing to say, and it kind of is to kind of put that in context, is to make it very clear that Jesus is not forbidding legitimate concerns over those things that he is going to talk about, about our life, about what we are to eat and what we are to wear and so many other things.

He's not saying that we shouldn't be concerned about these things. He's not saying that we shouldn't have legitimate concerns over the importance of providing these things, for our family and those we love.

[10 : 30] But what he is doing is forbidding that degree of anxiety and worry that disables and paralyzes and perhaps crucially is born of a lack of trust in God.

And that really is the heart of the matter. And worry becomes sinful or worry is sinful because it betrays a lack of trust in God. The core sin, as it were, is unbelief.

It's not trusting in God. And that sin finds expression in our worry and our anxiety. What the worry reveals, what the anxiety reveals is that we're not trusting God because if we were trusting God, then we wouldn't be so paralyzed by worry and anxiety.

So that's the heart of the matter. And maybe before we go any further and look at the reasons that Jesus gives for not worrying, we can just ask ourselves one or two questions.

Do we worry about some of the things that Jesus talks about in this passage? Do you worry about material possessions, about how much money you have, about the car you drive or that you would like to drive, about the weekly shopping, about the house you have bought or would like to buy?

[11 : 44] Do you worry about tomorrow? What will happen at work? Will you still have a job by the end of the month, by the end of the year? Do you worry about your pension? Does that worry cause you anxiety and stress?

Are you on edge and irritable because you're worrying about these things? Well, Jesus says to you and he says to me, don't worry. I tell you, do not worry about these things.

Why? Well, Jesus gives us reasons why we are not to worry. Now that in itself is worth highlighting. By giving us reasons, Jesus is demonstrating his love for us, his tender concern for us.

Jesus, remember, is Lord over all. He is supreme and sovereign over all. His word must be our command. And Jesus would be within his rights to simply command, do not worry, period.

He doesn't need to give reasons. He is sovereign. He can simply say, this is what you must do and this is what you must not do. And we are bound to obey. Our duty is to obey.

[12 : 53] But in his tender and loving concern to help us obey, he gives us reasons. And I think we can find six reasons that Jesus gives his disciples why we need not or ought not to worry.

And let's look at each of them just very briefly. The first reason that I can find here in this passage is this. Don't worry because life itself is such a wonderful and glorious gift to be enjoyed.

Verse 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. And then especially the words that follow. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes?

The argument that Jesus employs here is based on how special, how special life is. Jesus is saying that in the light of how special life is, it really doesn't matter what you wear or what you eat or what car you drive or what mobile phone you use.

These things are of no consequence in the light of how special life itself is. Why lose sleep over what you're going to wear when the dawn will bring a new day full of opportunities to live life to the

glory of God?

[14:12] If tomorrow you're going to phone a friend who is maybe lonely or dejected for some reason, and you're going to do that with a view to showing your love and concern, does it really matter if the phone you use is the latest iPhone or some phone that seems to have come from the ark?

It really doesn't matter what phone you use. It's of no consequence how much it costs or what status it maybe would give you among some of your contemporaries.

If this weekend you're planning to go up into the hills and enjoy the wonder and the glory of God's creation, does it really matter what car you drive in to get to that point when you can start walking into the hills, how much it costs and how impressed others might be by the car that you own?

It doesn't matter. Life itself is such a wonderful and glorious gift to be enjoyed that given that there's no purpose, there's no sense in worrying about these things.

That's the first reason that Jesus gives. But the second reason is very much connected to that, and it is this. Don't worry because you are so incredibly valuable and valued by God.

[15:26] In verse 26 we read, 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?

So the argument is based on how valuable we are. But the manner in which Jesus brings us to appreciate how valuable we are is by encouraging us to look at the birds of the air.

You know, I began by referencing Bob Marley's song about Don't Worry About a Thing, because every little thing is going to be all right.

And I did so somewhat disparagingly. But maybe that was a little bit harsh on Bob Marley and on the song that he penned. Because that song, and I only knew this when I Googled it today, actually. It was just that lyric that I was familiar with. But that little song, or that lyric, forms part of a song called Three Little Birds. Maybe some of you knew that. And within the lyrics of the song, you have these words.

[16:29] Rise up in the morning, smile with the rising sun, Three little birds pitch by my doorstep, Singing sweet songs of melodies pure and true, Singing, this is my message to you, Don't worry about a thing, Because every little thing is going to be all right.

So it's quite striking, actually, that the lyric kind of picks up on this biblical idea of looking at the birds and having the birds as our teachers. I don't know to what extent Bob Marley consciously or unconsciously was drawing on maybe some Sunday school lesson he attended as a child.

I don't know. But it is interesting that it's the birds in the song that are teaching and instructing the one who is hearing.

And Martin Luther has a very famous sermon on this passage where he speaks of the birds are school teachers. And this is the idea. Jesus is urging us to look at the birds and to be taught by them.

And what's the lesson? Well, the lesson is very clear. I provide for them. I clothe them so beautifully. I provide for them everything they need. And the argument from the lesser to the greater, if I do that for them, how much more will I do it for you, my children, whom I love, whom I value so highly?

[17:48] Obviously, I will provide for you if I provide for them. And so, this is the second reason that Jesus gives for us not to worry. The value that we have and that we enjoy in God's sight.

And what we need to be reminded of, even though we know this to be true, is that our value before God is not a function of the job we have or the salary we earn or how good and successful Christians we are.

And so much of our worrying centers around us feverishly trying to be more attractive or popular or successful. And God says, don't worry. I love and value you for who you are, my son, my daughter. And if we have any doubt as to how much God values us, then that doubt is dispelled when we look at the cross. And we see there that God so loved the world that He gave His Son to die for sinners, for us.

And there we have such powerful evidence of how valuable we are in God's sight. So valuable that He was willing to give His own Son.

[18:57] And so, this is a reason that Jesus gives for not worrying because of how valuable we are in God's sight. This third reason that Jesus gives is this, that worrying is a futile and pointless exercise.

We move on to verse 27. Can any of you, by worrying, add a single hour to your life? Now, I think in most Bibles there's a footnote here because there's some debate as to exactly the meaning of the Greek, whether what Jesus is saying is that we can add a single hour to our life or a cubit to our height.

So, can we make ourselves taller or can we make our life longer? Either seemingly as possible, and either convey the same message regarding how impossible that is.

It's not in our hands to be taller than we are. And it's not in our hands, even though some might foolishly think it is, to make our lives longer than God has determined that they will be.

We are mortal. We will die. And any attempt to prolong our life is, certainly any attempt that we imagine we have control over, is an exercise in futility.

[20 : 11] And so, this is the reason that Jesus is giving for not worrying. Why do you worry about these things that are not in your control? There's not, these are things you can't achieve. So, why worry about trying to achieve that which is beyond you?

It's futile to worry over these matters. There's another popular song on the theme of worrying, equally inane in terms of its lyrics, but don't worry, be happy.

Actually, I was having a look at that song as well, just curious as to what else that song has in terms of its lyrics. And it does actually contain a rather interesting line. Let me just read what it says, part of the song that has that as its, you know, main lyric, don't worry, be happy.

But it also has in the song these words, every night we have some trouble when you worry and you make it double. Now, you might say, well, it's not very profound, but it's true. You know, we worry about things thinking that that will bring some kind of solution, but really all we do is make the problem bigger by our constant worrying.

That's what Jesus is saying. It's saying it's futile. It doesn't achieve anything. It doesn't secure anything. It doesn't solve the problems you have. So don't do it. It doesn't make any sense.

[21 : 29] It is a futile exercise. Can any of you, by worrying, add a single hour to your life? So that's the third reason. Let's just remind ourselves of verse 3, and then we'll quickly look at the next three as well.

Why not worry? Because life itself is such a wonderful and glorious gift to be enjoyed. Because you are so incredibly valuable and valued by God. Because worrying is a futile and pointless exercise. But a fourth reason that Jesus gives is this. Don't worry because you are eternal. And of course here, especially the idea is don't worry about temporal things. Don't worry about things that are passing.

Given your nature and character and identity as one who is eternal. Verses 28 and following. Why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow?

They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 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, you of little faith?

[22 : 37] What is the contrast between the grass of the field and us? Well the grass of the field is here today and gone tomorrow. But we are not. Now we were hearing this morning how life at one level and one way of looking at is but a breath.

But in terms of the bigger picture, we are eternal. We are eternal beings. We are not passing. We will endure forever.

And because of that reason, because of the very nature of who we are, we are told not to worry. If God provides for that which is temporal, if he clothes the flowers of the field with such beauty when they're here today and gone tomorrow, how much more will he clothe and provide for those who he has created in his image and likeness as eternal beings?

God's care for us reflects that special status that we enjoy as though made in the image and likeness of God. And so don't worry as you reflect on who you are and what God has made you to be.

The penultimate reason that Jesus gives is this. Don't worry because worrying does not befit your status as a child of God. We're just going through the passage. Verses 31 and 32.

[23 : 51] So do not worry saying, What shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things. We'll just stop there. So Jesus is giving another reason.

He's saying, don't worry about these things. He's already told them several times not to worry about them. But now he says, he commands them again. And he gives this reason. For the pagans run

after all these things. He's saying, worrying is for pagans.

Worrying is for unbelievers. Worrying is for those people who don't trust in God, who don't know God. They have every reason to worry. Because these reasons, or many of these reasons, don't apply to them.

Some of them do. But that's something pagans do. That's something people who don't know God do. They worry. But that's not you. This is not something for you.

You are far too important to be wasting your time on worrying. You are a child of the king. You are in the royal family. Your father is almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.

[24 : 48] Worrying is not befitting of the believer. If we think of it even at the practical level of our witness as Christians. What kind of witness is it to those who are unbelievers?

If we're constantly worrying and anxious, what does that say about our trust in the God that we claim to be trusting in? Don't worry because worrying does not befit your status as a child of God. And one final reason that Jesus gives here is this. Don't worry because God knows everything you're going through and everything you need. In that verse 32, we kind of stopped in the middle of the sentence.

But let's just notice the end of the sentence. For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly father knows that you need them. Your heavenly father knows that you need them. It's as if God looks you in the eye and says, I know what you're going through. I know the needs that you have. I know that your job's on the line.

[25 : 50] I know that there's not enough in your account to cover that mortgage payment. I know that your car's about to pack in. I know that the kids need new trainers or whatever it is. We could multiply the examples.

And God is saying, I know all of these things. I know all of these things. I know all your needs. Indeed, I know some of the needs you have that you haven't even noticed yourself that you've got. I know them all.

I know what you need. And implicit, of course, is that knowing he will provide. Because he is a loving heavenly father. But earthly father, knowing that their child has a need, will not seek to provide for that.

Now, some of us do that better or worse than others. But we would acknowledge that that's a reasonable expectation of an earthly father to provide for their children.

We're horrified. We're shocked, rightly so, when a father doesn't show an interest in providing for their children. And I think that would be, there would be common agreement. You don't need to be a Christian to say, well, that's a terrible thing.

[26 : 53] Well, how much more can we be assured that our heavenly father will provide for us, given that he knows everything that we need? So there we have Jesus giving all these reasons to give a foundation for obeying.

Don't worry. Why? Well, for all of these reasons that he lays out to us. Reasons that give substance to an encouragement or an urging.

Don't worry. You know, be happy. You say, well, how? It's impossible. Well, here Jesus gives all these reasons why we are not to worry, not to be anxious. But let's just close with one final thought. And that is, well, if we, by God's grace, are enabled to obey this command, to not worry, what are we going to do with all the time and nervous energy that is going to be freed up by not worrying? Well, that brings us to the one do in this section of the sermon. There was a don't, don't worry, and then it closes. Following all the reasons, there's a do. Verse 34, therefore, rather in verse 33, This is what we are to do.

[28 : 09] Not to worry, but rather to do this. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. And what is this about? How do I do that? Well, a kingdom speaks of rule.

To seek God's kingdom is to submit to God's rule, to be submissive to the king. It speaks of seeking to extend his rule and kingdom in our own lives and in our midst.

To seek his righteousness. And notice that it's his righteousness that we are to seek. We're not challenged to seek our own righteousness. Our great need is of God's righteousness, of a right standing before God that is the result of trusting in Christ's saving work on our behalf.

We are to seek that righteousness, but also to live a life that is marked by the righteousness of God. That is what we are to invest our energies and our time and our lives in.

Not worrying about those things that are passing and of secondary importance, but rather to focus on the main thing. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.

[29 : 18] Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that you are a God who knows us. You know how we tick. You know our weaknesses. You know our proneness to worrying.

It comes so easily and so naturally to us. You know how we can be often guilty of justifying and excusing our disobedience in this matter.

We somehow consider it a less significant sin. As it's been termed by some, we see it as a respectable sin that doesn't shock or scandalize ourselves or others.

And yet the command is clear. And to disobey the command is displeasing to you and harmful to us. We thank you for your grace in giving us so many good reasons to obey you.

We're reminded that all your commands are for our good. Not to restrict us. Not to spoil our lives. But rather to help us live lives that are full and satisfying and useful to you.

[30 : 29] And so we pray that by your spirit you would indeed help us to hear your command and to obey your command. And to focus our attention on the main thing of seeking your kingdom and your righteousness.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.