Topical Study – Worry!

Read Matthew 6:25-34

This study (Matthew 6:25-34) examines how worry about money, life, or tomorrow can erode our very faith. Notice in verse 30b, Jesus chides those who worry for their "little faith."

First question to start with: Why do we worry? Why do we feel anxious? Why worry? What causes worry?

Looking at the word "worry", the KJV uses the phrase "take no thought" a number of times in this passage, but that translation can be misleading. NASB and RSV use "do not be anxious." NIV and NRSV render it "do not worry." The Greek word is merimnaō, "to be apprehensive, have anxiety, be anxious, be (unduly) concerned." And it conforms well to the English dictionary definition of worry: "mental distress or agitation resulting from concern, usually for something impending or anticipated, anxiety."

Q: Is it true that WORRY can affect someone's health? How?

Jesus Continues…

"Therefore" points back to verses 19-24, where Christ calls the disciples to store up treasures in heaven instead of on the earth. Then he describes how wealth can spiritually blind and master us. Essentially, Christ calls believers to focus on eternal matters—like riches in heaven—instead of focusing on temporary matters like wealth or our basic needs. In verse 25, he says, "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"

When believers live only for food, clothes, etc., they debase themselves to being like animals. Life becomes all about serving our physical body. **Really, that is what most advertising is about: "Eat this!" Wear this! Watch this!"** It is all about making the body attractive, pleasant smelling, comfortable, and entertained. Christ later says the pagans worry about these things (v. 32). Their primary concerns are temporal matters—not eternal ones—and they live in a constant rat race to fulfil those desires. However, believers are citizens, not only of this earth, but of heaven. Therefore, we must be primarily concerned about the affairs of heaven, even as we abide on the earth. Christ emphasizes this in Matthew 6:33 when he says seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness.

The Two Illustrations of Father's Care

*"Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (**v26**)*

*"…Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (**vv28-29**)*

God provides for the birds, and He takes care of them. Therefore, we should expect that God would take care of us. The birds do not worry, but they do work. Birds do not just sit with open mouths, expecting God to fill them. The worry many people have over the material things of life is rooted in a low understanding of their value before God. They do not comprehend how much He loves and cares for them. God even takes care of the grass of the field, so He will certainly take care of you. We are confident of the power and care of a loving heavenly Father.

Q: What is the difference between WORRY and THINKING ABOUT YOUR FUTURE?

Q: What Worry Can't Do (6:27)

We should have a wise concern for the future and take whatever steps we need to know to provide for ourselves and our families. Farmers have done that for thousands of years -- saving seed and planting crops for future harvest.

But what Jesus is addressing here is the kind of destructive anxiety that eats into our souls and deprives us of sleep. Anxiety that robs us of our present peace and joy and propels us into a mythical future where we lack what we need, where we are gripped by fear -- and which often is only that, a myth. Many of our fears and worries never materialize, and our worrying seldom has anything to do with fixing or repairing the future, only fearing it.

Jesus mentioned the impotence of worry:

*"Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?" (**6:27**)*

" No matter how you take it, the point is the same: our worrying accomplishes nothing at all.

Worry Is Sin (6:30-32)

In verses 31-32, Jesus notes that the "pagans" or "Gentiles" (ethnos) also seek after food and clothing. Believers ought to be different somehow!

Worry is a sign of little faith. Fear and anxiety are opposites of faith. Christians are to open their lives to faith and to reject worry. Worry involves the constant fretting and anxiety that results from thinking about future problems. We Christians are to grow out of that habit. The Apostle Paul tells us how to do that:

*"Don't be pulled in different directions or worried about a thing. Be saturated in prayer throughout each day, offering your faith-filled requests before God with overflowing gratitude. Tell him every detail of your life, then God's wonderful peace that transcends human understanding, will guard your heart and mind through Jesus Christ. (**Philippians 4:6-7 TPT**)*

Q: How do we escape worrying?

These two verses spell out the steps to escape worry's death grip. They require disciplining our minds and thoughts, something that even worldly people have realized is a prerequisite to success:

- ***Pray, bring your worries to God.*** Instead of letting your worries rattle around in your mind, formulate them into prayers and petitions to your Father.
- ***Pray with thanksgiving.*** Thanksgiving for what? For what God has done in the past. When we take time to praise God for who He is and what He has done in the past, we are encouraged and strengthened to believe He will do that for us in the future as well. Praise is the language of faith and stirs up faith.
- ***Turn your thoughts away from topics of anxiety*** to those good and noble thoughts that will bring you peace.
- ***Fill your heart with things that are spirit and soul lifting.***

Q: Can worry be demonic?

Seeking God (6:32-33)

People are always seeking something.

So, what is it you seek? Pagans or Gentile unbelievers seek after temporal things -- food, drink, clothing. What is more, Jesus says, *"your heavenly Father knows that you need them."* They are not bad things. But they can preoccupy our "seeking" so we do not have time, energy, or interest to seek the Source of those things -- God himself.

Seek God First and Foremost (6:33)

*"So above all, constantly seek God's kingdom and his righteousness, then all these less important things will be given to you abundantly" (**6:33 TPT**)*

The difference, then, between the disciple and others is that the disciple seeks God first. He or she gives priority to God first. This is the same issue that Jesus touched on in **6:21 -- "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." We seek first what we treasure most. He also touched on it in 6:24 -- "No one can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and Money." We are not to seek our welfare and God with equal intensity.** The great Quest for God must be first and foremost, not relegated to religion or Sunday practice, "... that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Colossians 1:18b).

Seeking God's Kingdom and Righteousness (6:33)

The object of our seeking is to be two-fold, according to Jesus.

First, we are to seek God's kingdom or God's reign in our lives and in his world. In the Lord's prayer we are taught to pray,

"Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (6:10).

Some are longing only to leave this earth and get to the peace of heaven. But the disciple is to seek for God's kingdom here on earth, too. Will it come? While I agree that the Kingdom will not come completely until Christ rules literally on the earth (Revelation 20:4), I believe that we Christians are to seek God's Kingdom in the here and now and not be satisfied with the reign of evil. We are to be salt and light in the earth (Matthew 5:13-14). We are to be leaven in the loaf (Matthew 13:33).
We are to seek the Kingdom of God.

Second, we are to seek God's righteousness. Much of Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount compares the Pharisaic understanding of legalistic righteousness with Jesus' heart righteousness which is the spirit of the Law. We are to seek the impossible righteousness that resonates with Jesus' command: *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48).* This kind of heart righteousness is not the stuff of religious observance alone. Nor ritual. Nor even righteous deeds. It comes from a persistent, insistent, thirsty seeking after God. It comes from a dissatisfaction with our own imperfections until we let him break our hardness of heart and then mould us more fully into his image.

Q: Is it a bad thing to seek for material things as Christians?

All these things will be given to you as well (6:33b)

Sometimes I think of Jesus' tragic words:

*"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (**Matthew 16:26**)*

Searching for the wrong thing first will damn us. We disciples must set our eyes towards one great Quest, and one only: *"**Seek first** the Kingdom of God and his righteousness,"* and with it comes a promise: *"and all these things will be given to you as well."*