

Fear and Faith
Matthew 6:25-34
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I do not know all of your physical addresses. But one thing I do know is that my guess is that many of us live actually at the exact same address. You might understand the address of a lot at the corner of worry, concern, anxiety, and there's one more street that intersects this four-corner spot. It's called the future. It's a crossroads, if you will. The future stretches out before us. We can't fully see it, but we know it's coming. But what often happens in this corner lot that we exist in is that we experience to varying degrees an internal sense that because we don't know the future, we find ourselves bouncing between worry and anxiety and concern. All of these are unique in and of themselves.

But I want to be careful in saying by this, I don't mean an internal experience of these things. What I mean is we do these things. We actually do things as a result of feeling this way because at this interesting intersection of the future and where we often live are a lot of questions, right? What does the future hold? Will I have another job beyond this contract when it ends in the spring of 2020? Will I get into that college? Will I graduate from the college I'm in? Will I have a job at the end of it? How will my children turn out? Will I ever get married? Is this the only marriage I'm going to experience?

All these questions at first seem benign. But the reality is because I know while we live at this space, we don't often realize what degree of high anxiety we all live in. In fact, I would suggest that for Jesus's time in which He's speaking to the disciples, they were living in an anxious period, and so are we. But we're so accustomed to it that it's like the air we breathe. We don't even realize that we're doing so many of the things that we do out of these very concerns. We do things as a result.

Here's an example. When was the last time you misplaced your phone? When was the last time you've misplaced your wallet which might be on that phone? Last week, I had it all dialed in. I was traveling, good to go, traveling light. Pulled into the airport, got up to the desk, ready to go, reach into my pocket, and no wallet. And the lady looks at me and she says, ID? And you don't want to know what I said. I had to apologize to her because I knew exactly in that moment where my wallet was. My wallet was in the rental car which is now a half mile away where I dropped it off. And I have to run back there. And I said, can I leave my bag here? No, I can't leave my bag here. And I said, just forget it. And I ran.

Now, fortunately, my wallet was where I had left it. But in that brief moment of existential crisis, I think oftentimes that's where many of us live. And in that space, we do all kinds of things. We make decisions we don't even realize that we make. We buy things that we don't even realize that we're buying because we feel concerned or worried. We say things. We don't say things. We respond because we are often living in this space.

If you're familiar at all with the Psalms, the Bible is quite familiar with this space. Many times, the psalmist is writing from that intersection of now knowing the future but doing things out of concern and worry and anxiety. Jesus meets us in this place. He meets His disciples in this place. And so, I want you to hear Jesus's words to us in Matthew 6:25-34.

Now, a brief word of introduction before I read anything. You'll note that this passage begins with "therefore" which means it's predicated on what precedes before it. I'm just going to glance at it, but I'm not dealing with that text because in a month, Dr. Paul Kooistra, the former head of Mission to the World of the PCA and president of Covenant Theological Seminary, is preaching on that text. So, I'm going to let him do that work. And I'm moving to this work which is built on that. But we'll go there together. So, I'm not skipping the serving two masters. We're just coming back to it.

Matthew 6:25-34.

“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? 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 which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 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? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

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

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Pray with me.

Father, we now ask that by your Holy Spirit you would bring the soothing power of your gracious provision. Help us, O Lord, to drink of it deeply. Help us to be reflective of where our hearts and minds are and the actions that proceed from that place. Help us by your Spirit to still our hearts and to be renewed again in a faith that actually offers rest for our weary souls. Minister to us by the power of your word and make us the people you desire us to be. Help the teacher. In Jesus’s name. Amen.

This morning as we look at this passage together, I want you to see what Jesus wants us to see which is first, disordered priorities. Second, an invitation to imagine. Third, the antidote to fear.

These disordered priorities which Jesus is using in the first portion of this passage are to be understood first by understanding where He’s been. He begins it by saying, “Therefore.” He’s just finished in the passage by saying to them, you’ve become overly focused and concerned in serving the pursuit of money. And you can’t serve both money and God. Either serve the one or the other. And so, He is inviting His disciples to a deeper understanding and reflection on what’s going on underneath that pursuit of money and understanding the power and the role of the word which is used here as anxious or worry.

Now, a brief word study. Before we can understand what He is talking about in terms of priorities, we need to understand what this word “anxious” means. The word here for “anxious” is the Greek word that means “to be distracted by,” to be so consumed by a pursuit that it chokes out other things. But please note the emphasis on action, not on feeling. Here, He is not calling us or thinking about our inward experience of anxiety and worry, but rather, the actions that result and are themselves a form of worry and concern. This same word would be used by Matthew when he talks about the different kinds of seed and the different soil that they grow up in, that the rocks will choke out. So, these rocks are the things that we do, the pursuits that we find ourselves imagining and doing that choke out actual life.

In essence, He’s saying, why are you so pursuing these things and doing these things because how are they adding to you? So, what is He actually talking about? He’s talking about what we love because what we do is the fruit of what we love.

Augustine said it this way when he was talking about the nature of the world and of our own hearts. He says, “A body, by its weight, tends to move towards its proper place. The weight movement is not necessarily downwards but to its appropriate position. Fire tends to move upwards, a stone downwards. They are acted on by their respective weights,” what we, of course, would call gravity.

These weights “seek their own place. Oil poured under water is drawn up to the surface on top of the water. Water poured on top of oil sinks below the oil. They are acted on by their respective densities. They seek their own place. Things which are not in their intended position are restless. Once they are in their ordered position, they are at rest.” Augustine concludes, “My weight is my love. Wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me.”

What Jesus is saying by calling us to understand what’s happening in our own hearts is expressing itself in priorities of action. And there are two kinds of action which Jesus is warning us about. One is ambition, the pursuit or building up of more and more things. But there is another kind of action. It is action which shows itself when we feel we’re going to be deprived of these things because, actually, that was more the experience of his audience. His disciples were not wealthy men. And the sustenance which they were looking for was simply daily bread and food and drink, and questions of were they going to have a place to live and clothes to wear?

So, in some sense, both are the two sides of the same coin. Our love, our focus, can be so distracted that we become overly concerned and we begin pouring ourselves, our thoughts, our actions into the pursuit of these things. It can be either through ambitious gain of more and more, or it can be through more and more worry because we’re trying to protect what we have in fear that we’re not going to have enough. Both the fear and love that leads to ambition or the fear and love that leads to a scarcity because we’re concerned that the Lord isn’t going to provide is the same thing. They look very, very different.

If you have been alive at any time, perhaps you’ve been around those who have or you yourself have been in seasons of deprivation but also great quantity. The quantity or the lack of doesn’t make us who we are. We are who we are regardless of our context.

And so, Jesus is trying to ask us the question, why are you in pursuit of these things? It is because your priorities are disordered. You’re so distracted in pursuing these things. And yet, I’m calling you to something different. He says, “Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” In some sense, He’s trying to draw us into seeing the absurdity of the pursuit of these things or the worry that we’re not going to have enough. But we aren’t acted upon by logic. We like to think we are, but we’re really on. We’re acted on by imagination and love first which is why Jesus, in recognizing our disordered priorities, invites us to imagine.

What does He do in inviting us to imagine? He does several things. First in this invitation, He wants us to consider His glory in the creation by looking at the reality of birds. 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.” He’s calling each and every one of us, for just a brief moment, out of the distraction that is our modern lives and the lives of His disciples. And we’re no different than they. He’s calling us to imagine the world and the birds that are about us. So, can we do that for just a minute?

It used to be thought that there were roughly 9,000 to 10,000 species of birds. But now, scientists believe there are close to 15,000 to 18,000 species of birds alone. There are somewhere in the ballpark of 200 to 400 billion actual birds in the world. So, He’s calling us to imagine these birds. And yet, in imagining all of that glory, all of it, He says, “your heavenly Father feeds them.” “Not by putting food in their beak,” as one writer said. They still have to fly and find it, but the Lord still provides it. Imagine with me.

As I often do in my office, I am gloriously distracted during my week by the sound of a young red-tail hawk. And I mean, this guy is just killing it. He is squawking all the time. And it captures my imagination. I love to go outside, and I love to watch him. He’ll spin above this neighborhood because it’s close to the lake, and he’s on the hunt. And it takes me out of myself.

Do you see what Jesus is wanting us to do? He’s wanting to take us out of our distraction and pay attention to what He’s actually doing in the world by looking at it. Do you see His glory? Do you see the

sustenance that He provides for the world? It's not just to consider His glory though. He invites us to imagine and consider His beauty.

Then He turns and He says in verse 28, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin." Perhaps you're on to me and know where I'm headed next. Now, we have a florist in the congregation, maybe more than one, but a wonderful florist. There are close to 4 billion species of flowers in the world that are glorious. In considering the beauty of the flowers of the field, Jesus says the following, "they neither toil nor spin." What is He saying? They provide nothing for themselves. They are dependent on that which is outside of them to provide for their internal life.

Sunflowers, which were gloriously in bloom just a few weeks ago out to our west in Dayton, Maryland, you can watch the time-lapse photography that shows how the sunflowers will follow the sun throughout the day. They're not toiling nor spinning. They are reliant. And in all of their beauty, they reflect the beauty of the Lord.

And then just in case we didn't think that Jesus was actually aware of our ambition of trying to amass more and more stuff, He says the following. He says, "I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." He's pointing at a man, a king, who is full of wisdom who tells us he pursued all of this stuff and found it wanting, but yet Solomon was famous for the glorious attire which he dressed himself in. But even Solomon, even Italy, even France, even Fashion Week in New York, none of it can ever reflect the glory of a simple lily flower in all of its radiant glory, its beautiful detail, and the reflection of its dependence on the God who brings about the beauty of the sun, the provision of the soil, the oxygen in the air, and the rain that gives life. If a flower can be so beautiful and yet not work itself up in distraction about the sun and whether it's going to be rising in the east and setting in the west, how much more then is He not inviting us to imagine, now consider your life. Isn't that what He does next?

This invitation to imagine isn't just God's glory, God's beauty. But He also wants us to consider our life. Notice this. He's actually calling us now to, after we've done that, consider your life. Consider it. Not a single one of our days that were ever stretched out before us did we ever know what was going to happen in the next day. And yet, here we sit. But even in retrospect, even though we knew that we made it through those days with clothes and food and a place to live, we still find ourselves distracted by our decisions and by our longings. And we still feel awfully restless.

You see, what Jesus is doing is beyond just considering the glory and considering the beauty of who God is. This final thing, this invitation to imagine when He calls us to imagine our life, what He's doing is He's actually calling us to consider God's providence. But I want to be clear. When He wants us to consider God's providence, in verse 30 He says, "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?" What He's doing is He's asking us to consider God's providence in light of our very life. But I want to be clear that He's not calling us to an abstract understanding of a God who is a deity who's in control. He's actually calling us to see the Father who lovingly cares for us, who knows what we need. It's not just an abstract theology lesson. He wants us to take a moment and to consider that this life you now find yourself in this very moment, the heavenly Father who looks upon you, who's solemn over you, is love.

Why then do we depend on any other story of life? It's because we become so distracted by the vanity fair of life that is before us, the cars, the clothes, the success, the achievement, and the goals, that we very subtly begin to take on these things because that's what the culture is teaching us. All things that God has created are good. But as we talked about last week, all things that are good, Satan simply takes them, and he tempts us to find sustenance in and of itself. The world does a great job of appealing to our imagination. Even though they say magazines are dead, you can still go into a website to find things whether you're looking for clothes or you're looking for that vacation. I simply looked on Airbnb for the possibility of what the prices might be at a location, but now, Airbnb will not leave me alone. I've received ten emails over the last week. I receive pop-ups on a cycling website where I'm looking for cycling news. Airbnb is trying to appeal to me. How did they even know I'm here?

The world is telling a really good story in all of its technicolor beauty. And it's a rival roadmap. Find happiness here. Find your identity here. It can be good. You can find peace and rest for your souls. It is a counter-gospel. But consider this for just a moment. I think we need to reflect upon the map which we're being presented with and compare it to the map that Jesus is offering us in this text. Why? Because if we're not paying attention to the map and who's drawing it and where it's leading, we will find ourselves so distracted that we find ourselves on that very same map.

Let me give this illustration. In the book *In the Kingdom of Ice*, Hampton Sides writes a compelling account of a failed 19th century polar expedition of the *U.S.S. Jeannette* captained by Lieutenant George De Long. You see, De Long's entire mission rested on a picture of the unknown North Pole that was laid out by a map that was drawn by Dr. August Heinrich Petermann. Petermann's maps suggested a thermometric gateway through the ice that opened up onto a vast polar sea on the top of the world, a fair-weather passage beyond all the ice. And De Long's entire expedition was staked on these maps.

Yet as one summary tells the story, "But it turned out as he was heading to a world that didn't exist, the perilous ice quickly surrounded the ship." Sides recounts the team that had to "shed its organizing ideas in all their unfounded romance and replace them with the reckoning of the way the Arctic truly is."

Our culture often sells us faulty fantastical maps of the good life that paint alluring pictures that draw us toward them. All too often, we stake the expedition of our lives on them, setting sail toward them with every sheet hoisted in the air. And we do so without even thinking about it. That, to me, is the scariest reality of being a human being. I can be so self-deceived that I don't even realize how my decisions are based on a faulty map to the good life.

I mean, let's be real. Who of you imagine a future full of failure? Okay. Maybe one or two of you. But what's the story you've written for your future, for your children's future? What do you imagine? What do you want? I know what fills my thoughts: greater wisdom, success, comfort, peace, and a really good bottle of wine. I love it. In ten years, I want to be able to look back and be able to say with my wife Kate while we're looking out on some bucolic view with my camera over my shoulder, my bike leaned up against the fence, sitting on rocking chairs and looking out enjoying a great bottle of wine going, wow, isn't Caroline doing great? Man, these grandchildren, they are so fun. And wow, I can still ride my bike without pain. And why don't you have any grey hair sweetheart? Right?

Somebody yesterday who hadn't seen me in years said, Randy, wow, you got all that grey hair! But you look good. And I want to say, yeah, what? Wait a second. This is not the future I imagined. Four years ago, I didn't have this. You've done this to me. Just kidding. But I didn't see it coming.

Let's be honest. Even though we might be mature in our faith, we're at different places in our walk with Jesus. We're at different depths of trusting in Him. But even if you've walked with Jesus for a long time and you have lots of pockets where there are deep roots of trust, you and I still imagine a future that looks pretty good. We imagine a retirement that will provide. We don't imagine getting cancer. May God bless the Flora family. We don't imagine that our children will experience great failure that we want to protect them from. We don't imagine getting into auto accidents that change the course of our futures.

So, imagine our lives. And when we imagine it, I want you to ask what roadmap are we on? Are we on the one that Jesus is inviting us to? Are we on the one the world is putting before us? And what are our decisions doing? Which map is it leading us on? And the decisions that we're making and that we want to make, what are they predicated on?

Jesus invites us to the antidote to all of this distraction and concern. The antidote to fear is faith. I do believe, as many writers and preachers have said, the opposite of faith is not doubt. It's fear. It's distraction. It's a dependence on self. And so, He is inviting us to understand the life that He is calling us to.

And please understand, church, if you're like me and you find yourself distracted by life's vanity fair and you look at the future in front of you imagining, God is looking at us and Jesus is looking at His disciples, and He is not judging us in our fear and anxiety. But He is inviting us to faith. Jesus understands that because we are sinners, anxiety and distraction and worry is built into the infrastructure of the world we live in. So, thanks be to God, the good news is He's not judging us; He's inviting us. I want you to hear that. The problem is not that we worry, per say, or that we get distracted. It's what we do when we are and when we realize that we are. Jesus sees that we are, and yet He invites us.

But before we go any further, I want to take just a few seconds of complete silence. And I want you to pause, and I want you to consider and reflect, what is so distracting and worrying you? And I want you to have it in your mind's eye and in your heart before you hear what Jesus is inviting us to do. Let's be silent for a few moments now.

All right. Now that you have that in your mind or several things like I do in my mind, Jesus already knows everything we've just thought about. And He is inviting us and He's calling us with all of it to consider a different end.

First, He does it by comparison. He compares it to the Gentiles. You see, in this text, He says, "For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all." He's already warned us about, if you will, this worry or this quest. Do you see what He says here? He says, "Why do you seek these things?" And then He talks about the Gentiles and the things they seek. He's using two different words for "seek." When He talks about the Gentiles and their pursuit of these things, it has an even greater sense. It is an anxious quest. I must get these things.

For the Gentiles of that time, they believed in a capricious existence of gods and goddesses who could be happy one day and mad the other. And whatever they could do to provide food or to amass wealth or to find identity and help in those things, they would do it. But it did not lead to rest. It led to restlessness. It leads to greater and greater anxiety. If you've been around those who have a great amount of wealth and yet do not know God's provision, God's care, and God's grace, oftentimes, they're just waiting for the next possible failure when it could be taken away.

Jesus is inviting us by way of comparison to a different quest. And He's telling us to seek after the kingdom of God and His righteousness. And all these things will be added to you. What He's doing is instead of seeking things, He's looking at us and calling us and inviting us to seek Himself. Seek the Lord and what He calls righteous. And thanks be to God, it's not in stuff. It's not in clothes. It's not in degrees. It's not in addresses. It's in Him. It's in His character.

And He tells us to seek these things. And so, I want to be clear in saying that Jesus is calling us not just by way of comparison. He's commanding us by way of invitation. He says, seek the Lord, which is in essence, seek a life of faith, meaning it doesn't matter whether your faith is big or small, strong or weak, but to find the object of your trust, the anchor for your dreams and conscience not in what we might amass or achieve, but in a relationship with our heavenly Father.

And so, He invites us to do this. And when He does, we need to understand He's inviting us to hope and expectation. But a hope and an expectation that is built on the character of who God is in His righteousness which enables us to say, if I can trust in what He does and who He is and what He has done, then I can trust as He has provided for the birds and provided for the fields, He will provide for me. He's inviting us to a place of rest for our weary souls.

But you want know what's really ironic? What's ironic is we know the end of the story that He's telling the disciples. This morning, we are all experiencing a positional irony. Jesus is talking to a rag-tag group of disciples who have not a clue about what's going to happen with regards to who He is as redeemer, how that redemption is going to happen on a Friday afternoon on the cross, and the fact that He's going to be raised on the third day. Even when He tells them that's what's going to happen, they still

don't know what's going to happen. We are far removed from that, and now, we're looking back, and we can see how the story unfolds. That Jesus dies for the reality of our sins. Although we're the ones who deserved wrath, He took it. And He died in His righteousness as a sacrifice for our sins before a holy God, and He achieves for us a place in the kingdom of called to be called His children, and not based on us but on who He is. But then even better than that, Jesus is raised from death to life conquering sin and death. We believe this story. We teach it. We trust in it. We call it the gospel.

But the really good news means we have to face the real news, that even though we sit here seeing all God has done, we still find ourselves in places of worry, don't we? We are no different than they. And yet, the invitation is the same to us as it was to His disciples.

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." What matters to His kingdom is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. The enjoyment of the gospel frees us to love the Lord and to find our rest in His provision, trusting Him for the future. It's not that we will escape difficulty and trial or accidents or sickness, but that because of His work in the past and because of His fatherly love, we know He will carry us through that period and deliver us on the other side to resurrection. He will take from us our worries and our concerns as we bring it to Him. Even though it may reappear all the time, we still bring it to Him, and He still says, "Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Is your soul weary? Is your mind distracted and preoccupied? Jesus says, come to me. Do you find yourself overly preoccupied in your imagination and your desires about things that will not satisfy? Come unto me. And the deep, mysterious, unbreakable, perfect love that casts out fear and distraction and it invites us to our home and who God is, who He is in Jesus Christ, and His grace that is sufficient for today because tomorrow will have enough worries of its own. But today, His grace isn't just sufficient. It fills our cup overflowing.

I finish with this. Famous hymn writer Charles Tindley was able to weave together this concern and worry and yet also where the gospel of grace meets and finds its home for a soul that can find rest in the provision of who Christ is. And he invites us to hear the same. He says in the third verse,

"Harder yet may be the fight. Right may often yield to might. Wickedness a while may reign. Satan's cause may seem to gain. But there is a God that rules above with a hand of power and a heart of love. And if I'm right, He'll fight my battle. I shall have peace someday. I do not know how long twill be nor what the future holds for me. But this I know. If Jesus leads me, I shall get home someday."

His hand of power and the might of His love invite our anxious, distracted, weary souls to find their rest in Him. And when we do, all these things will be added in the midst of challenge and difficulty because the Lord has promised it. He will be with us and He will carry us.

I know Pastor Flora, were he standing here today, would want me to say the Lord has already done it. The Lord will do it. And He will always be faithful to who He is. And He will be faithful in His love to you. Find your home in Him and nowhere else. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you this morning for your grace to us. Lord, we pray that by your Holy Spirit, we would become more and more conscious of the places and things that we do that are born not out of a heart of rest, but out of a heart that longs for something that cannot be satisfied outside of you. But Lord, in the midst of that worry and concern and actions, you invite us to come to you. Lord, we cannot do that alone. We long and hear your invitation because we thank you, O Lord. As you invite us, you give us the strength and power to receive it. So, Lord, I pray now that today, this Sabbath day, we would be able to rest and rejoice that because you provide for the birds and you clothe the lilies of the field, how much more then will you not also provide for us, your children? Not because of anything we've

done, but because your song over us is love. Lord, rescue us from these things that we might find our home in you. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.