

# At Peace in the Father's Hands

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**Bible Verse:** Matthew 6:25-34  
**Preached on:** Tuesday, October 5, 2021

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Well, as most of you know, I paused our study of the 10 Commandments on Sunday because I had a pastoral sense that some teaching from the Psalms on dealing with anxiety and fretting would be helpful, and I was surprised by the level of response that that generated, so many people said, "I know you preached that just for me," in so many words. It's kind of funny, different people say it about the same message. So, yeah, I'm glad you think it was just for you in the providence of God, in a sense it was just for you, but it was also for others. But the response kind of prompted me to maybe just kind of park it on this theme, go to a different part of Scripture to reinforce it for two or three times, and to give you some things that I think will be helpful to you to build on what we saw on Sunday.

In Psalm 37 on Sunday, we saw the writer of Scripture saying, "Do not fret because of evildoers. Be not envious toward wrongdoers." And he goes on and tells us to trust in the Lord and do good, dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness, you remember what we were talking about some 48 hours ago. It reminds us that the Bible understands the challenge and effect of anxiety and in the past year and a half, it's been a very difficult time in the world, in our country, it's been a difficult time for many Christians, and the weight of it, I think, is having an effect that maybe we don't always even recognize because just that day-to-day grind has a way of affecting attitudes and sapping away joy from people along with the other challenges of life, and I just feel a pastoral desire, a pastoral sense of urgency to be able to help us, anyway, to kind of think through things biblically and sometimes the best way to do that is go to a familiar passage where we can kind of soak in the truth all over again.

So I invite you to turn to Matthew 6. Matthew 6, and as you're turning there, Proverbs 12 says anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down. There's no question that we have hearts that are weighed down with anxiety as kind of the cumulative effect of the past 18 months and other matters and issues of life, and one of the things that Scripture warns us about and cautions us against there in Psalm 37 is it says that fretting has a way of leading people into evildoing. You get grumpy, you get agitated about things, and then it starts to spill over from your heart into other relationships. We're all vulnerable to that. We're probably all guilty of that. And so we just need to come back and, as it were, put our hearts under the running clear water of God's word, let it wash away some things and replace it with the pure milk of the word of God and bring us back into touch with the

certain love of our heavenly Father for us, and his certain care for us no matter what is happening around us.

So what I want to do is I want to read chapter 6 in Matthew, verses 24 through 34, and this will occupy our attention here from the pulpit for the next week and a half, I believe. So in Matthew 6:24 it says,

24 No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. 25 For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! 31 Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Now anxiety is a symptom of a spiritual problem just like a high fever is a symptom of a physical problem, and we need to approach it from that perspective. You know, we're all pretty quick to excuse our anxious thoughts and say, "Well, you know, I'm just wanting to do the best I can. I just want to take care of my family." These kinds of things, but Jesus here makes it very clear that anxiety is a spiritual issue that we are meant to address and not to allow it to captivate our minds and dominate the way that we live and so he addresses it with us and he does it in a negative and a positive way, and I'll explain this as we go through the text. As if so often the case in Scripture, it tells us not to do something and then gives us that which is to replace it. It tells us, "Don't think in this way, think in this way instead." And so we put off bad thinking, we put off anxiety, and we replace it with something else that has a positive spiritual impact upon us. So what we're going to do tonight is this, we're going to just look at this passage in an overview fashion and then we'll come back on Sunday and next Tuesday to look at it in greater detail. I like to do that sometimes, sweep through a passage, get a sense of its broad parameters, and then fill in the details in subsequent messages. I think that's especially helpful here in this familiar passage.

Now let me just remind you of something that would be easy to overlook. This section on anxiety that Jesus is teaching comes in the middle of a broader sermon that's called the Sermon on the Mount, chapters 5, 6, and 7, and Jesus introduces this sermon by letting us know that he's addressing it particularly to those people, those men and women, boys and girls, who are actually his disciples. This is not teaching that is directed to the world in general, this is directed to his disciples who have certain spiritual characteristics about them.

Look at Matthew 5:3-4. We'll just handle this very briefly here. Jesus says in chapter 5, verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." And then when you look at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:21, he says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter." Now my only point in mentioning this is that Jesus is addressing those who are on the path that leads to heaven. He is addressing those who have genuinely been born again and belong to the kingdom of God, and he is addressing them and them only. And so this is not teaching that the world can appropriate and have them help them because the whole premise of this entire sermon, and the whole premise of this particular section on anxiety, is that the hearer knows God as his heavenly Father, and an unsaved person does not know God in that capacity. An unsaved person who is dead in sin does not know God, does not have a loving relationship with him, instead he is abiding under the wrath of God, Ephesians 2:3.

So it is important for us to realize that Jesus is talking particularly to his disciples and telling them how they are to think and how they are to live. If someone would hear this message and not be a Christian, the first thing that you need is to be born again. You must have new life from God and enter into his kingdom in the first instance rather than jumping straight ahead and trying to find out that which would help you live a more peaceful life. That is a misuse of this passage. Jesus does not give this simply so that someone who actually has no regard for him can find a salve for their earthly anxiety. No, that's not the point at all. Jesus is assuming that someone is a Christian and then instructing them how they are to approach life on earth and to live in a way that brings glory to their heavenly Father. So this is a passage that is addressed to Christians and I'm going to speak from that perspective as we go through the passage here today.

Three points for tonight. The first one is this: as Jesus teaches us how to deal with anxiety, he tells us, first of all, to consider your priorities. To consider your priorities, and this starts in verse 24 which is why I read it at the start. Matthew 6:24, Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other." He says, "You cannot serve God and wealth." And his point is that you can't make your ultimate priority a twofold matter that is actually existing in opposition to one another. You can have as your ultimate priority, as your ultimate master, you can have God as your ultimate master, you can have Christ as your ultimate Lord and serve him preeminently, but you cannot, if that is the position of your heart, then you cannot have wealth and the pursuit of earthly matters as an equal priority in your heart. That doesn't work because the two are in conflict with one another, and so

he gives the idea of having two masters, you have one master who tells you to do one thing, and if you have a second master and he tells you to do something contradictory, then what are you going to do? You're in a place of tension that you cannot resolve and Jesus is illustrating that obvious point from the secular realm to make a spiritual point that your priorities have to be clear and established in your mind.

Now why is that so important? Notice in verse 25 he says, "For this reason I say to you," for what reason? For the reason that he was just giving. Because you cannot serve God and simultaneously serve wealth as the object of your heart, you have to make a choice. You have to set one as your priority and deny the other one. And so he's connecting his teaching on priorities, he's connecting that and saying that, "From My teaching on priorities flow an understanding of how to deal with anxiety." And his point is this: if your preeminent concern in life is built around earthly matters of the acquisition of wealth or earthly relationships preeminently, then, yes, you will suffer from anxiety because it is the nature of life on earth that things are passing. 1 John 2 says the world is passing away, and for those people who have set their affections on the things of this world and live for the things of this world and worry about having things taken away from them or not having what they want in the future, Jesus says, "Yes, you are going to live an anxious life and the reason for that is because your priorities are in the wrong place and those things are subject to loss at any time."

We all know this. We all understand this. We've all seen financial wealth come and go. We've all seen loved ones come and go. We've all, to one extent or another, either experienced a loss of employment or, you know, we've suffered in the workplace and things haven't gone well, that's just the nature of life. It is the ebb and flow of things. And so when those are the things that you ultimately love, then it is necessarily going to follow that you are going to have an anxiety-filled life. Why is that? It is because anxiety flows from that which you value. That which you value, if it can be taken away, then you're anxious about how you're going to keep it and to preserve it. But along with that, there's something else that I like to point out in this connection in this passage: beloved, none of you worry about anything that's not a priority to you. None of you worry about that. Are any of you worried about what the weather is going to be like tomorrow in Bend, Oregon on the eastern side of the mountains there? None of you think about that. Are any of you worried about the price that farmers are getting for their wheat in Canada? None of you worry about that. Do you know why? It's because it's not important to you. You don't worry about things that are not a priority to you but when things are pressing in on you that threaten the things that you are concerned about, then anxiety starts to occur. And all that we're saying here and all that we're drawing out here is that Jesus is teaching us that our anxieties flow out of what our priorities are so that if you tell me what you're anxious about, it's going to be pretty easy for us to find out what it is that you value and consider to be most important in your life.

Now in a time like this after the past year and a half or two years that we've walked through with this so-called pandemic, the past two years have hit us all very close to home. I understand that. There's no aspect of life that hasn't been affected in one way or another – stay with me here and follow what I'm saying here – and as a result of that as

things have happened so rapidly, you know, as the pandemic came out and there were responses and governments making mandates and all of that, and businesses are shutting down and then there's overflow effects from that even to this day, look, our thinking, and I say this sympathetically, our thinking about life on earth has been overwhelmed by a worldly tide that has come in that we didn't see and now we're just as the tide starts to go back out a little bit, we're dealing with all of the debris that it left behind and is still floating around and able to hit us in one way or another. Well, this is a perfect time for us to step back, to take a breath, as it were, for some take multiple multiple breaths, we need to come back, step back and remember what our priority is and what it is that is of first importance for the disciple of Christ, what it is that is of first importance for the one who belongs to the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus makes this very clear, look ahead toward the end of the passage when he says in verse 33, he says, "But seek first," seek first, what is it that you are after, what is it that you desire, what is it that you want, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." All the things of life God takes care of faithfully for his people because he is our heavenly Father, he loves us, and he promises to take care of us. Because that is the reality of things, because we can trust God for everything that comes into our lives, then we don't have to be anxious about that aspect of things, we simply devote our energies, our mental, physical energies, our resources, we devote them to seeking out his kingdom and we seek those things first. In other words, we seek them as that which exceeds everything else in importance. Let me say that again: we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness as that which exceeds everything else in importance. And this is challenging to all of us. It's challenging to me to hear this and I've taught this passage numerous times over the years. This is challenging but to realize that Christ is more important than anything that happens on earth, to realize that your personal holiness is more important than anything else that is happening in your life. That is what God values. That is what God has called you. He's called you to a holy life here on earth, and if you are a Christian, what God's call on your life is is the most important thing.

Now it's not that the other things aren't important but they are not the most important thing, and so we give our energy and we give our priority to his kingdom and his righteousness. Sinclair Ferguson says this, it's a rather lengthy quote. "The chief drive in our lives should be to live under the authority of Jesus Christ and to see His kingdom extended in every possible way: morally, socially, and geographically, as well as personally, inwardly and spiritually. When we have our priorities in order, we will discover, number one, God will provide all we need, and number two, many of the things we thought we needed we do not even want; in place of anxiety we have found contentment." And so as we enter into the passage that Jesus has for us here, the first thing that we have to consider is we have to step back and consider our priorities. What is it that you love? What is it that you want out of life? What is it that you seek from God preeminently? That is the starting point in dealing with anxiety.

Now you can see why this is such a uniquely Christian teaching. There are all kinds of anxiety coaches and other things that you can find online, all kinds of promises of earthly help to deal with your anxiety. When I did a Google search a few years ago for how to deal with anxiety, it returned 90 million hits. Ninety million. I'm sure that that number

has probably tripled or quadrupled since then, especially after we've been dealing with the whole COVID mess. And so we just need to step back and if you've been dealing with anxiety and you've been overwhelmed by it and you're worried about what's going to happen to you or happen to your loved ones, look, it's legitimate to take measures to protect yourself, we're not even talking about that, what we're talking about is what it is that you love the most and how it is that you're going to deal with and respond to the matters of anxiety and the anxious thoughts that are in your heart because Scripture addresses this repeatedly. Scripture talks about this over and over, "Do not fret. Do not fret. Do not fret." Psalm 37. "Trust the LORD."

Look at Proverbs 3:5 and 6 and, again, this is a familiar text but I really have the sense that, as I talk with people around the country and see what, you know, people are thinking and saying and, you know, what dominates discourse, I'm really convinced that Christians are missing this fundamental point and this fundamental matter. That's why I want to talk about it here from God's word. Proverbs 3:5 and 6, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones."

So our priority as we go through this time of life together, our priority is to please God and to know him, to know God and to love him and to serve him and to grow in holiness, to grow in his word, to grow in Christ, to sow and cultivate toward the Holy Spirit and the fruit that he brings in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Beloved, an anxious heart cannot generate that kind of fruit and so if that fruit is not coming out of your life on a consistent basis, I say this not to rebuke you but to help you, if that fruit is not coming out of your life on a consistent basis, it's because ultimately the Holy Spirit is not controlling the nature of your life, the nature of your thinking, and the nature of your desires. So we have to consider what is our priority and what it is that we love the most, and if that calls some of us to a measure of repentance, "God, I've gotten offtrack. God, I've gotten preoccupied with the things of the world. I have neglected Your word. I have neglected Christ. I have argued with people instead of just simply humbly seeking You in prayer." Then it's appropriate for us to acknowledge that, to repent of that, and to bring that before the Lord.

Look, Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture. Christ is a loving gracious Savior who bids us to come to him when we are weak and when we are heavy-laden. And Scripture promises us that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. None of us in the anxious moments that have confronted us over the past year and a half, none of us have committed the unpardonable sin in response to these things. Having said that, it is still appropriate, it is still necessary for us to recognize where our responsibility lies, confess it before the Lord and then turn to something else to be that which occupies the affections of our heart. This is really not that complicated. This is not complicated at all, it's just difficult to deal with

ourselves and to address our heart and not let our hearts run away with us in fear and anxiety over things.

So we consider what our priorities are. Secondly here this evening: we consider Christ's command. We consider Christ's command. Now, you know, let's just deal with things on the bottom shelf, the easiest principles that we can consider these things from. If you are a Christian, that means that you call Jesus Lord. You recognize to one degree or another, you recognize the authority of Christ in your life, that he is your Master, and as Your Master, as your Lord, he has the authority and the prerogative to tell you how your life is to go and how you are to be. We think about that far too often, I think, simply in external matters and think about what it is that we are to do, but what we find here as we go through Matthew 6 is this and it's true throughout all of Scripture but we're just focusing on Matthew 6 here, Jesus Christ commands us how we are to be in our inner man. He tells us how we are to think, how we are to respond to life, what our priorities are to be. He addresses our inner man and tells us how we are to be in the inner person of our hearts. That's the supremacy of Christ and the authority that he exercises over us. It's just breathtaking how important and how vast it is. He doesn't only tell us what to do, he tells us who to be, how to think. And as our Lord, that's his prerogative and we come under his command in obedience.

Well, with that in mind, think about it like this: if apart from this message you and I sat down and I said, "Why don't you list out the sins that you think God considers to be really bad." Your mind, first of all, would probably go to things like do not murder, do not commit adultery, you know, and maybe you'd go from there but your mind would go to those kind of heinous external sins that have a way of being the place where people start their thinking about morality. Apart from this message and, you know, maybe unless you've been reading or thinking about Scripture in recent times, you would not think anxiety was something that needed you to repent of. You wouldn't think of it as a matter of disobedience that required repentance and a change in your life but after you read Matthew 6, you can't think that way anymore. Before I point this out to you, let's just think about it like this: is it a serious matter when Jesus Christ tells his disciples to do something or not to do something? Is that serious? Is that something where his authority should be respected and honored and obeyed? Well, if we call him Lord, then, yes, the answer to that is obvious. That is something that we should sit up and take note of. Well, in light of that, look at this passage in Matthew 6:25-34. Three times in these 10 verses Jesus commands us not to be anxious three times.

Look at in verse 25, he says, "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life." Verse 31, he says, "Do not worry then." And in verse 34 he says, "So do not worry about tomorrow." Three times he has said it. The form in the original language in verse 25 has the idea of, "Stop being anxious. Stop." He comes and he addresses us, you know, "Here you are, you're anxious in your life, you're anxious in your heart. Stop being that way." Then in verses 31 and 34, the grammar of the commands has the idea, "Never do this. Don't ever worry about your life. Don't ever worry about tomorrow." And that's the idea. There's two different kind of forms, two different nuances there. Taken together, my friends, what this is saying is, Jesus is saying this, "Stop worrying and don't start again."

Christ forbids anxiety to his disciples as a moral imperative and when you read through the Sermon on the Mount and all of the high, lofty, moral ideals that are placed before us, matters of prayer and fasting and, you know, "Don't look at a woman with lust. Don't be angry with others. Love your enemy and, you know, pray for those who persecute you." On and on it goes. It is striking, it is stunning to read this sermon and realize that Jesus spends more time addressing the matter of anxiety in this sermon, in this foundational sermon than any other topic. Perhaps prayer is of equal length in this sermon, but the things that we run to when we think about morality are treated with less text, with less emphasis from Jesus than the matter of anxiety. Jesus by the length that he puts on it, triple command here, lifts it up as a matter of importance and we need to consider the fact that this is what Christ is commanding.

Now why do you think the matter of anxiety would be so important in the sight of God, so important in the sight of Christ? Why would that matter so much from the perspective of our Redeemer? Well, you know, what is anxiety except, you know, it's a fear of the future. You know, I mean, you can boil it all down to that. It's saying, "I'm afraid of what might happen. I'm going to lose something. I'm going to lose someone." You know, these kinds of things and there's just this worry about what the future is going to bring. Well, step back for a moment and ask ourselves the question, "Who is it that holds the future? Who runs the future? Who determines what happens in the days to come?" Well, Christian, you ought to be able to say and you should know deep in your heart, "The one who holds the future is my heavenly Father. God is the one who is sovereign over what happens, not man. God is sovereign over what happens, not doctors, not politicians, not my enemies, not, you know, the dangerous driver on the street. God is in charge. God has my future in His hands. God is working out His purposes in my life. And the Bible says that even when men mean evil against me, when I belong to Christ, God means it for good. God will work it out together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose." The Bible says, Romans 8, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

So that's the biblical reality about the future is that it's unknown to us but we know who holds it, our God does, our heavenly Father does, therefore to be afraid of what the future might bring, to be stewing and agitating in anxiety over what may or may not happen, what does that say? Think it through all the way to the end. What it says, what anxiety says is this, it says that God cannot be trusted. Our anxieties are a direct assault, they are an accusation in the final analysis, they are an accusation against God that he cannot be trusted for what the future is going to bring. There's no other conclusion to be drawn. The anxious person perhaps does not trust the power of God, "Well, you know, I mean, I believe God loves me but, you know, there's Satan, what's Satan going to do or what's going to happen in this or that situation?" And then you're just preoccupied about what someone else is going to do rather than trusting the power of God, or anxiety says, "I can't really at the end of the day, I really can't trust the love of God. You know, maybe He doesn't care about me. Maybe He's not going to look after these details. Maybe it doesn't really matter to Him." Well, beloved, and I'm speaking about these things in very very simple terms here this evening, remember we're talking to Christians now, we're



talking to Christians who claim to understand something about the nature of God and the character of God, it is basic to a Christian biblical understanding of God that he is omnipotent, that he has power over all things, that he created the heavens and the earth by his spoken word, that he sustains all things by his power, and that he will bring things to a conclusion, he will bring world history to an end when it pleases him to do so, that's basic fundamental to the nature of God that we say that we believe. Well, if we're anxious, then aren't we saying something about what we really believe about the power of God? Or if we question his love, I mean, pick your poison, neither of these are good options, are you really going to, would we really look back at the cross of Jesus Christ, see him on the cross suffering for our sins so that we would be forgiven, that we would be reconciled to God, that we would be delivered from the domain of Satan, that we would be brought into his heavenly kingdom in the end, and all of that undeserved by us, indeed we deserve judgment instead, are we really going to question the love of God as we look to the future? You see, there's just no good option here. We trust the power of God and we trust it for what will happen in the future. We trust the love of God, it's proven at the cross preeminently, we look back at the cross and say, "Of course God loves me." So he's sovereign over all and his love is particular to me, then where is there room to be anxious in the believing heart? You see, our theology matters. If we believe these things, then we have to work out the consequences all the way to the end.

Those of you that are parents or have been parents, imagine if one of your children came up to you, young child, 6, 7, 8, 10, old enough to have a sense of what's going on and a sense of what life has been like. Imagine, say you're a mother and your child would come up to you and say, "Mom, are you going to feed me today? Or are you going to send me to bed hungry?" Well, a loving mother would be greatly insulted by that question, wouldn't she, and rightly so. It's a violation of relationship for a child to question the loving care of his mother like that, and a mother would be right to say, "How can you so distrust me to ask a question like that? Of course I will feed you. I always feed you. I have always fed you and I always will. What is wrong with you to ask a question like that?" The thought is so absurd in a healthy family, especially in a healthy Christian family, that the thought of a dialog like that would never even cross anyone's mind. This is just assumed. This is what we do. "I'm your mom, that's what I do, I take care of you."

Well, multiply that by infinity, look at the love of God who created you in your mother's womb, who sustains your life, who sent his Son to the cross in order to reconcile you to himself, who placed his Holy Spirit inside you as a deposit, as a down-payment guaranteeing that there is more of your redemption still to come, think of the Holy Spirit interceding before God on your behalf, think of Christ at the right hand of heaven. I know we talk about this a lot, there's a reason we do, these are the fundamental realities of Christian existence. Think about all of those things and ask yourself how it could be possible that your heavenly Father would not take care of you in the end. Yes, maybe he leads us through a valley that's dry and dusty and hard, sometimes those valleys last for years, sometimes they are crushing in their weight and their difficulty and their sorrow, but they never give us a legitimate basis upon which to question the power and the love of God. I like to say it this way and we need to think about it in this way, think about the way that your body is constructed. Your head sits on top of your heart, meaning by

implication, by illustration, meaning that your thinking about God is to rule the way that you think and reason in your heart, and if these things are true and you know them to be true, then they are to work themselves out in the way that you look to the future that increasingly puts anxiety to death in your life. Right thinking results in right feeling in the end.

So dear Christian, dear Christian, I invite you to look at yourself in the mirror in your anxious thoughts and in the controlling anxiety that some of you feel and think about what we said about the mother who takes care of her child. Look at yourself in your anxiety and let me just ask you a couple of questions, more than a couple but you can use that figure loosely. My friend, hasn't God always provided for you? Hasn't he promised to do so in the future? Hasn't he said that nothing will separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord? Isn't he faithful? Didn't Christ go to the cross for you? Isn't he going to usher you into heaven when you die? If you're a Christian, that's what you believe. Well, then let me ask you some other questions assuming that you've given a hearty amen to those things in your heart. Well, if those things are true, then why do you dishonor your Father by doubting him in the way that he'll take care of you between now and heaven? Why do you question whether he will feed you, speaking metaphorically? What is wrong with you? If the mother would ask her child the question, "What is wrong with you? This is a total violation of relationship, this is a total violation of our relationship for you to question me like that!" Well, how much more in light of all of the wonderful spiritual realities that we enjoy in Christ. We have Christ himself. He is ours and we are his. How, if those things are true and we truly believe them, how is it that we could ever doubt his ultimate purposes for us and how things are going to work out?

What's wrong with us that we question such a good and sovereign God by wringing our hands anxiously about what tomorrow is going to bring? Yes, sometimes there's a lot at stake. Sometimes it's life, sometimes it's a career, sometimes it's relationships, and it seems like everything is at stake and we don't know how it's going to turn out. I get all of that but those things, you know, what is your priority and where does your ultimate trust lie? That is what we have to come to grips with because if you settle the greater issue of whether you truly believe the power and the love of God as he has given it to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, if you settle that and remind yourself of that again and again and again, it's going to shape the way that you respond to things in life. And if anxiety is a controlling besetting sin of yours, Scripture is pointing you to go back and to rehearse the things that you say you know to be true that we've been rehearsing here this evening.

So how do we return to trusting him? How can we be at peace? Well, Philippians 4:6 and 7 says, "Be anxious for nothing," you see, it's not just an isolated passage. I didn't just choose Psalm 37 and Matthew 6 and make it and, you know, and give them a biblical prominence that they're not worthy of that's not verified by the rest of Scripture. The rest of Scripture points us in this direction. We saw it in Proverbs 3, Philippians 4:6 and 7, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Casting all your anxiety upon him because he cares for you, 1 Peter 5. And on and on it goes. So when

these temptations, when these controlling thoughts of anxiety come to us, we've got to come back to the truth, we have to come back to Scripture, we have to come back and say, "What is it that I believe? Oh, yes, I believe this, this, this and this." You park your mind there and you rehearse that until it starts to sink in, and you're asking as you're considering it, "O Spirit of God, give me help. Give me wisdom. Give me Your assistance so that these things could grip my heart as they rightly should." We are asking the Spirit of God who indwells us to help us appropriate these things that we know to be true.

So we consider our priorities, we realize that anxiety flows out of that which we treasure, we consider Christ's command. We've seen over and over again these commands. We cannot evade them. We can't avoid them so that anxiety becomes a matter of sanctification, you know? Then thirdly tonight, for tonight's purposes: consider your thinking. Consider your thinking. We've kind of already alluded to this but we'll go into a bit more detail right now. One of the things that you have to love about this passage is the simplicity with which Jesus addresses us. He speaks to us as though we were, and I mean this in a positive way, in a loving, affirming way, he speaks to us as children and he gives us illustrations that even a child can understand in order to reinforce his teaching against anxiety. So we saw the three commands in verse 25, in verse 31 and in verse 34 where he said, "Do not worry. Do not be anxious." But you know, he goes beyond that. He doesn't simply give us a negative command, he tells us what it is that we are to do, what we are to think.

Look at verse 26, remembering that we're going to come through this passage verse by verse over our next couple of times together. In verse 26 he gives a different command and he says, "Look at the birds of the air." In verse 28, he says, "Observe how the lilies of the field grow." Do you know what he's done? This is almost, this is humbling. He takes us and he takes us in all of our, you know, all of our adult sophistication and, you know, we know all kinds of things and we've studied Scripture and all of that, Jesus, as it were, takes us by the hand and he says, "Let me lead you to something that you should think about," and he leads us to consider a common bird in the air and a common flower in the field and he says, "That bird and this flower has something very important to teach you. You need to stop and think about them." So he's saying it's not simply don't worry but replace your worry with right thinking about the nature and character of God.

So look at verse 26. He says, "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." This bird does nothing to provide for the future, it just goes day by day and day by day your heavenly Father feeds that bird and the 10 billion other birds that are in the atmosphere at any given time. Verse 28, "why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these." Verse 30, "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!" And so here's the argument that Jesus is making. He's arguing from a lesser thing in order to prove a greater point. He's saying if the lesser thing is true, then it's obvious that the greater thing is going to be true as well.

So God, and he attributes all of this activity in the natural realm to the active providence of God, the guiding hand of God, the purpose, intention, the working out of God, this is what God does. What does God do? He feeds birds who do not have an independent ability to feed themselves. What does God do? He clothes ordinary flowers with stunning beauty. He sustains his creation and he does so with such exquisite precision that birds don't miss a meal and flowers are beautiful, stunning in their captivating elegance, and yet they come and go within a day. Now isn't that what God does, Jesus says? And you say, "Yes, that's what God does. Scripture is clear that He orders the providence of His creation." Well, then if he does this for the natural world, what do you think he will do for you who are a disciple of his Son? What do you think he will do for you whom Christ redeemed at the cross? I realize Jesus is saying this before the cross but we're justified to talk about it after the cross with the fullness of the progress of revelation in front of us. If God made you and God redeemed you. If he is your Creator and Redeemer, that's the greater thing. You're greater to him, you're more important to him than a bird, than a flower is, and if he takes care of a bird and a flower like that, what do you think he's going to do for you? It is an impossible violation of logic to think that the God who takes care of a sparrow would not also take care of you in even greater measure. Jesus said just three chapters later, four chapters later in Matthew 10, "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent and yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart for your Father but the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

Now you see why there must be, you see why there is a spiritual component to anxiety. Scripture says in God, in our heavenly Father, we live and move and have our being. Every aspect of our life is under his hand and is being guided by his providential care for us, and he is working out a purpose that he established before time began, and that he will certainly bring to the fulfillment of all of his intended purposes for us in Christ. That's who he is. That's what he does. And understand that we're talking about the one that we call our heavenly Father, the one who loves us, the one who cares for us and so, beloved, he will provide for you far better than he cares for birds and flowers and he does a magnificent job of doing that. Then what could the only possible outcome be for you?

So I say this to my own heart and I say it to yours: your anxiety is utterly unnecessary. Whatever comes will be in the hands of God and will come from the hand of God. Anything, everything that comes into our lives is appointed to us by the hands of our sovereign heavenly Father and whatever comes on the other side of it, he will work it together for good. And so the only question that we have as we profess our faith in Christ is what will we do with that as we look to the future? Listen, life is messed up. We live in a fallen world and we feel the consequences of this Satan, sin-dominated environment in which we live. Our world is under a curse. People that we love get sick and they die. Evil people succeed and wield it over us. Our children often rebel against what we taught them and never come back to the truth. That's the experience of many Christians. Investments go bad, government abuses its authority, we could go on and on but we need not do that, shall we? That is life and we take all of that in and we take a deep breath and we say, "Okay, that's what life is like, this is what my heavenly Father is like." The question is what will you and I do with that information? What will we do with that

spiritual reality? The Christian says, "I am not living for this world. My Father is good. My heavenly Father loves me in Christ and therefore," the "therefore" is the important word here, "therefore I will rest. I will trust Him. I will be content with today and trust my Father for tomorrow."

Beloved, that commitment of faith puts a dagger in the heart of anxiety. And we don't just simply reason this out once, we need to reason this out again and again and again, and as we reason it out again and again as new anxieties come and beset us and we come back to this and we work through it again and again, over the course of time God is working out conviction and trust in your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. And we come back to these things repeatedly. The truth of the matter is, beloved, every one of you in Christ, every one of you in Christ and every anxiety that you feel, this reality of which Christ speaks in Matthew 6, this is where you can live. In fact, Jesus says it's where you are to live, it's where you must live. And so the only question that we answer for ourselves as we walk out the door tonight is whether we will embrace Christ and what he has told us in his word and let it transform our lives accordingly. Will you live in peace in the hands of your heavenly Father?

Let's pray together.

*O gracious Father, for this moment at least we set aside all of our anxieties, all of the unanswered questions, all of the uncertainties of life, and we simply rest in You. You are our heavenly Father. You are in control. You love us. You will keep us. You will protect us. You are our Good Shepherd and the Good Shepherd cares for the sheep. The Good Shepherd, Lord Jesus, which You are, the Good Shepherd provides for the sheep. You guide the sheep. You protect the sheep. And whatever our failings of today and the recent past may have been, Father, we confess our utter unworthiness of that love and care that You provide for us. We confess our failure to know and to trust You as You are worthy, but in this moment, Father, we lay all of that aside and acknowledge by principle in our heart that we love You, that we trust You, and we trust You even as we look to an uncertain future. We know that You will be good. We know that You will be kind. We know that you will work all things together for good to those who love Christ and are called according to His purpose. And so we trust You completely this evening. We cast our anxieties upon You and pray, Father, that by Your grace and by Your Spirit, You would help us to seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness and we'll trust You to take care of all of those other things to be added to us in Your wisdom and kindness to us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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