

“Anxiety & The Good Life” Matthew 6:25-34 Shane Hatfield 7/10/22

We've been going through a study called “The Good Life According to Jesus,” as we've been studying the Sermon on the Mount. This morning we're going to look at worry, anxiety, ambition, and the good life. What we've seen time and again as we've studied this, is that Jesus is really giving us a totally new way of being human. He's giving us a counter-cultural way of life. Something that is totally opposite to the religious world or the irreligious world around us. Now, you can see if you look in Matthew 6 that in verses 1-18, Jesus contrasts the Christian life with the hypocritical life of a religious person. Then in this section that we've been in, Matthew 6:19-34, Jesus contrasts the Christian life with a materialistic or an irreligious view of the world. Last week Steve took us through verses 19-24 and showed us that the good life is a good life that treasures God, and we treasure God because God treasures us, because He loves us and gave His only Son for us. And so this morning, this teaching that we're going to get into about worry and anxiety and ambition flows out of that section. Please read along with me as I read aloud. Hear the word of the Lord from Matthew 6, starting in verse 25.

“25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? **26** Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? **27** And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? **28** And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, **29** yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **30** But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **31** Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ **32** For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

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

This is the word of the Lord. It is sweeter than the honey from the honeycomb and more precious than much fine gold. Let's listen to it.

Last summer a friend of mine went to a grocery store and they were doing their normal grocery shopping that they normally do, that they've done hundreds and hundreds of times before. But for some reason, as they were doing their grocery shopping, the lights began to feel really bright and it felt like the people in the grocery store were kind of closing in on them, and their chest got tight, and their breathing got heavy, and they felt like something was happening that they didn't know what was going on! They were panicking! So, they ran out of the grocery store, they got in the car, they sat there for a little bit, and as they sat there and relaxed, their breathing slowed, their chest loosened, they regained composure, and they were fine! The next week came, they went to the grocery store, and the same thing happened. The next week came, they went to the grocery store, and the same thing happened! It took them kind of a while

to figure out what was going on, but what they realized was that they were having panic attacks while they were at the grocery store. They'd never had panic attacks before. I think what they realized is that it probably came from a heightened state of worry and anxiety due to the pandemic, due to months and months of prolonged anxiety about being in large crowds and getting sick. They were now experiencing this anxiety at the grocery store.

Worry and anxiety are things that we all struggle with, but for many people, worry and anxiety were heightened during the pandemic. Research shows that during the pandemic, 80% of people reported higher anxiety. 50% reported depressive thoughts. 20% of people expressed suicidal thoughts up from 10%. We all struggle with worry and anxiety to some degree, but the pandemic seems to have made it worse. What causes this worry and this anxiety that we struggle with? Well, in a real sense, we have real physical needs that need to be met, that we want met. We also have longings and desires in our hearts that we hope we receive! At the same time, we realize that we are a limited people, we are a finite people, in a huge world that's uncontrollable and there's really not a whole lot that we have control around. So, we worry that our desires aren't going to be met, that our needs aren't going to be fulfilled, and that worry creates this feeling of anxiety. Worry and anxiety are not a part of the good life that Jesus has for us.

He tells us three times in this passage, "Do not be anxious." Now, that may seem cold and harsh and unhelpful. If you didn't really know Jesus, you'd probably think, 'Come on, Jesus. Is that the best you've got? Don't worry?' He might sound like Bob Newhart on Mad TV. You guys may have seen this sketch, this was years ago, but Bob Newhart was counseling and a lady walks into his office and sits down and he says, "Tell me what's going on. Tell me what your problems are." She said, "Well, I'm afraid. I'm anxious." He says, "What are you scared about?" And she goes, "Well, I'm kind of embarrassed to say." And he says, "Well go on, tell me what it is and I'm sure I can solve it." So she says, "Well I'm scared that I'm going to be buried alive. I just don't know what to do. It just racks me with fear. What do I do?" And he goes, "Well I'm going to give you two words. These are the only two words you need. Stop it. Just, stop it." And she's like, "That's it? Just stop it?" And he's like, "Yes! Stop it! You don't want to live your life like that! Stop it!"

And I think if we didn't know Jesus we might come to this passage and we might think, 'Jesus, you're just telling me to stop it! Why are you just saying this?' But what I want you to see this morning is Jesus is not a bad counselor. That is a bad counselor. Someone that would just sit you down and in under five minutes tell you to just stop it. Jesus is not a bad counselor. Jesus is the wonderful counselor. So, instead of just telling us to stop it, He gives us kind, loving, and logical reasons not to worry. He says, "Don't be anxious," and He gives us three things to do. He says, consider your value, trust your Father, and seek His kingdom and His righteousness. And so, what I want you to see this morning is that as we do those things, we experience a peace that surpasses understanding, that God has promised for us.

So, the first thing I want you to see is that peace comes as we consider our value. If you look at verse 26, Jesus says, 'Don't worry. Look at the birds of the air. They don't plant their food, they don't grow their food, they don't store their food, how do they get their food? Our

heavenly Father feeds them.' Then in verse 28 He says, consider the lilies of the field. They grow, they look beautiful, they are more glorious than Solomon in all of his splendor. Yet, they don't do any of this on their own, God provides everything that they need for growth and beauty.' He says, look at both of these things, and are you not more valuable than them? Are you not more valuable than flowers and birds? Yes! You are much more valuable than them. You are infinitely more valuable than them. If God clothes them and feeds them, will He not much more clothe and feed you? We are infinitely more valuable than birds and flowers, because we are created in the image and likeness of God, every single person in here. We all struggle with the shame that tells us that we are not worthy, that we are not valuable, and that shame leads to worry and anxiety. What Jesus is saying here, is that you are worthy because you are created in God's image. If you've never heard anyone tell you that you're worthy, that you're valuable, that you have dignity in who you are, then I want you to hear it right now. Jesus is saying it. You are more valuable than flowers and birds because you are created in God's image.

Not only that, when we step back and look at the whole scope of the Bible, we see that we're infinitely more valuable than birds and flowers because God gave His only Son for us. God sacrificed His most precious thing for us on the cross. Do you want to know how valuable something is? The value is determined by what someone will pay for it. My kids have gotten into a hobby of collecting coins. They like to collect wheat pennies thanks to Benjamin Biggs, who may or may not be here, but Ben Biggs is a member of this congregation and he has sort of fed this hobby, and so, they've got a book with a spot for all the wheat pennies and they're trying to collect all of them. Some of the wheat pennies are really rare, so every once in a while they'll find one and they'll say, 'Dad! This is a 1947 wheat penny series DS! Man, look at this! They only made 4 million of these! Look at it! How much do you think it's worth, Dad?' I kind of say the same thing every time, I'm like, 'Look guys, it says it's worth a penny, but I guess it's worth whatever somebody will pay for it. If somebody wants to pay you a million dollars for that penny, then I guess it's worth a million dollars, because they paid a million dollars for it.' Right? Do we have any million dollar pennies in here? No. We are worth whatever God was willing to pay for us, and He was willing to pay His only Son for us. That's how much value you have. What do you worry about most? What makes you the most anxious? When you feel worried, and afraid, when you're anxious, consider your value.

Let me give you something really cheesy to do. Really cheesy. When you're anxious, go bird watching. I'm not a bird watcher, but I think it would be a good thing for us to do. Go outside. Go for a walk. Walk around. Look at those beautiful birds and listen to them and say, 'That is a beautiful bird. And I'm worth way more than that bird because God gave His only Son for me.' When you're anxious, go pick some flowers, put them in a vase. Put them on your table. Every time you see them, say, 'Those are beautiful flowers. And I'm worth way more than those flowers because God gave His only Son for me, and not for those flowers.' Ask the Holy Spirit to show you your value, and as you see your value in Christ, then peace will come more and more. What about planting and working?

Some of you, this would be me, right? We've got to plant and work, right? Well, God providentially placed birds and flowers in an ecosystem and as they participate in that ecosystem, God feeds them. Birds fly around and they get seeds and nectar and worms and all

that stuff and plants do photosynthesis. It's a little bit the same for us. God has placed us in an ecosystem. He has placed us in an economic system and as we participate in that system, then God uses that system to provide for our needs. So yes, we work, we plan, we pray, we think, we do all those things, and God uses them to meet our needs because He loves us and He cares for us. The first thing we see is that peace comes when we consider our value.

The second thing we see is that peace comes as we trust our Father. Look back at verses 30-32: "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." Notice in verse 31, Jesus kind of gets to the root of our worry and anxiety. He says, "O you of little faith." Anxiety and worry are the emotions of unbelief. They are the emotions of a lack of faith.

Now, as soon as I say that, there is just a mountain of shame and guilt that falls on all of us, including me, I can be an anxious person. I'm a worrier. You feel this anxiety and this fear. You might be prone to worry because of your temperament, or you might be prone to worry because of life experiences. You know it's sinful. You know you shouldn't worry. You know you should trust your heavenly Father, and there's a mountain of 'shoulds' that kind of collapses on top of you when you hear this. Well, let me give you maybe a different way to think about it. A pastor told me this once, and I think this is helpful, he said, when you feel anxious, instead of saying, "I shouldn't feel anxious." Say, "I am anxious." Just acknowledge your weakness. Change the language there. The reality is we are finite, sinful, broken people in an uncontrollable world. Just acknowledge that. Say, "I'm weak. I'm anxious." Yes, that comes from a lack of faith, but I think even Jesus, I feel a note of tenderness here.

Notice that He says, "Oh you of little faith," not no faith! He's talking to disciples like us, maybe He's got a few onlookers that are considering following Him. He doesn't say, 'Oh you of no faith,' He says, "You of little faith." He's acknowledging that His disciples have some degree of faith. I think He's even being gracious to them. He's making a promise to them. He's saying, 'Oh you of little faith, God is going to clothe you! He's not going to not clothe you or not feed you or not give you something to drink based on your lack of faith. He's going to do it anyway!' God is gracious to people of little faith. So, instead of seeing our worry and our anxiety as an occasion for shame and guilt, I think we can look at our worry and our anxiety as an opportunity to strengthen our faith in our heavenly Father, an opportunity to trust Him. There was a famous Christian leader, I think it was Bill Bright, who started Cru, who said, "When other people see problems, I see opportunities." I think we can look at our worry and anxiety as an opportunity.

If you're anxious, kids, if you're anxious about going to a new school, or starting a new school, look at that as an opportunity to trust your heavenly Father. If you're anxious, students, about going to college or about going back to college, then look at that as an opportunity to trust your Father! If you're nervous about starting a new job, or a new career, or about maintaining the career that you have that feels like it's built on a deck of cards that could crumble at any moment, use that as an opportunity to strengthen your faith in your heavenly Father. If you're

worried about your medical bills, or your court case, look at that as an opportunity to trust your Father. And when you pray, name those things specifically. Say, 'Father, I trust you with my job. I trust you with my health. I trust you with my court case. I trust you with my kids. I trust you with my schooling.' Name those things. Use that as an opportunity to trust your heavenly Father and to let Him be the Lord of the universe. Martin Luther was a famous reformer, you've probably heard of him before, he had a friend named Phillip Melancthon who often struggled with worry and anxiety, and sometimes whenever Luther would see Phillip and he could tell he was anxious, he would say to him, "Phillip, let Phillip cease to rule today." What is he saying? He's saying, 'Phillip, let God rule. Let God sit on His throne. He's all wise. He's all-powerful. Let Him be the one who's in charge.'" I mean, after all guys, do we really know how to orchestrate our lives and meet our needs better than God does? No!

I was talking to a guy this week and this point really came home to me. He was in the Navy, and his job in the Navy, he was a flight deck manager. Now imagine, he's out on a ship, a gigantic ship, in the middle of the ocean. They have, I don't know, dozens and dozens of planes on this ship. His job was to coordinate those planes taking off and landing and moving them all around the flight deck to get everything in proper order so they can take off and land and fulfill their mission. Now, I was thinking about that, and I was thinking about this sermon, and I said, "Now, imagine how silly it would be if I walked up to him," his name is Jeremy, and I said, "Jeremy, I really think I know better than you how to arrange the planes on the flight deck. I really think you should move this one over here. This one should fly. This one should go here." How silly would that be? Now, imagine that my seven-year-old Francis got out on the flight deck and said, "Jeremy, you know, I really have a better idea about how you can rearrange these planes and how they can take off and land in a much more efficient manner." That would be silly, right? That would be illogical! How much more silly and illogical would it be if we went to God and said, "You know what, God, I really know how my life should be ordered. I really know how You can meet all of my needs. You really need to do this, this and this, and I need this person to do this." The distance between us and God is infinitely greater than the distance between Jeremy and Francis on that flight deck.

We can trust Him with our lives. We can trust Him with our future. We can trust Him to meet our needs. He gave His only Son for us. He was powerful enough and wise enough to feed the birds, to clothe the grass, to restore and redeem all humanity through Jesus. Do you think we can trust Him with our job, and our kids, and our families, and our futures? Yes! We can trust Him. Peace comes as we do that more and more in our lives.

So, peace comes as we consider our value. Peace comes as we trust our Father, and peace comes as we see God's kingdom and God's righteousness. Look at verse 32. "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." So, Jesus is contrasting Gentile seeking with Christian seeking. The Gentiles were seeking the material world. That was the thing they were putting first: food, drink, clothing. Now, those are good things. Jesus is not saying those are bad things. You need to eat and drink, if not, you'll die! You need to wear clothes, if not, you won't have friends, and if you show up without clothes I'll have to ask you to leave. Right? Those things are not bad things in and of themselves, but

what Jesus is teaching His disciples is that those are not the most important things. Those aren't the priorities. Notice He says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," He's talking about the priority. Don't worship them. Jesus is saying, don't care for your bodies at the expense of your souls. He's saying, don't work for more food or more drink, at the expense of your families. A little side note, I was listening to a podcast this week and they were talking about parenting, and specifically, raising boys. One of the guys in there, he wrote a book called "The Boy Crisis," said that based on where you live, there is an income range, pretty low, he said it was about \$40-70,000 a year, based on where you live. He said once you reach that sort of income range, what your kids need is not more dime, but more time. Once we have our basic needs met, parents, what our kids need is more time with us, not necessarily more dime from us. Now, that's not to say that money is a bad thing, it's not a bad thing. But what Jesus is saying is that there is a higher priority that we are to look for in our lives. Jesus is saying, enjoy your clothes, but don't let your clothes define you. Anxiety and worry come when we make these the things that we seek first. So, Jesus says, instead of seeking worldly things, He says, seek the kingdom of God. Well, how do we do that?

Well first, we seek the kingdom of God when we humble ourselves, repent, believe the gospel, submit to God, and when we teach others to do the same thing. We seek the kingdom when we devote ourselves to seeing Jesus' rule extend to every area of our life: our home, family, friends, work, politics, morality, bank statements, tax returns, hobbies, you name it. In all things, we pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We seek that for Jesus' glory and for our good. So, instead of seeking worldly things, we seek the kingdom of God, and instead of seeking worldly things, we seek God's righteousness.

Now, what's the difference between the kingdom of God, and His righteousness? John Stott is a conservative theologian and commentator and this is what he says, "God's righteousness is a wider concern than His kingdom. He desires righteousness, not just in the Christian community, but in every human community. God is more pleased with righteousness outside the circle of His kingdom than unrighteousness. He is pleased more with justice than injustice, with righteousness than unrighteousness, with love than hate, with peace than war. To seek the kingdom first means to evangelize, but it also means we engage in social action and seek to spread God's higher standard of righteousness throughout our communities." To seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, is to want to see His shalom spread across the face of the earth as the waters cover the sea. It's to see God's kingdom as a vehicle for His righteousness to spread across the earth.

So, I think we have to ask ourselves, what do we seek? What is the thing we're seeking in our life? It might be vocational, it might be that you're a doctor or a lawyer or an entrepreneur, you're a businessman. It might be material, you might be seeking more wealth or more influence or more property, or a better position at work. It might be relational, you might be seeking to be a better father, or husband, or to become a father, or to become a husband. It might be to be a better football player, or a better musician, or something like that. All those things are good things, Jesus is not saying those are bad things. He taught us to pray for those things. But what He's saying is those things are not the priority. Those are not the things that we seek first. We develop our gifts. We widen our opportunities. We extend our influence. We promote our work to

bring glory to God, and all those secondary ambitions are things that we use to bring Him glory and to bring righteousness to earth. It's the supreme good and we seek it above all others.

Now, as we go through this journey of seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness, we're going to experience anxiety. We're going to have troubles. I think it's kind of freeing that Jesus says that you're going to have troubles. Verse 34, "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." Jesus is honest! We're going to have trouble as we go through this process, but He says, focus on the trouble for today. I love this. Can you do anything about tomorrow's trouble? No! You can't do anything about it. You can't control it. You don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, right? Whatever I'm worrying about today that I think is going to happen tomorrow, might not even happen. All I'm doing is something that might not happen in the future, and bringing it into today and doubling my trouble. I'm doubling my worry. Jesus says, "Sufficient for each day is its own trouble." Seek the kingdom of God. Seek His righteousness. Trust the Father, and let Him take care of the outcome. As we do that, I think we're going to experience more and more peace in our lives. Friends, it is not our job to control our life, to manage our life, to control this world, to control this universe. It is God's job. He's the only one who can do it. What is our job?

Whenever Mother Teresa was taking care of the poor and the sick in Calcutta, there was a friary that was near them and the friary was also there taking care of the poor and the sick, and one day the head of the friary came to Mother Teresa and he was worried and he was anxious and he said, "Mother Teresa, we have so much to do! There are so many people to take care of! There are so many poor to help! There are so many sick to heal! Help!" She looked at him and said, "What is your job?" He said, "My job is to take care of the poor and the sick in Calcutta." She said, "No, your job is to be loved by God and to love others with the overflow of that love." That's our job: to experience God's love and kindness to us in Christ Jesus, and then to love others out of the overflow of that love. As we do that, more and more, by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, then we'll experience the peace that surpasses all understanding. Let's pray that God would give us that peace now.