

Matthew 6:24-34
Overcoming Anxiousness
Take no thought... vv. 25,31,34

We find Christ dealing with two great spiritual maladies in Mt. 6. In the first half of the chapter we find Him dealing with hypocrisy – the kind of religion that puts on a show for others. In the second half of chapter 6 (from verse 19 to the end) we find Him dealing with worldliness. And by worldliness I mean the kind of mindset that is dominated by the things of this world, whether those things be legitimate things or not. The fact that Christ deals with these spiritual maladies should certainly lead us to the conclusion that the Sermon on the Mount is a timely sermon for our day.

Human nature being what it is – I’m sure that these maladies have posed challenges for Christians throughout the course of the history of the church. Indeed – as far back as the book of Genesis (Gen. 13) during the time of Abraham and Lot you find Lot setting his face toward Sodom because of the worldly appeal of that city. And Lot certainly stands out as an example of how worldliness can destroy families.

In Christ’s treatment of worldliness you could say that He treats the subject from two different perspectives. From verses 19 – 24 He argues that we should not set our aim on the things of this world. *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth* He says in v. 19 *where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal – But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal.*

We are not to aim for the things of this world in such a way that we set our hearts on those things. That’s the key to the matter – not that we disallow ourselves from any kind of planning for the future, but don’t allow your heart to be won by the things of the world. It’s an issue of the heart. Christ makes that plain in the next verse – v. 21 *for where your treasure is there will your heart be also.*

So we’re not to aim for the treasures of this world – we’re to aim for something higher. And then from vv. 25 – 34 Christ treats the subject of worldliness from another perspective. We’re not to aim for the treasures of this world neither are we to be overcome by the anxieties of this world. Of these two perspectives on concerns of the world the one that deals with anxiety is perhaps the greater of the two and more common among Christians.

I’m reminded of Paul’s words to the Corinthians – 1Co 1:26 *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, [are called].* I think the application could be made from this text that not many rich men are called to the Kingdom of Christ. It seems that those that are wealthy are often times so infected with a sense of self-sufficiency that they tragically fail to see their need of Christ. For this reason Christ said that it’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved.

On the other hand, many Christians are afflicted with anxiety over the things of the world. How do I pay my bills? How do I provide for my home? What do I do when the car breaks down, an unexpected expense becomes due, the children get sick and there's a great deal of uncertainty about my job? What do I do when prices rise and the challenge to make ends meet becomes a seemingly greater challenge than I'm able to meet? What do I do when I'm already working every possible hour I can – putting in every available hour of overtime and it still doesn't seem to be enough? You work the math and it doesn't seem hard to work out the numbers on paper but when it comes to life itself there rarely seems to be much connection between what you work out on paper and what life actually presents.

And when this malady of anxiety strains your heart and mind over a prolonged period of time your spiritual condition deteriorates. It's the cares of the world that choke the word and make it unfruitful – Christ says in the parable of the sower in Mt. 13:22. And as the word becomes unfruitful then the world takes on greater appeal and the infectious spirit of the world spreads in your soul like a cancer which in turn leads to even greater anxiety until you're brought to the place that you ruin your health and destroy your testimony and lose your peace of mind and make your family vulnerable to great spiritual decline.

Christ could certainly see the potential destruction of this kind of anxiety and that's why He places such a strong emphasis on taking no thought. *Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on* (v. 25); *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?* (v. 31); *Take therefore no thought for the morrow* (v. 34).

Now it's important from the outset that we understand the meaning of this phrase *take no thought*. There have been critics, you see, that have actually taken issue with the moral teaching of Christ by suggesting that Christ is commanding His followers to be such carefree fatalists that they simply yield to fate day by day. This isn't at all what Christ means. The word *thought* is one of the those old English words that has undergone a transformation of meaning. One commentator illustrates this transformation by quoting a line from Shakespeare: "The native hue of resolution Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." Another line reads: "Harris, an alderman of London, was put in trouble and died with thought and anguish."

I think you get the idea that what Christ is talking about is worry or anxiety. *Be not anxious*. That's the meaning of *take no thought*. You're not to be overcome with anxiety. You're not to be dominated by worry. This is an exhortation that Christ gives to us with authority. When mere men tell us not to worry our response in our minds anyway is to say – *but you don't really understand. You don't really know what I'm up against here*. Christ, however, is not a mere man. When Christ tells you to *take no thought* He is addressing you as One who knew what awaited Him but who could nevertheless commit His way to His Father.

The thing I want you to see, however, is that Christ gives us more than just the exhortation. He also gives us compelling reasons for His exhortation. And by taking heed to those reasons we discover that Christ also gives us the means for overcoming anxiety. And so this is what I want to focus on this morning – this theme of overcoming the cares of the world. We can and we should – indeed:

We Must Overcome the Anxieties of This World

I have a number of considerations based on Christ's words that I'd like to leave with you this morning. Think with me first of all that if you would overcome the anxieties of this world:

I. We Must Identify the Heart of the Issue

Although the Lord mentions the things we eat and drink and put on, He is using these terms to illustrate a deeper issue which is the issue of life itself. *Take no thought for your life* – He says in v. 25. Then in v. 34 He becomes even more specific. We're not dealing with life in general – we're not even dealing with our present lives or our past lives. Notice what He says – *Take no thought for the morrow*. We're dealing with the future. Isn't that the real issue here? We're worried about how we're going to live in the future. What will we eat and drink tomorrow or next week or next month? What will we wear tomorrow?

Our anxieties most often spring from what we cannot see and we cannot see tomorrow. And so you may be prone to reason that if only tomorrow will go like today then all will be well. But will tomorrow go like today? There may be a number of factors that could possibly disrupt tomorrow so that it doesn't go like today. Or you may reason that if tomorrow doesn't go better than today then things will go from bad to worse.

Life can be comfortable when our routines are predictable. And even when our lives become mundane there's still a certain level of security in a repetitious routine. This kind of reasoning is, of course, the reasoning of the world. This is worldly thinking. In the broader sense of this rationale Peter describes in his second epistle the reasoning of the scoffer: So in 2Pet. 3:4 we read that the scoffers say *Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as [they were] from the beginning of the creation*. Do you see the comfort the scoffer finds in a mundane routine? It makes it easy for him to cast God out of his thoughts. This is one of the reasons why God at times sees fit to disrupt mundane routines. It makes it harder on the scoffer to suppress his innate knowledge of God

Interestingly enough the thing that the scoffer is willingly ignorant of is the same thing that the Christian loses sight of when he falls prey to worldly anxiety. Listen to the next verse in 2Pet. 3:5 *For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water*. What are the scoffers willingly ignorant of? They're willingly ignorant of the truth that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

What does the Christian lose sight of when he's overcome by the cares of the world? He's lost sight of the same truth that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. This is the very thing that Christ illustrates when He makes reference to the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. Who provides for the birds? Who has arrayed the fields in beauty? Is it not God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe?

But let's remember that we're dealing with the heart of the issue and at the heart of the issue before us now is our value before God. Does God value you more highly than the sparrows? Are you worth more to God than the grass that is beautifully arrayed but is gone tomorrow?

In a sense it's not hard to build a case against ourselves. After all we are sinners. The birds of the air didn't rebel against God but we did and do. The grass of the field is more innocent than we are. The grass of the field is cast into the oven according to Christ in v. 30 but sinners are cast into a lake which burns forever where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. Why should God provide for your tomorrow when your conscience bears witness to the truth that you're a rebel against God and God owes you nothing?

One of the greatest contributing factors to our anxiety is the underlying feeling that we really are of no value to God. Do you remember some while back when all the world was a buzz about Y2K? When we reached the year 2000 all the computers in the world would crash and the sky would fall and economies would collapse and our worst fears would come to pass. I believe one of the reasons that Christians were so taken up in the Y2K craze was because they were conscious of the truth that this kind of judgment would be what we deserved.

And so we've identified the heart of the issue behind our anxieties which is our value to God. Would you think with me next on:

II. The Cause of This Anxiety

If we're going to overcome this anxiety, we must not only identify the heart of the issue but we must also know the cause. And in v. 30 Christ reveals the cause – *Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, [shall he] not much more [clothe] you, O ye of little faith?*

There's the cause which leads to worldly anxiety – little faith. We don't believe that we're of any value to God. We're convinced that in our worthlessness God not only leaves us to fend for ourselves but He even sees fit to stir His providential dealings against us.

Would you notice what Christ says in v. 26 – *Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?* Note the phrase your heavenly Father. Then look at v. 32 (*For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:)* for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

This phrase, of course, brings to mind the very opening statement of the Lord's prayer. We are taught to pray *Our Father which art in heaven*. Here, then, is the issue of our faith

– our relationship to God. Is He your heavenly Father? To the degree that you're convinced that He is – to that same degree you'll be free from the cares of the world. To the degree that you doubt it – to that same degree you'll be swallowed up by the cares of the world.

It's interesting that Christ appeals to the way His Father takes care of the lower orders of creation in order to convince of His followers that God will take care of them. Mt 6:26 *Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?* Mt 6:30 *Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, [shall he] not much more [clothe] you, O ye of little faith?*

The matter should become even more compelling to us when we remember and appreciate what was required of Christ in order for us to call God *our Father which art in heaven*. It would cost Christ His life blood in order for us to call God our Father. Christ was fulfilling all righteousness so that He could win for us the right to call God our Father.

We can build the case against ourselves apart from Christ. We could answer Christ's rhetorical question about our value compared to the value of sparrows by reflecting on our sin. If all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags then we are worth less than a sparrow. If all have sinned and come short of the glory of God then our value qualifies us for nothing short of everlasting damnation.

This is not the right gauge, however, for measuring our value to God. Our value to God must be measured by the price that God was willing to pay to redeem us. Our value to God must be measured by the value of Christ's blood. Our value to God must be calculated by the riches of His grace. It's not because of your level of holiness or your personal righteousness that Christ asks – *Are ye not much better than they?* (v. 26). It's because you're redeemed with something more valuable than silver and gold – it's because Christ has made you His purchased possession that He would have you know your value to Him.

This becomes, then, a matter of faith. If you walk by sight you won't find anything within yourself to commend you to God. The next chapter in this sermon will tell the story of those that thought they had something to commend themselves to God. *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?*

Their works may have been impressive in the eyes of others but not before God. Faith will not lead us to look to ourselves – it will lead us, rather, to look to Christ. And if God gave His Son for us then it follows that He'll also take care of us. Paul uses this reasoning in Rom. 8:32 *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

This text encompasses the principle that the greater blessing encompasses the lesser blessings. The greatest blessing has been given – that blessing is Christ. It stands to reason, therefore, as well as stands to the truth of God's word that God will take care of you.

The cure for anxiety or worldly cares will come through looking to Christ and realizing that through His shed blood you are able to call God your heavenly Father. I have made the remark in the past that one blessed aspect of our Christian liberty is the liberty to interpret the providence of God in the light of His love. This means that every circumstance of life – even the circumstances that would provoke carnal reasoning to anxiety and despair – every circumstances is ministered to us from a God who loves us whose aim is to sanctify us for His glory.

We've seen, then, the heart of the issue when it comes to worldly anxiety – the issue is your value to God. We've seen the cause behind the issue – it's a lack of faith – *O ye of little faith*. By identifying the cause we're also able to identify the cure and that is to tend to your faith – tend to your faith by looking to Christ.

It remains for us to consider that if we would overcome the anxieties of the world:

III. We Must Apply Christ's Alternative

But seek ye first the kingdom of God He says in v. 33 and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

The Lord would not have us free from care altogether – He would have us instead devote our cares to the right cause which is the cause of His Kingdom. This means that whatever vocation I'm called to I see it as the means to advancing His Kingdom. You're not working for your own wealth – nor are you working to make someone else rich by the labor you provide for an employer – you're laboring with the aim of glorifying your Redeemer and extending His Kingdom.

You're seeking His righteousness which means that you're striving to measure up to what He's freely given you. I never will forget the one occasion I had to be in the home of Ian Paisley. I was a student in the theological hall at the time and we were in Ulster for the week of prayer. This was before we had our own weeks of prayer in the States. And because Dave Brame's wife was good friends with Ian Paisley's daughter, Rhonda, that we were able to visit his home and at the end of our visit Dr. Paisley led us in prayer and I never will forget what he prayed. He said: *Lord grant that by the power and grace we'll shorten the distance between our position and our practice, our standing and our state.*

This is what it means to seek His righteousness. We reckon by faith upon the glorious truth of the gospel that He's given us the gift of righteousness. And out of love and gratitude and a humble heart we seek by His Spirit to measure up to what He's given us. This is nothing short of the obedience of faith – it's the obedience that disowns our own merit and claims the merit of Christ.

And so long as we're striving in this fashion then we can be confident that God will supply every need. And so the cares and anxieties of the world must be overcome. It's futile to worry Christ teaches. *Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?* (v. 27). When you think about it – the worries of the world serve no constructive purpose because they cannot accomplish anything constructive.

And when we allow ourselves to be gripped by the cares of the world we greatly hinder our testimonies for Christ. *For after all these things do the Gentiles seek* – Christ says in v. 32. The Gentiles – or the unbelieving world lives for the things of this world. Food and drink and clothing mean everything to them. It's all they have. To allow ourselves to be as unduly concerned for these things as they are causes us to resemble them.

This is not where Christ would have us. He would have us rise above these things. He would have us set our affections on things above not on the things of the earth. He would have us believe how valuable we are to Him. The challenge to our faith is the challenge to believe that we are of great value to Him. Indeed we are His inheritance.

Whether you cave in to worldly cares and anxieties or whether you press on to seek first His kingdom will be determined by your estimate of His value of you. This is why you must fix your gaze upon Calvary's cross. This is why you must not look in but you must look out and look up. I'm not now saying that we must become oblivious to our sins – not at all – but what I'm saying is that the measure of your sinfulness must be superseded by the riches of His grace. *Where sin abounded grace did much more abound.*

Make sure you don't dishonor Him, then, by suggesting that your sins run deeper and your guilt extends higher and your unworthiness stretches wider than His grace. That kind of thinking is blasphemous and devalues the merit of Christ.

May God deliver you, then, from the pressing cares of this world by convincing you that He's with you and for you and that His grace is sufficient for you. If you are convinced of this then you will seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and you will gain assurance that all the lesser things you need that pertain to your brief time in this transient world will be provided.