

Title: Why pray when you can worry?  
Text: Matthew 6.25-34  
Theme: The serious sin of worry  
Series: Matthew #37  
Prop Stmt. Worry is a serious sin because it reveals a heart of unbelief

3-year old Brittany (not her real name) was recently left alone in a strange apartment. Her mom, unsuccessfully trying to detox from heroin, left Brittany in order to get high. It was obviously not the first time that Brittany had been left alone. She was found and a rescue effort was made. A couple of days later she was living with a young couple who took her in and started to give her something that she had never experienced: a man, who was like a dad, who loved her and began to experience something else; the same place to sleep every night. A few nights ago Brittany asked her temporary parents with a bit of amazement, "Do you get to sleep in the same place every night?" If Brittany woke up from a nap or found herself alone in a room, even for a few seconds, she would begin to cry. She was constantly afraid of being left alone and was always worried that these new parents would leave her.

Some of you, like this young couple, have experience as foster parents, either formally or informally. Little children, often broken, afraid, lonely and confused are placed into your care. You welcome them, love them, feed them, provide for them, sacrifice for them, pray for them and with them, buy them clothes and accept them as one of your own, only to hear them worry that one day you are going to leave them, like everybody else. You wonder how you can convince this child that she has no reason to worry. You will take care of her. Her experience of loneliness and fear of rejection is so powerful that it seems to take years to convince her that you are different.

Before we came to faith in Christ we were just like Brittany. We were under the abusive authority of Satan. We learned to distrust because we were told and we experienced so many lies. We lived with fear that we would be left alone. Even after coming to Christ, we struggle with believing if God's promises really are true. Is God really going to take care of me? Sin affects us so deeply that we struggle with the idea that God truly loves us and will take care of us. It is not rational to question God, when you consider that he sent Christ to die for us, but yet, we wonder. Can I really trust God to provide for me?

Read Text:

Worry is the white-collar sin of Christianity. It does not appear to be too serious until you read what Jesus really said about it. Jesus spends more time in this sermon addressing worry than he does anger, murder, lust, adultery and revenge. (Now some of you are really getting worried, right?) If I got angry at someone and cussed 'em out, I would get fired. If I killed someone, or committed adultery, or plotted revenge and pursued it, I would be removed from being your pastor, as I should be. But, if I just worried about stuff, you would probably be more inclined to feel sorry for me, because that is not too serious, right? But, that is not how Jesus sees it.

**Jesus is Serious about the sin of Worry.** (25)

Three times Jesus says “do not be anxious.” (25, 31, 34) He warns us to stop worrying about life in terms of what we will eat, drink and wear. But, this text does not start with worry. Jesus begins by saying, “Therefore.” “Therefore” takes us back to the previous statement where Jesus is making it clear that “No one can serve two masters.... You cannot serve God and money.” I attempted to point out several weeks ago when we looked at this text, that you never really own money. Oh no! When it comes to money, you only have two options: 1) Money owns you (even though you think you own it) or 2) You are a steward of money that has been temporarily entrusted to you by God for maximum kingdom returns.

So, now we begin to see the picture. Worry is the fruit of trying to be in ultimate control of your life. Let’s look at this a bit closer. When we say that a person is in love with money, we all recognize that the person is not really in love with money itself, but the person loves and trusts what the money promises to purchase. Money is the means to comfort. Money is the means to protection. Money is the means to power, influence and control. Money is the means to respect. Money is the means to pleasure. Money is the means to relaxation. In fact, if we dig deep enough we find out that the reason why so many of us love money is because we believe that if we have enough money, then we really will not need God. Money makes a promise. Love me, serve me and I will give you all of these things. I will give you power, fame, comfort, health, protection, pleasure, knowledge, control, respect, worship and a long, comfortable life. Right? But, can money deliver on those promises? Is that promise an ironclad guarantee? Absolutely not!

Steve Jobs was the founder of the Apple Corporation. It is estimated that at his death he was worth somewhere between 10 and 11 billion dollars. Now, there are some people who are worth more than that, but that is some pretty serious net worth. In spite of his fortune, Steve could not beat his cancer. Can money guarantee you health? No. So, one of the reasons why we panic about our health, or become depressed over it, is because we tend to trust in the promises of this world instead of the promises of God. And when it becomes apparent that the promises of this world cannot deliver, we tend to panic. Do you see the connection now?

So, if you have invested your life in what really matters, if your life, your money, your time, your resources, and your values, are invested in the advancement of God’s kingdom, then you have nothing to be worried about. If, however, you are pursuing the wrong dream, and you are attempting to own money (which really owns you) then you are going to be worried. Your life is going to be marked by anxiousness because you are being owned by something that you cannot control. Your life is a reflection of what you worship. Your responses in life reflect where you have put your hope. What are you most passionate about? What are you most concerned about? What has the most emotional value to you? What do you get the most upset about? What are you anxious about? What strikes fear in you? Do you fear being out of control? Do you fear being alone? Do you fear being rejected? Do you fear being exposed as a failure? Do you fear that someone may know your fears? Do you fear people finding out your shame, your secrets, your past sins and present struggles? Do you live with fear that something bad will happen to someone you love? Do you see what Jesus is saying here? If you worship money, not only can you not worship God and money at the same time, but if you worship money, you are turning your life over to the cruel tyrant of worry.

Let's play this out. When you bow down before the goddess of money, you are saying, "I have to have you for life, for meaning, for purpose, for identity, for hope, security and happiness. Without you, I am nothing. Therefore, I am giving my life to serve you, follow you, trust in you and do whatever you command." Take, for example one of the worship choruses that we sing from time to time and simply apply it to money. "You are my strength when I am weak, you are the treasure that I seek, you are my all in all. When I am weak, you lift me up, when I am dry, you fill my cup, you are my all in all." When money is your god; that is how you think and feel about money. If you, in your heart of hearts, really believe that, then, what happens when your god is threatened? What happens when you hear that after shopping at Target someone has quite possibly stolen your banking information and at any moment is going to wipe out all of your accounts? If money is your god, then your anxiety level just went through the roof. If being healthy is your god, then unusual symptoms are going to create panic.

Parents, you see this with your kids. The ultimate punishment is what? Take away their phone. If you threaten to take away your kid's phone some of you will see your child morph before your very eyes into something between the Incredible Hulk and Godzilla, why? Because their entire life (they think) is in that phone. Is it really true? No, but some of them believe that. What does all of that fear reveal? You do not own your phone. Your phone owns you. And we all know that it is not the phone itself, but it is what the phone promises, that owns you.

Let's say you have what people call "panic-attacks." It's the instantaneous kick-in-the-gut, shot of adrenaline, flushed face, sweaty palms, and dry mouth sensation that overwhelms you because .... Why? You have a bunch of people coming over to your home and you fear that you are not ready. You have a major test or project that is going to determine whether or not you pass or fail. You neglected to pay your taxes and you just received a letter from the IRS. What is the problem here? The problem is not the panic-attack. The panic is simply revealing the problem. What would happen, if every time you had that panicky feeling, you drank a shot of whiskey to calm you down, or you took some Vicodin or Oxycontin? You would only be treating the symptoms instead of addressing the actual need. The problem is not the panic. The panic is a gift from God to help you realize that you are worshiping the wrong god.

On the other hand, if you worship God, you are accepting his Word, his promises as your authority and therefore, your security. Then, there is no reason for anxiety. So, Jesus is helping us connect the dots here. And by the way, he knows that we do not worship perfectly. We are prone to being anxious and we are tempted to be anxious because we are prone to and tempted to putting our trust in the wrong things. Look at how Christ helps us think through this. He graciously asks us questions so that we reason our way through this. And the questions that he asks go deep. For example, (25) "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" This is not a trivial question. Now, I could ask you, "Is not life more than a phone, fantasy football and a truck?" And some of you might have to really think about that one for a minute. But you seriously do not need a phone, fantasy football and a truck to live. Food? Clothing? That is a little more fundamental to the basic needs of life and yet, here is Jesus expecting us to say, along with him, that "yes, life is more than food and clothes." By the way, clothes, in those days were often passed down as heirlooms. They did not have styles that changed too much. Adding a bit more weight to his words is the fact that you wore clothes that indicated your social status. If

you were the child of a senator, statesman, or large land-owner, you did not dress as the servants did. Your clothes were a clear indication of “who you were”: at least to the world. But, is that it? Is that all that life is about? Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

That's a great question. Instead of just giving you a command, Jesus is making you think. In fact, he asks 4 questions so you will think this through. This is the 1st one. What is life really about? Is this it? Is food and clothes and stuff all there is? No, there's more to it. So, what is it? He doesn't answer it yet. There's more that he wants you think through. The question at the end of v.25 sets the stage for Christ's argument. It is a good and gracious argument.

(26) Look (consider closely) at the birds. Birds do not have souls. Birds do not have a conscience. Birds do not have the ability to think about God, to love him, to worship him, to adore him. They cannot recognize that God is Triune and that from eternity past God has enjoyed being God and is the out-giving, out-sourcing, out-loving, promising, faithful, joyful, delightful God who is true, righteous and merciful. But, even though birds do not know any of that, they instinctively trust God to provide food that they do not even plant, harvest and store. To them, it is “just there.” So, (2<sup>nd</sup> question) “Are you not of more value than they?”

1<sup>st</sup> question – is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

2<sup>nd</sup> question – are you not of more value than they (birds)?

Have you (the highest treasure of his creation) forgotten what even birds know? So, what are you worrying about? Which leads to the...

3<sup>rd</sup> question (27) – Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

How does worry advance your health? It doesn't! In fact, we are all aware of the many studies that have shown that worry can have a terrible affect on our health. And related to that is the...

4<sup>th</sup> question (28) – Why are you anxious about clothing?

Why? Think about that. Why are you anxious about clothes? You are anxious about that which you worship. Clothes are making a promise to you. Clothes are promising you an identity. Clothes are promising an image. Clothes promise that you will be attractive, desired, envied, accepted, noticed, valued, respected or intimidated by. Now, that may not have been how each person in Christ's audience thought about clothes. For some of them, clothes were not as much status as they were a basic necessity. But the point is the same. Whom do you trust for your needs? If you trust your clothes can your clothes deliver on that promise? No! So, like he did with the food issue, Jesus takes a bit deeper with the clothing issue. Consider (think carefully) about the lilies of the field. The lilies do not drive all over the w area to get the perfect sweater at the perfect price in the perfect size, do they? And yet, they are more beautiful than even Solomon whose clothing was really over the top. The 5<sup>th</sup> question that Jesus asks is not only a question; it is a statement. And now, Jesus is really starting to drive his point into our hearts.

**II. Worry is the fruit of the tree of unbelief. (30)**

“Oh you of little faith.” It is not that you do not have any faith; it is that we are living with an inconsistent faith, a flawed faith, even a tiny bit of faith. Worry is a sin. Worry is a serious sin because worry is a symptom of unbelief in the power of God and/or the goodness of God. Worry is the result of believing of a lie. Worry is the result of believing that God cares more about birds than He does me. Worry is the result of believing that God cares more about grass than He does me. Worry is the opposite of faith. Without faith you cannot please God. You cannot worry and please God. If you worry, you need to worry. Seriously, worry is self-centered. Worry assumes that you are more righteous than God. Worry assumes that you have greater wisdom and more goodness and a better plan than God. Worry is the fruit of seeking your own kingdom. You cannot seek the kingdom of God and worry.

But, we need to be clear on what Christ means when he commands us to not be anxious. Why does Jesus command us to not be anxious (or not worry as some translate it) and yet Christ shows great compassion and concern for his own sheep and commends the good shepherd who leaving the 99 goes after the 1 that is lost? The apostle Paul shows great concern, even anguish in his heart for his own people who have rejected Christ (Rom. 10.1-2). Later in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians Paul says, *“I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.”* So, we are commended to have and to exercise concern, but yet worry and anxiety are presented as being sinful. There is obviously a difference; what is it?

Worry is not the absence of concern. Worry is concern that ignores God. Concern for people is good. Concern for people is loving and kind. Concern for people reflects Christ. But when you attempt to exercise concern for people apart from God, then there is nothing to control, frame, define our limit your concern. Worry is concern that runs amok. Worry is functional atheism. Concern that is exercised apart from God has nothing to stop it from ruling you in a destructive way. Concern apart from God drives panic, paralysis and irrational behavior.

Ok, let’s follow the application that Jesus is making in verse 30. What has God done for the wild lilies of the field? He has clothed them! He has clothed them with a beauty that is more attractive than any man-made clothes you have ever seen. And what is going to happen to the grasses of the field? The lilies and the grasses have a very short life and a very bad ending. They are gathered up and burned. You are not grass! Christ died for you. Christ did not die for the grass. Christ died for you. You were made in the image of God. Grass was not made in the image of God. THEREFORE, (back to the original command), “do not be anxious.” When you worry about what you are going to eat, or what you are going to drink, or what you are going to wear, you are living like a person who does not trust in God. (32) People who do not know God (Gentiles in this context) do not know the Creator as their Father and Christ as their Savior. They have no reason for faith. They have no reason for security. They have every reason to panic. But, you are different. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. Wow! God knows what you need.

So, do you believe in God? Do you believe that God loves you? Do you believe that God knows what you need? Do you believe that God will provide for you what you need? So, do you have any reason to worry? Well, sometimes we worry about our kids, and grandkids, right? Ok, let’s apply this to them. Do you believe in God? Do you believe that God cares about your kids and

grandkids? Are you capable of loving your children more than God does? Do you believe that you love your children and grandchildren more than God does? (That's the rub isn't it?) Do you believe that God can provide for your children and grandchildren? How can we look at the manger, the cross and the empty tomb and then say to God, "I'm not sure that I can trust you."?

But worry is not only the result of unbelief...

### **III. Worry distracts you from what really matters. (33)**

Note the incompatibility of seeking the kingdom of God and worrying. BUT seek first. In other words, you do not seek the kingdom of God because you are seeking your own kingdom. Worry is the seeking first of my kingdom. Worry is my attempt at controlling my world and being my own little god. You cannot seek the kingdom of God through worry. Worry is not going to change anything for the better, but seeking the Kingdom of God does! So, instead of wasting your life, your thoughts, your affections, and your time on something that is fruitless, self-centered and destructive, pour yourself into what is eternal. Pursue the kingdom of God.

Oh, this is SO good. Jesus does not simply say, "Stop it!" Stop worrying! He tells us what to fix our hearts and attention on. We are to pursue his kingdom! We are to give attention and affection to advancing the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Besides, when you give yourself to advance the kingdom of Christ, you will have all that you need. You will have all that your Father knows that you need. You will have the food and the clothes that you need for as long as you need them.

What frees you to love others? Knowing that you are loved. What frees you to give? Knowing that you have all that you need. What frees you to forgive? Knowing that you have been forgiven. What frees you to serve? Knowing that you have been served. What frees you to invest your life for the gospel of Jesus Christ? Knowing that your eternal home, family, identity, life and security is all safely held by God and that nothing can ever take that away.

Next Sunday I am going to address what it means to seek first the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is forever and therefore, every thing that you do in pursuit of it is never wasted. How would you like to get to the end of a day, a week, a year, your life, and be able to say, "It was worth it!"? And it really be true?