

Part Nine
Do not be anxious
Matthew 6:25-34

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.

STUDY

1. READ

- a. Does Jesus command us to not have any concerns about material things?
- b. How is anxiety described in this passage?
- c. Is God aware of our needs and concerns?

2. MEANING

- a. What can we learn from nature about anxiety?
- b. Was Jesus tempted with anxiety while on earth? How did he respond?
- c. How did Jesus demonstrate his priority for the kingdom of heaven? What are some examples of how Jesus demonstrated his lower priority for physical things?

3. APPLY

- a. What time frame does Jesus command us to focus on?
- b. Currently, what are you tempted to be anxious about?
- c. How can we be ambitious for the kingdom of heaven?

NOTES ON THE PASSAGE

v. 25 - The word *therefore* indicates this passage is connected to the previous section about laying up treasures in heaven. Only when we have deliberately chosen heavenly treasure over earthly possessions can we be free of anxiety about temporal concerns.

v. 32 - Note that Jesus doesn't command us to have no care for temporal things, but states they are legitimate needs

v. 33 - We can only be free of anxiety when we are ambitious for "the kingdom of God and his righteousness". This verse reiterates a phrase included earlier in the Lord's Prayer that "thy kingdom come, thy will be done". Praying this part of the Lord's prayer is a practical way to release our specific anxieties

v. 34 - This verse helps us understand when planning crosses over into anxiety. John Stott wrote that "All worry is about *tomorrow*, whether about food or clothing or anything else; but all worry is experienced *today*. Whenever we are anxious, we are upset in the present about some event which may happen in the future."

COMMENTS

In this section, Jesus is focused on our ambitions or what we *seek first*. John Stott defines ambition here as what “concerns our goals in life and our incentives for pursuing them”. It is “what makes us tick; it uncovers the mainspring of our actions, our secret inner motivations”. Jesus contrasts the two options for where to place our ambition: our own security (food, drink and clothing) vs God’s rule and righteousness, and with their spread and triumph in the world.

Jesus neither denies nor despises the needs of the body. After all, he himself made our bodies, and he has just taught us to pray for our daily bread. Jesus also fed the crowds and turned water into wine at a wedding. Jesus is also not condemning planning. In this passage he commends birds, who build nests, lay eggs and feed their young. Jesus is specifically condemning *anxious* thought.

The source of our anxiety is being of “little faith” (v30). God has created us and continues to sustain our body. We did not create ourselves or keep ourselves alive. Jesus points out that if God capably manages great things (life and body), he is certainly capable of managing less important things (food and clothing). He also points out that our anxious thoughts are incapable of affecting any change, like adding hours to our lifetime.

God uses examples of nature (birds and flowers) to teach us what trust looks like. Note that nature is not exempt of responsibility, and not excluded from unpleasant things (e.g. being cast into the fire), but nature is not worried that God will not provide good things.

To seek first this kingdom is to first desire the spread of the reign of Jesus Christ. Such a desire will start with ourselves until every part of our lives is joyfully and freely submissive to Christ.

How can we have ambition for His kingdom? John Stott writes “Christians should be eager to develop their gifts, widen their opportunities, extend their influence and be given promotion in their work – not now to boost their own ego or build their empire, but rather through everything they do to bring glory to God. Lesser ambitions are safe and right provided they are not an end in themselves (namely ourselves) but means to a greater end (the spread of God’s kingdom and righteousness) and therefore to the greatest of all ends, namely God’s glory.”

References

The Message of the Sermon on the Mount by John Stott