



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

Jesus on Worry

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Pastor Tim Boettger

TEXT: Matthew 6:25-34 (NIV)

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Dear friends,

If you've ever found yourself feeling like the rug's been pulled out from underneath you, or false supports that you've had, false securities, have been taken away from you, or the speed of change in the world is making you anxious, then the message from the scripture today is just for you. You know, we're looking at the portion of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus addresses the topic of worry, but its context is important. Just

before this, Jesus is talking about having his followers loosen their grip on the things of this world. He says to them, "You shouldn't lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and thieves break in and steal." That makes sense. I mean, everything is temporary in this physical world. But he says, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal." It's smart advice if you believe and you understand the reality of truth and eternity and heaven. But understanding that that maybe this isn't enough, Jesus then goes on and says the truth of the matter is you can't serve both God and money, (or mammon, which is the spirit behind money). He says you can't do it. You're going to have to serve one and then hate the other or make a choice what you're going to serve. Understanding that this might create some anxiety in his followers, loosening their grip on the things of this world. He then launches into this teaching on worry, where he says, "Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life."

Interesting way to start this passage: "Do not worry about your life." I don't know what kind of advice you got when you were younger, but I got lots of different advice and the majority of it revolved around being very concerned about your life, making sure you did the right things, making sure you were wise into worldly sense. And some of that flowed into: where are you going to go to college? What kind of job are you going to get? What kind of money are you going to make to provide for your family? (And how important this was.) And I don't negate that there is some good advice and appropriate concern. And God wants us working hard and making a living for these things. But in this context, I think Jesus is trying to shake people loose from their attachments to things of this world and live a better way. "Do not worry about your life." And then he talks about these very specific needs we have. "Do not worry about what you will eat or drink or about your body, what you will wear," fundamental needs. And he says, "I don't want you worrying about them in your life." How can he say this? What is he getting at? And he starts to then give his rationale. He says this in a couple of questions. "Is not life more important than food and the body more important than clothes?" He's trying to raise the consciousness of his listeners beyond the physical into the spiritual here. Life is more important than the pleasure and the nourishment of food. There's something more to it than just the biological essence of it.

We're in the middle of this challenge we've faced with the virus and one of the byproducts of the virus is, for many people, a symptom of loss of taste and loss of smell; which, if you've experienced that, it causes you to lose, in a sense, the pleasure of eating,

the pleasure of food. Clearly, then you still need to keep eating to survive. But when the pleasure of food is taken away, it has a different ring to it. And you start to sense when you're not tasting the food and all that, there's got to be something more. If this pleasure is taken away and that pleasure is taken away and that pleasure is taken away, what is life? And Jesus is saying here: it's more than something biological. It's more than some of the physical pleasures we experience. "Is not the body more important than clothes?" There's something about the body that's beyond just needing to be covered and cared for and nourished in life. He is pointing to some truths that are unseen, unseen realities. If you've ever been to an open casket, you know this. You see a lifeless body lying there and you see there's more to life than just the body.

And now Jesus gives us the first of two illustrations why we shouldn't worry about our life. He says this: "Look at the birds of the air. They don't sew or rip or store away in barns. And yet," now he introduces something beyond ourselves, the Heavenly Father factor. "Look at the birds of the air. They don't sew a rip or store away in barns. They're not striving after these basic needs. And yet your Heavenly Father feeds them."

I have a little grandson. He's about a year and a half old. We like to go out in the corn fields and bean fields of Iowa. And when we go out there, one of his favorite things to do is listen to the birds. We were out there just the other night sitting in a waterway, it was quiet. The wind wasn't blowing much. You could hear the crickets in the grass and then you could hear different kinds of birds chirping, big birds, crows, even some eagles around our area. Then you have little birds, sparrows and red wing blackbirds. There's so many of them. They're just everywhere. And as we sit in the middle of the field and we listen, sometimes we call out, and his favorite is to call to the crows. "Caw, caw, caw!" And then the crows will call back.

There's all kinds of life around us that God himself is sustaining, and they're not striving or reaping or storing away in barns. And Jesus is saying here, your Heavenly Father cares for them. Think about them. Don't think about all the anxiousness, the negative information, tuning into all the drama and the tragedy in the world; he says, "Take a minute to think about the birds. They don't so or reap, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them." And then he asks this question: "Are you not much more valuable than they?" Now, this question right here might be a challenging question in the politically correct arenas of the world. But Jesus is saying to his listeners here, "Listen, you're more important than the birds, than the animals." Jesus is really letting these

people know a truth behind creation: that God has created human beings just beneath the angels, a little lower than the angels. He's crowned us with glory and honor. We are the perfect representation of the image of God in creation. He made us in his image, male and female, separated us into two genders. And we are the reflection of the glory of God in the world. And if God cares for the lower parts of creation, the birds, will he not much more care for us, are we not more valuable than they? And then he goes on to a second illustration. Why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow? They don't labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon King Solomon, in all his riches, in all his creativity and all his artistry in the temple and the clothing he had, not even Solomon in all of his splendor, was dressed like one of these.

If you drive through Iowa in the roadways now, you'll see that, overtaking the state are a very unique array of flowers along the roadways. There's a white flower, Queen Anne's Lace. There's purple flowers, there's yellow flowers. And as you drive down many of the interstates and roads here, it's just a marvel and a wonder. It's like someone designed it. Someone planned it. This is the beauty of nature God is pointing us to here, Jesus is saying, "Look at all the artistry in the wonder of nature, the flowers of the field." You might even consider the beauty of sunsets, the marvel and majesty of the mountains and the trees and all of these things. And if God does this for creation itself, what is he going to do for those who are made in his image that he cares so deeply for, that he even sent his son into the world to redeem? Jesus continues, "If that is how God clothed the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, oh you of little faith?" This question here points to the first key element that Jesus is bringing to his listeners about living life outside of the negative influence of worry and an anxious or distracted mind. He's asked this question: "Which of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to your life?"

You know, there's a spectrum of how we think about things in the world. There's slothfulness and laziness and disconcern, and then there's appropriate godly concern about things. And then on the other end of the spectrum is anxiousness and worry, which does nothing for us. When our mind is distracted and worry is coming in, it only has negative consequences for us. Appropriate concern and action and prayer can feed us and help us be more alive and disciplined. But worry can paralyze us. It can't add anything to our lives. Well, it can... I was in a Bible study recently and we were talking about this. It can add headaches to our life. It can add back aches and back tension to our life. It can cause problems in our hormones, hormonal life. It can create problems in

our heart and blood flow issues, but it can't add anything positive. "Which of you, by worrying, can add a single hour?" So, he's saying, consider these two illustrations, the birds, the beauty of nature, what God does there – and do not worry. Saying "What shall we eat, what should we drink? What should we wear?", getting obsessive, concerned about all these things in life.

You know, it's interesting in the Bible studies that I've just led in this passage recently, I've been asked in each of them this question: "Tim, this is nice here where we have food and clothing and shelter, but what about all those people in the world who don't have these things? What does it mean for the people and in third-world countries that are struggling for food and clothing and shelter?" You know, I've had to think about this as I've gone to Haiti myself and had the opportunity to actually speak on passages like this there, and I've come to the conclusion that even as I've been in third-world countries speaking this, that the word of God is true wherever it is brought into the world to anyone, any time, anywhere. And what Jesus is saying here, his faithfulness to his word is true just as much here as it is anywhere else in the world. And so when he says, "Do not worry, saying what shall we eat, what shall we drink, what shall we wear?" He means it because of what he's driving at in this passage.

Then he continues – now it gets more poignant. You're going to need some faith. God responds to faith in people. "Without faith," Hebrews 11:6 says, "we cannot please him, but God rewards those who trust in him and earnestly seek him." He moves on their behalf. Faith is the lever that prompts God's spirit into action. And so he says to them, "Oh, you have little faith. Why do you worry? What should we eat? What should we drink? What should we wear?" And then he says this: it's the people who don't know God, who don't have this Heavenly Father awareness, this sense of a great creator who cares, it's the pagans who run after these things. "Yet your heavenly father knows that you need them." Jesus is reminding us again and again: there's a creator behind the scenes. He's loving and caring. He's looking for those whose hearts are devoted to him, that he may strongly support them. And that's why – and I believe this is the apex of the passage here. He says "Seek first." It's not just about our faith, it's about our priorities. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And then all of these things will be added to you as well."

When I was in college, I was doing just the wisdom – I was absorbing through my early life in high school. I was getting that degree so I could get that job so I could earn that

money. And that's when the Lord pulled the rug out from under me. I was in my senior year and I was interviewing for a job with a relatively large company and they had invited me back for a second interview and I'd seen the benefit package. I'd seen the salary package. I was pretty sure they were going to offer me a job. And as I went to the interview, it was encouraging, and they said they would get back to me in a week. And during that week, I received a letter from some friends who were in ministry. And they were inviting me to join them in ministry. The caveat was they couldn't pay me, they could give me shelter and food. And as I was reading that letter, there was a deep sense in my spirit: "This is the way – I should trust God, and walk in it, leave the worldly wisdom behind. And listen to the spirit and what he was saying to me. 'The pagans run after all these things, and yet your heavenly father knows that you need them.'" During that prayerful week, the Lord brought me to this verse: Matthew 6:33. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you as well." I look back now, 30-plus years later. I went into ministry and I told God I would do it for three months. I've done it for over 30 years. And he has met every need I've had. And he will do this for anyone. It is true: if you have faith, God rewards faith. If you put him first, he will care for your needs. It's about faith. It's about priorities. And in order to do this, well, as we seek first his kingdom in his righteousness, God says he will give us a supernatural peace that passes all understanding. We need not worry about our lives: what we'll eat, what we'll drink, what we'll wear, or anything. He'll meet every need we have.

He closes this passage saying, "Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." The three elements that Jesus gives us here to live free from the negative effects of worry in life are develop a growing faith, feed your faith, encourage it, think on those things that show you God is there and that he cares: the birds of the air, the beauty of nature, his word, which brings faith to us. Then have your priorities right. Let nothing come before the seeking and the pursuing of the eternal kingdom of God in your life. Let nothing be prioritized before it. And then in the end, he says: live simply. Don't get caught up in all the anxiousness and worry of what could happen in the days ahead in a complex world. Focus on today and give today your best. Keep your life simple and seize the opportunities in front of you right now. God says if you do these things, you'll move towards a life that has appropriate concern and not all the negative effects of worry. I don't know about you, but I want more of this in my life.

Let's pray to that end:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the chance to be here today and open your word together. Minister to each one of us as we need to hear from you. Help us apply these things, not just be hearers, but doers of the word. Help us feed our faith in ways that you've given us to feed it. Help us prioritize our lives and then live in the moment, simply trusting you for all that lies ahead. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.