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Questions Jesus Asked: Questions to Calm Our Anxious Souls

Matthew 6:24-34

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

"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? 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? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 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. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

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

We're in week three of our summer series entitled *Questions Jesus Asked*. We've looked at a couple questions already that Jesus asked.

The first one we looked at was an open-ended question. It's the most often asked question that God asked of people when he was here on the earth: What or who are you looking for? He asked this in the context of two disciples who were leaving John as their leader, and they were coming to Jesus, and he said, "What are you looking for?" What's in your heart? What's driving you to switch your allegiance from John to me?

We looked last week at a very direct, specific, personal question that Jesus asked of his disciples. It must be a very important question. It's a very unique question. Not many people would ever ask this question. It must give hint as to how God feels about what people believe about Jesus, and then give voice to

about Jesus. He first asked an open-ended question to his disciples and said, "Who are people saying I am?" Let's talk about the chatter. And then he turned to his disciples and said to them personally, "Who do you say that I am?" Very direct, very specific, very personal.

In today's text, we see Jesus ask five rapid-fire rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions are different, yet they're often dramatic questions that do not seek a direct answer from the listener. They seek to make or remind the listener of a point that is presumably obvious. But maybe the listener has forgotten, or maybe never heard before.

We've all heard rhetorical questions. One might be asked of someone if they're mispending or misallocating a lot of funds. If you're a father and your children are spending their money willy-nilly, you might ask a question like this: "Do you think money grows on trees?" Anybody ever heard that question before? They're not looking for an answer. The answer is obvious. They're trying to get them to critically think about how they're using their money.

How about this? Something crazy happens in someone's life and everybody's watching their response. And instead of answering or saying something about what happened, they just simply say, "Isn't life full of surprises?" They're not really looking for an answer. They're just displaying something about where they're at when they ask this question.

When I was eight years old, my mother asked me if I wanted to sort of culture myself a little bit and go to *The Nutcracker Ballet* in Omaha, Nebraska. Now you need to understand, I had never thought about or heard of *The Nutcracker Ballet*. I'd seen those nutcrackers at Christmas, and my instant reaction was, no, I don't necessarily want to go there, but I could have asked a rhetorical question. I could have said to my mother, "Do pigs fly?" If she would have asked me if I wanted to go to Dallas, Texas, and enter the stadium and watch the Cowboys, I could have asked her a rhetorical question: "Mom, is the sky blue?"

Perhaps you've been in a point where someone is riding you over a mistake you've made, and you don't really know how to respond. You could respond with a simple rhetorical question: "How could I be so foolish?" And it might bring a little grace into the conversation.

Or what about Hamlet's famous rhetorical question: "To be or not to be?" I don't know why it's so famous, but it can stir up thinking about life. To be or not to be. I guess I don't quite understand the question. As far as I'm concerned, we just are. But it's very famous.

When you study God's Word, you see that God must really like rhetorical questions. I did some digging to find out how many rhetorical questions God asked throughout the whole of Scripture. And you know, I couldn't figure it out, and even I couldn't figure it out. There are many hundreds of times that God asks rhetorical questions from his throne in the throne room of heaven.

In one book, we have record of God asking 60 to 80 rhetorical questions of one man. His name is Job. Job was asking to state his case, his personal case of suffering, before God. It seemed very unjust to him. And so he was asking for a hearing with God. And that was in Job chapter 13.

And then some time passed, and there were much conversation with his friends. And finally God decided to answer Job's request with an appearance. It's recorded for us in Job 38.

I'll just read you a few of the rhetorical questions that God asks Job.

The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, it says.

The first question is this: "Who is it that darkens or questions my counsel with words that lack knowledge? Gird yourself up like a man," God said to Job. "I will question you, and then you make known to me the answer."

But he's going to ask many questions for which Job has no answer.

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know. Or what were its bases sunk into? Who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all of heaven rejoiced?"

God is not looking for an answer from Job. He's trying to make a point with Job.

Today we're looking at five rapid-fire questions that God asked when he was here on the earth. The context of these questions is in the middle of a teaching that Jesus is giving to many, many people that were gathered around him. He's teaching a point about the human heart, that the human heart often has a tendency in sin to split its allegiances or split its devotions.

And so the teaching is this: No one can serve two masters. He's just stating something that's true. Either you will hate one and love the other, or you'll be devoted to one and despise the other. If you try to serve two masters, you're going to be double-minded. And Jesus taught in other places that a double-minded person, or a house divided against itself, cannot stand.

He's just simply teaching this reality and this truth. Then he gives an example. He says, "You cannot serve both God and money," things of the earth. "You can't do it." It's just a reality. It'll weaken you, and eventually you will fall.

Knowing that this teaching might produce a little anxiety in the heart of the listener, God then launches into a teaching on worry and anxiety. If you give up serving money, trusting in money, relying on money, resources, you might get a little nervous.

Therefore, he says, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, what you will drink, about your body, what you will wear.

And then the first question, to get us to think: "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes?"

Your life, he's saying here, just getting us to think, is more than just biological existence. There's more than just staying alive and the survival of the fittest. There's more than just adorning yourself with different accoutrements and clothing. Yes, they cover up our nakedness, but we have levels of clothing and appearances and money we can spend on them.

Is not life more than the vanity of how we appear and sustaining ourselves through food? There's something deeper going on here. Jesus is saying there's something transcendent going on in your life. Life is more than just mere existence in the biological form, and presenting ourselves with certain

accoutrements. Is not life more than staying alive and the body itself designed for more than just clothes? These are things that money can buy.

And so if you're giving up trusting in money, you might get a little anxious. And so he says this, uses an illustration: "Look at the birds of the air."

I don't know if any of you went outside yesterday morning, but it was so calm and quiet. I just had my son and his wife happen to stop by, and I grabbed my little grandson, Brody, and I walked outside, and you could hear the birds chirping and something transcendent kind of. And what happened to him? He doesn't use words very much yet, but he started to just talk with the birds. It just sort of stirred him to say some things.

"Look at the birds," Jesus said. "They don't farm or strive or work, build up for the future, but there they sit, singing, alive, well fed, because your heavenly Father feeds them."

Question number two: "Are you not much more valuable than them?"

Aren't you higher in God's design than them?

Now, if you are here today and you don't know the answer to this question, or maybe you have a little low self-esteem or low measure of yourself, I just want to answer this for you. You're more precious than any other living thing. God created you and I as human beings, are made in the image of God. Just beneath the angelic beings, we were put here to rule and to reign, to manage what God entrusted to us as a reflection of him.

We're much more valuable than the animals, than the plants. You are the crown of creation, the *imago Dei*, the representation of the image of God, the glory of God here on the planet, far more valuable than the birds or the animals.

"Are you not much more valuable than them?"

Getting back to the topic of worry, he asks another question: "Can any one of you, by worrying," projecting negative possibilities into the future, straining and stressing over what might come our way in a fallen and evil world, "can you, by worrying about what might lie ahead, add anything to your life?"

What's the rationale for your worry? What good is it bringing about?

God talking to us here about our design, about how he made us, and he's saying worry doesn't help. It doesn't do anything for us. It doesn't add a single moment to our lives.

And then he goes back to his original statement with yet another question: "Why do you worry about clothes?" Appearances and physical provision.

And goes into another example. He must want us to get this. Two images that he paints in our minds for our thoughts to go around.

Consider the birds. They're not striving and straining, but your heavenly Father is feeding them.

And then he says, "See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. They're not striving or working. Yet not even Solomon, who had all kinds of adornments, and I'm sure a very fancy wardrobe, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these."

Then question number five: "If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

Our Creator here is telling us in no uncertain terms: worry doesn't work. It doesn't work. But he's hinting at something. Faith does. Faith can change things. Faith can bring about good.

As a matter of fact, the Bible tells us that without faith we cannot please God. Anyone who comes to God and doesn't at some level believe that he's there and believe that he's good and kind and merciful and trust him in some way, they'll never please God. But if a person starts to move out of worry into faith, and they have just some element of faith that God is good and he's trustworthy, God will reward that person.

So do not worry, he says, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?"

And then he says this: The people who don't know God run after all of those things. They're serving those things. They're relying on those things. The pagans run after these things. But your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

So he offers a proposal, a promise. He says, if you're going to move out of the world's way and move into God's way, here's what he says. If you will seek first the kingdom of God, the authority of God, the rulership of God, the ways of God in your life, seek first the kingdom of God and his goodness, his kindness, his mercy, if you will sell out to that, he will meet every need you have.

It's the best job offer in history.

I wish someone would have screamed this at the top of my lungs to me when I was in the fourth grade, in the fifth grade, in the sixth grade. Listen to him. If you give your life to God, he's going to give you the best benefit package of anyone, anywhere. He will meet every need you have. It's a promise.

When I was in college, I was looking to do the world's thing: get a job and make money, get a house, a wife, a family, prosper. When I got a letter that called me into ministry, and I read that letter, and I felt the Lord say to me, "Tim, this is the way. Walk in."

And then this verse came through my mind: "If you seek me first, I'll take care of every need you have."

And by faith I said to God, "I'll take that job. I'll take it."

Thirty years later, I can say he doesn't go back on his promises. Everything of our lives he'll watch over.

He says it again: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow." Now into the future. Don't worry about it. Tomorrow will worry about itself. Focus on today. Make it the best you can today and release the worries and the cares about the future.

Something happens when we do this. Paul wrote about it, Philippians chapter four. He said, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice. Be gentle with the people around you because God is near. You don't have to be anxious about anything, but in everything, with praying in faith requests, pouring our heart out to God with thanksgiving for his goodness and kindness, something will happen to you. The peace of God, which transcends the human mind, will settle in on you and guard you in Christ Jesus." Not just your mind, but your heart.

And Paul, the great seasoned follower of Christ, said, "If you practice these things, prayer, faith, obedience, the God of peace will be with you."

I ask you today what you're worried about. What are you tempted to worry about?

I could list many, many things I'm worried about. My aging parents, tempted too often. I'm worried sometimes about my own aging. I'm worried about my grandchildren, what kind of world they're going to grow up in. I get sometimes tempted to worry about the church.

What are you worried about?

When I was 23, I entered a psychiatric unit and was diagnosed with an acute anxiety disorder. My whole identity had become worry, and I can tell you, it's a journey out of that trap. But if you seek God with your whole heart, slowly he will bring you up out of the prison of worry and anxiety, fear into faith, into hope, into belief and confidence in him.

And who doesn't want that?

Let's pray together.

Father, I thank you for the chance to gather in here and listen to your teaching of us through questions. I thank you for inspiring these words of Jesus to be written down so that we could hear them ourselves directly from your Word and let them work on our hearts and our souls.

I am mindful here that there are probably many of us who carry around anxieties and fears and worries that concern us deeply about our lives and about the future. And in our anxiousness, we lose sight of who you are, your goodness and your kindness.

We hear the messages for which many, many dollars are spent to stir up anxiety and worry in us about the world, about our futures, about our lives. And sometimes we buy into them and forget that you have promised to be a good shepherd to us, to lead us, to guide us, to care for us, to minister to us in a way that no one else can.

So as we think about these words of yours, I pray that you would minister to us. Help us hear them louder than all the other noise. Let them settle in on our hearts and our souls until we more and more come to believe that you are who you say you are.

Minister to us in such a way that we become more and more confident in throwing our lives into your hands.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

