

1

Why Do You Worry?

Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. 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 can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸ And why do you worry 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 clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

Chip Borgstadt, sessions 6-13, is a husband, dad, pastor, and volunteer. He has been blessed to write curricula for Augsburg Fortress for the past twenty-five years.

Theme Statement

Jesus redirects his disciples' attention from the pursuit of the security of material treasures to the pursuit of God's kingdom. In this pursuit, attention to inner wisdom over outer values diminishes anxiety and makes room for confident hope.

Exploring the Word

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew (chapters 5-7) is arguably his most important collection of teachings, establishing priorities for the Christian life of faith. It contains today's focus passage, in which Jesus encourages life-giving attitudes toward wealth and treasure.

Matthew 6:25-30 Is your heart in the right place?

In the verses preceding the focus passage, Jesus teaches about treasures: "Do not store up treasures for yourself on earth . . . , but store up . . . treasures in heaven" (vv. 19-20); "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be" (v. 21); "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will . . . be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth [mammon]" (v. 24).

The focus passage then begins with a connecting phrase, *dia tou*, translated "therefore," "for this reason," or "on this account." This phrase signals that what follows will be the logical implication of all that Jesus has just said about treasures, God, and mammon (the precious and valuable things people accumulate). Jesus' teachings about worry are to be understood as they relate to the activity of accumulating material wealth.

Jesus speaks of worry five times in nine verses. "Worry" translates the Greek word *merimnaō*, which literally means "being anxious," but also suggests being preoccupied with

a concern because of its potential for danger or misfortune. Jesus shifts the topic from earthly treasures to those things basic to life and survival: food, drink, and clothing. He exposes the fundamental fears fueling worry—fears of lack and death.

Jesus wants the disciples to see the drive to store up treasures for what it is, a misdirected and outsized effort at safeguarding against misfortune. Jesus speaks of worry not because mammon itself is a problem, but because worry betrays a preoccupation with it. And an anxious preoccupation with mammon reveals it as the master being served rather than God.

Matthew 6:31-34 Strive for the kingdom

Jesus' teaching continues with another "therefore," indicating that what he says about the kingdom is to be understood as it relates to having little faith in God's providence as God demonstrates it with life-sustaining care for the natural world.

Jesus anticipates his followers' questions to be, "What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?" and hears the fear that distracts them from that which God most wants them to have and to know. Jesus exhorts them to serve just one master, to redirect their devotion and commitments to God's service: "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

Righteousness is a key theme throughout the entire Bible, but one that resists a simple definition. Here we might think of it in terms of integrity, clarity of purpose, and being rightly oriented to the things of God. For Matthew, striving for the kingdom and seeking righteousness are not two separate searches; there is no genuine search for the kingdom except in the effort to live with integrity and wholeness and according to God's purposes of justice and

mercy. When righteousness is sought by Jesus' disciples and followers, God's kingdom will be manifest on earth. When God's kingdom is manifest on earth, no one will need to be anxious about how they will live.

The Word Today

Many church stewardship campaigns have taken "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" as their theme. Often people respond by surveying where their treasures are and then making sure those allocations reflect that their hearts are in the right place. "My treasure is in my children's college funds. Yes, I love my children, and my heart is with their well-being and secure future. Check." "My treasure is in my house. Yes, I love my family, and my heart is concerned for their comfort and security, that they have a place they can call home. Check." "My treasure is in my retirement fund. Yes, my heart's desire is to not ever be a financial burden on my children. Check." These are good things, worthy of our efforts, and reflect an alignment between our hearts and our treasures.

However, Jesus suggests there is another way to read this teaching about hearts and treasures. He provides a guiding principle: "Strive first for the kingdom of God." Rather than starting with our treasures, Jesus wants us to ask, "Where does God want our hearts to be?"

If our eyes are on God's kingdom and on manifesting God's righteousness, we might answer with things of the beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), like, "In inclusive communities, equitable distribution of economic resources, alliance with outcasts, courage in activism; in peacemaking, comforting, and forgiving." When the eyes of our hearts are trained on those things, our treasure will follow. But more important, and this is Jesus' point, we will not fall victim

to a fretful preoccupation with material security as a protection against personal tragedy or hardship.

Jesus is not asking us to choose between spiritual and material treasures. In fact, righteousness in the kingdom has a lot to do with how material resources are stewarded and distributed. And he's not just asking us to rethink how we allocate our resources. Jesus is asking us to keep our primary focus on God's priorities. When our eyes are trained on what is required for God's kingdom to be manifest in the world, God's kingdom takes root within us. When we orient our hearts—our interior lives—toward God's righteousness, then God's kingdom opens to all, leaving little room for worry and plenty of reason for confident hope.

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. What are the three things you worry about most? How do you experience anxiety in your body?
2. Describe two of your most precious treasures. What makes them precious to you?

Exploring the Word

1. Read Matthew 5:1-11. Now try to rewrite Jesus' teachings on wealth and worry as a beatitude:
"Blessed are _____, for they will be _____."
2. Read Matthew 5:21-37. Now try to rewrite several of Jesus' teachings as antitheses:
"You have heard it said _____, but I tell you _____."

3. Read all of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Make a list of five to seven characteristics of the kingdom. Make another list of five to seven characteristics of a disciple who has the kingdom alive in them.
4. This is not Jesus' only teaching about his followers' relationship to material resources. Read Matthew 25:14-30 (the parable of the talents) and Mark 12:41-44 (the woman who gave two coins). What others can you think of? In what ways do these teachings support the instruction of the focus passage?

The Word Today

1. On this continuum, how would you rate your level of concern about material security in your life?

I live like the
birds and flowers.

I am preoccupied with
the state of my storage bins.

What is one thing you do that resembles the faith of the birds and flowers?

What is one thing you do that reveals your anxiety about security?

2. Jesus' teaching seems counterintuitive and almost foolish in a world where financial planners, retirement funds, and the Dow Jones place a high value on accumulation. Where do you feel tension between your lifestyle choices and Jesus' teaching?

Closing Prayer

God of wisdom, help us to see the life you desire for us in the extravagant abundance of your providence. Through the teachings and example of Jesus the Christ, we commit ourselves to manifesting your kingdom in our lives. Amen.

Further Study

Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5; Matthew 25:14-30;
Mark 12:41-44

Daily Readings

M. 1 Samuel 9:5-10

F. Luke 12:22-34

T. Ezekiel 34:11-16

S. Matthew 6:19-24

W. 1 Timothy 6:17-19

S. Matthew 6:25-34

T. Matthew 17:14-20

Memorization

Matthew 6:32b-33

Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.