

DO NOT BE ANXIOUS!
The Eighth Sunday after Epiphany
27 February Anno Domini 2011
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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.

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen!

I. INTRODUCTION

Our text for today is Matthew 6:25: *"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?"* Other translations say, *"Do not worry about your life"*. The words anxious and worry are interchangeable.

Do not be anxious! That's easier said than done. We are all anxious about some things. Webster's Dictionary says: *anxiety is painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind usually over an impending or anticipated ill*. Not necessarily a real ill but an anticipated ill, a projected ill a guesstimated event that might take place. The second definition from Webster's is this: *Anxiety is an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physiological signs, such as sweating, tension, and increased pulse, by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it*. Anxiety creates stress. Now what that mean to us?

The AMA (American Medical Association) released some interesting news a few years ago. When considering the greatest killer in the United States one might look to automobile accidents, substance abuse or war but none of these come close to the death produced by stress. Stress is a quiet killer that leads to all sorts of maladies and woes. The following seven major health effects are controlled by and often created by stress. Diabetes, High Blood Pressure, Weight Gain, Susceptibility to Disease, Depression, Heart Disease and even Cancer. One American author noted that the American people are addicted to stress, often jumping from one worry to another.

It's no wonder Bobby McFerrin's song became a number one hit in 1988, **"Don't Worry, Be Happy!"** People realize the need to not worry and to lower anxiety and stress. Countless clinics and self help programs are available to help people reduce stress. This has been a problem for

decades, no let me rephrase that, not for decades but for millennia. In 1944 motivational speaker Dale Carnegie wrote a book called, "How To Stop Worrying and Start Living". It's still in print today and has sold over 6 million copies. In the book Carnegie writes, *"We worry most of the time about things with less than a 1% probability of happening!"* In other words, 99% percent of the time we worry needlessly.

II. FOUNDATION OF WORRY!

But where is the origin of this worry? That takes us to the first verse of our Scripture reading today. Matthew 6:24 ***"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."*** I think Jesus is pointing the cause of worry out to us. It's caused by being conflicted about two realities. We are creatures of the flesh and of the spirit. The father of our flesh is the devil. And he wants us to serve ourselves and get as much as we can for ourselves. That's why we have phrases like, "If it's meant to be, it's up to me!" or "I am a self made man, I pulled myself up by my bootstraps and became what I am today, look at me!" Wasn't that the line the devil gave Eve in the garden? "If you want to be like God just take the fruit, take the initiative and take control of your life. Don't let anybody, even God, get in your way. Our fallen man wants to be in control. We want things our way. The world teaches us to say: "My way or the highway!"

On the other hand, we are also creatures of the spirit. The fruit of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). The spirit doesn't point to self but to sacrifice, first to the sacrifice of Christ Jesus for all, then the selfless sacrifice of ourselves in service for others. We don't look to gather in a gluttonous way, but to gather to help others. When life deals us good, we give God the credit. Even the spiritual lives we live we acknowledge the work of Holy Spirit in us and therefore give God all the credit.

St. Paul writes in Galatians 5:17 ***"For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things you please"***. No wonder we face anxiety. Jesus goes on to point out our biggest conflict ever. ***"You cannot serve God and money"***. The first commandment is ***"Thou shall have no other gods before me!"*** What does this mean? "We should fear, love and trust in God above all things". So what is a god? Anything that we fear, love and trust in above all things! ***"You cannot serve God and money"***, this text is not saying to despise money or to hate it or to loathe it. The Greek word used here for money is $\mu\alpha\mu\omega\upsilon\tilde{\nu}\acute{\alpha}$ (mam-mo-nas) and is often translated mammon. It literally means worldly wealth not just money. It's sometimes translated money because our money gives us what we want to buy, our worldly wealth. It represents our houses, cars, food, clothing, vacations, retirement accounts, and anything else that our heart desires and yearns for. Has your money become your god? Do you find ultimate security in having enough money in the bank, a big enough roof over your heads; enough food in your pantries, the list goes on and on. What gives you security, what do you trust in above all things? Do you trust in what you have accumulated or in the power of God?

Over 2 thousands years ago Jesus said, ***"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"*** You'd think we would have learned something by now wouldn't you? But we do worry, we are anxious and we are troubled. We become frightened when our savings diminish, our cupboards run low and our bills continue to pile up. So how do we face fear and anxiety and overcome worry?

III. THE WORD OF OUR SAVIOR

Listen once again to part of our reading: ***“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”*** (Matthew 6:26-29). God is in control. Faith in Jesus and His Gospel drives the worry out of our hearts. Jesus looks at this problem from a different angle. And then He tells us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. John 14:27 says: ***“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”***

The wild birds teach us not to worry about food. Wild birds do not sow, harvest nor gather into barns. And yet your heavenly Father provides for them. These birds have no souls. Their life is only temporal. But you have a soul. You will live forever. Aren't you worth far more than the birds which God does feed? Doesn't He love you? Your life is worth much more than food. Your body is worth much more than your clothing. You worry. But your worry is sin.

The wild flowers teach us not to worry about clothing. In spring we see wild flowers growing everywhere. Who makes them grow? God! They don't weave. They don't spin. And yet their clothing, their petals, their flowers are more beautiful than Solomon who was known far and wide for his luxurious living (I Kings 10+11, II Chron. 9:13 ff). These wild flowers bloom today but dry up tomorrow and are good only for fire. Their life is very short. But you will live eternally. Aren't you worth far more than wild flowers? You worry. But your worry is sin.

“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’” (Matthew 6:31). ***“For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all”*** (Matthew 6:32). Of the life of the heathen nations, the secular world, Jesus says: "The heathen nations seek after these things (food and clothing)." They are not as wise as wild birds or wild flowers. Because they don't truly know God they think that these things are more important than their bodies and lives. They don't know that they will live eternally. They are absorbed with concern about food, clothing and the body. They are like the rich man in the parable at Luke 12. They store up treasure for themselves but are poor toward God. The people who don't know God will lose their souls. 1 Timothy 6:6 says: ***Godliness with contentment is great gain.*** Gain for this life but a debt for eternity. People who worry and want to be rich pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

III. HELPS COMES IN FAITH WITH A COMMAND AND A PROMISE

Jesus tells them to seek first the Kingdom of God. What is the Kingdom of God? John the Baptist and Jesus both came and said: ***“Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*** That means: "Confess your sins and trust in the forgiveness of sins." Confess all your worries to the Lord. Then hear Him say: ***“Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest”*** (Matthew 11:28) Hear what St. Paul says: ***“The Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Lord”*** (Roman 14:17). The Gospel of Jesus Christ cleanses our hearts by faith in the message of Jesus.

Jesus promises that all these things (food, clothing all that's necessary) will be given to us by Him who takes care of us? He takes care of wild birds and wild flowers doesn't He? Won't He also care for sinners who repent and then seek the Kingdom of God? St. Paul says in Romans 8:32: ***“He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, won't He with Christ freely give us***

all things? Will a mother abandon a child? Most certainly not! Will the Heavenly Father abandon a believer? Never!

When we listen to this text we understand what Jesus means by the last sentence: ***“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”*** Worry only makes double the trouble.

The final verse contains some somber thoughts. Evil is ever present with us. There's plenty of it every day. Deal with it each day as it comes, not before. Deal with it as God directs in these verses, not like the pagans, but like the believers. Trust in Jesus, He alone gives contentment. For in Christ alone there is peace, a peace which the world cannot give. His peace I give you, for in Jesus all your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The peace of Jesus be with you now and forevermore, Amen and Amen!

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
AMEN!