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## **What do you worry about?**

This is one of those passages where I hope if I keep reading, Jesus will say something like, “just kidding” at the end. Do not worry? He’s got to be kidding right? We all worry. I worry about myself, the people I love, the world, the weather, and this week, I worried about writing a sermon on worry.

Last weekend, I had the privilege of taking 25 junior high kids on a retreat to Tower Hill camp in Sawyer, MI. We spent the better part of a morning talking about this very passage and then made videos of each group’s interpretation of it—I’m not gonna lie, I picked this passage to talk about hoping that it might assist me in my sermon prep! I’d like to share with you just one of the group’s interpretations.

Now, I don’t think that this passage is about whether or not worrying gets us to heaven or hell, But I do think that the subject Jesus raises for us in today’s Scripture is one that touches all of us and is also a favorite subject for jokes—you all have heard them.

Mary C. Crowley: "Every evening I turn my worries over to God. He's going to be up all night anyway."

Anonymous: "Worry is like a rocking chair -- it gives you something to do but it doesn't get you anywhere."

Robert Frost: "The reason why worry kills more people than work is that more people worry than work."

I have a question for you, and I want you to take a moment to talk about it with your neighbor. What do you worry about? Be honest.

Now let's look at what Jesus had to say on the subject. Here it is, in a sentence: **your worries expose your values and priorities**. Jesus offers at least three angles on worry that can transform us.

## **The first is, Name your worries**

Jesus preached this sermon on worry almost two thousand years ago. Isn't it interesting that the worries he named are the same worries people struggle with today? Specifically, he names worries about survival, about appearance, and about the future.

Survival is in verse 25: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink." The Greek word for "life" translates into "soul," literally, but it implies the whole of your person. In Jesus' time, and for far too many people in our world today including some in our community, worrying about life meant worrying about basic survival nutrition.

Most of us in this room do not have to worry about having enough food to eat or a roof over our heads. We have more than enough.

The related subject we worry about is health. Will I get cancer or Alzheimer's or have a stroke or get in an accident? Will some disease or mishap either take my life or rob me of sufficient quality of life that I will wish I were dead?

Then there's appearance. Jesus mentions "what you will wear" in verses 25 and 31, and "clothes" in 25, 28, 29, and 30. Once again, the issue for some people past and present is whether they will have anything to wear, or enough to wear to keep warm. That's not a problem for us, but do you think we worry about what to wear? How many items of clothing or jewelry are in your closet or house? Is that enough, or will you be buying more? What's the deal about clothes for us? It's about appearance, how other people perceive us.

But appearance is more than just clothes. We worry about what people think of us. Do they think I'm dumb or disorganized or messy or stiff or cheap or wasteful or shy or selfish or bad or just plain crazy? You and I spend far more time than we are willing to admit worrying about the impression we make on others by our performance or our personality or our possessions.

A third area of worry is the future. "Do not worry about tomorrow," Jesus says in verse 34. That is a broad subject. Certainly survival (health) and appearance are part of it. But there's more -- relationships, education, career, children, parents, church, retirement, financial security, leisure -- a whole host of subtopics under "tomorrow" that consume our waking hours and maybe even our dreams and nightmares. The future is a big category of worry.

So the first angle on worry from Jesus is to name your worries. Admit to them. And realize they're neither new nor unusual to humanity.

## **The second angle on worry that Jesus teaches us in this passage is, Ask good questions**

This second angle should not surprise us, since Jesus often used questions to teach. But I must confess that in my prior reading of this text, I don't remember realizing the extent to which Jesus uses questions in addressing the subject of worry. Here are Jesus' questions about worry in our text --

- Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? (25) That's a rhetorical question. Stop and think for a moment. When you worry most about external matters you are exposing your heart. Things matter most to you. More on that shortly.
- 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? (26) Another rhetorical question. We all know that God cares for birds. Did it ever occur to you how much more God values you?
- Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? (27) Yet another rhetorical question.
- And why do you worry about clothes? (28) This is not a rhetorical question. This is a penetrating, reflective question. Why? Who or what gave you the idea that how you look is a measure of your worth? When did it happen? How does it affect your daily life and your financial priorities? How can you begin to make changes?
- If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will God not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (30) There is a dual point in this question. Jesus has just said that God "clothes" grassy-looking, wild field plants that we call lilies with exquisite flowers that King Solomon's splendor could never match. But Jesus also notes the transitory nature of that grass. So he's really saying that your fragility is only marginally better off than grass and flowers, but he adds that God's concern for your provision is exponentially greater.

Great questions.

## **The third angle, Prioritize what matters most**

Verse 33 is the third angle on worry from Jesus. This is one of the more familiar texts of Scripture to anyone who grew up on the "contemporary" Christian music of the 1970s. We sang a little chorus based on Matthew 6:33 in the King James Version:

Seek ye first the kingdom of God  
And his righteousness.  
And all these things shall be added unto you.  
Allelu, Alleluia.

It's a great little chorus, but in singing it we always pulled this verse totally out of its context. What are "these things" which shall be added unto you? They didn't seem relevant -- or maybe they seemed obvious -- but our only point in the song was one of priorities. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

Now as I take another look at this text, I realize that Matthew 6:33 comes in the context of worry. The passage is about worry, and Jesus says if you seek first God's kingdom you will stop worrying.

A key sentence earlier in this sermon makes the same point in a slightly different way: worry exposes your values and priorities. Let's rephrase yet once more: what you worry about reveals what is most important in your life. One more paraphrase: worry reveals what you most want to control but feel most powerless to control.

Your worries expose you. They expose your concerns, yes. Do you worry about money? About clothes? About the future? About what you can get done? About what people think of you? Those are your concerns.

Your worries not only expose your concerns, they expose your theology -- your understanding of God. What can God take care of? When and how does God intervene? Does God answer prayer? Does God care? Worry, on some level, answers "no" to all those questions.

The Heidelberg Catechism says in question 1, that God "protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head." True or not? The catechism also says in Question 27 that "rain and drought, fruitful and unfruitful years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, and everything else, come to us not by chance but by God's hand." Does that theology raise questions? Of course. Is it consistent with what Jesus said? Of course.

Your worries expose your concerns, they expose your theology, and they also expose your priorities. Jesus says, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" and it's so much easier to remember that "all these things will be added to you as well." If "these things" are really first place in your life, you'll never stop worrying about how to make more money and keep it, how to take care of your stuff, how to live to be 100 and stay active. But if doing God's work matters most no matter what it costs, you'll gain a degree of contentment otherwise unattainable by the pursuit of what matters least.

## **Tomorrow**

Many of you know that I've started a First United softball team this year. Softball has been on my brain these last few weeks. I researched the many rules and regulations of Oak Park Park district's softball program—and trust me there are many, many rules!—I came across this old comedy routine by Abbott and Costello. Costello is new to the coaching staff and Abbott is another coach giving Costello the names of the team members by position. It turns out these guys have funny names. Who's on first, what's on second, and I Don't Know's on third. Most of the comedy is about first base.

Costello: Look, you gotta first baseman?

Abbott: Certainly.

Costello: Who's playing first?

Abbott: That's right.

Costello: When you pay off the first baseman every month, who gets the money?

Abbott: Every dollar of it.

Costello: All I'm trying to find out is the fellow's name on first base.

Abbott: Who.

On they go through the players. Who's on first. What's on second. I Don't Know's on third. Why's in left field. Because is in center field. I Don't Give a Darn is playing shortstop.

The best part of the player names, however, may be the pitcher and the catcher. Tomorrow is the pitcher and Today is the catcher. That parallels how Jesus finishes this passage on worry.

Jesus says, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" ([34](#)).

Actually, without suggesting that I could improve on the comedy of the great Abbott and Costello, I kind of wish they had said Tomorrow is the pitcher, Yesterday is the catcher, and Today is the ball coming across the plate.

I don't know much about baseball—but the Parks district is certainly teaching me a few things! As a batter, however, I would think you can't worry too much about what the pitcher is going to throw at you (Tomorrow), and you certainly can't worry about the ball that's already in the catcher's mitt (Yesterday). The ball you need to keep your eye on is the one en route to the plate.

You can't change yesterday. You can't predict tomorrow. God's grace is enough for this moment. Amen.