

Sermon on the Mount | Control and Worry Redefined (Matthew 6:25-34, 7:7-11)

August 18, 2019 | Matthew McNutt

We are in the seventh week of our series, *Summer on the Mount*, in which we take a look at the greatest sermon of all time, the sermon on the mount! Found in Matthew 5-7, delivered by Jesus, it is timeless and powerful.

Throughout this series, we have seen Jesus asking, **“Will you follow me?”** Who is the king of your heart? Is it Jesus, or is it you?

Last week, Pastor Todd tackled the question of wealth and value, the verses leading up to these passages. Jesus’ listeners were possibly wondering, “If I choose God as my Master and place my value and worth and source of security in heaven, who will take care of my daily needs on earth?”¹ And so, Jesus addresses worry!

Matthew 6:25-34 (NIV)²⁵ ***“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?”***²⁶ ***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?”***²⁷ ***Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”***²⁸ ***“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.”***²⁹ ***Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.”***³⁰ ***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?”***³¹ ***So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’***³² ***For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.”***³³ ***But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”***³⁴ ***Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.***

So, today I’m going to be preaching to myself. Are there any worriers in the room? Confession is good for the soul. When I was little; eight, ten years old, my family used to joke that I worried so much I was going to give myself an ulcer. Which probably tells you all you need to know about my childhood.

What exactly is the worry being addressed in this passage? It’s important to note that it’s not saying to never worry; in fact, throughout the gospels Jesus teaches us to be

¹ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew: NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text ... to Contemporary Life*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 296.

concerned for others, to care for the hungry, the homeless, those in need. This passage tells us to **“seek first His kingdom;”** how do we do that? Later in this gospel, Jesus teaches;

Matthew 25:35-36 (NIV) “³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

They were mystified and wanted to know when they had done these things for God; Jesus replied:

Matthew 25:40 (NIV) ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

There is a Godly worry, a Godly concern for the world around us that desires to bring about God’s kingdom. The passage we are looking at today is not that type of worry.

The Greek word translated “worry” here is **“merimna.” It means “restless, anxious care.”**² It is an unhealthy focus on the temporal, the now. Notice that Jesus does not tell them not to worry about eating – He tells them not to worry about **what** they eat. He doesn’t tell them not to worry about being clothed – he tells them not to worry about **what** they’re wearing. Do you see the difference? They’re worried about status.

Let me put it a different way; **the other week a news story went viral about a 22-year-old man who was given a new \$50,000 BMW for his birthday.** He was furious; the car he wanted was a \$70,000 Jaguar. So, he pushed his BMW into the river, filming the whole episode, which he then sent to his parents.³ His restless, anxious care, his worry, was focused on status that he wanted, felt he deserved, and ultimately, has made him a joke.

Hopefully, that’s not a story we can identify with.

But we do worry. How often do we find ourselves preoccupied with things of earth instead of the eternal? We want possessions and wealth that build our personal worth, our esteem, our value. We worry about whether others think we are successful. We want clothes, cars, food, possessions, that will make us feel good about ourselves. We want power, status. One of the realities of the pursuit of the American Dream is that we are a culture that lives on the edge, just beyond our means, drowning in debt – because we’re worried about keeping up those around us. Talk about misplaced priorities!

² Bruner, Frederick Dale. *Matthew: A Commentary. Volume 1, The Christbook: Matthew 1- 12.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004. Kindle location 6660.

³ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/man-pushes-bmw-into-river-birthday-gift-parent-india/>

This restless, anxious worry destroys us. It keeps us awake at night. Ruins our health. It controls our lives.

In His challenge to us to follow Him, in His call to faith, a focus on the eternal, Jesus gives **three reasons why we should not worry**:

1. **God cares for His creatures**. Jesus points to the birds of the air, and asks the question, aren't we so much more valuable than they are in God's eyes? It reminds us of passages like **Ephesians 2:10** where we are literally called "**God's masterpiece**" (NLT). Scripture paints a picture of us having unparalleled value in God's eyes; that He sees us far beyond what we see in ourselves – it's why He was willing to sacrifice Jesus on the cross on our behalf!
2. **The Flowers of the Field**. Jesus comments on how these flowers are here today and tossed in the fire tomorrow; they have such a brief role in our world – and yet God cares about them. In comparison to them, how could He not care about His eternal children? When Jesus says, "Will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith," (Matthew 6:30, NIV), note that Jesus is not saying they have no faith. He's pointing out a deficiency of faith.⁴ Their priorities aren't right.
3. **Our Father knows**. Jesus challenges the listener; faith believes that God knows our needs and will take care of them. In other words, worry reveals a lack of trust in God's plan. Worry about such temporal things reveals a lack of focus on God. This restless, anxious worry reveals a preoccupation with worldly priorities.

In the next chapter, Jesus adds to this message;

Matthew 7:7-11 (NIV) ⁷ "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

Let's get uncomfortable for a moment. This is a beautiful and often referenced passage. But birds die all the time, often because they can't find enough food. There are entire species that God created, said were good, and have gone extinct. "**Yet your heavenly Father feeds them**" (Matthew 6:26, NIV)? Right now, around the world, there are countless people dying of starvation, diseases, naked, homeless. Today, Christians have died of starvation. It's a reality we usually don't have to confront.

⁴ Wilkins, *Matthew: NIV Application Commentary*, 298.

Richard France, a commentator, suggests that “**This teaching seems to envisage the world as it should be rather than the world as it is.**”⁵

I think it might be something else. I heard a sermon once that agitated me; the Pastor spoke about the warning God gave to Mary and Joseph in Matthew 2 about King Herod’s murderous intent, so they fled with the baby Jesus to Egypt. The Pastor’s point was that God protects us; but I remember feeling frustrated because that conclusion ignored the dozens of other baby boys that were murdered that night by Herod’s men. None of their parents received a warning. How do I reconcile that?

I think we get very focused on our present, but God’s promises of protection have to do with the eternal. **James 4:14** says that this life is a vapor, it’s over quickly, while the spiritual is eternal. Scripture warns us over and over that we will suffer. These passages we are reading were part of the sermon on the mount, given to people facing far more severe poverty than most of us will ever experience. They would go on to suffer incredible persecution. I don’t want you to hear this message and believe that if you have enough faith, everything will work out – it just takes looking at the lives of the believers in the New Testament to know that’s not the case. But we can be confident in our eternity. There is no need to worry when such a great promise waits.

Jesus’ message in this passage culminates in His challenge to not let restless, anxious worry get in the way of our charge to **“seek first His kingdom and His righteousness!”** (Matthew 6:33, NIV)

What does that look like? In 1995, I spent three weeks in the Ukraine. Communism had fallen only a few years before. The people were in incredible poverty; the shelves in the stores were empty. None of the homes I visited had yards the way we do – every inch of dirt was used to grow food in a desperate attempt to make it month to month. I spent a lot of time with one family in particular; they told me stories of what faith looked like under the Soviet Union. They had one Bible that they would keep buried in the garden to protect themselves; if they were caught with it, they would lose all their income for the month. Can you imagine? I wonder how many Americans would have Bibles if it meant risking a month’s wages? They told me they were caught several times, and each time they went without money as a result. They lived day to day, there were no savings to get them through it.

For me, this was an eye opening, convicting challenge. Such an incredible example of having ones’ focus on the eternal, such a powerful example of complete trust in God.

I love how the Message version of the Bible puts parts of **Matthew 6:**

⁵ France, Richard T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010. 265.

Matthew 6:25, 33-34 (The Message) There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body ... Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out ... Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.

This is a call to follow Christ! To set aside worldly concerns and put our focus on God! This passage should prompt questions and an honest look inward at priorities.

Do you worry? What does your attitude about money, possessions, clothes, reveal about your priorities? Who are you trying to impress? If you don't like the answer, then a few things need to happen: **(1) repent.** Confess your lack of focus to God; list the worries. Name them to God and ask for His strength to both let them go and to pursue His kingdom and righteousness. **(2) Build God's kingdom!** Join one of our service teams, commit your time and resources to a local ministry – the reality of serving others and building the kingdom is that it shrinks our worries and concerns! **(3) Pursue righteousness;** in other words, deepen your relationship with God through Bible study and prayer. One of the best ways to be consistent in this area is in a small group.

Repent. Build the Kingdom. Pursue righteousness. These restless, anxious worries will disappear.