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Matthew 6:25 - 6:34



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this lecture, Steve Gregg discusses Matthew 6:25-34 and the issue of anxiety. Jesus instructs his followers to not worry about food, clothing, or tomorrow, arguing that worrying will not make things better. Gregg reminds his listeners that God has already done remarkable and difficult things for them, and He will provide for their needs according to His riches and glory. Gregg further emphasizes that worrying is simply fretting and is not beneficial, and that Christians should trust in God's provision for their lives.

Transcript

Today we're going to be studying the last part of Matthew chapter 6, which is still part of the Sermon on the Mount. And Jesus here teaches us about a subject which is probably the greatest sin that Christians, as well as non-Christians, commit. Now it's possible that non-Christians commit sins on a regular basis that are more grievous than this.

Hopefully, some of the worst kinds of sins that unbelievers commit, Christians would be ashamed to commit and would certainly know better than to do. But there is a sin that almost everybody seems to do, and unfortunately, when they do it, they don't necessarily even think of themselves as sinning. And that is worrying.

Worrying is probably the greatest sin in the church. There may be others, but it is probably the most widespread and the one about which people are most unashamed. Some people give it another name, like anxiety.

And then sometimes they'll even call it a weakness or a sickness. These days, anxiety is considered to be a health issue, and people take medication to avoid or to overcome anxiety. That is not necessarily the biblical way of looking at it.

The Bible commands us to be anxious for nothing. And that means don't worry about anything. Don't have anxiety about anything.

But by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. So it says in Philippians chapter 4. Now Jesus talks about anxiety or worry here, and he

forbids it. He tells his disciples not to worry, and he gives them reasons for not worrying.

He gives several good reasons. Jesus is always reasonable. And he doesn't just tell you not to do something just to make your life hard.

He tells you not to do something for very good reasons, and we will read what those reasons are. Now, in Matthew 6, beginning at verse 25, Jesus said, Therefore I say to you, do not worry 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, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns.

Yet your heavenly Father feeds them, and are you not of more value than they? Which of you, by worrying, can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now, if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For after all these things the Gentiles seek.

For your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things.

Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Now, as I said, this is a teaching against worry, and Jesus absolutely forbids his disciples to worry. He says, Do not worry about your life, in verse 25.

He also says, Do not worry about food, and do not worry about clothing. And finally he says, in the very end, in verse 34, Do not worry about tomorrow. These are certainly things that people do tend to worry about, and the fact that Jesus told his disciples not to do so has not seemed to have much impact, from what I observe, about many Christians, because they act as if Jesus never said these words, and they go ahead and worry anyway.

Now, in the King James Version, I've been reading the New King James Version, but in the King James Version, where we have here the words, Do not worry, the King James says, Take no thought about your life. Take no thought about food. Take no thought about raiment, etc.

Take no thought about tomorrow. And this has led some people to believe that we are not to think about the future at all. However, the words that Jesus uses mean, Do not be anxious.

Do not take anxious thought. Do not worry. And so the New King James has not done any

violence to the idea, simply by translating it as it has here, Do not worry.

After all, taking thought about the future is not only okay, sometimes it's absolutely necessary. There is a way of thinking about the future that is certainly forbidden, and that is a worried way. But to take precaution about future things, and to be wise about future contingencies, is not only okay, but it's commanded in Scripture.

Twice in the Proverbs, in Proverbs 22.3, and again in Proverbs 27.12, Solomon wrote, The wise man foresees the danger and hides himself. The foolish pass on and suffer for it. So, the Bible teaches us that if you are wise, and certainly both the Old and the New Testament command us to be wise, that we will foresee obvious dangers that lurk and make provision for them.

We are told in Proverbs to be like the ant, who seems to foresee the time of winter coming. And so in the summer, stores up food for the winter. Human beings have also had to do this through the centuries as well, because until the time of trucking and trains to deliver foods from all over the world, people had to live on, through the winter, on the foods that their gardens and their farms produced during the summer.

And they just had to store it up. They had to can it and freeze it or do whatever they could do, because they saw that winter was coming, just like the ant they laid up for that time. There's nothing wrong with that.

That is not worrying. That is being responsible. However, worrying is simply fretting.

Worrying is, generally speaking, the opposite of doing something precautionary or something useful. Worry seems to cripple our actions, seems to paralyze us. A person can be so worried that they simply do nothing but sit in fret.

Now, on the other hand, if you are concerned about real problems that are really there, and you make certain precautions for them, that is not worry. That is simply obedience to the dictates of wisdom, which the Bible advocates. Now, when Jesus says not to worry, as I said a moment ago, He's very reasonable.

He gives us reasons not to worry. He doesn't just tell us to do a thing, hard as it may be, to obey and just say, well, do it, I'm the boss and you need to do what I say. He gives us incentives and reasons why we should not worry.

And I'd like to enumerate some of them for you. I know of at least six reasons that come up in this passage why people should not worry. Jesus said in verse 25, Therefore I say to you, do not worry 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? Now, what does He mean by that? Is not life more than food and is not the body more than clothing? Well, here's what

I believe His point is. God has given you life and God has given you a body. Both of these things are things that man cannot do.

These are very difficult things. I mean, it takes a supernatural, omnipotent God to do this kind of thing. Now, man can make clothing, man can grow food, but man cannot create life out of nothing.

Man cannot create bodies. God has done that which is remarkable, that which is difficult. He's given you that which is the most valuable thing.

Certainly your life is worth more than the food that sustains it and your body is worth more than the clothing you hang on it. And what He is saying is that God has already shown His commitment to you by giving you both life and a body. And are you worried that He won't want to be committed to you enough to give you food and clothing? Is not the life He's already given you, is that not greater than the food that you need? The body that He's already given you, is that not something greater than the clothing you need to put on it? This is what Jesus is saying.

He's arguing from the greater to the lesser. God has already done the greater mercy for you. How can you doubt that He would do the lesser thing? It's like if God gave you a car, but He refused to give you the gas you need for the car.

I mean, if He gives you a car and you need one, you can pretty well assume that if God can provide a car, He can provide the gas. If He can provide a body, He can provide clothing for it. And that's what Jesus is saying.

God has already given you that which is greater. Can you really be seriously doubting that He could give you and will give you the lesser things that are necessary for you? Then His second argument is in verse 26, and it also is found in verses 28 through 30. In verse 26, He says, Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns.

Yet your heavenly Father feeds them, and are not you worth more than they? Then in verse 28, So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin. And yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Now what's the argument here? He says, You worry about food. Now the birds, they don't worry about food. They don't even have the ways of providing for themselves that you have.

You can go out and grow food and store it in a barn. They don't have that option. They don't grow food.

They don't sow and reap and gather into barns. They depend day by day on God to provide for them because they can't accumulate in the way that we can. They can't guarantee a crop for themselves like we can to a large extent.

They, in other words, depend on God without worry, although they are much more at His mercy than we seem to be in many cases. Now God takes care of them. Likewise, the flowers of the field.

They're beautiful. They are adorned. They are arrayed.

They are clothed as beautifully as anyone could wish to be clothed. And yet they don't make clothing. God clothes them.

Now God clothes the flowers, and those are of almost no value at all. Today they exist, and tomorrow they're dead and they're thrown in the oven as fuel. God feeds the birds, which you're of much more value than they, He said.

If He takes care of these lesser things in the creation, will He not take care of the greater thing, you, a human being? He cares much more for human beings than He does for birds. Now the point here, of course, is arguing just the opposite direction from the other argument. He argued from the greater to the lesser when He said, well, God's given you body and life.

He'll give you the lesser things too. Now He's arguing the other direction from the lesser to the greater. God has taken care of the lesser creation, the birds, the grass.

They're of less importance and of less concern to Him than you are. Then will He not take care of the greater thing, you? So Jesus argues both ways, and both arguments are quite compelling, really. Not really any way you could argue against that.

His third argument is in verse 27. Which of you, by worrying, can add one cubit to his stature? Now what is the point of this question? You know, it's a question, it's not a statement. It's a rhetorical question.

And of course, the implied answer is no one, by worrying, can add a cubit to his stature. But what's the point of Jesus raising this question? Over in the parallel passage to it in Luke 12, verses 25 and 26, we get a sense of where He's going with this. In Luke 12, 25, He says, in which of you, by worrying, can add one cubit to his stature? And in the next verse, He says, if you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious about the rest? Now, what He's saying here is that even inconsequential things, like changing your height, you don't have the power over.

And if you don't have power over that, if you're not in control of that, then how could you possibly see yourself in control of the other? In other words, worrying is not going to change it. By worrying, you won't make things better. Do you wish you were taller? You

can't add a cubit to your height by worrying about it.

Worrying, in other words, will not improve the situation. It doesn't change anything. It changes you for the worse, but it doesn't change anything for the better.

Now, again, wisdom and precaution and taking judicious action can change things for the better, but worrying itself does not change anything for the better. Now, I might comment that the meaning of this expression, add one cubit to his stature, taken literally means to add about 18 inches to one's height. Now, it's strange that Jesus would use that expression since he's trying to describe something that is a small matter to do.

Remember, he says, if you can't do that which is least, why do you worry about the rest? And yet, adding 18 inches, a foot and a half to your height, would be a major thing. And yet, he talks about it as if it's a small matter. Even when he says you cannot change one hair white or black, he's also making the same point.

You're not really in control of all of this. God is the one in control of it. Now, adding a cubit to the stature can be taken figuratively because in the scriptures, sometimes a measurement of length is used as a metaphor for a measurement of time.

For example, in Psalm 39 and verse 5, David says, all of my days are like a hand breadth. Now, a hand breadth is a measurement of distance from the outstretched tip of the little finger to the outstretched tip of the thumb. That's a hand breadth.

Now, that was an actual measurement, just like a cubit was a measurement of length. And yet, David used the expression as a metaphor for length of life. All of my days are like a hand breadth, even though I have a short life.

And it may be that Jesus is using it that way too. When he says you cannot add a cubit to your stature, there are at least some theologians who believe that what he means is you cannot add to the length of your life. You cannot, by worrying, prolong your life even a little bit.

And that is true. You can probably shorten your life by worrying. And you can lengthen your life by being careful.

That is, careful in the positive sense of not doing stupid and dangerous things unnecessarily. But worrying is not going to make your life any longer. It won't make you any taller.

In other words, worrying doesn't really change things. If you're sitting around worrying about not making it on the basketball team, and you could if you were 18 inches taller, well, worrying about it isn't going to help. You're not going to become 18 inches taller by worrying about it.

If you're worrying that there's going to be a nuclear war and you're going to die at age 40 instead of at age 80, well, worrying about it isn't going to change anything. It may or may not happen. But the point is it doesn't change anything at all.

It doesn't improve things. Worrying is not a productive activity. If there is anything dangerous in the future, worrying is the wrong thing to do about it.

Taking action is the right thing to do about it. Now, there's another argument he gives here. The fourth argument, I would say, is in verses 31 and 32, where Jesus says, Now, what's he saying? The Gentiles worry about these things, but you have a Father in heaven who knows that you have need of them.

And he is, after all, as Jesus says, a father. Your father knows that you have need of these things. Now, a father cares for the needs of his children.

Now, the Gentiles don't have a father like that. The Gentiles in Jesus' day were worshipping idols of stone and of wood covered with gold. They were in the fashion of people and of animals and so forth, and they'd offer sacrifices to them.

But these idols were not alive. They didn't even know there was somebody offering a sacrifice to them, much less care. These gods of the heathen simply could not do them any good.

These gods of the heathen, if you are looking to them to take care of you, you've got plenty to worry about. If you're a Gentile, a pagan, without a living God, you've got plenty of cause to worry. Jesus did not tell the general populace, don't worry, because there's plenty for the general populace to be worried about.

He told his disciples, don't worry. Why? Because they don't have a dead God. They have a living God, and this God is their Father.

He says, your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things. It makes all the difference in the world to know this. I can remember years ago when I was single, and I felt very strongly that I needed to be married.

I actually had a daughter from a previous marriage. I had custody, and I was grazing her, and I thought, this is not ideal. I need a wife.

I need a mother for my daughter, and I talked to the Lord about this a great deal. Eventually, he gave me a very wonderful wife, but I didn't foresee at the time how this was going to come about with my present circumstances. I remember once I was complaining to the Lord about this, and he brought only these words to my mind.

He says, your Father knows that you have need of these things. That was all it took to banish all sense of worry, any sense of discontent, because I thought, that's true. God

knows that I need this.

Once I was reminded of that, it changed my whole perspective on everything. Jesus said over in chapter 7 of Matthew, if you earthly fathers being evil know how to give good gifts to your children when they ask, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him? You have a real Father if you're a Christian. You're born into his family, and he cares about you like fathers care about their children.

Now, that is a very good reason not to worry. If you were a heathen who had no God, this argument could not be made for you. But if you have a God, then, of course, this is a very potent argument against worry.

A fifth, or sixth, I guess, no, this is a fifth reason that Jesus gives for not worrying is in this very familiar verse in verse 33. He says, but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Now, seeking God's kingdom and his righteousness simply means that you make it your business to please the Lord, that you do the thing that pleases God.

Don't worry about the outcome. Don't worry about whether you're going to have enough to eat or drink or whether your children will go cold. Don't worry about those things.

Just do the thing that's pleasing to God, and he will take care of the details. That's what Jesus meant when he said, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all of these things. Now, the things in question are the food and the clothing and the necessary things he's been talking about.

He said all these things will be added to you. As you do the will of God and you make it your business and your sole business to please the Lord, you will find that the things you need will be supplied. I can say this as one who has spent 30 years without any guaranteed income at all and have raised five children, partially raised, and they're not all gone yet, but some are raised all the way, and some are, I've got a couple of teenagers, I've got a daughter who's 26.

All the years I was raising my children, I have never had a guaranteed income, but I have been guaranteed that the God who I serve will supply my needs, and I have been in ministry during those years without pay, and yet God has sent in support, and we have no debt. We are in very good condition. God has provided all our needs according to his riches and glory for 30 years.

I can testify, if you just seek to please God and don't worry about the details, leave those details with him, he'll take care of them. The last argument against worry that Jesus gives is in the last verse, verse 34. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things.

Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Now what Jesus means about that is that in the

providence of God, you have a certain number of challenges you will face each day. You have enough trouble each day for itself.

If you are worrying about the future, what you're really doing is, instead of mastering and conquering the challenges that are before you today, you're taking on tomorrow's challenges, emotionally at least. You are emotionally taking on the challenges of tomorrow. Tomorrow, that's not given to you yet.

Tomorrow will have its own challenges, and God will give the grace for them then. He will not give you the grace for them now. He has certain problems and troubles for you to tackle today.

Sufficient for each day is the amount of trouble given with it. And when God gives you trouble to cope with, he gives you the grace to overcome it. But he has not yet given you tomorrow's troubles.

If you borrow them by anticipation and by worrying about them, then you will, of course, not have the grace for it, and it will wear you away, you'll fret away, it can do you serious harm. By the way, those things you worry about in the future, either are going to happen or they're not going to happen. Whether you worry about it or not, the thing you worry about either will happen or it will not happen.

If it does happen, your worrying about it will not have helped at all. It will not have prevented it. On the other hand, if it doesn't happen, your worry will have not prevented it.

You will have worried for nothing. Even if the thing does happen, if you worry about it in advance, you suffer twice for it. The time that it comes and the time you anticipated it and worried about it then.

Why not just suffer at one time when it comes and face the challenges God gives you each day with the grace he gives you and don't worry about tomorrow's challenges. They will be sufficient and God's grace then will be sufficient as well. We've ended our session today, but we will come back to chapter 7 of Matthew in the next session.

I hope you'll be able to join us at that time.