



Trusting God

St. Matthew 6:25-34

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A few years ago in the US there was an advertisement running on TV. It showed a man talking about how he had the good life, the American Dream, if you will. He was shown posing in front of his beautiful home, next to his swimming pool, driving his new SUV, playing golf, and playing with his kids and their dog – I'll with a giant forced smile on his face. The script went something like this:

"I'm Stanley Johnson. I've got a great family, a four bedroom house in a great community. Like my car? It's new. I even belong to the local golf club. How do I do it? [Still with the big smile] I'm in debt up to my eyeballs. I can barely pay my finance charges. Somebody help me."

Stanley Johnson epitomises what we talked about last week when Jesus reminded us that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also – that you can't serve God and earthly possessions. The natural man puts everything into earthly things. He puts his trust in his bank account, even when he knows, like Stanley, that there's nothing there that's actually worth anything.

And the end result, despite the fake smiles we might show everyone around us, is worry and anxiety. We no longer trust in God; instead we trust in "things," in money, and in government. And those things have failed us repeatedly. So it's no wonder that the last half-century has seen our culture become dominated by anxiety. It's so bad that we're now seeing preschoolers being put on anti-anxiety and anti-depressants drugs at an alarming rate. And yet their parents see nothing wrong with it. After all, that's what mom and dad do to deal with their own problems. The world offers psychiatrists and mind-altering drugs. But the Bible has an entirely different cure for worry and anxiety.

Jesus says plainly and simply: *don't worry*. If you have your Bible, you can follow along in 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?

And then down in verses 32 and 33 he says:

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.

Last week we looked at Jesus' warning that love of earthly possessions and "things" will stunt and stifle our Christian life and ruin our Christian witness. Here in these verses that follow he warns us that anxiety and worry will do the same thing.

Jesus gives us three reasons why we shouldn't worry. Notice that verse 25 starts with the word "therefore." When you study the Bible and come across the word "therefore," you need to stop and ask what the "therefore" is there for. Jesus gives us three "therefores" between verses 25 and 34, and each one of them points to a reason why we shouldn't worry.

"Therefore" basically means "because" or "because of this." Because of what he teaches in verses 24, Jesus says the Christian isn't to worry. We looked at that verse last week:

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.

Jesus said that we kill our spiritual life in him through love of money, because you can't serve two masters. Money, possessions, "stuff" are the sorts of things that end up consuming us. Either you let them serve you, seeing yourself merely as God's steward of them, or you end up making them the boss, the master, and spending all your time working to get more. The problem is that the Christian should be devoting himself to God's service. You can't do both.

But it goes further. If you put your trust in earthly things and make them the boss, eventually you're also going to make worry the boss – because earthly things are going to let you down, sooner or later. What happens when the money dries up? You get anxious. Think about Stanley Johnson in the advertisement. He made idols out of his house, his car, and his golf club membership and now he's in debt up to his eyeballs. He put "things" first, and now he's anxious because he doesn't know if he'll be able to

hold onto all of it. And it comes from not putting our trust in God in the first place.

Think about it this way. Ask yourself why God created you and put you on earth. That's the first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "What is the chief end of man?" And the answer in the catechism (which is bang on) is: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever." The first and primary way that we serve God is by glorifying him. But you see, you can never serve God by glorifying him if, at the same time, you're constantly filled with doubt about his ability to take care of you.

You can also think of it this way. There's an old adage that says, "If you're worrying, you're not trusting; and if you're trusting, you're not worrying." That's common sense and it's literally true. You can't trust and worry at the same time about the same thing. Serving God means putting your trust in him. You can't do that and worry at the same time. One commentator puts it this way, "God commands us to 'Stop perpetually worrying about even one thing.' We commit sin when we worry. We do not trust God when we worry. We do not receive answers to prayer when we worry, because we are not trusting." We might not think of it that way, but he's right: worry is sin.

Jesus gives us a second reason not to worry. In verse 31 he says:

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

How often do we worry about where our next bite to eat is coming from or how we're going to pay the rent or the mortgage this month? Jesus says, "Don't *worry*, instead *trust* in me." Why? Again, this verse starts with "therefore." What's the therefore there for? Look at the verses immediately before this one: vv. 26-30. Jesus says:

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?

Jesus reminds us that we have no reason to worry. Instead we should be secure in the knowledge that God is able and willing to care for those who put their trust in him.

Jesus' first reason why we shouldn't worry is almost a command: Don't worry, because you can't worry and trust God at the same time. And yet I think Jesus knew that this is one of the biggest trouble areas for a lot of people. Lots of us have mistakenly put our trust in money and earthly "stuff," and the result is that when things get tight we worry how we're going to hold onto all of it. But even if we don't have all that stuff – even if we're materially poor – we can still worry just as much. Instead of wondering how we're going to make the next payment on our luxury car, we might simply be worrying about how we'll buy groceries next week. It doesn't matter who you are – worry can and often is something we struggle with. So Jesus doesn't just say, "Don't worry – it's sin." He give us reason to trust him when he says, "Don't worry." He reassures us. He points to the birds and reminds us that God takes care of them. He points to the flowers and shows us that God takes care of them too. And then he asks, "Who do you think is more important to God: a bird or a flower or you?"

He makes the same point in Chapter 7 when he asks:

Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:9-11)

We have to learn to trust and we learn to trust God as we see him in action. If we don't see it in nature, Jesus gives the example of our earthly fathers. And if we don't see it there, we can see it as God works in the lives of other Christians. Look at St. Peter. He worried about things all the time. Remember when Jesus called him to get out of the boat and come to him, walking on the water. Peter got out and started walking on the water. He was excited about it – that is, until he looked around and saw the storm around him. What did he do? He started to worry. He forgot about his excitement in following Jesus. He thought, "This isn't supposed to be possible. People don't walk on water! I'm in trouble." And he sank. He started worrying because he took his focus off Jesus.

St. Peter was always doubting, but Jesus kept giving him reason to trust. Think about the time the tax collectors came to Peter and asked whether or not Jesus was going to pay his taxes. Peter told them he'd pay, but these guys were poor. They didn't have any money, so he ran back to Jesus. "Lord, what are we going to do? The guys in black suits from Revenue Judea are here! We don't have any money to pay the tax!" And that's when Jesus calmed him down and told him to go fishing. And sure enough, just as Jesus told him he would, Peter found the money for the tax in the mouth of the first fish he caught.

Peter got stressed out about who was going to betray Jesus (John 13:24). He got stressed out about the idea that Jesus would have to suffer and even rebuked his own Lord (Matthew 16:22). On the night the soldiers came for Jesus, it was Peter who pulled out his sword and cut off the ear of one of the soldiers. He should have taken is cue from Jesus, but no, he took matters into his own hands. He wasn't trusting. He was a worry-wart. But Peter gives even the worst of us hope, because as we see his witness unfold in the New Testament we can see that as he came to know Jesus better, he learned that Jesus was not only able to take care of himself, but that he could also take care of Peter. We see an amazing change a few decades later where Peter the worry-wart now writes in his first epistle:

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7 NIV)

That's a big change! In fact, when St. Peter says "care" he uses the same word that St. Matthew uses in the Sermon on the Mount. What's interesting though, is that he doesn't use the normal word for "cast" in the sense of throwing something. The word he uses signifies a definite act of the will in which we stop worrying about things and let God take over the responsibility for our welfare. It's also significant that the word "care" here doesn't mean "worry." It literally means "for he is mindful of you and your interests." St. Peter is saying, "Give up your worry and let God take it. He knows you and he knows what you need. Let him care for you. God is thinking about you!"

They say that when it comes to learning something new, there's the easy way and there's the hard way. Peter had to learn the hard way. He had to see God in action for himself. And yet the message he gives us here is the same message that we see through the pages of Scripture: cast your worries on God, because he cares for you."

You can choose to learn it the hard way like Peter did, or you can learn it the easy way: you can trust that what God says in his Word is true and you can do what he says and experience his care now.

Finally, in verse 34 Jesus says:

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

What's the therefore there for? Go back a couple of lines and look at verse 33:

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

First Jesus said, don't worry, because you can't serve God and worry at the same time. Then he said, if you don't trust me, look at how God takes care of the birds and the flowers. You're more important than they are. Do you really think he won't care for you? And now he gives his promise: If you put me first, if you put God's kingdom first, then God's going to take care of all these other things for you. That's a promise that each of us really needs to think about. I know a lot of Christians who do a lot of worrying. You need ask yourself if you've experienced the truth of this promise in your own life. Because if you haven't, it just might be that you've never had that hunger and thirst for righteousness that Jesus told us about back in the Beatitudes, or the poverty of spirit that Jesus asks for in those who would inherit God's kingdom. Think back again to what we looked at last week when Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21)

Now you might say, "Fair enough. Obviously I shouldn't worry like I do. But I still *do* worry. What's the answer? What can I do myself to set aside all of my worry?" I think the answer has three parts.

The first part is the most basic. We need to go back to one of the very first things I said last Spring in the sermon that started this series on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' promises here aren't for everybody – they're specifically for Christians – for those who follow him. If you're not a Christian, or if you're not completely sure that you are, the first thing you have to do is straighten

out that question. People ask all the time, “If God has promised to take care of all our needs, why is there so much poverty and suffering in the world?” And the answer to that question is that the promises of God’s care are for Christians only. They’re for those who have accepted the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the one sufficient ground for their salvation. Unless you believe these things, the promises of God’s care are not for you.

Have you ever noticed that when things go well for a people, it doesn’t take long before they stop trusting in God and instead start patting themselves on the back for all the good things in their lives. I’m no prophet by any means, but I suspect that this is one reason for our current economic troubles. God blessed us, but we turned our back on him. We took credit for our own prosperity. We began to trust in ourselves and in the governments we created. And now God’s letting it slip away. Those governments and central banks are frantically trying to fix the unfixable and what I see in it all is God’s way of showing us that we’ve misplaced our trust. We’re looking in the wrong place for security. His promise is that when we put our trust in him, he will take care of us.

Second, if you *are* a believer, don’t stop growing and maturing. Keep learning from Scripture. Keep learning all about God and his character and his ability to care for his people. Look at the record of his care in the Bible, and as you fellowship with brothers and sisters, listen as they witness to God’s provision in their lives. Each Sunday after the Absolution we hear those comfortable words, “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” That passage goes on to say, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). Keep learning about Jesus Christ and fix your eyes on his promises – like the ones we read every Sunday morning – because as you learn about him you’ll grow strong in faith, knowing that he is able to do the things he has promised.

And finally, you need to learn to turn to God whenever you start to get worried. Make a habit of it. Your reaction in trouble should be like a conditioned reflex. We all know what a natural reflex is. I experienced that a couple of days ago. I was setting down a lid from a pot and didn’t realise that the burner I was setting it on was still hot. My finger got too close and I naturally and instinctively jerked it away. A conditioned reflex is the

same except that it’s learned – like stepping on the brake pedal when you see a red light or standing up when you hear the national anthem played. It’s almost automatic, but it doesn’t happen from instinct. You have to practice and train yourself. We need to build a reflex in ourselves that will turn us to the Lord at the first sign of trouble.

Because of our fallen nature, our natural reflex when trouble comes is to turn to anything but God: we turn to ourselves, we turn to other people, we turn drugs or a bottle. As a Christian you need to relearn your response to trouble. It’s that “put off, put on” principle that I’ve talked about before. Put off the sinful and ungodly behaviour and put on the righteous one. And the best way to do that is to commit God’s promises to your memory – verses like we’ve been studying this morning – so that when trouble comes, they’ll be there to remind you: Don’t start worrying; give it to God. And as you start giving your troubles and worries to God, more and more you’ll come to know the divine peace that passes all understanding.

I said at the outset today that worry destroys not only our Christian growth, but it also destroys our witness. After all, why should the rest of the world trust God, when his own followers don’t? So let me close with one final example. There’s an ancient manuscript from the first century that talks about a man named Titedios Amerimnos. Titedios is a given name, just like Bill or Bob. But Amerimnos isn’t. It’s actually a name made from the Greek words for “worry” and “never.” It’s a descriptive name like Constantine the Great or Richard the Lionheart. You see Titedios was a man who worried about everything. But when he became a Christian and came to know Christ, he changed. He gave his problems over to God and he stopped worrying. In fact, the change was so dramatic that people noticed and started calling him Titedios Amerimnos: “Titedios, the man who never worries.” We have no idea what sort of evangelism this man was involved in, but we do know that he made an impact for Christ simply by showing everyone around him how his life was transformed. And he showed that transformation simply by putting his faith and trust in God. Each of us ought to be able to do the same.

Please pray with me: Heavenly Father, living in the world isn’t an easy thing. Things go wrong. Life is often hard and full of ups and downs. We give you thanks and praise for your provision and for the assurance you give us of that provision

through your promises. But we also confess, Father, that too much of the time we ignore your promises and we put our trust elsewhere. Remind us that that only leads to worry. Turn us back to yourself and to your promises we ask, and teach us to lean on you, that our faith might grow and that others might be drawn to you by our witness. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.