



The World's Greatest Talk: Life Beyond Worry

Matthew 6:25-34

I want to say a special welcome to all the children here in this service. Because of the nature of this weekend, I told the planning team that with lots of children here, I would keep the sermon to 20 minutes, and they did not believe me. They laughed at me. So here is what we are going to do. We are going to actually put a countdown clock on the screen. I make no guarantees about quality, but this will be the shortest regular weekend message I have ever given. To make sure, when it hits 60 seconds or less, you can raise your hands just to make sure I know that I need to be in the homestretch at this point.

Also, I thought that this weekend I would especially keep in mind those of you who are 12 and under, so everybody can listen in, but if you are in that age category, I want to especially talk to you this weekend.

Now, a long time ago, when the Bible was read, people used to stand up. It was a way of honoring the Bible and saying these words are to be not just heard, but done. So we are going to do that today. I am going to ask if everybody would stand up, and I will read these words, and then, we will put the clock up on the screen. Here we go...

"Therefore, Jesus said, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food and the body more important than clothes? 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? Can anyone of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? Why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers in the field grow. They do not labor or spin, yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 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. So do not worry, saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear, for the pagans run after all these things and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them, but seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has trouble enough of its own."

You may be seated. Now...the countdown begins.



I spent some time this week trying to remember what I worried about when I was in grade school. I worried about my grades. I worried about homework. I worried about getting in trouble. One time I carved my initials in my desk, and I got in trouble that I could not get out of because they were my initials, and it was in my desk. I was not really a smart kid. I worried if I would be good enough in sports. I worried about Brad Olson. Brad Olson was a bully, and he lived in my neighborhood. When he was 10 years old, his voice had already changed. He was shaving regularly. Brad Olson wasn't his real name, but I changed it because he might be out there, and he might hear this sermon, and I still kind of worry about Brad Olson.

I remember worrying about getting in trouble with my parents. I remember having the thought...you know, they don't have parents they have to worry about getting in trouble with. I remember thinking how good it will be one day when I am grown up and I just never have to worry. I won't have teachers or parents to have to worry about.

Now Jesus was talking to a large group of people in the Sermon on the Mount, and He says here what I would tell you. My advice to you is to just not worry about your life...about anything. What is striking about this when you think about it is, think about that crowd, the people that Jesus was talking to. Do you think living conditions for them were easier or more difficult than living conditions in our day? They were more difficult. Most of them were incredibly poor. They lived on less than a dollar a day. They would be poor until they died, 95% of them would never be able to read or write. Many of them were lame or sick. They had no medicines. Plagues would come and kill up to a third of an entire city. A lot of them were slaves. They would never be free.

If you were a baby, the odds were you would not live past the age of 30. That was their world. If you look around this room, there are a lot of people here over 30. There are some people older than 40. But back in Jesus' day, 30 was about the average life expectancy. If you were going to do a chart of life in Jesus' day, I think you would have to say living conditions then were about here; and therefore, the anxiety factor was pretty high. You would probably say people's worry factor was about right here.

Now, over the last 2,000 years, living conditions have gotten a lot better. We are better educated, healthier, better resourced, cleaner, and freer, 20 times over than people were back then. So isn't it great that we don't have to worry anymore? That anxiety has just been pretty much eliminated from the human



condition? Or has it? Or maybe, oddly enough, has anxiety gone kind of like that, too?

There was a study done recently by a Harvard guy writing about how over the last 40 years the diagnosis of depression and anxiety is 10 times more common today than it was just 40 years ago. Even though by every objective measure, living conditions...healthier, better educated, wealthier, and so on.

Because now Jesus says, if you think more money, more health, more success...will free you from worry, you are in for a surprise. You will never get to the worry-free life by engineering improved circumstances...more wealth, better health. The only way is learning how to put your life in the hands of the Father...to let it go. Just let go of your life like the birds.

My favorite story about this is when we lived in Chicago, every year in the Spring time, there were a lot of Canadian geese around, and they would give birth to these goslings, and you would see these little, tiny, yellow, fuzzy balls all over the place. There was a lake, and one time, Nancy and I were driving around, and we came to this lake and there were 2 adult geese and 9 little goslings. One of the adults and all 9 goslings had their heads down and were eating as fast as they could, and the other adult goose was watching over the whole family. We used to sit there and look at them.

My wife said, "Isn't that just beautiful, to see how that mother goose is watching over her family as the father and all the little babies are eating." And I said, "Well how do you know it's the mother goose that is watching, because you don't know geese that well. Maybe it's the dad that's watching." My wife said, "No, no, it's always the same in every species. It's the mother who sacrifices her own comfort and her convenience while the dad just stuffs his face like all the kids do. It's always the same." And right when she said that, the 2 geese switched off, and the adult one that had been eating started watching and the one that had been watching started eating. And I was so grateful to God because I knew that was a Holy Spirit induced moment right there. Then both of the adults started eating and nobody was watching the kids, and it kind of shot the whole analogy.

Jesus said, "Take a look at the birds." Maybe there were some flying around right as he was teaching because he would often teach right out of the moment. "Look at the birds," he said. They don't plant seeds. They don't harvest crops. They don't store food. Now, there is nothing wrong with planting or harvesting



or storing. There is nothing wrong with working, but they don't do that stuff, and they still eat. How does that happen? Well, Jesus said it is because of God, because God is so good. It is not by accident.

He said, "Look at the flowers in the field." The phrase he uses there is not like roses that grow in a florist's shop or something. It is just wild flowers that nobody plants. They don't toil or spin. There is nothing wrong with toiling or spinning, but they don't do it, and they are so beautiful that the best-dressed, made-up human beings in the world are nothing in comparison. Why are they so beautiful? Where does that beauty come from? It comes from God. And Jesus says, "If God takes care of the birds in the air and the flowers of the field that are here today and gone tomorrow, then he will take care of you. He is watching over you." And people enter into this kind of life sometimes. Even though, sometimes, their circumstances are pretty difficult.

A friend of mine who I was talking to last week is from out of state. He is quite well educated, doing well financially, but he has been through some deep waters personally and felt like he needed a fresh experience of God. He started attending a church. It is an urban church, kind of small. Most of the people are very strapped financially, but what struck him was when they would get together, even though life is pretty tough for most of them, their joy level is really, really high. Their problems seem bigger but their anxiety seems to be lower.

He was telling me about different people in their congregation. One woman lives on \$600 a month. That is what she lives on. She got up in front of the church, and she said, "I want to tell all of you a secret. As soon as you get your monthly check, you take it down and you cash it and that same day, you bring your tithe down to the church and you give God your tithe. That is what I do." Only \$600 a month. She said, "God always takes care of me."

My friend said every time they gather to pray, one of the guys who had a very difficult life, would always pray the same thing, "God, I thank you for getting me up this morning because I wouldn't have gotten up if you didn't get me up. Thank you." Did you do that this morning? You know, a lot of the time I just think I get me up. I don't even think to be grateful.

I'll give you another one along these lines. Everybody do this for a moment. Everybody just swallow, just in your throat. Right now, just take a swallow. I talked to another friend this week who was telling me about somebody she loves



who is real sick and who recently improved enough that she was able to swallow some orange juice, and she is so grateful, so happy that she can swallow. I'm never grateful for swallowing. I just assume it.

Here is the thing about Jesus' life. He never assumed anything. Every time He woke up, He just thought, *God, thank you for waking me up for another day.* Every time He swallowed, he said, "God, thank you that my body is working again." Every time He saw a bird. Every time He saw a flower, He saw a good God at work. He did not get anxious over what might happen tomorrow. He lived a day at a time in the goodness of His Father, and so He brought a great gift to people.

This is a phrase I ran across a while ago. I don't know where it first started, but it describes in a wonderful way who Jesus was, and you can remember it from these 3 little initials...NAP...which stands for Non-Anxious Presence. Jesus was a non-anxious presence.

I'll give you a description of this. There is a group of people, maybe a family or at school, and there is a problem. There is a rumor of bad news, and one person after another hits the panic button, and pretty soon, everybody is anxious. Everybody is tense. Everybody is wired. Everybody is afraid. It's contagious. Then, they notice somebody in their midst who is not afraid, who is fully aware of the problem, not in denial, but this person is calm and able to think and plan and has this quiet confidence, and their spirit begins to spread. Everybody begins to calm down. They bring the gift of a non-anxious presence.

I'll tell you a modern day example of this. There is a football team in the San Francisco area named the 49ers. Twenty years ago, they had a rather celebrated quarterback. Does anybody remember his name? Joe Montana. He was maybe the greatest non-Chicago Bear to ever play NFL football. What was great about him, mostly, was not just his arm strength or his foot speed. He could be in the Super Bowl, 2 minutes to go, 4 points behind, life or death, win or lose, 80 yards from scoring, 90,000 people going crazy. They could just get in a huddle, and Joe would kind of just look at everybody, "Everybody calm down. Here is what we are going to do. It will be okay." And they would do it. They would all think, *Well, if Joe thinks it is going to be okay, it's going to be okay.* That is a non-anxious presence. Every group needs one. Every family needs one. Everybody needs one.



Here is the good news. Jesus says to you today, "Whatever your living conditions are, if you let me, I will be your non-anxious presence." He was in a boat one time with His friends, and a storm comes, and they all hit the panic button. They were all scared to death. Does anybody remember what Jesus was doing at that moment? Taking a nap. They wake Him up. "Jesus, we are all going to die. It's terrible. It's awful." Jesus says, "No, it will be okay." He looks out at the storm, "Peace, be still." And it is. And they look at each other. Who is this man?

Now Jesus says, "If you want to invite Me into your life and make Me your friend and your leader and your forgiver, your guide..." This is real important. You do this one day at a time. We get all worried about the rest of our life and try to figure everything out, and Jesus says, "Every day will bring trouble enough of its own. You just do this with Me, just today."

I'll give you a picture of this. My wife and I recently decided we were going to take dancing lessons. I was going to do this as a gift for my wife. I grew up Swedish and Baptist, and we were not a dancing people. I went to college where it was against the law to dance, but I've been married now 25 years so I guess it is okay. So, we decided to take dancing lessons. We signed up for a bunch of them. We have taken one so far. We had this terrific instructor who before we began, pulled us aside. "I have a very important question," this instructor said. "You are going to dance now. Who leads?" And there was silence. I knew the answer, but I wanted to hear my wife say it. A few more seconds of silence, and then kind of through gritted teeth, "He leads."

"And who follows?" Silence. "I follow."

It was hard for her to follow for 2 reasons. One reason is when you aren't leading, you aren't in control. It is hard not to be in control. The other one is when it comes to dancing, I'm a thoroughly incompetent leader. But Jesus comes and says, "Now when your day arrives in the morning, I am a thoroughly competent leader." So you wake up and you say, "Okay, Jesus, just for this one day, You lead, and I'll follow. And whatever I have to do in my relationships and my body and my health and my finances, Jesus, they are in your hands. You lead. I'll follow. Just for this day. I won't try to figure out the rest of my life. I won't try to solve every...just today. You lead. I'll follow." And Jesus says then, "I'll be this for you." People do this.

Now, this is real important. Jesus does not say, "If you follow Me, you will never have problems." Did Jesus have problems? Jesus had big problems. He



challenged sin. He challenged people's greed and materialism and religious exclusivism and pride and sexually mismanaged behavior. He was always getting in trouble. He ended up getting killed while He was a young man. He had big problems, and He said, "If you come follow Me, externally, you can expect to have big problems." He actually said, "If the world hates you, keep in mind, it hated Me first, but I have told you these things so that you might have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but don't worry, I have overcome the world." This is why He says to not worry. Not because you won't have problems.

It is so hard for us to get our minds around this, and I know how deeply this violates the appearance of the ways things are, but here is what Jesus is saying on the Sermon on the Mount. Do not worry because nothing that really matters is ultimately at risk. Don't worry because nothing that matters to you is at risk in this world. I'll give you a picture of this because I know how weird it sounds to us.

When our daughters were very little, I think around 5 and 3, we took them to a hotel with a pool. Do you remember when you were a little kid, how cool it was to go a hotel that had a pool? Nancy was in the room, but I was in the water with them, and they were taking turns jumping into my arms. Laura was jumping to me. Mallory was sitting on the edge of the pool, and she slipped into the water.

Now we had talked to the girls before about being careful. We had warned them of the danger of drowning. Laura was jumping to me, and Mallory slipped into the water. She was under for less than a second, but when I pulled her up, she was sobbing, and she cried, "I drowned, I drowned, I drowned." From her perspective, that was terrifying. From my perspective, it was actually kind of funny...kind of cute. I said to her, "No, honey, you didn't drown. I had you the whole time. You were always safe...so let's not tell Mommy about this..." I knew what she didn't know that she was never in danger, that her father had her the whole time.

This is what Jesus saw. I affirm it. I want to believe it the way He did. I want to believe it the way that He did. I don't believe it yet, but I want to, but He did. Death itself, every kind of loss is simply nothing to worry about because you are always in the hand of your Father and even when that moment comes, when death itself comes, it will be like Mallory dipping in the pool, and we'll come up, "I drowned, I drowned, I drowned," and maybe you did, but then the Father will say, "I had you the whole time." Jesus says, "The one who believes, who trusts



in Me, even though he dies, will live, will not taste death." Nothing is ultimately at risk.

Now, I know what happens is people hear a message like this and think, "I know Jesus said not to worry. I shouldn't worry so much. I feel bad about worrying a lot..." And then what they will do is go away and try really hard not to worry. Have you ever tried really hard not to worry? How's that going for you? Not so good, because you can't stop worrying by trying not to worry. So, I just want to lift that burden from everybody. That is not the Jesus way.

Paul puts it like this, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, with prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God, and then the peace of God will guard your hearts and your mind in Christ Jesus." The idea is, when a worry comes into your mind, don't feel guilty about it, don't think that your faith is inadequate, don't beat yourself up, just pray, cast that anxiety on Him.

What we are going to do in a moment is take a second offering in this service. I've never done one like this before. Only instead of giving God of our finances this time, we are going to give God our worries, because He wants them. We are going to write them down, collect them, and then we are going to celebrate together that God is a god that says you don't have to worry. We are going to pray right now, we are going to do that, and then we are going to celebrate.

Right now, you know what it is. What is your worry? What is your concern? What is gnawing at you? What makes you afraid? Maybe it is your health. Maybe it is death. Maybe it is a financial loss. Maybe it is your job. Maybe it is unemployment. Maybe it is another person. Write it down on this card. We are going to put this card in the basket, and we are going to give God our worries. It is kind of a simple way to practice what we want to do every day. So write it down. Cast your anxiety on God right now. Give it to God.