

Worry!

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[0 : 0 0] So please turn back to Matthew's Gospel and the main section that we're going to look at tonight is Matthew chapter 6 from verse 25.

The words of a song came back to me today and I don't think it's a very good song. The words are simply don't worry, be happy. I can't remember who sang it.

Don't worry, be happy. I think it has to be some pretty bad advice, really. I don't know about you. For me, life doesn't work like that.

It doesn't happen that one day you wake up and decide, you know, today I'm just not going to worry. I'm going to step out of worry because that's been my custom and you know I'm really fed up worrying.

I'm going to step out of it and I'm going to put on happiness as if it was that easy because for me and for you, I think, worry is a very real thing.

[1 : 0 7] It's something that comes naturally to us. Sometimes it feels like it's something that you can never get away from. Now Jesus, as the one who made us and who knows us, knows that about us.

So Jesus takes worry seriously and what I mean by that is he speaks about it in his great sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. He speaks about worry. In order to address that tendency that we have so often, not only to worry a wee bit, but to get enmeshed in worry, to get to the point where it can take us over.

And he wants to give us perspective. So this passage that we're going to look at is Jesus' advice on worry. In many ways, I also want to take a springboard from what we were talking of this morning.

If you are at church this morning, we were looking at the will of God, the big purposes of God, that God has this one will, this main objective and that is the salvation of a people.

This great plan from before the world's beginning that he would take a people to be his own and he would know them and he would love them. So therefore it follows that if that is his great purpose for these people, his ambition is that they would know him, then that should be their priority.

[2 : 2 4] That should be their singular focus and direction in their life. Now I mentioned the word ambition because in reading about this passage, John Stott had an interesting thing to say.

I was reading what he had to say. Very helpful. He would say that this passage, as much as being about worry, is about ambition.

It's about what goes on inside of our hearts to direct the motivation of our lives. And of course out of that flows what we think about, what we concern ourselves with.

And of course down that path lies very potentially a lot of worry and a lot of concern. So this is a passage that really asks the question of us, what is the main ambition, what is the main concern or focal point of our life?

And Jesus wants us to see that he doesn't want to say, don't worry, be happy. He wants to say, don't worry, but as we come to the end of the passage, seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

[3 : 28] Seek that big picture goal that God has for you primarily. That is the primary focus of your life. That is the primary goal to which he has made you and called you and for which he has given you assurance.

And he wants to make sure you have that perspective so that secondary issues are secondary issues. Now I want to say, as I mentioned, worry is a very real thing.

It's very difficult to speak about worry without sounding trite, without sounding just like we're just dismissing out of hand. I don't want to do that tonight at all. There are many real things that come up in life that cause us a lot of natural anxiety.

But I think that by looking at this passage and by heeding the advice of Jesus, it helps us to get perspective and priority. Hopefully we'll do so.

The passage works by emphasising first of all a negative and then as we get to the end of the passage a positive. So you'll see that Jesus starts off by saying, do not. So we start with a negative and that's where I want to go first.

[4 : 31] And in this negative instruction that Jesus gives us, he has first of all a couple of different propositions. So let's just notice them for starters. Verse 25, the first proposition that Jesus says, do not be anxious.

So there we go. Now that's straightforward advice. It's easy to understand and it's something that you're probably very familiar with. Don't be anxious. Don't worry. And the reason he gives for that is this main proposition, life is more than food and clothes.

Life is more than stuff. The things in your life that you're tempted to put as primary issues are not primary issues. Life is much more than that.

And so what Jesus is doing, just to clarify this, I think it's helpful just to the start, is that the type of worry Jesus is addressing here is that tendency we have to take particularly material things.

Again, I don't want to dismiss them, but surface things. Things about what we're going to eat or drink or where he suggests, things that make up the fabric of daily life and put them at primary place in our lives as the main source of concern that we have.

[5 : 47] So that's what Jesus is seeking to deal with primarily in this passage, that type of worry, that type of concern. And what he goes on to say in this passage is that these things ultimately, we could spend all of our lives making them our primary concern, but they wouldn't fulfill us because they're not our primary goal.

Your primary goal is to seek the kingdom. So the gospel teaches us, as Jesus has been calling people to himself as he delivers this sermon, calling people to himself because in him is found the source of all life and in him is found salvation.

In him is found rest for ourselves because we know our maker. And in him is hope for the future. You know if we try and just make up our future by ourselves, it's going to be difficult for us because who of us can assure our own future in material terms?

We can try and we can do a pretty good job of it sometimes, but only in him is there hope for eternity. And so in the gospel, only do we have this true assurance.

And in the gospel, do we have the only effective counter to the tendency that people often have to deal with the worry about material things?

[7 : 13] You know Christianity isn't the only religion or philosophy that says don't worry and don't worry too much about material things. There are lots of different people, books, ideas, groups that will say try and eliminate the concern for material things, things that kind of stress you out and get in the way and stop you receiving peace or a true sense of meaning.

But I think sometimes the way that we maybe tend or people suggest the way to deal with material things is just to say they're bad, get rid of them.

And what we do is we form a kind of unhealthy dualism where we say that material things are just evil, they just stress us out and get us there, we should just get rid of them all. But I think that's a really over simplistic and actually unhelpful way of dealing with it.

It's not a new idea, you could think back to a really, really ancient idea where the ascetics sought to get rid of anything that was distracting or material and live a very austere life with only the bare essentials and only then would you get to a really true pure spirituality.

And you could end up like Simon Stylites who ended up living most of his life on top of a pole and so that way can end in a kind of farce.

[8 : 46] And another way I think a more recent way, I went through a phase I remember reading a book called No Logo back in the 90s I guess and that was a book that really promoted the way of living that was the kind of anti-capitalist thing, get rid of all these big corporations and all these designer labels, we don't need them, they're bad, they're rubbish, throw it all out the window.

Now fine, there is a kind of freedom in that isn't there, we don't need corporations to tell us how to run our lives. But actually all that does sometimes is create a kind of reverse snobbery where we become so proud because we're not like all these other people who are so materialistic and all they worry about is labels and all the rest of it and also I think it just creates a new kind of legalism.

Well what we define ourselves by is our own new code of ethics that we're not concerned by all these designer labels, we've got rid of all of them and look how terrible our clothes are we're living in rags, it's just a new form of pride sometimes.

So ways of dealing with material issues, ways of trying to get rid of them can be so futile and ultimately so unsatisfying. But what Jesus in the Gospel offers is a way of understanding that these things aren't a primary, they're not even that important that we have to make them the biggest issue in our lives.

And what he does is Jesus shows us perspective, a good healthy perspective, a way of seeing him first and his provision which puts all these other things, these material things in their place.

[10 : 25] And I think that's a challenge for us isn't it, having if you like external or material concerns in the right place.

It can be easy for us, if you're a Christian, it can be easy for you to say my primary concern is not in stuff, in my job, in my things, in my car, whatever.

My primary concern is the Gospel. And I was at a talk recently and the person who was speaking was talking about stated desires and real desires where we say, yeah this is the thing that I'm all about, this is the thing that is the most important thing in my life.

By the way that we live, speak, act, do, betrays another way of thinking, another real underlying desire. And I think that can be so easy for us sometimes.

So there's a real challenge for us isn't there in terms of worrying about material things. We know we've heard a lot of times not to put external things, not to put chasing after this or that material thing as a primary focal point of our life.

[11 : 39] But so often it's so easy for us to step back into that as the thing that we're after, we want, that governs the way we think. And Jesus is really getting at here, what is the thing that governs our hearts and so controls what we think about?

What we concern ourselves with, the way we think. I remember in an old church I used to go to somebody saying she found it so easy to go to a prayer meeting and to come into that prayer meeting with all her concerns and the burdens of her heart and to lay them out before the Lord and then to walk out of the prayer meeting and take them all right there with her.

You know the way that we can do that, the way that we can say, well I know that I don't care anymore, these aren't the primary things in my life. But actually dealing with that and actually being able to leave worry and concern with the Lord is that attention for you, it is attention for me.

And so that first proposition that Jesus says, don't be anxious, life is more than stuff, is true but isn't it so hard on a daily basis?

Second proposition I just want to move to is in verse 27. Jesus says which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life.

[13 : 04] So the second proposition Jesus makes, taking this a little bit further is anxiety or worry doesn't work. Not only are you not to do it, he takes this if you like common sense approach and says well it doesn't even work.

Obviously in the realm of your life I said that you can try your very best to secure your future maybe in material terms and with your very life you cannot secure that.

You can try, you can take steps that will give you a healthier lifestyle and it will maybe prolong your life. You can't add to your life beyond the will of God, you don't know when the end of your days will come.

So Jesus says, he uses this one example of death but it applies doesn't it? Worry so often just doesn't work. Now we know that and that's why we I think become so frustrated with worry because we go around in circles concerning ourselves with things that we maybe want to have in our lives or things that are maybe real concerns but we seem to not be able to do anything about it and so it remains a frustration for us because we're powerless to secure the desire or the effect that we want.

So there's a genuine real frustration there. Now I just want to make a distinction. I think to say don't worry like with the song don't worry be happy can sound trite.

[14 : 35] People can give all kinds of bad advice to people who are worried but the Bible nowhere says or kind of encourages an attitude of well be carefree and just chill.

Don't worry too much things will be fine. That's not what's being spoken of here at all. One commenter says what is prohibited in this passage is worry not work.

So in other words it is important for us for you to be practical to be diligent to take steps in your life to secure what you need.

You need to work. You need to go out and be practical. You need to be diligent and all the different things that you have to do. So we're nowhere released from responsibility because we think well God's got it covered he'll just provide for me.

I don't really have to do anything. Proverbs back in the Old Testament is good on this. Let me read a couple of Proverbs. In Proverbs chapter 12 it says he who works his land will have abundant food but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment.

[15 : 48] There's a really common sense attitude to things there and what's being stressed when we again compare scripture to scripture and look at the consistent message throughout the Bible is that we are called to practical living.

We are called to take steps to look after what we need to get from our life. But and this is where the Bible is so wonderful and wise.

Proverbs 16 we read this. The lot is cast into the lap but it's every judgment is from the Lord. So in that same book is advice to be practical to be diligent and to work but also to understand that in your work the outcome of that work how much profit you will make and the benefit physical material that you will receive the Lord governs that he is over that and that the outcome of that is in his hands.

And you know that relieves us from the pressure of thinking that every outcome every possible attainment is all down to us.

We are called to work to work hard and to be diligent. So the Bible is a very practical book. So that distinction is really important that we are called to work and to be practical.

[17 : 04] And a book like Proverbs condemns laziness. Absolutely condemns laziness those who will just if you like lie in bed all day and say somebody else will give me my dinner tonight. The passage also up holds just to say that trouble is a real element of our lives. Again, not to dismiss genuine concerns that we have.

That's not what Jesus is saying and not what the passage says. The trouble is a real part of our lives. If you want to just skip down to the last verse of this section we're looking at, verse 34, Jesus concludes by saying therefore don't be anxious about tomorrow for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.

And then he says this sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. In other words, your days will have trouble.

There will come things into your life that are troublesome, that are difficult. So Jesus isn't saying don't worry because it will be a breeze and you'll have no pressure or trouble or things to deal with.

[18 : 13] You will have trouble but the question for the Christian is how to deal with it and how to proceed. You know how to move forward and how to have perspective and priority in the way that we approach things like this.

There are times in our lives when we face crisis because of health or you'll maybe know a time where you had no money at all.

Some of you may know that feeling of thinking I do not have any more money left in my bank account and we know and we should remember as well that there are many people throughout the world who face that on a very daily basis.

So for some people that's a problem isn't it? They say oh it's very well Jesus saying and Christians when they say to people don't worry. But what about the people who actually don't have anything?

Well as we're just remembering just to clarify again that Jesus is dealing with the kind of worry where maybe the people he was speaking to did have what they needed but they tended to slip back time and time again into a kind of materialistic worry where they just put the concerns of the day before them.

[19 : 25] So that's the kind of worry that Jesus is dealing with here. But the worry where there is genuine need is genuine. So obviously if you have absolutely no money that will be your priority.

And we should say as well that where there is genuine need in the world and in our city sometimes what we need to do is flip the question.

Sometimes we blame God or say well he's very unjust here. This is really unfair of God. All these people in Edinburgh have nothing but then we should ask ourselves the questions well how much do we have?

Because the way in which God works often in providing for people is through means and sometimes we are the means by which he will provide for somebody else.

By which their concern of having no food or no money to pay the electric or whatever it is is alleviated. So it is very important for us to consider our complacency sometimes.

[20 : 26] Sometimes we're very worried but sometimes we're very complacent and your complacency is so dangerous because it stops us seeing other people's need that we can help with.

And it's also important to stress that Jesus is concerned and God's concern is for the poor and for the needy. Jesus often speaks of his concern for the poor of those who do not have as we saw again this morning.

His miracles were often provisioned for and care for those who were sick and downtrodden and forgotten about by so many other people. Often the problem in our culture and in our society is inequality, human inequality where society where we don't care for those who need.

So I think that's an important consideration to remember. So the first proposition that Jesus makes is don't be anxious because life is more than food and clothes and then he goes on to say that worry doesn't actually work.

You know the example he gives is you can't add an hour to your life by worrying, it simply doesn't work. But the end of this section that is a negative if you like, don't be anxious.

[21 : 40] We have this wonderful resolution in these examples that Jesus himself uses, these illustrations from nature. And the resolution that we're given, verse 30, then in the end of verse 32 is that God is the provider of what we need.

God is the provider of what we need. So in verse 30, if God so clothes the grass of the field which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, well not much more clothes you or you of little faith.

And the end of verse 32, your heavenly Father knows that you need them all, all being all these material things, all these different things, different aspects of your life that you need.

Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. And you know Jesus says he can provide them. So the illustrations that Jesus uses are these beautiful natural illustrations.

He talks about the grass, he talks about the lilies. So the point of him using these illustrations is to say something that is small and something that is big.

[22 : 51] God can provide for the small thing. Well how much more can he provide for the big thing? He can provide for the natural thing. How much more can he provide for you?

And then he uses that almost rebuke by saying you have little faith in playing. Those who are listening to him often forget the fact that they are those who are made in the image of God.

Who God delights in. Who God knows everything about. Who God knows all their needs. He knows all the cares that they have and the concerns and the real needs that they have. And he's able, more than able, to provide for them.

But here's the point, let me just stress this. I think this is really important. I think in looking at these illustrations sometimes we kind of miss the point.

The point is that God can provide for these small things so he can absolutely provide for all of our needs. All the different things. And you can take that at face value, that God is able to provide for all the material things that you need.

[23 : 51] And he knows you need them. Baiting in mind that there are days of trouble. Baiting in mind that long life, whenever the end of your days is, isn't guaranteed. Baiting in mind all these things.

But I think the operative word or the primary point here is need. Here's the question, what is our need? What do you actually need?

The example of the lilies important, he says that God clothes the lily beautifully. Not even Solomon in all his splendor was arrayed like one of these lilies.

Aren't they beautiful? And doesn't God provide so wonderfully for these lilies? But here's the point, that's the lilies purpose.

To be beautiful, to be arrayed beautifully. It's a beautiful flower and we use it decoratively. But you need to then apply to yourself the question, what is your purpose?

[24 : 49] And this takes us right back to what I mentioned at the start, which links in with the morning sermon about God's purposes for your life.

Because God's purposes for your life are much more than being beautiful and being arrayed beautifully. So don't make the kind of, if you like face value application, that the lily looks stunning and has much to commend itself because of how good it looks therefore in material terms and success and all the rest of it, we must equally receive beautiful things from the Lord.

According to your need, according to the purposes that God has for you, he will provide for you. And what is that need? See the purpose that God has for you as a child of God, as one called from before the beginning of the earth, one called to know him, to know his forgiveness, to know his gospel and to know his grace and his future for you where he will take you to be with him so that you will see him face to face is to be one who knows the good news gospel and who is able to carry that and give it to others and bear testimony and grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus and walk according to the spirit and be a blessing to other believers around about you.

That is the primary calling to which he has for you. That is his primary goal for you and for your life. And so according to that purpose, he will provide for all of your needs.

According to however long his will is for you to live in whatever state he will provide for you. He will be able to provide according to your needs, according to his purposes, but he is to remember what are his purposes.

[26 : 49] What is the goal to which he is calling us? And so the point of thinking about that isn't to minimize genuine concerns that we may have, fears that you may have for this week.

It's not to say, oh, that doesn't matter. Forget about all that. It is important and you'll have to take steps to deal with that. The point is to say that in all of that, we are to be pointed time and again back to God Himself because He's the one who saved us and loved us and knows us and gives us all things.

God Himself is the one that we need. Let me read a verse from a Psalm. I'm going to turn to Psalm 73 and I'm going to read just one verse. Two verses.

Psalm 73, verse 25, whom have I in heaven but you and there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

Now that's a goal, isn't it, for a Christian to express that sentiment, to genuinely be able to say there's nothing on earth that I desire besides you, Lord.

[27 : 57] Verse 26, my flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. There's a primary goal, desire that we are called to.

So the first part of the resolution, if you like, of this passage is to say that God is the one who provides and He provides for your need according to His purposes for you. I just want to finish by looking at the positive.

I said we get to the positive. He starts by saying, do not worry that Jesus then ends this passage by saying a positive. What should we do then?

If we shouldn't worry, verse 33 says, Jesus says, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these other things will be given to you.

So that's the kind of ultimate counterpoint to the negative that we started off with. That's the real counterpoint. Don't worry. Jesus doesn't say don't worry, be happy.

[28 : 54] Don't worry, forget about it. Don't worry, just move on. Don't worry, seek the kingdom. Now we have to say, ask the question genuinely of ourselves, am I seeking the kingdom with all my heart?

Because of the gospel, because of the way Jesus has worked in my life, because He's given me new life, because of His mercy and His grace, do I then seek Him with my whole heart?

Is that the thing that guides the thought processes that I will go into this week? It takes us back to the start of the passage that we're at.

It answers the question, what's life all about? Remember I said, do not be anxious about your life, what you'll eat. So in other words, life is more than stuff. And this is really answering that question. This is what life is about for us, is it?

Tomorrow morning will our guiding thought be, how can I seek the kingdom this week? Now obviously you're not going to wake up and express it quite like that. But you know that along what lines do we think?

[30 : 05] What are the primary concerns or focal points that we have? The kingdom and God's righteousness. And it takes us back, the reason I read from the passage that Cori looked up last week, is because you'll notice that Jesus starts this section with therefore.

This all comes out of what he started saying, what we looked at last week. Verse 19, don't lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy.

Verse 20, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. There's your heart. There's your resting place. There's your security now in the middle of the whirlwind that you may be facing.

And there your heart will know peace with your Savior. There you will seek God's kingdom. That's what we're called to.

So that's the perspective that Jesus is advocating. And he's calling you on May 2 tonight. And you know, if you're a Christian and if you're in Christ's kingdom, trusting in Him, trusting in the Gospel, and if He calls you into this kingdom life and He calls you to be one who follows Him, then you are very rich.

[31 : 26] You're really very, very rich. We have every spiritual blessing in Him, in Christ, for the purposes for which He's called us, for those primary purposes, seeking His face, keeping in step with the Spirit, being those who testify to the Gospel.

All of those are His kingdom concerns. And for whatever part He has, whatever work that He has for you in that calling, He will provide everything that you need.

And you are very, very rich. You have a great Lord and Savior, and He is with you at all times to assist you in all those things.

So we are very rich in the Gospel. So just in finishing, I started by saying that Jesus takes worry seriously. He talks about it in this passage. He deals with it in order to help us deal with it.

I think we should take worry seriously too. I don't mean that we should go away and obsess about the things that we worry about in a sinful way.

[32 : 33] The ways in which, as Jesus is saying, we can get fixated on things that distract us from that primary purpose, or where there are things that are not to be foremost in our lives, but we make them the most important thing because we want them, and there we can go down a sinful route to take worry seriously because we are to see that that train of thought, that obsession, that preoccupation, what does it do?

It's not harmless, but it's actually a sinful self-reliance, self-dependence, or self-obsession. It's a way of saying, God, You can't provide for me this week.

I'm going to just deal with it all by myself. Or it's a way of saying, God, these other things are the most important things in my life that I want this week, and I'm going to just leave off worrying too much about Your Kingdom and Your Gospel and all the people that need to hear about it this week.

So we take worry seriously in order to deal with it, in order to have the right perspective, and to not let it dominate us, to not let it cripple us. I think that's what worry can do so often, isn't it?

When we allow it to become, when we allow it to dominate our thinking, and when we forget the Gospel and the way in which God can provide all that we need, it cripples us. It feels like we are the only ones who are able to deal with anything in our lives.

[34 : 03] And so we're advised, Jesus advises us to seek secondary things, not to seek secondary things as primary things. You know, He says in verse 32, we didn't look at that, but just briefly He says that that's what the Gentiles do.

In other words, that's what the people who aren't my followers in that context, aren't my believers. He says in verse 32, the Gentiles seek after all these things. See that word seek, that means they make them their priority.

That's what they're all about. All these other things that aren't primary things are peripheral things. They seek after those things, because that's all they have.

And Jesus says, you know you have so much more. Don't make those things your priority. Make sure the Kingdom and the righteousness of God, and the goodness of God, is our primary concern.

And so if God's purpose is so big, if God's plans are so wide, if His power is so great that He was able to affect that on the cross, as Jesus died and was then raised again, as He's realized this great goal, and as He's called you into His Kingdom for this great role of being one of His children, one of His followers, one of His workers in whatever way He has for you to go and serve Him, then have big, godly ambitions.

[35 : 38] Is that word again ambition? What's our ambition? Have big, godly ambitions, because He is able to do immeasurably more.

He is awesomely powerful, and He has a great Gospel, and a great work for many more people to hear about. Have godly ambitions, and then as we have godly ambitions, I think we will have proportionate secondary ambitions.

We'll be able to see what is an appropriate way to approach all the different concerns, worldly ambitions, jobs, needs, relationships, all of these different things that we have to deal with.

We'll have a proportionate way of being able to approach them and deal with them. We'll have a way of seeking wisdom from one another, seeking counsel from God's Word, because we do have to deal with these things, but we'll seek them proportionately when our ambition is primarily to seek His Kingdom.

Amen. I'm just going to pray when we're finished. Our Lord, we do ask that you give us perspective tonight and help us to focus on you, Lord Jesus, we know you are the one who is our Lord and our Saviour.

[36 : 56] You are the greatest thing for us to think about and to consider. You're the one who's given us assurance for the future. We seek to follow you in the way that we live now.

We seek to live out our lives according to your purposes. We seek to work for you, and we seek to call others to the Gospel message.

But so often it's the case that we get distracted. Sometimes for what are valid reasons, help us to deal with those things, Lord, and sometimes forgive us for things that are invalid and that are just distractions.

Lord, we ask that you would give us good perspective on these things and help us to have a great vision of your awesomeness and to have great godly ambitions.

We pray this in Jesus. Amen.