

Seek His Kingdom
Matthew 6:25-34

I wonder if people read the National Enquirer just so that they have something to worry about. What if the earth is stricken by a giant asteroid? What if we are invaded by space aliens? What if the Illuminati have an international headquarters in a bunker underneath the Denver airport, and what if they're the real reason why so much luggage goes missing there?

Of course we have some other worries that are a bit more realistic. What if the nuclear plant has a meltdown? What if the stock market collapses again? What if a tornado comes through and destroys my house? Such worries are within the realm of possibility, and they may cross our minds on occasion, but we don't tend to dwell on them – they're just not that likely to happen.

And then there are those other, more realistic worries – things that haven't happened to us yet, but they really could. You might lose your job. Your spouse may be healthy today, but she or he might get sick or be injured. Your kids or grandkids may be well behaved and attentive today, but what if they fall into bad company or get involved with drugs?

But however possible these devastating scenarios might be, if they haven't happened yet we can dismiss them from our minds, following Miss Scarlett's excellent advice – We won't think about that today, but think about it tomorrow.

But what about those worries that go to bed with you and wake up with you, the ones that are not based upon some hypothetical future, but the ones that grow out of our present experience? You worry about a boss you don't get along with. You worry about how much your kids are learning while going to school online. You look at all the things you have to do, and you worry that you can't get them all done. You look at your monthly bills, and don't see how they'll all get paid.

Or you worry about whether you'll have the strength and endurance to go on taking care of your ailing loved ones. You worry about your friends who are sick or in the hospital today. You worry about the progress of a disease you have, or the COVID numbers that seem to be rising. These are not problems to be dismissed lightly, with Scarlett's "Fiddle dee dee." What do we do about such problems that are impossible to ignore? What do we do about the problem of worrying about them?

Well, for starters, what did Jesus say in today's passage? "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" It's a good question. It really puts worry into perspective, doesn't it? For when you get right down to it, can worry really help anything? After all, just dwelling on the problems we face can't solve any of them, can it? Oh, as we worry our mental gears may be turning, but they are just as effective as the wheels of a truck stuck in the sand. I will not get any taller, and my life won't get any longer – in fact, none of my pressing problems will be solved just because I worry about them.

In fact, worry can actually make our problems worse. For when we work ourselves up into a lather about any given situation, our fears can keep us from thinking clearly about it. Our worries can thus prevent us from coming up with a solution. And all the doctors tell us that worry actually shortens our lives, as the stress from worry eats away at us. No, as Jesus tells us, worry does no one any real good.

So, we should not worry because worry is worthless (say that three times fast). But Jesus goes on to tell us that we should not worry because worry is needless. We should not worry because of the way God loves and provides for us.

Look around you at the birds, Jesus says. They don't sow seeds or reap a harvest and gather it into barns. But God takes care of them anyway. Look around you at the beautiful wildflowers, Jesus says. They don't pick cotton and spin thread and weave it into cloth. But God dresses them in the most beautiful of fabrics.

And as a good rabbi did in those days, Jesus argues from the lesser to the greater, from a small thing to a large one. If God takes care of the birds and the grass, how much more will He take care of His people, those who are made in His own image, those for whom He has shed His own blood? So, in the face of our loving, powerful God's ability to provide for all our needs, does it really make sense to worry?

Worry is needless and worry is useless. So stop worrying. Go and sin no more.

Is that all there is? I don't know about you, but as someone who really ought to be a member of Worrywarts Anonymous, I need some stronger medicine than this. I mean, I know that I need to stop worrying. But the critical question is, in the face of all my pressing problems, how do I stop worrying?

Well, Jesus says that we must first of all seek God's kingdom. And having such a kingdom perspective does indeed strike at the heart of most things we worry about. That's because, at the end of the day, most of our worries are about things over which we have no control. We can't control the reactions that other people will have to us. We can't control the number of responsibilities that will fall upon us. We can't control the progress of diseases.

No, we can't control any of these things – but God can. For God not only provides food for birds and flowers for plants. God controls every circumstance of every human life. God is the mighty king, ruling over every part of His universal kingdom all the time. The prophet Daniel records that even King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon realized and admitted this awesome truth:

“God's dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom *is* from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done’” (Daniel 4:34-35)?

No, as long as we try to control the circumstances of our own lives, we will continue to worry about them – because no matter how hard we try, we can't do anything about most of our biggest problems. But if we seek the Kingdom of God, if we acknowledge God's sovereign control over everything that happens to us and to our loved ones, then we are on the road to getting a handle on the worst of our worries. For we can take comfort that the Lord and Master of everyone and everything throughout space and time really is able to handle the source of our greatest fears.

So, seek the Kingdom of God. Take your worries and your problems to Him in prayer. Whenever you are tempted to worry about something, remember that God is in charge of that problem, not you. For the fact is that God is the God of whatever it is that worries you.

And you know, I've found it easier to put this sort of understanding into practice when I name my worries to God in prayer. When I worry about whether I will be able to get everything done, it helps me to pray, “God, You are the God of my time and of my schedule.” Whenever I look at the rising coronavirus numbers, it helps me to pray, “God, You are the God of viruses.” And whatever the source of your worry may be, God is the God of that, too.

So yes, if the fact is that none of us will ever be in control of all the circumstances of our lives, it's also true that God is in charge of everyone and everything. And we can live with less worry if we'll just remember that. If we seek His kingdom, if we remember that He rules and reigns over the worst of our worries, we can rest in His power and His love.

But Jesus also tells us to seek God's righteousness, doesn't He? And when we hear that, we might just start worrying again. For which of us always lives in righteous ways, always lining our thoughts, words, and deeds up with God's perfect will? And so, if we are truly honest with ourselves, we'll admit that we do not deserve God's mercy and love, that we do not deserve God's help with our problems. No, if we have to be righteous before we can stop worrying, all of us are in big trouble.

For so many of our worries flow out of our sins, don't they? If we have told a lie, don't we worry about being caught in it? If we've spread harmful gossip, don't we hope that the one we have talked about never finds out what we have said? And whatever secret, shameful habits we might have, don't we worry that they'll be discovered?

Or if we don't worry about our sins of commission, maybe we worry about what we've left undone. Maybe we worry that we are not doing enough to satisfy God or to earn His favor. Maybe we live with a vague sort of anxiety that we are not doing enough good things to help the needy all around us.

And the sad fact is that all our worry is actually a sin in itself. For whenever we are anxious, aren't we demonstrating a lack of trust in God to protect us and to provide for us? So, how can we say that we are seeking God's kingdom, how can we bow the knee before His throne of grace when we aren't fully trusting Him?

For remember that God's law makes not only behavioral demands on us. It also demands purity of thought and of emotion. God's law demands that we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. God's law thus

demands that we trust God and stop worrying. But who among us worrywarts can possibly live up to such a standard?

Hear the good news. Jesus says that we are to seek God's righteousness, not our own righteousness. And if it's impossible for us to become perfectly trusting and worry-free through our own efforts, the good news is that Christ's righteousness is only a prayer away.

Now, that may sound too good to be true, but it is. Christ offers His own perfect obedience, His own spotless, sinless life to all who will trust in Him. And so, if by faith we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, God no longer sees our sins, our fears, our anxieties, or our worries when He looks at us. Instead, God sees the perfection of His faithful, trusting Son, the One Who went to the cross in obedience to His Father, the One Who died to show His great love for sinners like us.

This is the righteousness we must have, if we are to live in accordance with God's will. And this is the righteousness we need if we are finally to overcome worry. For when the Father credits the righteousness of the Son to our account, He gives us a new life along with it. As we trust in Jesus as our Savior, he makes us new from the inside out. He gives us the ability to trust Him not only with our salvation, but even with the most difficult circumstances of our lives today. And as we trust Him more and more in every way, we will worry less and less about everything.

But here is the best part. If we seek Jesus' kingdom and His righteousness, God does more than promise that we will avoid worry. He says that all the things we need, our food and our clothing, will be given to us. That means we will not simply stop worrying about those kinds of things. God promises to take care of all those worries according to His riches in glory.

Now, this does not mean that everything we worry about will turn out the way we want it to. No, it's much better than that. This means that everything we worry about will turn out the way that God wants it to. And if He is our King and our Savior, that means everything will turn out for the best, for His glory and for our good.

So, how can we stop worrying? We will stop worrying when we stop needing to worry. And if we trust Jesus to be both our Savior and our Lord, we will have no need to worry.

So, let's trust our King to be in control of all our worries. Let's trust our Savior to give us His righteousness in spite of our worries. Let's trust our Master to provide everything we need in the face of our worries. And then we will be able to give no thought for the morrow – because we can be sure God's taking care of us.