

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday,
September 11, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

MATTHEW 6:25-34

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 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? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 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, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF GOD'S KINGDOM #28
BIRD WATCHING AND FLOWER PICKING

Intro: Video: 10 Years Ago (2 minutes 57 seconds)

It's been ten years. Ten years since that day. Some here don't remember September 11. They were either too young, or not yet born, and can't remember what life in America was like before that tragic day. Some here have been trying to forget September 11 for the past ten years, because the painful events of that day are almost too much to bear. Others say, “Never forget,” and the past ten years have included the personal investment of military service or volunteer hours or career changes. September 11, 2001 has been called the defining moment for a generation of Americans. While tomorrow's history is still being written, the lingering effect of the catastrophic events of that horrible day in American history have certainly been felt. We all remember where we were when we first heard the news. It was a typical Tuesday morning in the Schulenburg home. My wife, Cyndi was upstairs getting Breanna and Chris ready to go to school when I heard the news come over the radio that the first World Trade Center tower had been hit. I raced to the television set to see what was happening and called Cyndi and the kids downstairs. We couldn't believe our eyes as we witnessed the second World Trade Center tower being hit by a jet.

Americans all over the country began to worry about loved ones in New York and Washington D. C. We began to worry about the safety of our daily lives. We began to

appreciate the time that we have each day with our family. In the weeks that followed September 11, words like anthrax, terrorist, Al Queda, and Bin Laden became a regular part of our vocabulary. Churches were filled like it was Christmas Eve. A new breed of hero was born. And new fears about our economy began to emerge.

It has been a tense ten years in America. We are a country that has its guard up. For a time we responded as one nation under God. And in ten years, that initial unity has been replaced by finger pointing, division, and for some, a sense of hopelessness. News stories this past week have focused on the ten year anniversary of 9/11. They have focused on presidential debates and a presidential address about the economy. The jobless rate, economic downturn, and fears of new terrorist attacks have more than made their impact upon us. Worry is a word that could be used to describe many Americans today. People who have never worried about a thing are now living stressed out, defeated, worried lives.

What are the top worries in America today? In the aftermath of September 11, people worry about safety like never before. People worry about their families, and the world that their children are growing up in. People continue to worry about their finances, the future of social security, and their 401K's. And, our nation continues to worry about the safety of our schools. That is just a list of the top worries. Worry takes many different forms and often paralyzes its victims with a lack of energy, a hopelessness, and true fear.

But, worry is not a new phenomenon. In fact many of us are born as natural worriers. In a profound passage of Scripture in which Jesus was teaching a huge crowd of people at the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed the topic of worry. Let's see what Jesus had to say about worry, as recorded in Matthew 6:25-34.

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 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? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 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, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

The Sin of Worry

Jesus' teaching on worry naturally divides itself into four main thoughts. The first is found in verse 25. It is Jesus' introduction to the remainder of his teaching on worry, and it shows us the sin of worry. Looking again at the verse:

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"

Why do I call this the sin of worry? Isn't that a little bit harsh? No it's not. Jesus was very clear to his listeners that we are not to worry. He didn't say, "If you feel like not worrying today, that would be a good thing." He said, "Do not worry." This isn't the only place in the Bible where we are commanded not to worry.

Philippians 4:6 says, "6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

1 Peter 5:7 says, "7 Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you."

Did you catch the truth of the words in those passages? If not, let me tell you something awesome, not only has Jesus commanded us not to worry, He has told us that if we will allow Him to, He'll carry the burdens for us! Now, I am anticipating that at this point some of you are saying, "Yeah, but Jesus can't work my job. He doesn't have to work for people I do. He doesn't have to live with my work stress. He doesn't have my deadlines." Maybe some of you say, "Jesus doesn't live in my family. He doesn't have to live with my spouse." Or, "He doesn't have to live with my parents." You might say, "It sounds really nice that Jesus wants to carry my burdens. But, it's not practical, Brian. If Jesus were really to carry my burdens and take my anxiety, He would have to be right here – and not here in the sense that God is everywhere, but right here. I need to see Him. I need to experience Him walking through this thing called life with me."

Those are valid feelings. You might be here today, and your life might be harder to live than anyone else in this sanctuary. But, Jesus will show us, all too soon, how our arguments don't hold water. Whether we like it or not, Jesus has commanded us not to worry, and He will not command us to do something that is impossible to carry through on.

The Senselessness of Worry

In verses 26-32 Jesus moves from showing us the sin of worry to showing us the senselessness of worry. It is here that Jesus uses three illustrations from everyday life to show us how futile worry really is.

He begins by talking to us about birds. “26 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? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”

I’ll never forget my sixth grade year of school. Maybe you can relate to the feelings I had as a sixth grader. It was an awkward time of life. For the first time in my life, friends were disappointing me. They were hurting me with their actions and words. Things were changing in my appearance, and my self-confidence was shot. God gave me a gift that year. He brought Ms. Bingham into my life.

Now Miss Bingham had a way of teaching that made her special. She loved teaching, and she knew how to make her teaching come alive. When she taught us about the stars and the moon and the sky, she didn’t just tell us about solar systems and planets, and atmospheric phenomena. She taught us about the creative God who made the stars and moon and sky. She made our God of Wonders come alive by sharing the incredible things that He had made. There was section of science that she particularly loved to teach. It was the section on birds. Every sixth grader had a bird report, which they were responsible for. Mine was the Red Tailed Hawk. I learned more about the Red Tailed Hawk that year than I ever thought possible. Ms. Bingham wanted us to learn about other birds too, so, every classmate gave their reports out loud. And then Ms. Bingham would bring out one of the great birds books illustrated by the Audubon Society. These books exposed us to the wide variety of beautiful birds that existed in the world. She told us about the hundreds of types of birds that she had personally witnessed with her binoculars and bird book in hand. Then she would tell us about the God who loved birds. Whether it was singing her favorite hymn, *His Eye Is On The Sparrow*, or reading us verses like Matthew 10:29, Miss Bingham communicated God’s love to us. Listen to Matthew 10:29, “29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.”

Birds are incredible. The Bible speaks about over fifteen different types of birds; including peacocks, and owls, storks, and turtle doves, eagles, and hawks, and my favorite, the pelican. Birds don’t worry about where their food is going to come from. God provides for them. Even though birds don’t have the ability to store away the food like we do, God provides for them. God will do the same for us. The food that Jesus speaks of is representative of our physical needs. We Americans don’t worry about the physical needs we have, as much people in other countries. But, the worry is there from time to time. The worry tends to come when we lose a job, or our financial plans don’t go as we would have liked. God wants us to understand that he understands. He loves us. He knows about it. We are more valuable to God than birds are. Scripture is full of verses that talk about the way God views man in comparison to the rest of creation. We are created in the image of God. He loves us. He’s constantly watching over us. He wants us to know that. Jesus ends his discussion of birds by asking us, “27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” He reminds us that it is futile to worry about our physical needs.

Jesus uses a second illustration from everyday life to show us the senselessness of worry. This time he uses the illustration of flowers, and the aspect of worry about material needs. Pick up the reading at Matthew 6:28, “28 And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 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, O you of little faith?”

Here Jesus uses the example of beautiful lilies, to show how much he cares about you. If he clothes them, he'll certainly clothe you. Why worry about your material possessions? It's as if Jesus is saying, “If I take care of making flowers beautiful, then I'm going to take care of clothing you. I'll take care of your material needs. Why? Because if I put a ton of thought into flowers which in the end are going to die and be burned in a fire, I am going to put more time into you.”

In Psalm 139 the psalmist wrote, “13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, 16 your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. 17 How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! 18 Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.”

God is watching. He will take care of His children.

A third aspect of the senselessness of worry is shown here as well. Jesus shows us in verses 31-32 the type of people that worry. Jesus says, “31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.”

Jesus slaps us in the face with the realization that worry has no place in the life of a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. It is the one who has not trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation that worries, because there is no hope for God's intervention. Those who know Jesus Christ as their Savior have the greatest source of strength imaginable available to us 24 hours a day, seven days a week. God doesn't desire to see us give up when the going gets tough. God wants us to trust Him to meet our needs.

Solomon said in the book of Proverbs that “25 An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.” A believer in Jesus Christ sends the wrong message to the world when we are bogged down with worry. I have some friends who were going through a tough time a while back. A job loss required them to trust that Jesus will truly meet their needs. They sent an e-mail out during that time period which included a quote from a Mark Schultz CD. It said, “Faith is coming to the edge of all you know and trusting God will give you something to stand on or you will be taught to fly.” I like that. Instead of

wasting time worrying this family has said, “We will trust that God knows. He knows what He is doing, and He wants to teach us something through this experience.” So, the senselessness of worry is shown to us by birds, flowers, and pagans.

The Solution to Worry

The solution to worry is the next lesson that Jesus gives. It is found in verse 33. Matthew 6:33 is one of the most famous verses in all of Scripture. It says, “33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Doesn't sound like the solution that we would expect? Is it true that following the principles that God has described in this verse can stifle worry? I believe so. We live in a very egocentric culture that celebrates the “what's in it for me mentality.” Living first and foremost for ourselves will bring worry every time.

I have defined worry as the inability to see God for Who He is. It is the direct result of putting ourselves in the place that God belongs. Worry occurs when we care about our own needs more than we care about the needs of others. It occurs when we put ourselves first, and all others come after us. Our needs become most important, not our neighbors'. Our desires become most important, not God's. Damaris Carbaugh, the great soloist from the Brooklyn Tabernacle was interviewed a few years ago on the Christian radio program *Words to Live By*. She said, “We humans are the only ones not doing what God created us to do. God created the birds to sing, and they sing. He created ants to work, and they work. He created humans to worship Him, and have fellowship with Him, and we worship ourselves.”

How do you get rid of worry? We get rid of worry, when we put God back in the place He deserves to be in our lives. He deserves first place and no other. There is an old acronym that I learned in Sunday School as a child. It's the JOY acronym. Jesus First, Others Second, Yourself Last. That is the way to find joy. What is your life telling other people? Do you have joy? Or is your life a big ball of stress?

Jesus showed us what it means to put His kingdom first on a regular basis in an interaction with Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus. The story is found in Luke 10:38-42. Read with me.

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

It wasn't bad for Martha to be hard at work, but it was bad for her to judge Mary for listening to Jesus. Mary was doing what was good, because she was seeking Jesus first. She wanted to drink in everything He said. She wanted to be totally immersed in His teaching. She was seeking first His kingdom, and his righteousness.

The Seriousness of Worry

Jesus taught us a fourth lesson on worry in verse 34. It is simply the seriousness of worry. As if we hadn't caught it yet in his teaching, Jesus again repeats the admonishment to not worry. "34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own," are the words Jesus has for us. These words seem impractical to our "plan-ahead" world. Jesus isn't saying do not plan ahead. Jesus is telling us, don't worry about the future. Take care of the things that need to be done today. We don't know how many days we have left on this earth. To waste our time worrying about the future is a shame. We need to plan for the future, but not worry about it. Our lives need to show the world the difference that Jesus can make in a life. Does Jesus want His followers to look different than the rest of the world? You bet he does. If we live lives filled with worry what message are we communicating? This is the third time in ten verses that Jesus uses the command "Do not worry." Do you think He is serious about it?

Teaching on worry in the church is kind of like teaching about the speed limit. We are all guilty of breaking this command far too often. And because of it, we tend to not take it serious enough. Christians worry. Christians have stress and anxiety. It's just that like other areas where Christians struggle these sins need to be given over to God. Remember what 1 Peter 5:7 said? 7 Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

I have a little exercise for you to try this week. The first is for married men. The next time you go to the store, and you see a bouquet of fresh cut flowers, pick some up for your wife. Instead of bringing home the stresses and worries of work, bring home a reminder that we don't need to worry. Even King Solomon in all his splendor wasn't dressed as beautiful as those flowers you'll bring home.

The rest of you; pick up a book on birds this week. Find those old binoculars that have been stored away for years. Pull them out. It's warming up a little bit. Maybe you can be adventurous. Bring your book and your binoculars to the park, and look at the birds. Look at the birds that God has created, and remember, they don't worry about their food. God provides. He takes care of their every need. He will take care of you. It's time for a little bird watching and flower picking. And it's time to cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you. I don't know about you, but I can't think of a better place to put those fears.