

Matthew 6:33-34 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday! So what did that worry get you???

We come today to Jesus’ concluding words about anxiety given in the Sermon on the Mount, and to the end of a major division in this sermon.

Chapter 5 centered around the kingdom citizen’s relationship to the Law, and concluded with a provocative summary statement in verse 48:

“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

In the same way, Chapter 6 also concludes with a provocative summary statement - **today’s** Scripture consideration. This chapter has focused on the kingdom citizen’s relationship to his God, most recently dealing with trusting God and not being anxious in regards to provision. In summary of this teaching Jesus gives us this memorable summary in verse 33:

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

In a moment we will look at this more closely, but first note that Chapter 7, the final chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, will move to a third key focus, namely the kingdom citizen’s relationship to others in 7:1-12. And this section will also conclude with a third memorable, provocative summary statement in 7:12:

“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” (We call this the “Golden Rule.”)

I have entitled this third and final message on trusting in God rather than worrying, “The Angst of Anxiety, part 3 – Fresh Focus!” We have previously looked at the lesson of the birds and the flowers. And last week we looked at the challenge of growing our faith from “little faith” to “mustard seed faith.” And now Jesus concludes this consideration with a fresh and deeper look at how we must not worry, but trust God more.

This “fresh focus” comes in two specific, practical admonitions:

- (1) SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS and
- (2) DO NOT WORRY ABOUT TOMORROW (focus on today).

Let’s meditate on each in turn. And rather than hearing and considering them as well-worn, well-known Scriptures, try to approach them as new “friends” with fresh meaning for the soul.

SEEK HIM FIRST

Yes, we are to not worry. Yes, we are to trust Him. And trusting Him will drive away worry, as worry and trust are mutually exclusive. But the “fresh focus” here is to **SEEK HIM**. I think you will agree that seeking Him is more far-reaching than trusting Him. Seeking is actively, passionately and persistently looking for every way and every opportunity to know God more. And seeking Him “first” speaks of this becoming and continuing to be my number one priority for life – before self, before others, before needs, before wants.

We’re not talking here about seeking God to find Him for salvation. Yes, that usually takes an active, passionate and persistent search as well. But again, Jesus is talking here to Christians – those who are already kingdom citizens – and he urges, yes commands us to give Him a lifetime search for greater relationship.

The apostle Paul expressed this “search” for greater relationship in this way:

*Philippians 3:7-14 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be **found in Him ... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus ... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***

And wise king Solomon in writing to his earthly son in the book of Proverbs, expressed this “search” for God and His righteous wisdom in this way:

Proverbs 2:1-5 My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God.

What both Paul and Solomon describe here is **what might be called a “desperation” for God and for His wisdom and ways.** And certainly they describe a lifetime search for what Paul calls of **“surpassing value”** and Solomon calls a **“hidden treasure.”**

Is this your passion? Is it mine?

Most of our “searching” in life is trying to get by, earning money, finishing the chores, making it through the day without a major mishap and hoping to do a few good things along the way. This is what the Bee Gees called in their hit song from 40 years ago in 1977 “Stayin’ Alive.” That’s what a lot of people are just trying to do – “stayin’ alive.” But this is not seeking God first.

KINGDOM AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

These two go together and cannot be separated. if you are seeking to promote God’s kingdom rather than just your own, you are doing what is right, or practicing righteousness. And conversely, if you are seeking to please God and do what is right in His eyes, you are putting His kingdom first.

So Jesus’ provocative summary of how we are to better our relationship with God is this: seek that which furthers and promotes the kingdom of God and does what is pleasing to in God’s eyes.

OK – super practical. The first check I write, or if you prefer, the first “bill” I pay is my tithe (tenth) to the local church. This is the “storehouse” of God’s provision, as referred to in Malachi 3:10 – the house of worship where I am most active in participation. This is where I am most blessed and most serve to be a blessing. Then the next checks I write or next “bills” I pay are those missionaries or Christian organizations that God has called me to support within my means. These would be my “offerings” above and beyond my tithe. Sometimes these are monthly commitments and sometimes they are one time gifts, as we are able and so led. This is the way I (and we as a couple) personally assure that I/we “seek first His kingdom and righteousness” in our finances.

Again – super practical. I keep a calendar of most all my major activities – appointments, meetings, ministries, recreation, family commitments, study times and even fun extras. And I plan in such a way that there is significant priority scheduling for things of the kingdom, including my own study and times with God. Now you might say this is “easy” for me because I am a pastor, paid to do these spiritual activities. Yes – some fall more naturally because of my calling – but I still need to be sure my calendar is prioritized around “seeking first His kingdom and righteousness.” And you can be sure that I am a believer in church attendance and involvement being a high priority for the kingdom citizen who strives to seek God first!

Again – super practical. It’s not just about money and scheduling. It’s also about being open and sensitive to each activity or meeting I’m involved in as a potential opportunity to represent God. As pastor David and I were meeting last week, it was he who reminded me when I mentioned “representing God” that the word literally means to re-present God. To represent God is to freshly present Him to my world through my person in whatever activity I am engaged in. This is helped by a

quick but sincere prayer before each encounter of activity asking God for sensitivity to the opportunity to represent Him in word or deed or response. This is another way to **“seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.”**

Conversations, whether brief or extended, are opportunities to “seek first His kingdom.” Look for ways to comfortably insert the name of God or Jesus into your conversation. Be sure you are **“blessed”** rather than **“lucky”** or **“fortunate”**. This might stimulate a God conversation. Insert a sincere compliment or smile or encouragement into the encounter. Let it be known that the **“good”** thing you have done is really a **“God”** thing and that the helpful deed is given in the **“love of Jesus.”** Don't force it, but let it become natural and second nature that you are a God's representative.

And in context, we are to seek God's kingdom and righteousness above the needs of food and clothing. But Jesus promises that when we His children put God first as priority in every area, He will surely take care of our needs.

We remember that Solomon prayed not for wealth and long life, but for wisdom to discern God's truth. Because of the priority Solomon gave to God, God gave not only to Solomon the wisdom for which he asked, but also the wealth and long life.

We also remember that though both Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, were followers and close friends of Jesus, Martha was found to be busy with important but mundane things, while Mary was resting at the feet of Jesus seeking to know Him better. For this priority, Mary was commended and Martha was challenged to better priority.

FOCUS ON TODAY

The final verse of Matthew, Chapter 6, is a fresh look at the subject of anxiety. Jesus has already taught not to be anxious about needs which God would surely provide for his children. But now He addresses another aspect of worry – that of what the future will bring. This is super-practical God wisdom: focus your effort and concern on today! Live in the present, giving your all and priority to making the present count for what most matters to Him in attitude and focus.

Remember the quote I gave you from a couple of lessons ago: ***“Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it **only saps today of its joy.**”*** It is as if Jesus is saying that God **“allots”** or allows a certain amount of trouble for each day, but it is always something we can handle (1 Cor. 10:13). There is even a bit of humor injected, in that the implication is – **don't worry about tomorrow, for today has enough to worry about!**

And remember that concern over a pending problem is not worry if it is turned into problem solving. Seek the counsel you need, weigh options and plan, even invest, for the future – **but don't worry about it.** A song I learned long ago said: ***“I don't know what's around the corner, Lord, but I know that You'll be there.”***

And that's true confidence in the future. Remember that the manna God gave the children in the wilderness was only good for the day they gathered it. There was no need to gather for tomorrow (except in the case of the Sabbath). The same is true for stress – **no need to stress over what hasn't even happened yet.** God's promise is that new love and mercy will unfold on the morrow.

We all love the hymn, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.” It's chorus comes from the little book of Lamentations, where Jeremiah writes words that will close out our considerations for today:

*Lamentations 3:22-23 **The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness!”***