The Constitution of the Kingdom

A 33-Session Journey through the Sermon on the Mount & the Sermon on the Plain

SESSION TWENTY-FOUR — Do Not Worry: Consider the Lilies

Part Five: The Kingdom and the Heart · Texts: Matthew 6:25–34; Luke 12:22–31

The Texts

> **Matthew 6:25–26** *Therefore… do not worry about your life… Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air… your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*
>
> **Matthew 6:33–34** *But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow… Today's trouble is enough for today.*

The Shadow of Mammon

Last session, we watched Jesus take money off the throne. This session, he turns to money's shadow — worry. And the very first word tells you they belong together: "therefore." Because you cannot serve God and Mammon, therefore — do not worry. The anxious heart and the greedy heart turn out to be the same heart. Worry is simply what serving money does to you: it promises security and delivers dread, forever.

Money always claimed it could cure our worry, and it never could — because the problem was never the amount in the account; it was the trust in the heart. So having dethroned Mammon, Jesus turns to the anxiety it left behind, and he speaks into it some of the tenderest words in the whole Sermon. Not a scolding. A bird. A flower. And a Father who already knows.[1]

Let's search the Scriptures together.

A Word of Care Before We Begin

Before we take one step further, hear this, because it matters. "Do not worry" has been used as a bludgeon against anxious people — "just have more faith, stop worrying, quit being afraid." That is not what Jesus is doing here, and we will not do it either.

Jesus is not shaming anyone who struggles with anxiety. For many of us, anxiety is a real and heavy thing — sometimes a genuine medical condition — and it deserves compassion, and care, and help, never a rebuke. "Do not worry" is an invitation to trust, not a command to feel calm on demand, and it is certainly not a substitute for the help some of us need and should never be ashamed to seek. And Jesus is not being naive about real need; he is not telling the hungry to stop caring about food — he is the one who taught us to pray for daily bread and to

[1]Unless noted, Scripture is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue), the base translation for this course. Matthew 6:25–34, with a close parallel at Luke 12:22–31. The opening "therefore" (6:25) ties this passage directly to the teaching on Mammon (6:24): anxiety is the shadow of serving wealth.

feed the poor. So hear everything that follows as a gentle invitation, held out with open hands — never a weapon.

The Word Behind the Worry

It helps to know what kind of worry Jesus means. The word is not ordinary, healthy concern — the kind that leads you to plan, to work, to provide responsibly. Jesus is not against any of that; the birds he is about to point to work hard all day finding their food. What he names is something else: the corrosive, faithless anxiety that tries to secure the entire future by our own frantic control — the fretting that eats you alive and accomplishes precisely nothing. It is the anxiety of a heart that does not believe it has a Father.[2]

And notice the first thing Jesus says about it: "is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" Worry has a way of shrinking your whole life down to survival math — what will I eat, what will I wear, how will I make it — until you forget that life is so much more than that. Anxiety is a thief that steals the largeness of life and leaves you counting pennies in the dark.

Look at the Birds

So Jesus points out the window. "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." Watch the argument he's making. It is not "be lazy like the birds" — birds forage from dawn to dusk. It is "the birds don't hoard, they build no barns to hedge against tomorrow, and still the Father feeds them." And then the turn: "are you not of more value than they?" If God sees to the sparrow, how much more will he see to his own children? It is an argument from the small to the great: look how he cares for the least of creatures, and then dare to believe he cares that much more for you.

And he adds a plain, almost wry observation: "can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" Worry is not only faithless; it is useless. It changes nothing about tomorrow. All it actually does is steal today — and, if anything, shorten the very life you're anxious to protect. It is a tax you pay on a disaster that usually never comes.

Consider the Lilies

Then he points to the wildflowers on the hillside. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these." These are weeds, really — here today, and tomorrow gathered up and thrown into the oven for fuel. The most temporary things imaginable. And God clothes them in a beauty that outshines a king. Do you feel the weight of that? God does not provide the bare minimum for the flowers. He does not give them plain green and leave it there. He lavishes

[2] "Worry" (merimnaō) is not ordinary, responsible concern—which leads to planning and work; Jesus does not commend idleness, and the birds forage—but corrosive, faithless anxiety that tries to secure the future by one's own control. It is also not a rebuke of those who suffer anxiety as a mental-health condition, which is real and deserves compassion and care; "do not worry" is an invitation to trust, not a demand to feel calm, nor a substitute for the help some of us need.

glory on things that will be kindling by the weekend. Our God is not a stingy provider; he is extravagant. "Will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith?"[3]

And catch that last phrase, because it is gentler than it sounds. Not "you of no faith." "You of little faith." Little-faiths. It is almost affectionate — the coaxing of a parent to a frightened child, not the condemnation of a judge. Jesus is not scolding you for the smallness of your faith; he is tenderly inviting the little faith you have to grow, by looking — really looking — at how carefully your Father tends the birds and the flowers and the whole watched world.

The Difference a Father Makes

Then Jesus names what is really at stake. "Do not worry, saying, What will we eat? or What will we drink? or What will we wear? — for it is the pagans who strive after all these things." The frantic, anxious striving to secure everything ourselves is the mark of those who do not know they have a Father — who believe, deep down, that they are orphans in an uncaring universe and had better grab and hoard and control while they can, because no one is watching out for them. But you are not an orphan. "Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." There it is again — the Father who already knows, from back in the prayer. The whole question of worry comes down to this: do you believe you are an orphan securing yourself alone in the dark, or a child, held and known by a Father who has not once looked away?

Seek First the Kingdom

And now the pivot of the entire passage — one of the great verses of the whole Sermon. "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Here is the actual antidote to anxiety, and notice it is not "relax" or "think positive" or "try to feel calm." It is a re-ordering of priorities. Seek the Kingdom first — make God's reign the organizing center of your life — and the frantic pursuit of everything else loses its grip on you. And do not miss "his righteousness," because we learned back in the fifth session that the word means justice — a world set right. So "seek first the kingdom and its justice" is not a retreat into private, spiritual calm; it is the pursuit of everyone's flourishing. Anxiety turns us inward, onto our own survival; the cure turns us outward, toward God's reign and God's justice for the world.[4]

And hear "all these things will be given to you as well" rightly — because it is not a prosperity promise. Jesus is not saying "seek God and get rich," and he is not naively promising that faithful people never go hungry; they sometimes do, and the Sermon is never naive. He is saying that when first things are truly first, the Father who feeds the birds sees to what his

[3]The arguments from birds (6:26) and lilies (6:28–30) reason from lesser to greater: if God feeds the birds and clothes the wildflowers more gloriously than Solomon, how much more his own children. "You of little faith" (oligopistoi) is gentle—not "no faith" but "small faith," coaxed to grow.

[4]"Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (6:33): the antidote to anxiety is re-ordered priority, not positive thinking. "Righteousness" here carries the sense of justice (dikaiosynē; see Session Five)—the Kingdom sought is a world set right, not a private spirituality. "All these things will be given" is not a prosperity guarantee but the trust that the Father who knows our needs provides, often through the Kingdom community that shares its bread (6:11).

children genuinely need — and, very often, he sees to it through the Kingdom community that shares its bread. Remember: it is "give us our daily bread." In the family of the Kingdom, "all these things" flow as we care for one another. So seeking the Kingdom first and being fed are not two separate things — a Kingdom-seeking people is exactly how God feeds his hungry.

One Day at a Time

And Jesus ends with the most practical anti-anxiety wisdom ever spoken: "do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." Because that is what worry almost always does — it reaches into tomorrow, borrows all of tomorrow's troubles, and drags them back into today, so that we carry two days' weight on one day's strength. Jesus says: stop. Stay in today. It is the manna again — gathered fresh each morning, enough for the day, never hoarded. You do not have to face tomorrow yet; and when tomorrow comes, so will the grace for it. You only ever have to live one single day at a time, and today's grace is enough for today's trouble.[5]

Freedom for Others

Put it to our thread, and notice how even this most inward struggle turns outward. "Seek first the kingdom and its justice" is, at its core, a prayer for others — the cure for my private anxiety is bound up with the pursuit of a world set right for everyone. And there is a plainer connection still: the anxious, self-securing heart cannot be generous. You cannot open your hand to your neighbor while it is clenched shut in fear for yourself; trust is what unclenches the hand. Freedom from worry is freedom to give. And "give us our bread" means we were never meant to secure ourselves alone in the first place — we are held in a family that shares, so that my trust in the Father and my care for the neighbor are one single movement. So ask with me: what am I anxiously trying to secure all by myself — and could I hand it to the Father? And whose real, material worry am I being called to help answer? *Freedom for others may cost us the illusion of control — what can we lay down?*

Around the Table — For Discussion

- Worry is called the "shadow of Mammon." Where does your anxiety and your relationship to money seem to feed each other?
- "Look at the birds… consider the lilies." When has really noticing how God tends the world quieted something in you?
- Jesus says "you of little faith" gently — not "no faith." How is that different from the way worry usually gets talked about in church?
- "Seek first the kingdom and its justice." How might re-ordering your priorities loosen anxiety's grip — more than just "trying to relax" ever could?
- Freedom for others may cost us something. What are you clutching out of fear that you might be able to open your hand and give?

[5] "Today's trouble is enough for today" (6:34): the manna wisdom of daily dependence (see Session Twenty-One); worry borrows tomorrow's burdens into today. Compare Exodus 16.

This Week — A Practice

Two movements. First, hand over one worry. Name the single thing you are most anxiously trying to control right now — and each day this week, when it rises, deliberately hand it to the Father: "you know I need this," and then return your attention to today. Just today. Second, seek first. Choose one Kingdom thing — an act of justice, of generosity, of love — and put it first this week, ahead of your anxious striving, and notice what it does to the worry. And hold this gently: if anxiety is a heavy or a medical weight for you, none of this is a substitute for the care and help you deserve — seek that too, and without a shred of shame. Trusting the Father and getting real help are not enemies; they are friends. Then bring back what you found. This Kingdom, like all the rest, is learned in the doing.

Looking Ahead

Next session we step into the seventh chapter — the home stretch of the Sermon — and Jesus turns back to how we treat one another, with a word we love to aim at everyone but ourselves: "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged… Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own?" We'll ask what Jesus does and does not mean by "judge not" — because it, too, has been badly misused — and how to see clearly enough to help, once we've dealt with the log.

Benediction

So go this week and lift your eyes. Look at the birds; consider the lilies; and dare to believe that the God who clothes the weeds in glory and feeds the sparrows their supper has not forgotten you — you, who are worth so much more. Hand him the worry you cannot carry, and take up only today. Seek first his Kingdom and his justice, and trust him with the rest. And if fear has a grip on you tonight that will not simply let go, hear this above every other word: you are not an orphan, you are not alone, and it is not weakness to reach for help — your Father sees you, and he loves you, and he is nearer than your next breath. Blessed are the little-faiths who lift their eyes and trust, for they will find the Kingdom, and everything else besides.

Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.

Blessings,
Pastor Mick Finch

SESSION TWENTY-FOUR

Introduction Video Script

Single presenter, to camera · target 5–6 minutes · warm, steady, unhurried

[Begin still.]

Welcome back to the table. Last session, we watched Jesus take money off the throne. Today he turns to money's shadow — worry. And the very first word tells you they belong together: "therefore." Because you cannot serve God and Mammon, therefore — do not worry. The anxious heart and the greedy heart turn out to be the same heart. Worry is just what serving money does to you: it promises security and delivers dread.

Money always claimed it could cure our worry, and it never could — because the problem was never the amount in the account; it was the trust in the heart. So having dethroned Mammon, Jesus speaks into the anxiety it left behind, and he uses some of the tenderest words in the whole Sermon. Not a scolding. A bird. A flower. And a Father who already knows.

[A word of care — gentle, up front.]

But first, hear this, because it matters. "Do not worry" has been used as a bludgeon against anxious people — "just have more faith, stop worrying." That is not what Jesus is doing, and we won't do it either. He is not shaming anyone who struggles with anxiety. For a lot of us, anxiety is a real, heavy thing — sometimes a genuine medical condition — and it deserves compassion and care and help, never a rebuke. "Do not worry" is an invitation to trust, not a command to feel calm on demand, and it's no substitute for the help some of us need and should never be ashamed to seek. And Jesus isn't being naive about real need — he's not telling the hungry to stop caring about food. So hear all of this as a gentle invitation, held out with open hands, never a weapon.

[The word behind the worry.]

It helps to know what kind of worry he means. Not ordinary, healthy concern — the kind that makes you plan, work, provide. Jesus isn't against that; the birds he's about to point to work hard all day. He means something else — the corrosive, faithless anxiety that tries to secure the whole future by our own frantic control, the fretting that eats you alive and accomplishes exactly nothing. It's the anxiety of a heart that doesn't believe it has a Father. And notice the first thing he says: "is not life more than food?" Worry shrinks your whole life down to survival math — what will I eat, what will I wear — until you forget life is so much more than that.

[Birds and lilies.]

So Jesus points out the window. "Look at the birds — they don't sow or reap or gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feeds them." Not "be lazy like the birds" — birds forage all day. It's "they don't hoard, they build no barns against tomorrow, and still the Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" If God sees to the sparrow, how much more to his own children? And he adds, almost wryly — "can worrying add a single hour to your life?" Worry's not just faithless, it's useless. It changes nothing about tomorrow; it just steals today.

Then he points to the wildflowers — weeds, really, here today and thrown in the oven tomorrow — "even Solomon in all his glory wasn't clothed like one of these." God doesn't give the flowers the bare minimum — he lavishes glory on things that'll be kindling by the

weekend. Our God isn't stingy; he's extravagant. "Will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith?" And catch that — not "no faith." Little faith. It's almost affectionate, a parent coaxing a frightened child, not a judge condemning. He's not scolding your small faith; he's inviting it to grow, by really looking at how carefully your Father tends the world.

[Orphan or child.]

Then he names what's at stake. "The pagans strive after all these things" — the frantic striving to secure everything ourselves is the mark of those who don't know they have a Father, who believe, deep down, they're orphans in an uncaring universe and had better grab and hoard while they can. But you are not an orphan. "Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." The whole question of worry comes down to this: do you believe you're an orphan securing yourself alone in the dark — or a child, held and known by a Father who hasn't once looked away?

[Seek first.]

And now the pivot — one of the great verses of the whole Sermon. "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." The antidote to anxiety isn't "relax" or "think positive." It's a re-ordering of priorities: seek the Kingdom first, and the frantic chase after everything else loses its grip. And don't miss "his righteousness" — which, from session five, means justice, a world set right. So it's not a retreat into private calm; it's the pursuit of everyone's flourishing. Anxiety turns us inward onto our own survival; the cure turns us outward. And "all these things will be given" is not a prosperity promise — not "seek God, get rich" — it's the trust that the Father who feeds the birds sees to what his children need, often through the Kingdom community that shares its bread. "Give us our bread." A Kingdom-seeking people is exactly how God feeds his hungry.

[One day at a time, thread, practice.]

And he ends with the most practical anti-anxiety wisdom ever spoken: "don't worry about tomorrow; today's trouble is enough for today." Because that's what worry does — reaches into tomorrow, borrows its troubles, and drags them into today, so we carry two days' weight on one day's strength. Stay in today. It's the manna again — enough for the day, gathered fresh, never hoarded. You only ever have to live one day at a time, and today's grace is enough for today.

So here's our question this week — freedom for others: what am I anxiously trying to secure all by myself, and could I hand it to the Father? And whose real, material worry am I being called to help answer? Because a clenched, fearful hand can't give — and trust is what unclenches it. Two things to practice. First, hand over one worry — name the thing you're most anxiously controlling, and each day when it rises, hand it to the Father and return to today. Second, seek first — put one Kingdom thing, one act of justice or generosity, ahead of your anxious striving, and watch what it does to the worry. And gently: if anxiety is a heavy or medical weight for you, none of this replaces the care you deserve — seek that too, without any shame. Trusting God and getting help are friends, not enemies.

Next time — we step into chapter seven, the home stretch, and "do not judge." The speck, and the log, and a word we love to aim at everyone but ourselves.

[Slow. Land it.]

For now, go and lift your eyes. Look at the birds; consider the lilies; and dare to believe that the God who clothes the weeds in glory and feeds the sparrows their supper hasn't forgotten you — you, who are worth so much more. Hand him the worry you can't carry, and take up only today. And if fear has a grip on you tonight that won't let go, hear this above every other word: you are not an orphan, you are not alone, and it is not weakness to reach for help. Your Father sees you, and he loves you, and he is nearer than your next breath.

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