

Do not worry

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[0 : 00] Have you ever had what's called a final demand letter? Yes. You have? Yes.

It's the sort of thing you don't want to get.! You don't want to seize your bed.

So you're worried. Maybe it's for a substantial sum of money. The sort of money you haven't got in your bank. And as you share this with family and friends, well, what sort of responses might you get?

People might just laugh it off. Don't worry, it's probably a mistake. Or hopefully you might have someone with some sympathy.

You can get alongside you and say, don't worry, don't worry. Or somebody who's more concerned, maybe it was your parent, they might say, you mustn't worry.

[1 : 25] Or someone might be helpful and say, don't worry. I'll lend you a bit. What about a bit of crowdfunding? That seems to be the way of getting money these days.

If you're short of a bit of cash, some crowdfunding. But what if you have that final demand letter in your hand? And instead of talking to your friend or a family, what if you were to bring that to the living God?

What do you think he might say to you? Well, it's really quite remarkable to see that in the Bible, God has a great deal to say about this kind of subject.

And I just want us to pause and just be very grateful that we have such a God who is concerned about someone getting a final demand letter.

How unlike the gods that are fabricated by men and women. The God of the Bible is startlingly remarkable in his concern for those he's made.

[2 : 43] But what if the God came to us to speak to you about this? In this passage, we have the Son of God and the Son of God's own words.

And Matthew is careful to describe the setting. Jesus Christ is about 28 years old. He's been some months into his public ministry.

He goes up onto a hill, the north end of Galilee, probably near Capernaum. And we have a picture of those he's just called. The fishermen have just been called.

And the disciples. And it talks about crowds, crowds of people. Vast number of people gathering around to hear what this man has to say.

Because we know the secret, don't we? He's not just a man. He's the Son of God. He's come from heaven. And he's come with something to say. And even something to say to poor, frail people like us.

[3 : 59] In this particular discourse, he has much to say about how to live. We're doing a series at the moment on how to live.

And Jesus Christ has much to say about how to live. Love for our enemies. Giving to the needy. Judging others. It's part and parcel of our daily lives.

This material. And in the passage that we read, there is a very extensive section which probably in your Bible is headed. Do not worry.

It's the, probably the fullest teaching given in the Bible on this subject matter. Although, you'll find plenty of other verses as well.

But this is deep and it's comprehensive. And I hope it will be helpful for us. Because the final demand letter looks pretty threatening. But here is one with greater authority.

[5 : 08] At the very end of the discourse, Matthew chapter 7, verses 28 and 29, we read, When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching.

Because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law. We know instinctively when we encounter people with authority, there is just something about their manner,

something about their way.

And wherever Jesus went, he went with authority. Even in bleak, difficult and discouraging situations, the authority of Jesus Christ shines through.

I'm thinking of him standing before Pilate. And who's in control of that situation? From every human perspective, the authority lies with this Roman governor.

But the reality is, the authority is lying with a prisoner. So how healthy and necessary it is for us today, as we read these words, to recognize that they do not come from just somebody who is giving some good ideas, some good advice, but they come with the authority of the Son of God.

[6 : 47] He has something most important to say to us. And what we're doing today is to note and receive the authority of Jesus Christ. So I want this morning to tackle the issue of worry.

Because we all worry. This is a universal problem. Some of us are more driven to it by our own personalities or by the circumstances of our lives or by past experiences that may have seared us in a certain way that makes us quite nervous and uncertain.

But we all worry at some point or other. We worry more in the night, the day, because the night is always a more threatening time, isn't it? We worry more when we're alone than when we're with others.

We tend to worry more when we're quiet than when we're busy. But we all worry. So Jesus is addressing a universal issue when he says to the crowds, this, do not worry about your life.

Do not worry about your life. Matthew 6 and verse 25. Do not worry about your life.

[8 : 15] But we ought to go further and say that he's especially speaking here to his followers. If you go back to the beginning of the passage in Matthew 5, you see his disciples are there.

This is not addressed only or even primarily to people who are not the followers of Jesus. It is actually addressed to people who are following Jesus Christ.

However, vaguely and uncertainly, they are following him. They're on his side. And so I think we ought to say here that Jesus has something very important to say to Christians who worry.

Where does worry come from? We can say that worry comes from a broken relationship with God. It's a result of the fall.

But as a result of the sin of Adam, our natural, close, trusting, and provided for relationship with God has been totally damaged.

[9 : 31] And worry is just one of the many evidences that we live in a world which is under God's judgment. There is a curse as a result of the fall.

And part of that curse is that you and I worry. And we're used to it. We grow up with it. But I want you to notice also that Jesus is not speaking about all our worries.

He's only speaking about those that concern life needs. So look again at the passage. Do not worry about your life. What you will eat or drink or about your body, what you will wear.

Now this may sound quite strange to us because we don't live, most of us do not live in a subsistence economy. We do not live in a situation where we're very concerned about what we might eat the next day.

It's very interesting hearing Joel saying it's a simple life in Cambodia. Our life is more complex and in a sense much more protected, isn't it?

[10 : 47] But the Lord Jesus is not just using hyperbole there. He's not looking for the one person in the crowd who is in that desperate situation.

But there were many people in that crowd who really didn't know if the harvest did not come in, what would they eat? And Jesus is addressing those life needs.

But we might extend that to say that there would be other issues that equally come into that issue of life need. Like health. Health is a very big issue for all of us.

Because however much we might fight against it and feel that somehow science and technology will overcome it. We get ill. And we die. And it is absolutely natural and typical for us to be concerned about our health.

We are concerned about tomorrow. Jesus has something to say about that as well. In verse 34. We do think about tomorrow. We do spend a lot of time actually thinking about what is coming up.

[11 : 58] And we are concerned and we worry about our families. We worry about our children.

How often people say, I am so worried about the sort of world that my child is growing up into. We worry about the government in this country.

We worry about education. We worry about law. We do get concerned about these matters. These are everyday things for us. But what Jesus is not talking about is luxuries.

So I hope that you are not going to try and find some comfort in this particular passage about whether or not you have chosen exactly the right cruise to go on into the fjords of Norway.

Okay? Because I do not think this is actually about that. You may not have got the very best deal for that. And I have to say, even though it does consume a lot of people's minds, Jesus is not concerned here about worrying whether Brighton and Hove Albion are going to stay in the premiership this season.

I know this is a big issue. But it is not the subject matter of this particular conversation. That is what I would call an ineligible worry.

[13:18] But worry is pointless. Has worrying ever changed anything? Jesus says it, doesn't he? Verse 27.

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? I haven't done the math. Let's say you are 65 years old. What is one hour extra on the end of a 65 year old life?

It is ridiculous. And Jesus says you can't do it. You can't make it happen. Not by worrying. This point is straight forward. Worry is pointless.

You all know it. Has a complete sleepless night of worry made any difference to your life situation? And it's destructive.

Worry distresses and upsets us. What should we wear? It's not said in a calm and measured way, but one of deep concern and anxiousness.

[14:26] It makes us unhappy and it makes everyone else who hears us unhappy as well. Over anxiety becomes a mental illness, sometimes treated by drugs which don't deal with the root problem and can have unpredictable side effects.

Worry is exhausting and debilitating. A sleepless night of worry wrecks and disables us for the next day. Time draining. We spend hours in fruitless worry which incapacitates us from productive living. Jesus knows all this as well. And isn't it wonderful that as we read this passage, we read the heartbeat of the Son of God who knows us intimately.

Let me suggest some solutions to worry.

So verse 32. Of how some people deal with worry. The pagans, the heathens, those who don't know the God of Israel, they run after all these things.

[15:41] That's what we do. That's how you kind of solve your worry problem. By rushing around. Looking here, there, for resolution.

Running around. It's very graphic, isn't it? I think it's rather a good description of how we can get. Or we can avoid and deny and delay the issue by various diversions.

And denial is a very common habit, isn't it? When we're facing a situation. And I know I've been with people who, when they get a letter like that, final demand or a tax bill or something, it just goes in a pile.

It's sort of buried away and it's just not dealt with. And we can smother it. So substances seems to be a way of dealing with our worries.

Drown your sorrows. Or you might try mind control. Power of positive thinking. There's always plenty of books on that subject. But anyhow, let's hear Jesus' authoritative words this morning.

[17:02] Because I don't think he offers any of those as solutions. The first thing he says here in verse 25 is this. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life.

I just wonder what tone of voice he's using there. Thinking of that friend or family member that I was talking to about at the beginning. What kind of voice would Jesus have used about that?

I think he speaks with authority here. And compassion, but with authority. One of the commentators translates this.

Do not have this bad habit. He's saying to people, do not have this bad habit. This might sound insensitive. Or it might perhaps be very encouraging because Jesus is about to tell us, you don't need to have this habit.

He doesn't say, I'm sorry you've got this. He says, don't worry. It is Jesus who not only understands the problem of men and women, but has come to provide a lasting solution.

[18:11] That is the person who says, do not worry. And therefore, rather than getting cross and grumpy about such a strong word, we're coming to the one who gives not only the command, but also the solution.

It's well worth us to keep on listening. But that's how Jesus starts, do not worry. And he goes on to say, is not life more important than food and the body more important than clothes?

What do you think he's getting at here? Firstly, that in our worries, we tend to make the particular worry more important than anything else in our lives.

It's out of context and proportion. The resolution of this worry is the key to my happiness.

And Jesus says, no, no, there is much more to your life than your particular worry topic. Don't we generally find that out once the worry goes away?

[19 : 36] And secondly, all of us are more than flesh and blood. We have immortal souls and one day new bodies.

So a comparison has to be made. And the Bible is very regular in making this comparison. The scales are immensely weighted on the side of eternity.

So Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4.18, So we fix our eyes on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

And he encourages us to use the same scales in our lives. And to be saying to ourselves, in the situations of our life, and this is the first step. What you're going through at this time is a temporary issue.

But there is an eternity that all of us are going to face. And Jesus makes it very plain in his life teaching that there is an eternity to be one.

[21 : 04] There is an eternity that we need to be sure about. There is an eternity that we need to be able to look forward to. And that we are to invest. That's why he says in verse 19, Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

There is an investing that needs to take place in this life in heaven. Do not worry.

Put things in perspective. Thirdly, the God who provides. Jesus now speaks about the birds of the air. Maybe the birds need to fly above him.

He says, look at the birds of the air. 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.

Birds are very needy, and yet God supplies for them. Or an even more extreme example. You find in verse 28, See the lilies of the field.

[22 : 20] What are the lilies of the field? Seems to be they are actually just sort of wild flowers. They are not something special. We think of lilies now, don't we? Sort of quite expensive, sort of very dramatic flower.

But that's not what this is about. This is about sort of the everyday. So that where these people were, there would be around about them these small wild flowers.

And so common and so expendable. So in those days the poor people would use dross from the field to fire their ovens.

And they would just gather this all up in a great heap for fuel. And Jesus says, I just want you to stop and think about the fact.

God the Creator looks after these. And then he goes on to say, and he's very careful of this.

[23 : 27] He's saying right. God is actually your heavenly Father. For the birds and the flowers, he is their creator.

But here in verse 26, Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. He feeds them as a creator.

The same one who is your heavenly Father. And the point is this. If God the Creator looks after the birds and flowers so beautifully well, how well will he think about and care for you?

Because God is not only our maker, but we are his children and he is our Father. Isn't that an absolutely transforming thought?

And how right and necessary it is that as much as we might rejoice in the knowledge of God as creator, that we should never stop there, but go on to say that this God is also our heavenly Father.

[24 : 41] And notice Jesus does talk about the fact that he is a heavenly Father. He is our Father, but he is also a heavenly Father, which gives to us the idea of the place of affection and power.

Human fathers do their best, but with limited resources. Human resources. But we have a heavenly Father with no limitation on what he can do and provide for us.

And in another place Jesus comes this up. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

There is some perspective. 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? And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid. You are one of the many sparrows. And so we come to the pivotal verse, which is verse 33.

[26 : 00] Here is the action, the right action.

And I think we need to look at this very carefully because this is one of those verses that trips off the tongue very easily and is often used in prayer and so forth.

But just look at exactly what Jesus says here. And you need to ask the question, why has he said this rather than something else? Of course. Of course.

Of course. Up till now has been a sort of a question of attitude. Now don't worry. Get some perspective. Remember who is looking after you in your life.

These are all things of attitude. But now there is something to do with action. There is some action required here. Jesus says seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

[27 : 06] Is it curious that Jesus... Why should the answer to worry be seeking? It sounds as if we need to find some difficult to find treasure.

Seeking, searching, hacking our way through a jungle to get to some sort of El Dorado destination. Well, initially yes, because energy and desire is needed to become a Christian.

If you are not a Christian here today, you do need to put energy and desire into it. You need to put yourself in the place where you can hear the voice of God. And express your desire to God.

And that is necessary for us to enter the kingdom of God. But what about Christians?

The burden of this message is for Jesus' followers. They are already those who have found the pearl of great price. They bought the field as it were. They have experienced the grace of God.

[28 : 13] And yet Jesus says to his followers, you need to seek. If you are going to be released from worry, you need to seek.

I suggest that this is an idea of a deliberate and energetic embrace of the kingdom of God.

And its values. Prioritizing a servant-hearted welcoming of God's reign and rule in our lives.

How might that work out? How might that work out? How might that work out? This might be sort of clever words I've just used here. But how might that work out? What is this about? Well, I think it is about living each day and each moment of each day in such a way that we are calling upon our heavenly Father to bring his kingdom to bear upon our life situations.

So why not pray for the number 5A that goes from Hangleton to Brighton, that last you get on that bus, that the kingdom of God might be better expressed upon the means of transport.

[29 : 36] And as he says, whereas you have to work as well. What a great prayer. And so often I fail to do this, but when I do it makes a difference.

And I fail to do it, just to be asking that God's kingdom should be present in my workplace. And that I should be a willing servant of that kingdom. And that the ways of God should be more clearly known in the hospital, in the school, in your university, in your lecture room.

Well, what an exciting thought. That God is not only the God who we pray earnestly might be present with us on a Sunday morning, but we pray with such urgency also that he might be the God who actually comes in and reveals his kingdom in a strong way the everyday of our lives.

It is a transforming kind of thought, isn't it? You know, here we are this weekend and it's very easy to us feel we're a little flock.

The tide's against us. Everything's running the wrong way in this city. There's darkness all around us and so forth. But here we've got a secret. And the secret is that our Heavenly Father is a king upon his throne.

[31 : 07] And he has an authority and a rule and a reign over this city. This is not a no-go area for our Father. He owns it.

These people are responsible to him. One day they will have to give account at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ.

All the cards may be stacked up in their favour as it appears. But this is not the reality as God sees it.

And it is in this very discourse that Jesus prays the Lord's Prayer. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. It's the prayer. It's the prayer we pray now. And it's not just the prayer for the coming return of the Lord Jesus Christ eventually.

[32 : 06] But it is that now his kingdom should be more manifest in the world that we live in. The real world that we live in.

And I think on an individual level, this is what Jesus is encouraging us to be thinking like. To seek. And to search for the way of the kingdom in the situations of our lives. That's an interesting thought, isn't it?

How might God's kingship be more demonstrated in the areas of my life? What would that look like? Well, here is another phrase that we cannot separate. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. [33 : 11] And again you might say, well, what's righteousness got to do with you? But in God's economy, there is no division.

There cannot be any separation between the coming of his kingdom and righteousness. The two go hand in hand. The ways of the king are righteous.

The ways of his servants, the servants of the king are righteous as well. The righteousness we need to have is not only the righteousness of Jesus Christ to become his servants in the first place. And praise God, that's a gift of grace. But the righteousness, I believe, that is being referenced here is actually about character and behavior. As the rest of this sermon on the mountain is all about. We cannot be those who pure heartedly enjoy the blessings and provisions of God. Unless our attitudes and lives embrace the attitudes and behaviors of the kingdom.

[34 : 28] That's a long sentence, so I'll say it again. We cannot be those who pure heartedly enjoy the blessings and provisions of God's kingdom.

Unless our attitudes and lives embrace the attitudes and lives and behaviors of the kingdom. That's righteousness. When we put ourselves consciously before the king every day with freshly cleansed lives, we are in the finest place to receive the care of a king who is also our father.

We are in such a fine place to be able to detect his handiwork, to see him at work, and to be able to acknowledge that and therefore give praise and glory back to him.

And so Jesus says at this point, if you do this and you live in this fashion, all these things will be given to you as well.

Is it as well? Because the main thing is to be in his kingdom. The main thing is to be living as his servants.

[35 : 45] Jesus says, if you're in your place, this will come to you. Not as a reward. There's other places for rewards. This is just a natural outworking of the fact of being the children of the heavenly father.

The greatest blessing is the kingdom and by grace to be a part of that. But as well, the needed things of life will be given to us in a timely, full and sufficient way.

And in the world to come, please turn to Revelation 22, verse 3.

Revelation 3. We read, no longer will there be any curse.

Isn't that a most satisfying thought? Said at the very beginning that worry is a part of the curse.

[36 : 58] No worrying in heaven. Because there won't be any more curse. We'll be in the presence of the king.

The kingdom will have fully come. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the lamb will be in the city.

And his servants will serve him. And they'll do it beautifully. And they'll do it well. And they'll do it with his presence. And they'll do it with gladness. And meanwhile, we're just getting ready for that moment.

We're preparing for it. Dress rehearsal time. The kingdom of God has not fully come. But we're looking forward to it.

And every day, we're asking for its greater outworking and presence and reality in our daily lives. Now, may God bless this to you, brothers and sisters.

[38 : 03] May God bless this to you. Because we all worry. And as I look around, I know, I know you all have life situations which are tough.

But this is the word of God. And this is the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is his word. And he may have other things to say to you, but he certainly has this to say to you.

And it is for your blessing and benefit. And I ask you just to seize it and enjoy it and put it to the test. And ask God in your praying that you might know something of that joy and reality.

I had it on my heart. And I'll just try this. The very end. We're just coming to an end here. But I just think it would be very nice if you just wanted to turn to a neighbor or a friend.

And just to have a gentle share in prayer just for three or four minutes together on this topic. So that we could say, we've not only heard the word of God, but we've actually brought it to the Lord in our prayer.

[39 : 18] Do you think that's possible? Try that. Maybe one or two people or two or three together. And we'll finish up. I'll draw it to a close at 25 past. Let's pray if I pass.

Thank you.