



A Life Without Worry

Ever get a piece of advice that seemed painfully obvious?

"Just be yourself." "Make your bed." "Look both ways before crossing the street." You could probably think of a million more.

At first glance, Jesus' words in these verses kind of sound like that. "Do not worry." Well, duh. Who wants to worry?? When was the last time you woke up and said, "I can't wait to feel anxious today!" Nobody *wants* to worry, nobody really *plans* to do it.

And yet we do it anyway.

That's where things get interesting. Because when Jesus says "Do not worry," he is not giving advice. When he says it for the first time, in the Greek it's an imperative, fancy way of saying a command. You could actually translate that verse, "I order you not to worry."

Why is Christ speaking so strongly? Especially when he is talking about an emotional response that we often think of as involuntary?

As we go through these verses for today, we will see that Jesus does not give this command as a drill instructor. Instead, he uses these words to do surgery on your heart. To remove your worry and pain and anxiety by dealing with it right at the source. And by replacing it with something infinitely better.

To get started, we need to understand *why* worry is such a bad thing. I recently heard a pastor who explained this by drawing a connection between our worries and an old folk tale. I'm sure many of you have heard the story of Hansel and Gretel. At one point during the story, the children drop bread crumbs on a path so that they can find their way back home from the woods, but end up finding the house of an evil witch.

The pastor connected that picture to our worries by saying this. "Your fears are like breadcrumbs. Follow them and you'll find the house of the witch."

Let's spend a few moments doing that. What are you afraid of? What worries keep you up in the middle of the night?

Maybe you worry about *belonging*. You agonize over the impressions that people have of you, obsess over awkward moments or interactions. Even if you're not overly self-conscious, that worry can come about as you think about your reputation, or even the legacy that you want to one day leave behind.

Maybe it's *security*. You look at the headlines and see a world out of control. And your personal life doesn't seem much better. You live in constant fear of losing your job, losing your health, and no matter how hard you work at either one of those things it never feels like enough.

I think that there's one even more common than that. When Jesus spoke to the people originally, it was at a point in time where you often needed to worry about having clothes to wear and having food to put on the table. So what happens when you live in a culture like ours today, where we rarely if ever worry about basic survival? You worry about *time*. You have regrets about not getting enough time with people you don't see anymore. You worry about having enough time with people around you right now. But all that worry ends up making you controlling of others – of their schedules, their lives, the things you do when you are together. You try to hang on to people so tightly that you end up pushing them away.

There's a common thread in all three of those big worries. Know what it is? Control. *You desire to be in control of your own life. You don't want to entrust it to somebody else. Your sinful nature doesn't want to entrust it to God either. You want to be your own master, your own king, and you set up your life to give yourself the illusion of control as much as possible.*

Worried about belonging? It's because you can't control how other people think and feel about you.

Worried about time? It's because you are not in control of how much time you get with any other person, or even in this world.

Worried about security? Well, that's because every life crisis is terrifying. Why? Because it strips away the illusion completely, and forces you to face the truth that *you have never been in control of your life not even for a second.*

That's actually why Jesus starts off our reading by talking about money – money gives you the illusion of control better than just about anything else. But it still won't last, and it won't satisfy. If you think you are in charge of your own life, you are stuck in a fantasy world. And that's no way to live.

As kind hearted and gentle as these words of Jesus are, they cut deep. But thankfully, Jesus doesn't just diagnose your problems. He also points to the solution. READ v. 33.

A couple definitions are in order, because you can't seek something if you don't even know what it is. First up, the kingdom of God. What is that? It's not a physical place. Here's the way the catechism describes it: "God working in our hearts..." Notice in that definition, GOD is the one doing all the work. Not you!

Next we need to take a look at righteousness. The definition: sinlessness, or moral perfection. At first glance, that sounds like bad news. After all, nobody's perfect! The Bible agrees with that too: "No one is righteous, not even one..." this is something you don't have and cannot get for yourself! But here's the good news. Righteousness is something that God gives to you. For free.

What does that mean? It means that we know what Jesus is NOT saying. He is not saying "Work hard enough and God's kingdom will come to you." He is not saying, "be good enough and you'll be righteous." That would be seeking more selfish control.

Instead Jesus says, "Seek the things that God is already doing and has already done *for you*."

It starts by looking at the cross. That was the place where Jesus was punished for sin instead of you. It's the place where he cried out, "It is finished!" The work is done. The debt is paid. The victory is won. The cross means that you are safe from sin, death, and hell.

And if you want to be sure that Jesus' work on the cross applies to you personally, just look at your baptism. That is the moment that God gave you a brand-new identity, and covered you with the righteousness of his Son. You know who you are. You know that you belong, right here, in God's family.

And then if you want constant, ongoing assurance of the Lord's forgiveness and presence in your life – *look to the Bible. Look to communion*. These are the places where God continues to speak to you and give you himself. Where he tells you that the solution to a life of worry is a life of trusting him through faith – a life of trusting that God who loved you so much he died for you.

Seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness. Remember who you are. Remember what your God has already done. And as the Holy Spirit focuses you on those gospel promises, you'll find that your worries are being replaced with *absolute confidence in your status* as God's child.

That gospel confidence causes a seismic shift on how we approach our lives. See, worry and fear turn you inward. Even physically. You hunch over. You look down and see only yourself.

Only through faith can the Lord finally lift our eyes upward to see all the opportunities you have to serve God and the people around you. Through his Word and Sacraments God gives you total confidence and certainty about your place in God's Kingdom. And as the Holy Spirit leads you to see your place – your identity as a redeemed child of God – he also gives you the confidence to *work for* the Kingdom.

It can happen in so many ways. For one, evangelism. It can be so easy to be held back by fear. To worry about what other people will think, or just worry that you don't know the right thing to say. But you already know what God thinks about you. *And you know that it is His Word, not your words, that makes all the difference*. So no matter how awkward or clumsy it might be on the outside, just get the Word out to people whenever you can. And be amazed as the Holy Spirit does his work.

It can happen with giving. When money is used as a tool for your own self sufficiency, it chokes you. But as one Christ has firmly planted in the Lord's Kingdom, with eyes of faith, and can become a powerful tool for selfless service. It can support tuition for young people training to study the Word full time. It can be used to support missionaries in far away places you may never reach yourself, or to build new places for God's people to gather together and reflect his love to the community around us.

As we do all that, we don't have to worry about a thing. Because of Christ, you don't need to be afraid of what happens after death. And that means you don't need to fear anything in this life either.

There is one final question I want you to consider today. What will you think of all your worries when you get to heaven? When you look back on them, you'll see nothing but God's amazing faithfulness to you. You'll see that you were always part of a family so much bigger than you could imagine. You'll rejoice that you are in a place where there will never be problems, or tears, or pain ever again. And when you remember what time was like here, how it always felt too short, or like it was running out, it will make you appreciate that much more the fact that God has brought you to the place where you will never be in a hurry again. Where there will be no such thing as too little time with those you love. And where you'll find there's no such thing as too *much* time with the Savior who loves you.

Amen.