ANXIETY

"With this in view, I say to you: Do not be filled with anxiety for your life, concerning, for example, what you will eat [or drink], or how you will clothe your body. Is not life more significant than nourishment and the body more significant than clothing? Consider well the birds of the sky: they neither sow, nor reap, nor gather crops into a storehouse, yet your heavenly Father provides them with food. Are you not worth more than they? Besides, who of you, by being anxious about it, can add to his or her life even one hour? And why are you anxious about clothing? Learn a lesson from how the flowers of the field grow: they neither labor nor toil, but I tell you not even Solomon in all his splendor could match such clothing! Now since God clothes the grass of the field like this – grass which is alive one day, but n the next is used as fuel for the oven – will he not much more clothe you, you who have little faith? Therefore do not be full of anxiety, saying, What are we to eat? Or what are we to drink? Or what are we to wear? For the Gentiles are the ones who earnestly seek after precisely all these things. But your heavenly Father is well aware that you need all of them. So keep seeking above all else the kingdom of God and the righteousness he demands and all these things will also be yours. Do not then be filled with anxiety about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have its own share of anxiety. For each day has its own sufficient supply of evil.
Matthew 6:25-34

The sermon now turns naturally from negative references concerning wealth to the impropriety of anxiety for the disciple.

If the disciple is not to be preoccupied with treasures on earth, if they are not to compromise the singlemindedness of their commitment, it would seem worth asking how their basic needs are to be met.

Again, the teaching of Jesus centers on the importance of getting priorities right.

The reference to ordinary needs and specifically to food, links this pericope to the fourth petition in the Lord's Prayer which creates a continuing symmetry to the sermon.

Give us this day our daily bread.

The word *"anxiety"* occurs 6 times in this section and is not found in Matthew any other time with the exception of Matthew 10:19.

This section contains two basic needs:

1) nourishment;
2) clothing.

This section is constructed as follows.

1) V. 25 serves as an introduction which exhorts the hearers not to be anxious and then asks whether *life is more than the basic needs of nourishment and more than clothing.*

2) V. 26 focuses on nourishment.

3) Vv.28-30 focus on clothing. Parallelisms are found here with *the flowers of the field* against *the birds sky.*

4) V. 31 is a summary of *nourishment* and *clothing* with an exhortation to *"not be anxious about anything"* which reaches back to include v.25.

5) Vv. 32-33 draws the conclusion that challenges the disciple by contrasting their life with that of the Gentiles.

6) V. 34 expands the challenge by referring to anxiety concerning the future by once again using a parallel and adding a proverb about each day having its own anxieties.

As elsewhere in the Gospel, Jesus uses parables in his teaching to illustrate the main points which help validate that this teaching is indeed, spoken by the historical Jesus.

> *"With this in view, I say to you: Do not be filled with anxiety for your life, concerning, <u>for example</u>, what you will eat [or drink], or how you will clothe your body. Is not life more significant than nourishment and the body more significant than clothing?*
> *Matthew 6:25*

The section starts with a *"therefore"* or *"with this view in mind"* which connects this section to the previous one about *laying up one's treasures in heaven.* Again, we find Jesus meeting the disciple in the practical: *if the disciple lays up treasure in heaven through absolute allegiance to God, then what about their immediate material needs?*

"I say to you" echoes the authority Jesus spoke back in the *antheses* of chapter 5: *You have heard it said, but I say to you."*

The idea of being anxious in this context has to do with fear. In this sense *anxiety* by the people of the time was viewed as the agent of sleeplessness.

> *And he called for all his friends and said to them: "<u>Sleep is gone from my eyes</u>, and I am fallen away, and <u>my heart is cast down from anxiety</u>.*
> *1 Maccabees 6:10*

> *A daughter is a treasure that keeps her father wakeful, and <u>worry over her drives away rest</u>: lest she pass her prime unmarried, or when she is married, lest she be repudiated;*
> *Sirach 42:9*

"Jealousy and anger shorten life, and anxiety brings on old age too soon."
Sirach 30:24

As for what was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares (anxieties) of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.
Matthew 13:22

The word can also carry the meaning of being *"disturbed"* or *"distressed."*

And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, and they shall dwell by themselves, and shall be no more distressed (anxious): and the son of iniquity shall no more afflict them, as he has done from the beginning.
2 Samuel 7:10

The context in which the word *"anxiety"* operates in our passage today carries the idea of being not just anxious about nourishment and clothing, but about survival itself.

Jesus is speaking of a paralyzing anxiety that drains the very energy of a disciple. Quite literally, the very soul.

The conundrum here is that food and clothing are essential to life and yet in this context, they act only as examples of where and how anxiety can occur. The point being made through nourishment and clothing as examples is that anxiety about things such as these can hinder a disciple's undistracted and absolute commitment to God.

Is not life more significant than nourishment and the body more significant than clothing?

Through this question Jesus tells the hearers that though food and clothing are essential to life, life is more than food or clothing. God is the source of the greater things such as creation, breath itself, and eternity; therefore, he will provide for the lesser things.

Jesus is saying that a life dominated by concern for food and clothing and such things is misdirected. And being misdirected, it will not necessitate a life of full commitment to what really matters.

do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God.
Philippians 4:6

casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you.
1 Peter 5:7

The absurdity of being anxious is illustrated beautifully in the following verses.

Consider well the birds of the sky: they neither sow, nor reap, nor gather crops into a storehouse, yet your heavenly Father provides them with food. Are you not worth more than they?
Matthew 6:26

The idea of the birds was a common in Jewish thought.

But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will teach you.
Job 12:7

"You feed the birds and the fish, as you send rain to the wilderness that the grass may sprout to provide pasture in the wilderness for every living thing, and if they are hungry, they will lift up their faces.
Psalm of Solomon 5:9-10

And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.
Matthew 8:20

they neither sow, nor reap, nor gather

Note that Jesus says the birds do none of the three actions mentioned above. These are the actions of humanity, and they represent a preoccupation with financial security.

And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this" I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.'"
Luke 12:16-18

The birds, unlike humanity are carefree yet God supplies their needs.

If the disciples are worth more than birds, then they may be assured of God's providential care for their needs just as certainly as the birds depend on God for theirs. They do not need to be distracted from their discipleship by inordinate attention to their ongoing concern of their physical needs.

Besides, who of you, by being anxious about it, can add to his or her life even one hour?
Matthew 6:27

In this sentence, the word *"anxious"* is conditional: by being anxious can one add a unit of time to their life?

Some manuscripts such as the KJV phrase the verse in the following:

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

The more accurate rendering when one takes *cubit* and *stature* in the Greek context is as follows:

And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

Stature can mean *length of age* or *physical stature*. In classical Greek it primarily means *"age"* but in a related way as one grows into adulthood, *"height."*

And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature.
Luke 19:3

It can also be translated as *"maturity."*

until we attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
Ephesians 4:13

In the context of Matthew, it is best seen as speaking of *"length of life"* and as a *"fraction of time."*

This idea of a *cubit* from the KJV which is a measuring length from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, being employed instead as a measure of time is seen in the following:

Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you.
Psalm 39:5

Despite the debates, to phrase the verse as saying that *"one's being anxious cannot add any height to their stature*", sounds misdirected given the context of essential items such as *"nourishment"* and *"clothing"* which are needed to sustain life.

Anxiety then should be seen as something that cannot extend one's life even by a small amount.

And why are you anxious about clothing? Learn a lesson from how the flowers of the field grow: they neither labor nor toil, but I tell you not even Solomon in all his splendor could match such clothing! Now since God clothes the grass of the field like this – grass which is alive one day, but the next is used as fuel for the oven – will he not much more clothe you, you who have little faith?
Matthew 6:28-30

These verses address the matters of clothing by another example from the natural world created by God.

Jesus asks, *"why are you anxious about clothing"* and then proceeds to reveal the absurdity of the thought. The flowers of the field do not labor or toil – no anxiety – yet they grow.

Once again Jesus uses the phrase, *"but I tell you",* which harkens back to the formula used in the antitheses of chapter 5.

And not only do the flowers grow, but they do so in such a way that the wealthy Solomon was not arrayed in such fine clothing. This statement would be eye-opening against the glory of Solomon which had long become proverbial.

I gave you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days.
1 Kings 3:13

Learn a lesson from how the flowers of the field grow: they neither labor nor toil, but I tell you not even Solomon in all his splendor could match such clothing!

Now since God clothes the grass of the field like this -

The emphasis Jesus places here on clothing is seen in v.28 where the flowers are regarded as *clothed",* then in v.30 the grass is said to be clothed with the beauty of the flowers.

And yet, despite this beauty and care provided by the Father, the emphasis of a short life in the use of *"one day – toady"* and *"the next (day) – tomorrow"* is seen in the grass being used as fuel for the oven.

As for man, <u>his days are like grass</u>; <u>he flourishes like a flower of the field</u>; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.
Psalm 103:15-16

A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" <u>all flesh is like grass</u>, and all <u>its beauty is like the flower of the field</u>. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.
Isaiah 40:6-8

The conclusion to be drawn is readily apparent: since God so wonderfully "clothes" what is so transitory and worthless, how much more true must it be that God will provide clothing for the disciple, quite apart from any anxiety on their part.
Hagner – Matthew, page 165

you who have little faith – is a comment directed toward the disciples and is a favored saying by Matthew, signifying the believer's failure to trust God completely.

Therefore do not be full of anxiety, saying, What are we to eat? Or what are we to drink? Or what are we to wear?
Matthew 6:31

This verse quite simply recapitulates the prior portion of the passage.

For the Gentiles are the ones who earnestly seek after precisely all these things. But your heavenly Father is well aware that you need all of them. So keep seeking above all else the kingdom of God and the righteousness he demands and all these things will also be yours.
Matthew 6:32-33

The term *"Gentiles"* here is negative and refers to the pagans who are outside the family of faith. Thus, the Gentiles may not be aware of the Heavenly Father, but those in the family of faith can be assured that their God knows their legitimate needs and will address them.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.
Matthew 6:8

The disciple is to be concerned with one thing and that one thing needs to be the priority.

So keep seeking above all else the kingdom of God and the righteousness he demands and all these things will also be yours.

This verse is the climactic point of the entire pericope. The Kingdom and the Kingdom alone, is to be the sole priority of the disciple and the Kingdom is that reality toward which the disciple is to devote their energy.

"Seek" here does not mean to look for something that is not yet present. It also doesn't mean that by *seeking* one can bring in the Kingdom of God. Rather it means that a disciple should make the Kingdom the center of their existence.

And if the center of their existence, then the center of their experience and that experience will last the remainder of their life which is why we have used the wording *"keep seeking above all else the kingdom."*

To pursue the Kingdom with one's passion is to seek the King's *"righteousness."*

What must be understood is that Matthew's Gospel is about the Kingdom and if about the Kingdom, then about the Kingdom's King. This is why Jesus as that King *begins his ministry* by teaching the concept of *"righteousness" at the onset of his ministry*.

Participation in the Kingdom necessitates righteousness.

Kingdom and righteousness are inseparable.

If we can comprehend and live our lives this way, then the *righteousness* he demands should not be looked at as a burden. It should be seen as a gift. Note the wording here:

the righteousness he demands - and <u>all these things will also be yours</u>.

Gift, not *demand* is the implication of the text.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
Romans 14:17

So keep seeking above all else – means to make the *Kingdom and righteousness* the clear priority in life.

all these things will also be yours – indicates the fulness of God's provision.

Yet all good things together came to me in wisdom's company, and countless riches at her hands.
Wisdom 7:11

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will grant you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust in him and he will act.
Psalm 37:4-5

I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread.
Psalm 37:25

You must say that the attribute of reward is greater than the attribute of punishment, as with regard to the attribute of reward it is written: "He commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and rained upon them manna to eat." And with regard to the attribute of punishment at the time of the flood the verse says: "And the windows of heaven were opened. To mete out punishment, God opened only windows, which are considerably smaller than doors, indicating that the attribute of reward is greater.
Sanhedrin 100b.

Do not then be filled with anxiety about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have its own share of anxiety. For each day has its own sufficient supply of evil.
Matthew 6:34

Jesus here broadens the context of *anxiety* to include everything that might make people anxious or fearful of tomorrow. Such anxious worry is out of place for the disciple of Christ.

each day has its own sufficient supply of evil – the disciple should live in the present not in the future and not in the past. After all, the evil for this present day is clearly sufficient for today.

Each day has its evil, but God's faithfulness can be counted upon on a daily basis.

Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.
Proverbs 27:1

The book of James, written by the brother of Jesus, also reflects this teaching (James 4:13-15).

This passage, like the preceding one, stresses the importance of undistracted, absolute discipleship. The key to avoiding anxiety is to make the kingdom one's priority. The disciples have a "heavenly Father" who knows of their ongoing needs and who will supply them. If he takes care of his creation, he will surely take care of those who participate in his kingdom. The passage does not mean, however, that food, drink, clothing, and other such necessities will come to the disciple automatically without work or foresight. It addresses only the problem of anxiety about these things. The answer to this anxiety and all such debilitating anxiety is to be found in an absolute allegiance to the kingdom and the righteousness that is the natural expression of that kingdom. For Christians of every age, anxiety is incompatible with a lifestyle focused on God's kingdom. Indeed, anxiety and worry need not govern the disciple who has known the grace of the kingdom.

Hagner – Matthew, page 166