

From Anxiety to Rest

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Well, I couldn't be more delighted to have you all here with us today. I'm always glad that you're with us but today especially because I am quite confident that the word of God is going to minister to your heart in a significant and profound way today.

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 6. You know, one of the great blessings of the church of our size is the ability to have relationships where you come to know people a little better than you can in a large place where things are rather done on an anonymous basis, and as I was praying earlier and just remembering some of the burdens that I know are represented in the room, losses and different aspects of the difficulty of life, you know, I'm mindful of the fact that as you go through those things, that they have a way of captivating and consuming your attention. I know it's true of me. I need today's message as much as everybody else does and things just have a way of coming to dominate your mind as you think about that broken relationship or the loss that you have experienced or the uncertainty of the future, and what is going to happen and why did this come to pass as it did, and just recognizing that life is filled with things like that. And as I said last week as we were looking at Jesus' teaching, in Matthew 5, 6 and 7 in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus devotes more attention to the topic of anxiety than he does anything else in that entire sermon with the possible exception of prayer, the matters are about equal in weight there. And that tells us something very sweet and precious about the nature of our Lord, it's that he understands the nature of the human condition in this sin-cursed world. He understands our weakness and he has made provision for it for us. He has given us a path through that so that we have a different perspective, a way of looking at life that allows us to transcend those things that would otherwise swallow us whole. In Psalm 69, David certainly knew of that experience, he says that, "The waters are about to drown me, that my feet have sunk into deep mire," and he's speaking as though his problems are about to swallow him up whole. Well, isn't it encouraging to know that Scripture addresses us like that; that we can come to Scripture and realize that we find in this book and we find in our Lord Jesus Christ, a book, a Savior, a living Savior that understands our condition and is able to address it with wisdom and power and authority. Isn't that great? Well, Jesus here in our text for this morning gives us that which would help us as we cultivate it in our mind and rehearse it again and again in our mind. It gives us the perspective that does lift us out of the mire, that does lift us out of the sorrow, that does give us a sense of perspective, of being in our Father's hand and knowing that that's all that we need.

Look at Matthew 6:25 through 30 with me as I open here this morning. We did an overview of verses 25 through 34 last week. I invite you to pick up a copy of the CD on your way out if you weren't with us. So now we're going to deal with it in shorter segments because we understand that this topic is so real and personal and necessary for each one of us. Matthew 6:25, Jesus said,

25 "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!"

I pointed out last time something that I think is very important to go back to to start as we begin here this morning is this: is that it's very important for you to recognize that when Jesus is teaching on anxiety here, he does not simply say, "Do not be anxious. Stop being anxious." He says that, he commands it and we are responsible to respond to that, but he doesn't simply leave it with a negative command. As we said last time, if he just left it with the negative command, that would leave us in greater despair than what we had before because not only would we have the sense of anxiety over our problem, we would have a command hanging over us that added to our guilt and just adds to the complexity of mind and the agitation of our heart. Jesus doesn't approach us that way. He commands us not to be anxious but then as we said last time, he teaches us to replace anxiety with right thinking about God and right thinking about his work in creation and in his life. So he's not simply telling us, "Don't be like that," as if he were scolding us for our weakness, rather he is giving us that which will strengthen us and help us along the way.

So what he teaches us in this passage basically is this: in the broad space shuttle view of this passage, what Jesus is teaching us is that we continually remind ourselves of transcendent truths about who God is and who Christ is, realize that they apply to our lives, that they apply to our specific situation, and once we recognize those transcendent truths and that they apply to us as those who are disciples of Christ, then we realize we come by the force and the power of truth that our anxiety is not necessary. He doesn't simply tell us, "Don't be anxious," he gives us the key that unlocks it. Going back to the Psalm 69 analogy, he lifts us out of the mire by the power of his truth and places us on a solid rock. The part of the problem of anxiety is that we are searching through and trying to sort through earthly things which we often have no control over, which are uncertain in the way that they work out, and there is nothing but sinking in that. What Christ does is

he lifts us up, puts us on solid ground and says, "Think here. Live here. Process your anxiety through this prism and things will work out in your heart."

Now by way of another simple point and observation here, beloved, what I want you to see is that this passage that we are looking at goes far beyond the matters of food and clothing. Think about it this way, he's speaking about it in terms of food and clothing, "Don't be anxious for your body, what you'll eat," and all of that, and he uses those things to illustrate his point but think about it this way and I want you to understand and know at the outset that what Jesus is teaching here applies to everything that agitates your heart, applies to everything, not simply the matter of day to day provision and you can understand that by thinking about it in a couple of different ways.

First of all, Jesus didn't forbid anxiety over food and clothing simply to allow it in other areas of life. That would be foolishness. He's not making a distinction, "Well, don't be anxious about food and clothing but I'm not talking about other things. I realize that anxiety is going to happen there and I don't have anything to say about that." That's impossible. That's not possibly what he meant. The food and clothing are simply illustrations of a broader approach to life. Along with that, Scripture teaches us elsewhere, Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing." For nothing. 1 Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all of your anxieties upon Him because He cares for you." All of them. Be anxious for nothing, cast all of your anxieties upon him, and so as we look at the sense of the passage in Matthew 6, as we look at it more broadly from the scope of all of Scripture, we realize that Christ is providing us with a comprehensive way to think about life that is designed for your blessing, that is designed to help you. I realize that some of you perhaps that have grown up in ritualistic religion where God was taught to you as somebody who was simply waiting to smack you when you failed, that this is almost foreign to your thinking because you were so enmeshed and so engrossed and that was just beat down upon you again and again and again, "Don't mess up or God is going to have your head."

Well, praise be to God that we are at a point of Scripture where we can step back and see the truth about what the love and grace of God means for us in our lives, and what it means for us is this: it means that anxiety is not necessary and it means that anxiety can be overcome. There is hope for you in the midst of anxieties even that have been chronic for 20 years in your heart and life. And what we're going to do today as we look at these five or six verses, is we're going to see that Jesus gives us four different reasons to support his command for you not to be anxious about the future. There are four reasons that are contained in this very brief passage of Scripture that are overwhelming in their power, that are massive in their significance, that are deep in their encouragement for what they offer to us here today. And look, I have no doubt that each one of you need this. You need this. If you don't need it today this morning because life is swell, you'll need it tomorrow when life changes because we don't know what our life will be like tomorrow. Jesus is giving us here four principles that anchor us in life in a way that stabilizes us, that gives us courage, and that can give us serenity even in the most difficult and the most surprising changes in life that take place. So let's take a look at them. Those are pretty lofty promises to make at the beginning of the message. I have no doubt that the Lord will fulfill that promise as we make our way through.

Why is it that you don't have to be anxious? Stated positively: why is it that you can be confident that your trust in your God is well placed? As you look to the future, how can you know, how can you know that you are not wasting your trust? That you are not wasting your confidence in trusting in this God? Well, Jesus makes it plain for us and, first of all, there is a "B" alliteration to this, the letter B. First of all, I want you to see that the blessedness of God requires your trust. The blessedness of God requires your trust. What I mean by that is who God is means that your trust is well-placed, even to the point of saying that your trust is required, that it is right, that it would be sinful not to trust him in light of these things.

Now, before we go any further, let me just repeat what I've often said in the course of this long series on the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is addressing his disciples. He is addressing those who have truly put their faith in Christ for their salvation. This isn't advice given to the world at large because the world at large does not know God. They are separated from God. They are dead in their trespasses and sins. They are dominated and blinded by Satan and they have no hope in this world except for the Gospel, except for the promise of Christ that, "If you will come to me, I will forgive your sins." We are assuming as we speak here today, we are assuming that you have put your trust in Christ for your salvation; that you have been born again to me; that your salvation is real. If your salvation is real, then there are consequences to that. There are implications to that that go everywhere in life.

You see, beloved, we don't gather here at Truth Community Church simply to give you a little moral homily, a little statement about, "You should be more moral in your life." That's not biblical preaching. That's not the message of the Bible. The message of the Bible is we are not good enough, we are not moral enough, and that we need to be saved from our sin. Having been saved from our sin, there are realities that are attached to that, that God has put his Spirit in us, that Christ loves us and has accepted us and has redeemed us and we are to process and to think about all of life through that prism. Nothing about your life should be thought about independently of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on your behalf. Nothing in your life should be thought about apart from the character of such a good and gracious and awesome and mighty God who designed such a plan of salvation and included you in it before the foundation of the world.

Every thought should presuppose those things in your mind and what we see as we look at Matthew 6 in this blessedness of God that requires your trust, is that Jesus is teaching here in this passage, Matthew 6:25 through 30, it rests squarely on the character of God. Everything is built on the foundation of the character of God and Jesus builds from there and here's one way for you to see that: 17 times in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refers to God as "your Father." Seventeen times he refers to him as God as "your Father." Twelve of those occurrences occur in chapter 6 alone. And so Jesus is building an entire mindset about God in this chapter and that is what to inform your understanding about how to approach anxiety. And the Father's character – oh, beloved, the glasses are going off early this morning – the character of God, your Father, lays the foundation for trust in your life. You must understand that trust is not based on how the earthly circumstance or

the earthly relationship might work out in the future. You don't know that. We don't know that. We can't know that. People die, people refuse to come back, we just don't have any control over that. So Jesus is not saying, "Trust God because he will make the circumstances work out the way that you want to." That has nothing to do whatsoever with this passage or with this teaching.

So you kind of have to begin by understanding what it is that you are trusting God for. I've said this in the past and I probably don't say it often enough, and contrary to the way this is so often presented in other places, beloved, I want you to understand this: that when we say we trust God, when you say, "I trust God," here is what you're not saying, trusting God is not saying, "I am trusting God to work out this problem the way I want it to come out." That is not trust, that's simply saying, "I hope God works it out the way that I want." We don't trust God for a specific result. It's possible that the loved ones that you are concerned about will never come to Christ, what then? It's possible that your financial situation will never reverse, what then? It's possible that a loved one will die before their time, what then? It happens every day, beloved, and the church of Christ is not exempt from it. So that is the shifting sand of earthly hopes that people rest in and hope in and just try to baptize their own desires with a spiritual sounding thing, "I'm trusting God to do this for me." No. No, that is the wrong way to think about trust.

You see, the trust that Scripture calls you to as a believer in Christ, is a trust that is exclusively based on the character of who your heavenly Father is. Period. Full stop. End of sentence. End of paragraph. End of chapter. End of book. It's over. You are to know God and to trust him for who he is and whatever works out in the future of your life and however he sorts out your difficult past, to rest in him and to trust in him that he is wise, that he is good, and that he intends your blessing even if you don't understand and even if the circumstances are contrary to the desires that you have at the beginning. That's real trust. You don't need to be a Christian to say, "I want it to work out the way that I want it to work out."

That is so crucial for you to understanding this whole passage and this particular point in particular. It is the character of God, the attributes of God, that lay the foundation for trust in your life. Jesus has been talking about that all the way through this entire chapter, and just in chapter 6 and a little bit before and after, I want to show you some things here. What is the character of God? Having said that, "Trust the character of God," well, what is that character like and why is it worthy of your trust no matter what?

Well, first of all, God is holy. Look at Matthew 5:48, Jesus says, "your heavenly Father is perfect." He is perfect in wisdom. He is perfect in love. He is perfect in power. He is perfect in every conceivable way. He is perfect and, therefore, he is holy. There is no sin in him. It is impossible for him to ever design anything or to allow anything in your life that doesn't ultimately have a good purpose. That's impossible. God could not do that because that's not who he is and his character never changes. God is perfect, therefore, we trust him.

Secondly, God is omniscient, by which we mean that God knows everything, including the need of your present situation. Look at Matthew 6:4, or actually, let's look at Matthew 6:8. This is a clearer place to look at it. Matthew 6:8, Jesus said, "your Father," do you see it again? "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." He knows your whole situation. He's omniscient. He knows everything about your life. He knows everything about this church. He knows everything about me. He knows everything about molecular structure. He knows everything about the orbit of the stars. He knows everything, including the needs that you have; not just external but the needs of your inner man. He knows it all.

That's who your heavenly Father is. He is holy. He is omniscient. Not only that, he's omnipresent, he's always with you. Matthew 6:6, Jesus says, "go into your inner room, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Do you know why God sees in secret? It's because he's omnipresent. He is everywhere present. There is no place that you can go anywhere on earth, anywhere in the universe, where God is not present, and this is the same God, the God who is present is the same God who sent the Lord Jesus Christ to redeem your soul.

That's who God is. He's present. He's wise. He's holy. He is omnipotent. He has the power to reward you according to his will. Look at verse 6 again, it says, "your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." How can Jesus make such a blanket statement about the ultimate outcome of your faith in Christ, your faith in the heavenly Father? How can he make such a blanket statement without qualification or exception? It's because God is omnipotent. God can do what he wants and God has designed to bless you, my fellow brother and sister in Christ. God has designed to bless you. You know that for certain because Christ died for your sins, because he shed his blood. He voluntarily did that and so you know from the cross that his intentions are good for you. The ultimate outcome of all of his dealings with you will be good and that's not just a pie in the sky promise, it is guaranteed by the omnipotent power of God. He can do what he wants and it pleased him to choose to bless you and to draw him to yourself.

So God is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, holy. Not only that and we've been saying this and assuming it all along: God is love. Matthew 6:6, "your Father who sees what is done will reward you." What is that except a statement that God is favorably disposed toward you? That he intends to do good for you? He is wise. He knows your need and how best to meet it. He is merciful. Even in your sin as a believer, even as you slip into the bog of unnecessary anxiety. What does Jesus say? Verse 14, "your heavenly Father will also forgive you." As you come to him in faith, as you come to him with a sincere heart, that your heavenly Father is willing to forgive you as well. He is merciful.

And not only that, and you see in all of these Scripture references I'm making, your Father, your Father, your Father. Chapter 7, verse 11, he is good. "If you then," Jesus says, chapter 7, verse 11, "If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" Here's what we are saying, beloved, in the whole context here, Jesus has been incidentally giving us a discourse on the attributes of God and he has been showing God to be lofty, high, glorious, loving, merciful and good. That's who God is. That's what his character is. There is no sin in him. There is no deceit in him. There is no betrayal in him. Oh, we've betrayed him. Judas betrayed him ultimately. We've betrayed him with our own sinful lives, haven't we, time and time again, but has he ever betrayed you? Has he ever betrayed any of his children? Never. Not once. Never will. Never could happen because that's not who he is. He's good. He's faithful. And what Jesus is doing in this whole context of this brilliant discourse about the nature of God, is he is connecting the character of God to his command against anxiety.

Look at verse 25 and 26 with me. He says, "For this reason I say to you," talking about life priorities, making that connection, he says "do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" Verse 26, he says, "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into

barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?" Verse 32, "the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."

Now beloved, oh, this is the whole pivot point. This is the whole pivot point of the sermon. This is the whole pivot point of the Christian life when it comes to the matter of dealing with anxiety. You must understand this. When Jesus commands you not to be anxious, his argument is not simply that God is sovereign over his creation. That is not his argument. It's a part of his argument but that's not the core of the argument. And you know, when you move in circles where the sovereignty of God is emphasized and the doctrines of grace are rightfully preached and honored and taught and believed, people have a grasp of some sort on the sovereignty of God but that doesn't mean that they grasp and understand Jesus' argument here in Matthew 6, and I would dare say that for many of you, at least for some of you, that's probably the case of you before today.

I can remember a time where I had gotten hurt, this was even before I was a Christian so this was decades ago. I can remember a time where I had gotten hurt, I had broken my arm, I wasn't able to do what I wanted to do and I told somebody who was asking me, I said, "Well, you know, God is sovereign over this." First of all, that was a meaningless statement on my pagan unbelieving tongue at that point. But you hear people go through trials and it always saddens me and concerns me when I simply hear them say, "Well, God is sovereign." Yes, beloved, God is sovereign and we praise him and we teach that and we affirm that without any hesitation, qualification whatsoever, but you can affirm the sovereignty of God from an untrusting, unbelieving heart. You can affirm that from a spirit of resignation, of fatalism that says, "Well, God is sovereign," and if you were to speak out what was really in your heart, "and he's going to do what he wants and so it doesn't really matter what I think or believe," and it's just a statement of resignation that says, "God is sovereign, this has happened to me, and here I am." That's not Christian thinking. That's not Christian thinking. That is not at all the spirit of which Jesus teaches here. Here's what you must understand: his argument is not just that God is sovereign over his creation, his argument is that this sovereign God of this blessed character that we just detailed so quickly, this sovereign God of this blessed character – here it is – that sovereign blessed God is your heavenly Father and what is a father in a healthy family but the one who protects, provides and guides, the one who loves and cares and dispenses and watches, that all that are under his household would be protected and secure and well supplied for. That's what a father is. I realize that many of you haven't had a father like that. This is an opportunity for you to look past the earthly parent who failed you and to see what a true father looks like, and the true, the ultimate father is the God of the Bible who has brought you into his family through faith in Christ. The Bible says we are called children of God, 1 John 3:2. "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is," 1 John 3:2. Children of God. Adopted into his family. And God is the Father adopting you into his family, has the full intention to bless you, to keep you, to protect you, to help you, and you are to know your Father well enough to rest in that.

You see, beloved, God's sovereignty is not an impersonal force. God's sovereignty is not like gravity that pulls everything down to the ground, and that it just operates by force of a physical law. No. No. No. No. No. No. We don't think about God that way. We realize that our God is a personal seeing, hearing, loving, merciful God. He is a person, not a force. The nature of his person is revealed in Scripture in all of the ways that we have explained here. So that God who is sovereign is also your Father and he does what a good father does. That was Jesus' point.

Look at Matthew 7:11 again, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children," we'll look at this passage in a few weeks but if you as a sinful father know to give your child food instead of a rock when he asks you for something to eat, if you as a father would know to give a fish, not a snake, you wouldn't give something evil when your child asked for something good, Jesus says, going from the lesser, "If you can do that as a sinner, do you see how much more a holy good God will certainly give what is good to those who approach him?" He is a father and as your heavenly Father, God says that he will lovingly provide for you. You can rest assured that he will take care of every matter in life because that's what a father does. He doesn't expose his children to danger. He doesn't leave them alone to their vulnerability and to wicked forces. He assumes and takes on the responsibility, "I will protect you even if you don't see my protection at work. I'm there to protect, to help, to keep." That's who God is.

You go further and in the deepest sorrow of life, the greatest uncertainty of life, you set it aside and you look at the cross of Christ and what do you see at the cross of Christ? Look at 1 John 4 with me. 1 John 4:10, let's say in verse 9, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Go mentally in your mind back 2,000 years to the cross, beloved. Go back where Christ was bearing your sin at a great personal cost as he suffered on the cross of Calvary. Think about that. Contemplate it in your mind and realize that this was the supreme act of love. We sang earlier today, "He emptied himself and all for love." We go back and we look together collectively at the cross and we are humbled and we are encouraged and we are strengthened and we say, "I cannot look at the cross of Christ and think anything other than God has a supreme infinite love for my soul. Nothing else could explain that. The cross in bearing my sin in his body on the cross, proves conclusively that Christ loves me. That he cares for me. That he has my best interest at heart." Revelation 1:5 says, "He has released us from our sins by His blood." And while sometimes earthly circumstances will seem to contradict the appearance of the love of God, the love of God was driven in a stake in the ground in a way that is conclusively established for all time, God loves his people supremely. You can't look at the cross of Christ and say anything else.

I needed this a long long time ago and it occurred to me, just imagining, going back 2,000 years ago as Christ was there bearing the sins, suffering as he was and saying, "Lord, I'm not really sure you love me." Can you imagine the blasphemy of that? Well, we're in that same position. We don't have to be there physically to realize the reality. This Christ loves us. He sealed his love. He sealed the proof of his love in blood.

So we realize that that kind of love and that kind of blessed character requires our trust. That is your context as a Christian for your anxiety. You say, and it's a matter of perspective. We get all wrapped up in the pressure of the day, the pressure of the moment, and of hostile people and all of that, but we've got to step back and say, "Ah, but what's the context of this?" The context is, "I know God as my heavenly Father. I know Christ as my Lord, as my Savior, as my brother in heaven." So you say to yourself, "What am I going to do? I'm going to trust that blessed God for my future even though it is unseen. I'm going to trust that blessed God when anxiety wells up in my heart because nothing earthly can contradict his character." Nothing earthly can ever ever ever ever, nothing earthly can ever stop his intention to bless you in the end. His blessed character guarantees that.

That's the God that we proclaim here and, Christian, this is your God. That's who he is like. Aren't you blessed to be in his family? Aren't you blessed to be the object of the affection of the love, of the careful intention of a God like that who designs every detail in order to ultimately produce your good even if you don't understand it now? Isn't that great? As the pressure builds up in your heart as you think about these things, that's the relief valve, that's the release that says, "Phew. It's okay. I know my blessed God and he has my interest at heart. That's my heavenly Father."

Well, secondly, the body of your life reinforces your trust. The blessedness of God, the body of your life reinforces your trust. And we will be brief on this point here. Jesus goes on as he continues to teach in verse 25, he goes on to teach and helps you think through something really vital and crucial. Verse 25, Jesus says, "For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" And here's the point, here's what Jesus is teaching. He's making an argument from the greater to the lesser. If the greater thing is true, then the lesser things that are underneath the umbrella of that are true as well. And here's what Jesus is saying: it is indisputable that God has given you physical life. Acts says in him we live and move and have our being. Psalm 139 says that God formed you in your mother's womb. God made you. He gave you life. He planned your life. He established you for this time, in this place, in this period of life, and he has given you life. Now, what Jesus is saying is that's the greater thing. That's undeniable. It's obvious that God has given you life.

What does that mean? The simplicity of this is profound and the profundity of this is simple. God gave you your life and body. That's the greater gift. What Jesus is saying is if he gave you the greater gift, do you

know what he'll do? He'll give you the lesser gifts that are necessary to sustain it. It would be foolish, it would be self-contradictory in a way that is utterly alien to the unity of the character of God, it would be ridiculous for him to give you a life and then withhold what was necessary for you to sustain that life. Your Father knows that you need food and clothing, Jesus says. Well, he gave you life and it's obvious that he's going to provide that along the way. The greater gift of life will be sustained by the lesser gifts of food and clothing. He didn't give you life only to withhold what you need. Beloved, that would be ridiculous. He who gave you life will sustain it.

Now in part, that comes, Scripture says if a man doesn't work, neither let him eat. In part God's provision comes by you working and doing your thing so that you earn a living. That's part of God's provision for you. This isn't teaching that suddenly makes us passive and we can just sit and drink margaritas on a Caribbean beach. It doesn't work that way. The idea is not that you take a passive approach to life. We work. We plan. We do those things and God provides through that. Your God will provide for you. You know that for a fact because he made you, he created you, he gave you life. He has done the greater thing, beloved, he will do the lesser thing as well and so you trust him for that.

Thirdly, the birds of the air reinforce your trust. The birds of the air reinforce your trust. Jesus reinforces his teaching with an illustration that the smallest of children could understand. Look at Matthew 6:26. He says, "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?" Here Jesus makes an argument from the lesser to the greater. If God does the smaller thing, he'll do the greater thing.

And what Jesus says here about the birds is this: he makes an obvious point, he says, "Birds don't plant, they don't harvest, they don't store anything up for tomorrow, and yet without fail, your heavenly Father feeds them." He comprehensively cares for all aspects of his creation so that even feeding the birds falls under his care and provision. Some birds get their food from people throwing them things at the beach. Some birds that disgust me personally, eat roadkill on the highway. Some birds eat from your backyard feeders. The means differ but God coordinates everything so that 10 billion birds existing on planet earth at any given time, all have a means of their sustenance for their day to day existence.

Jesus says God does that. Scripture teaches that. A sparrow doesn't fall to the ground apart from him, Jesus says in Matthew 10. Then he makes this compelling point, this compelling question. He says, "Are you not worth much more than they?" Aren't you as one made in the image of God more valuable than a bird who is not? Aren't you, Christian here today in this sanctuary, aren't you as one who is part of the saving purpose of Christ at the cross, an intentional beneficiary of his shed blood, aren't you an even greater recipient of his love and care?

Well, just think. Just think it all the way through. If your heavenly Father feeds a bird, don't you think that he'll feed you, you who are of much greater value than a bird? Don't you think your Father will do that? You don't have to know how the provision is going to come, you don't have to know the solution to your present dilemma in order to come to a place of settled peace and confidence. Say, "It doesn't matter what the future brings. It doesn't matter that I don't understand. It doesn't matter that I can't see it, I know something more important. I'm not leaning on my own understanding here. I know who God is. I know what he does. He feeds the birds. Do you know what? I'm more precious to him than a bird because Christ didn't become flesh as a bird, he became flesh as a man and I have trusted him and I belong to him and if he has done these things, he'll do what's ever necessary to provide for me." And it deflates the pressure of anxiety. Common birds disprove your fears every single day. Jesus says, "Discern the activity of God in little things and then apply them to the bigger things in your own life."

Beloved, for some of you, for all of us, for all of us, we would benefit from just going out with this verse in mind and just sitting and watching birds for 5 or 10 minutes. That's what Jesus tells us to do, "Look at the birds. Go out and think about what is happening here. This helpless vulnerable creature, that weigh some of them ounces, they weigh ounces, and there they are, the provision of God being provided for them consistently day after day." You go and you think about that and that's far more valuable to you than an hour on a therapist's couch, far more valuable than any other means of relieving anxiety that the world offers to you. You are designed to use your mind and to think about creation in light of God's revealed

word and come to certain conclusions about what it means for the future of your life, and when you come to those conclusions, it deals a deathblow to anxiety.

Jesus says not only is your anxiety unnecessary, it's useless. Verse 27, he says, "who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?" What he means is that you can't stretch out your life by an hour. Some translations talk about it and the phrase could go either way, you can't add an inch to your height. You can't make yourself taller, you can't make your life any longer when the hour of death comes so why are you worried about things that you can't control? Trust your Father instead. That's his point. It is fruitless to worry about the provision for life. It is unnecessary to worry about it as well.

Now finally, point 4: the blossoms of the field reinforce your trust. The blossoms of the field. Jesus points to another aspect of God's provision for his creation in verse 28 and 29. He says, "why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these." Here's what he's saying: he's saying wildflowers of great beauty grow without any effort on their own and yet their beauty is greater than what Solomon had at the height of his reign, and yet these flowers will wilt by the end of the day, they will be gathered up to be used as fuel in a furnace. Flowers grow up, splendid beauty, spectacular and they have a beauty from God-given to them, and yet at the end of the day they are gathered up and burned. God makes even such fading flowers beautiful. Here's his point, same point as with the birds: if God clothes temporary plants like that, don't you think that your heavenly Father will meet your needs when you belong to his kingdom? Isn't that obvious?

So he says take it to the logical conclusion and here's the logical conclusion in verse 30, he says, "if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you?" When you really understand what Jesus is saying here and we are honest about the often anxious condition of our heart, there is only one thing that we can say in light of that and that's this: ouch. Ouch. This is exactly right. This is exactly true. This hurts. This is convicting to us and what Jesus is saying here is this, beloved, I say it gently, I say it to help you. If you are anxious, if your life has been dominated by anxiety, maybe for the first time you're going to hear something that will truly help you. When a man who claims to be a Christian is anxious, beloved, the problem is really ultimately not his circumstances. It's not his circumstances. Your problem is little faith. You are anxious because you do not know and trust God like you should because, step back and think with me through it, think about his blessed character, think about what he has done in making you, think about what he does for birds, think about what he does for the blossoms of the field. The power, the care, even more, the attention to detail by this God is staggering and it is undeniable. And because these things are true, when we belong to his family, we realize that those things are the fire extinguisher on the flame of anxiety. It just puts it out. That's what it's intended to do.

So rather than asking the question, "How is my problem going to work out?" the question is, "Who is my God? Who is God here? Where is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Where is the God who led out the people of Israel from Egypt out of slavery? Where is the God who sent Christ and had him suffer for the sins of the world? Where is the God who made me? Where is the God who holds the stars in place? Where is that God because that's the God who is over my situation here?" And when you put it in the whole context of what God has done in the past and who he has revealed himself to be, you realize that your anxiety has no place to go except out.

Jesus says, look at it there again with me in verse 30, "if God so clothes the grass, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!" You who are anxious, he equates with you of little faith. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says this and I quote, he says, "It is a poor type of Christianity that has this wonderful faith with respect to salvation and then whimpers and cries when confronted with the daily trials of life. We must apply our faith. Little faith does not do this." So the problem is little faith.

Now let me give you a word of encouragement. If you see and realize that you have been that person of little faith, first of all, notice that Jesus anticipated your need and he has provided this instruction so that you would go from little faith to great faith. There is not a one of you in here who truly believes in Christ that cannot go from being a man of small little faith to being a person of great faith, of surpassing

confidence and prevailing trust in who this God is. This isn't an exclusive realm designed only for clergy, this is the way the people of God are meant to live. Jesus has fed you from his word today to help you understand that this is how you grow out of that to become the trusting person in your God that you're supposed to be.

But also let me encourage you with another thing. Jesus doesn't say that you have no faith, he's not saying these anxious people are outside of the kingdom, he says you have little faith which means that you can grow into greater faith. He deals with us, he rebukes us in order to eliminate the inconsistency of faith that causes us to dwell in that sinking realm of mire of anxiety. He rebukes us in order to help us. He confronts us in order to lead us, and knowing the love that motivated him to go to the cross, we can know that he plans to do just that.

Beloved brother and sister in Christ, God is going to care for you no matter how uncertain your future may seem to be today. Your earthly life ultimately yields to eternal life in heaven with Christ. Think it through. Think all of these things through. You have to take what you've heard today and go out and think about it. It's not simply the impression that a message makes on you at the moment in a message like this, it's what you do when you take it and you go out and you think about it and you apply it to your heart and say, "Yes, I do believe this. Yes, I do see this. Yes, I see the implications that it has." All I've done is presented it to you, you have to take and eat, so to speak, so that this becomes the real dynamic that governs the way that you think about life. But beloved, think it through and come to the inevitable conclusion: as Christians we have nothing to worry about. Our God reigns. Our God is our heavenly Father. Our God is who he is as he has been presented here today. So beloved, I invite you, I call you, put your anxiety to rest and walk in peace toward your heavenly home.

Let's pray.

Father, we are such sinful miserable creatures, weak in the flesh, needy before you. We thank you that when Christ died for our sins, that he died not only for the external sins that some of us have committed, but he died even for the sins of our heart; that Christ died even to cleanse us from our failure to trust you. How great is this Christ. How perfect he is. How wonderful to know that we have a Christ who has lived a perfect life and shares the outworking of that with us, covers us in righteousness so that you see us through the righteousness of Christ, not through the littleness of our faith. We thank you, Father, that our brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, is in heaven now representing us, interceding for us before you, and that you accept us because you accept your Son who names us as his own. Thank you, Father. May all of the things that we've said today work to settle the hearts of anxious Christians in our midst, to give them a new sense of peace and confidence in you that looks not at the immediate circumstances but that looks up, that sees Christ high and exalted, the one who loved them, who gave his soul, gave his body and blood for them. And Father, in that may they find the peace and confidence they need to replace anxiety with peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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