

Sermon for December 10, 2017 – Advent 2

Matthew 6:25-34 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

**Theme: God's Fatherly Providence moves the Christian . . .**

- 1) To stop worrying about life.
- 2) To focus on what's truly important.

*<sup>25</sup> “For this reason I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? <sup>27</sup> “Which of you can add a single moment to his lifespan by worrying? <sup>28</sup> Why do you worry about clothing? Consider how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin, <sup>29</sup> but I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will he not clothe you even more, you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> “So do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the unbelievers chase after all these things. Certainly your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

There are few things more emotionally suffocating than financial stress. Being in unpayable debt feels like being stuck in the middle of the ocean – with each bill being a giant wave tossing you further from land. Worse yet, you might feel like your family is drowning with you – and it's all your fault!

Yes, financial stress often causes so much anxiety that people literally worry themselves sick. People are dying from it – as a recent study indicates, revealing that roughly 1/3 of all suicides are linked to despair over financial problems like job loss, economic downturns, business troubles, etc. . .

And who of us haven't felt such anxiety ourselves? I am sure many of you can point to a time when either you or a loved one felt financial stress.

But why?

“Why?!?” you might be thinking, “Isn't it obvious? I was in danger of losing my job, my home and unable to put food on the table!”

But are those reasons to worry and fret? Jesus tells us no. And why not? Because we have an all-powerful Father in heaven who promises to take care of us. And if we have such a God who made such promises, do we have any right or reason to be anxious about anything?

Therefore, with Jesus himself as our guide, let us learn how **God's Fatherly Providence moves the Christian . . .** 1) To stop worrying about life. 2) To focus on what's truly important.

### Part One: Stop Worrying about Life.

Our sermon text is part of Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount." He had just warned his listeners against treasuring material things. Why? Because money can all too easily become an idol in which we are tempted to place all our hope, trust and love instead of in the LORD.

Want proof? How often don't the plans we make for our lives revolve around either making money or spending it on ourselves – instead of how we can use our life and all the things God has graciously blest us with to his glory? How often don't we worry ourselves into a frenzy, when money runs short? Because our hopes, dreams and fears regarding finances can all too easily replace the LORD as the god of our heart, Jesus says:

*Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?*

Well, what do you think: is the total sum, substance and purpose of our existence found in finding good food to eat and clothing to wear? Of course not! And yet, how often don't we worry about those things as if they are the only things that matter? How often don't we live our lives as if it's up to us and us alone to provide for our needs and wants? Jesus, however, directs our attention elsewhere:

*Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?*

Have you ever heard someone call someone else a "bird brain"? Usually that description is meant to insult a person's intelligence, and yet Jesus shows us that birds actually live far more wisely than fallen humanity. They don't worry about how they will feed themselves tomorrow or the next day. They simply live day to day – fulfilling their purpose as they fly about and eat the daily bread God provides for them. And God does provide for them! Why? Because they are his creation – meant to bring him glory.

But, someone might say, aren't there times when even birds suffer want and die – like during a severe famine or flood? Yes, that may certainly happen, but never apart from God's good and gracious will – as Jesus himself said on another occasion: *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.<sup>i</sup>*

The point Jesus is making is not that the animal kingdom doesn't sometimes suffer want as a result of sin being in the world, but that it does not worry like mankind. The animal kingdom lives from day to day – fulfilling the purpose for which God created it. They don't worry, because the LORD provides everything they need – all to the glory of his name.

And if the LORD will do this for animals, will he not do the same for us, who he created in his image, saved through the life, death and resurrection of his Son, and adopted by means of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel?

Jesus continues: *“Which of you can add a single moment to his lifespan by worrying? Truth be told, no one can. Stress and anxiety do far more to shorten our life than lengthen it. Therefore Jesus asks:*

*<sup>28</sup> Why do you worry about clothing? Consider how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin, <sup>29</sup> but I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will he not clothe you even more, you of little faith?*

Jesus' point is this: if our heavenly Father cares, clothes and honors unthinking plants, whose existence is only for the moment, won't he much more provide for us, whose existence he purposed to be everlasting? Of course he will! There is, therefore, no reason to worry. Truth be told, anxiety over things like food and clothing reveals a sinful lack of faith in the LORD's love and power to take care of us, for which reason Jesus says:

*“So do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the unbelievers chase after all these things. Certainly your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*

Yes, the unbelieving world will always worry about having enough to survive. Why? Because it refuses to acknowledge the LORD as its God and see his hand in everything. And if you don't have the LORD, what do you have? Nothing and no one!

Oh, how sad life is without God: constantly worrying and striving to get and to keep. And when disaster strikes, taking away everything for which a person has labored, the world despairs, whereas we Christians can hope. And why can we hope? Because the God who created and sustains the universe is our heavenly Father, who promises to give us everything we need. Yes, even if we become like poor, sick Lazarus who begged outside the rich man's gate and received nothing from him, we can still live in the same hope he lived in. How so? Because God is faithful to all his promises. He will give us what we need - even if that only be a little - sustaining us through every evil we experience on this earth until he delivers us home to heaven - just as he did for poor Lazarus!

Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, there is no reason for us to worry about our life if we believe in the LORD. Why? Because the LORD is our loving God and Father, who proved his greatest care for us by giving up his greatest love (His Son) to attend to our greatest need (our salvation). And if God *did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*<sup>ii</sup> These facts give you every reason to repent of your worrying (which actually reveals a lack of faith in God's promises) and focus on what is truly important, as Jesus himself says:

Part Two: To focus on what's truly important.

<sup>33</sup> *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

What exactly is God's kingdom and why does he want us to give it top priority in our lives? God's kingdom is His gracious rule by means of His Holy Gospel. Through repentance and faith in His Gospel, the LORD forgives our every sin and covers us with the righteousness we need to stand before him. And the blessings don't just stop there, God's kingdom (his gracious rule in our hearts) gives every aspect of our lives purpose and meaning. Whatever occupation we have as our calling: be it farmer, plumber, police officer, school teacher, insurance salesman, banker . . . is not merely a means through which we gain money to live, but means through which God is glorified as he provides for other people through our work. That's right: our lives – as boring and monotonous as they may sometimes seem to us, are full of purpose and meaning in Christ – especially when we combine our works with God's Word – confessing his saving Gospel to those around us in love.

*“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,”* Jesus says, *“and all these things will be given to you as well.”* But this invites the question: where do we find Christ's kingdom and his righteousness? Only in the Gospel.

To seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, therefore, means to give the Gospel top priority in our lives – clinging to it as our greatest treasure and good. It means living in our baptismal grace – repenting of our sins and remembering that God adopted us into his family that we, in the peace of his forgiveness, might live a new life of love and obedience to his commands. Seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness means meditating on the Scriptures daily, coming to worship weekly, and partaking of the Lord's Supper as often as it is offered – realizing that, through this blessed sacrament, we are receiving the very body and blood Christ used on the cross to redeem us from all sin, death and the power of the devil.

And do you know what will happen when we *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*? God will graciously give us everything else we need for our body and life – that we might fulfill the purposes for which he created us – all to the glory of his name!

Now, we need to understand that God is not, thereby, promising us a trouble-free life. On another occasion Jesus flat out told us that, due to our relationship with him, we can expect trouble from the world. But that doesn't mean we should worry about it, as Jesus himself says: <sup>34</sup> *So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*”

Yes, we will always face trouble on this sin cursed earth – threats to both our bodily and spiritual welfare. But how does God want us to handle such threats? By worrying? No; rather by trusting in him and his promises. God is faithful. He will keep his promise to provide our daily bread. He will keep his promise to rescue us from every evil attack and bring us safely to his heavenly kingdom.<sup>iii</sup>

Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, keep the LORD and his providential care ever in mind. Why? Because only it can keep you from worrying about life. Only it can keep us focused on what is truly important: believing and proclaiming his saving Gospel in thought Word and deed – all to the glory of his name. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Matthew 10:29 NIV84

<sup>ii</sup> Romans 8:32 NIV84

<sup>iii</sup> 2 Timothy. 4:18 NIV84