

## The Inutility of Worry

*"And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span?"*

Matthew 6:27 NASB

Our verse is taken from the first recorded sermon of Jesus which is normally referred to as "The Sermon on the Mount." The sermon begins in Matthew 5:1 and continues through 7:27.

Among the multiple subjects Jesus addressed in this sermon was that of worry. We are looking specifically at Matthew 6:27 but the section in Jesus' sermon which deals with the subject of worry actually begins in verse 19 and continues through the end of chapter 6.

The general theme of the context of these verses is complete devotion to God. In this section of the sermon Jesus calls His people to singleness of heart regarding the kingdom of God. Each one is to be fully devoted to God by faith. Note the contrast in verses 19 and 20 between laying up treasures on earth versus laying up treasures in heaven. The two word phrase *lay up* conveys the idea of devotion. This is made evident as Jesus calls for singleness of vision in verses 22-23 and emphatically states in verse 24 that no one can serve two masters. Thus, in verse 33 Jesus commands<sup>1</sup> full devotion to the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Jesus is calling for devotion to God in every aspect of a person's life. God and His kingdom are not merely to be at the top of life's lists. Instead, God and His kingdom are to be the priority in every element of life's lists. In essence, Jesus is calling the believer to honor God by living in complete obedience to God's Word (living by faith) in every aspect of life regardless of the conditions.

### **Worry, a great contender against allegiance to God**

Jesus was aware that one of the greatest contenders against one's allegiance to God is worry. Therefore, after Jesus called for singleness of devotion to God in verses 19-24, and made it clear in verse 24 that it is impossible to serve God and money, in verse 25 He commanded, "For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life..." and then five more times in this section He warned believers about worry (vs. 27, 28, 31 and twice in 34).

Jesus was not advocating irresponsibility by negating prudence when He commanded people not to worry. The Bible commends prudence (Pr. 22:3; 27:12) and Jesus would never contradict the Word of God. Instead, He was addressing those thoughts of the mind that distract us from allegiance to the will of God. The noun form of the Greek verb translated *anxious* or *worry* comes from a word that means, "*to be drawn in different directions.*"<sup>2</sup> It is a word that clearly pertains to one's mind. For this reason the KJV translates each use of the word in Mathew 6 as either *taking thought* or a form thereof. When a person's mind or thoughts are drawn in different directions we say that such a person is distracted.

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek word translated *seek* is imperative.

<sup>2</sup> Thayer's Gk. Lexicon

This is the great danger in worrying. Worry distracts the believer from his or her devotion to God. This is likely why Jesus, in this section of the Sermon on the Mount that pertains to devotion to God and His kingdom, addressed specifically the threat of worry more than any other. As a matter of fact, in this immediate section He addressed no other threat.

The first time the word was attributed to Jesus in this section it came as a command (v. 25). Since Jesus commands us not to worry, it is a violation of His command to worry. Therefore, to worry is a sin against God. There are other sins that threaten one's allegiance to God but be assured worry is a leading contender.

### **Worry, a clever contender against allegiance to God**

However, Jesus did not stop at the command. Had He done so that would have certainly been enough to teach us that we should not worry (add to this our awareness of the negative repercussions of violating one of God's commands and you have another reason not to worry). Instead, Jesus continued and in our verse He communicated a divine truth concerning worries—their uselessness or inutility in the life of the believer.

Perhaps one of the best methods used by teachers to promote thought and ultimately learning on a particular subject is that of asking a question. This is exactly what Jesus did in Matthew 6:27. The NIV translates the question this way,

***“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”***

He asked a profoundly simple question and in doing so conveyed profound truth. The question demands the absolute answer, “No one!” The correct answer to Jesus' question is not “most” or even “some of us” but “no one.” There is no exception. Not so much as one person is excluded. There is no person who can justifiably claim that by worrying, he or she has ever or could ever add an hour to his or her life. No good thing can be accomplished by worrying. To claim the opposite would be a direct contradiction of Christ Himself. Thus, in addition to being a sin worrying is absolutely useless in the kingdom of God.

But worrying is an interesting sin in that it uses one of the most potent elements of sin, that of deceit.<sup>3</sup> Anyone who has ever experienced worry knows that there seems to be some strange form of comfort that is derived from the experience. I say strange because worry, at times, seems to lead us to believe that it is in some way a constructive element even though Jesus taught it is not. I remember a church member from my first pastorate who once jokingly told me she knew her worrying was affective in eliminating most of her problems because, as she put it, “Most of the things she worried about never came true.” That is double deception!

Worry works spiritually in the mind of the believer somewhat like a drug works physically on the brain of an addict. The way a drug can lead an addict to think his high is a good state while it is actually destroying his brain and bringing him closer to death is similar to the way worry can make a believer think he or she is working out problems while the worry is actually leading one away from walking by faith. Within the context of Jesus' message on devotion to God He described those who worry as those of little faith (Mt. 6:30). Thus, He contrasted worry to faith.

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<sup>3</sup> In Hebrews 3:13 the Bible speaks of the deceitfulness of sin.

## **Worry, a devil's leverage in the mind**

We must remember that according to our verse (Mt. 6:27) worry is useless. It takes control of the mind and seeks to lure the Christian away from a walk of faith and thus away from life with God. But we must also know that while worry is useless to the believer it is certainly useful to another. When the sin of worry distracts the believer from allegiance to God it gives leverage to the hand of the devil. There is little wonder therefore that Peter, who was one of the first listeners to this message of Christ on devotion to God and the threat of worry, later instructed Christians to be about casting **all** their anxiety on God because He cares for them (1 Peter 5:7)<sup>4</sup> and immediately followed this instruction with,

***“<sup>8</sup> Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.”***

1 Peter 5:8-9 NASB

Peter's word's in verse 8 "*be of sober spirit, be on the alert*" call for the believer to be free from the intoxicating distracting factor of worry because of the presence of the adversary. When the believer worries he puts down the shield of faith and gives the devil a clear shot with one of his flaming arrows (Eph. 6:16). Be assured that because Satan is an opportunist he will take careful aim and let loose his flaming piercing arrow (Eph. 4:27).

There is no doubt beloved, that when Jesus dealt with one's allegiance to God that He knew the danger of worry for us and therefore expressed to His hearers its uselessness in the question, "*And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span?*" It is my prayer that as you consider this verse you will remember the sin of worry, its uselessness in your minds and its leverage in the hands of the enemy.

Instead of worrying trust the Lord (Ps. 56:3). Trust or faith is not blind. To trust the Lord you must know His Word. So study His truth confessing and forsaking the sin of worry that you may be equipped with the armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18) prepared for the Master's use (2 Tim. 2:21 with 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Much more could be written on the subject of worry and much has. For further study and for biblical examples consider the following:

## **Worry over the future leads to failure in the present**

### ***LUKE 12:13-21***

Right in the middle of Jesus' teaching a man interrupted Him and said, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." (v. 13) While Jesus was instructing the disciples on priceless subjects such as warning against the false teaching of the Pharisees (12:1), fearing God Who after killing the body has the authority to cast into hell (12:5), confessing Christ before men or denying Him and being confessed by Christ or denied by Christ (12:8-9), blaspheming the Holy Spirit (12:10) and persecution (12:11-12), this man was worried about his earthly

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<sup>4</sup>Compare Peter's words "because He ["God" from verse 6] cares for you", to Jesus words in Matthew 6:26-32 regarding the Father's care for those who are His.

inheritance. He was so distracted by his thoughts on the inheritance and the fact that his brother was not giving him his portion that he actually told Christ what to do!

Jesus' response in verse 14 implies that the man may have actually interrupted the teaching of Christ. In verse 15 it appears that the man's concern over the inheritance was spawned by greed. Then in verses 16-21 Jesus spoke a parable that not only related to the man's concern over the inheritance but captured the entire setting involving the man being distracted by his worry while Christ taught on eternal truths.

Dear Christian, space will not allow us to examine the details of the parable in this writing but read the parable and compare it to the man and his interruption. Then consider yourself and see whether or not worry over the temporal has distracted you dear one from the eternal things of the kingdom of God. See if worry has or is presently hindering your conformity to the image of Christ. Is worry robbing you of the priceless truths of God's precious Word?

King Saul of the Old Testament was a worrier. Consider a few consequences in his life that resulted either directly or indirectly from his worrying. I will mention a few with brief comments and encourage you to study these Old Testament examples showing the sin inutility and danger of worry.

### **Worry over the present leads to failure in the future**

#### ***Saul worried over his present: (1 Samuel 13:5-14)***

Verses 11-12 contain Saul's own explanation of what he experienced. He worried his own personal security was lost because Samuel had not shown up in the appointed time. Actually Samuel was within the time appointed but Saul's anxiety over the strengthened position of the enemy caused him to act presumptuously, breaking God's command and assuming the role of a priest. Therefore, Samuel told Saul his kingdom would not endure (v. 14). Saul's worry over the present led to the loss in the future.

### **Worry over the past leads to failure in the present**

#### ***Saul worried over his past: (1 Samuel 15:1-23)***

The first three verses of this chapter inform us of God's instructions to Saul. He was to destroy Amalek and all that he had including all the people (v. 3). Nothing was to be left alive. Upon being asked by Samuel in verse 14 why he had not followed God's instructions Saul again condemned himself with his own words in verse 15. The best of the sheep and the cattle were spared for the purpose of making an offering to God.

Multiple verses in this event indicate that Saul was anxious over the consequence of his sin in chapter 13, the fact that because he did not obey, his kingdom would not endure. It appears in this event therefore that Saul was worried over that loss and was attempting to reverse God's decision. He attempted to appease God by elevating sacrifice over obedience. This was actually a similar sin to the former. This time God stated emphatically through Samuel that to obey is better than sacrifice (v. 22). In verse 23 Saul is informed again that he has been rejected as king. This is repeated in verses 26 and 28 and then Saul is informed in verse 29 that God will not change His mind. Saul's worry over the past resulted in failure in the present.

## **Worry over the future leads to failure in the present**

***Saul worried over his future: (1 Samuel 18:8-11; 20:30-31)***

Saul worried about something he could not change. He worried over losing his kingdom to David. He became so obsessed with this worry that he could do nothing but pursue David. The worry over the future loss of his kingdom destroyed his present life. He turned on his Son (1 Samuel 20:30-31). He killed God's priests (1 Samuel 22:6-23). He sought the assistance of a witch (1 Samuel 28:7-25). He eventually even killed himself (1 Samuel 31:4). Saul's worry over future things he could not change resulted in failure in his present life.

Dear one, it should be evident by now the inutility of worry. This sin will distract you from devotion to God and render you vulnerable to the devil and unprepared for the difficulties of the last days and the coming of God's kingdom,

***“Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap...”***

Luke 21:34 NASB

***“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”***