



Life of Christ

A study of the life and teachings of Jesus

Don't Worry

—by Marc Turnage

We live in interesting days—in a world predicated upon fear and worry, and we encounter it everywhere we go. I wonder what Jesus would have to say about our culture founded on concern, worry, and fear. That's what we're going to talk about this week.

Today, we are going to dive into understanding Jesus' world view as it relates to the cares of life; so, open your Bibles with me to Matthew 6:25-34.

“Therefore 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 clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

What is Jesus' response to a world infused with fear, anxiety, and concern? "Don't worry." You may say, "Well, that's pretty simple to say, but listen! You don't understand my situation!" But notice where Jesus' instructions to not worry come from: They are rooted in the conviction and the reality of God.

I studied with a man in Israel who, at the time of his passing, was the world's authority on ancient Judaism and the origins of Christianity. He often said that you could summarize all of Jesus' teachings into one word: Relax! Our faith is not about the power of positive thinking; it's about the conviction of the God of the universe Who is your Father. It's about coming to a realization that God—Who created the heavens, and the earth, and everything in them—is concerned about you.

Jesus belongs to a stream of thought we find in ancient Jewish piety that views God as the source of provision for the needs of the day. One of the central stories of the Bible, which became the foundation for this ideology, is the story of the manna in the wilderness. Let me remind you of that story, which we find in the book of Exodus.

The children of Israel are wandering in the wilderness. They need to eat and they need to drink water; and every day, God provides manna for them. But what is His rule? It's this: They can gather only enough for that day. If they tried to gather more because they were concerned about having enough for the coming day, the remainder would rot. However, on the sixth day, Friday, they were allowed to gather a double portion for the seventh day, the Sabbath. But on no other day could they do that.

Why? What lesson was God teaching the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness? The answer is this: to depend upon Him. In fact, we find this again in Deuteronomy 8, when the children of Israel are getting ready to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land. In this passage, Moses reminds them that the entire time they wandered in the wilderness, their clothes and sandals didn't wear out, and they were fed by the manna. He explains that God's reason for this was to see if they would obey His Word and to teach them that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

***God is the source of provision for today,
so don't worry about tomorrow***

Jesus' Jewish contemporaries looked at this and said that God is the source of our provision for all things that we need in life: food, shelter, and clothing. They said that the person who has enough to eat today and worries about what he will eat tomorrow is a person of little faith. Notice in our passage from Matthew 6 how Jesus describes those who are anxious about tomorrow: They are those of little faith. In fact, when

we find that phrasing in the Gospels, “Oh you of little faith,” it is directly tied to the ideology that says, “God is the source of provision for today, so don’t worry about tomorrow.”

You may say, “Well, that seems really easy; that’s very simple.” Let me raise one question to you: What if Jesus was actually serious, though? You say, “Well, Marc, He doesn’t understand my life.” Take a moment to look at your life. The things in our lives often have the ability to crowd out our faith and our trust in God. In fact, Jesus tells a parable about seed that falls among the weeds, then the weeds grow up and choke out the seed. (We call it “The Parable of the Sower,” but really it’s about the four soils). He explains to His listeners that the weeds are riches and the cares of life that choke out our ability to grow.

Are there things in your life—I’m not saying they’re wrong, I’m not saying they’re bad, and I’m not saying they’re sinful—that are inhibiting your growth and trust in God?

In this passage, Jesus said, “Look at the birds of the air, look at the grass of the field, look at the flowers that grow up and then wither in the summer sun! If God takes such account of those things, how much more valuable are you to God?” (Matthew 6:26, paraphrased).

We live in an age where many are rightly concerned about the atmosphere of the world. But even as important as the world we live in is to us, and should be to us, God values human life even more. So don’t worry. In fact, Jesus compares His worried followers to pagan Gentiles, “The pagans worry after these things, but not so with you. Why? Because your God is your Father, and He’s going to take care of you,” (Matthew 6:32-34, paraphrased).

Jesus illustrates this in multiple ways in the Gospels. One of them is in the Lord’s Prayer, where He teaches His disciples to pray, “Give us today our daily bread.” That language should draw their minds to the story of manna, calling them to remember that God is the source of their provision.

Too often, especially in our world today, it’s easy to view ourselves as self-made individuals. We look at our success after the fact and say, “Well, God blessed me!” But what about when you walk through deep waters? Do you see that God is still there, and then choose to not worry? Do you relax, believing “God’s got me”? Do you have the courage to pray today for your daily bread, knowing that the God Who provides your bread for today will also be there tomorrow to provide what you need then?

Can you trust that God’s got you?

One way Jesus demonstrates this in the Gospels is in a famous story—the storm on the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is not an actual sea, but a lake—the lowest freshwater lake in the world. It sits at 600 feet below sea

level and is surrounded on the western, northern, and eastern sides by high hills, creating the perfect condition for storms to blow up quickly. There are these winds that blow in the fall and early winter of the year out of the east—the Arabic term for them is sharkia. The topography and the winds create ripe conditions for serious 10-12 feet high swells on the waters.

I experienced this a few years ago, when I was with a group traveling from Tiberias, which rests on the western shore of the lake of Galilee, across to the eastern side. As we started off, suddenly the winds kicked up. By the time we got across to the other side, the waves were so high they were coming over our boat, which was powered by a modern diesel engine. The captain was forced to dock the boat in that port; they could not sail it back across so had to call for taxis from Tiberias to pick them up. They then had to drive back the next morning and get back on their boat. It was that serious of a storm. The place we were staying in that night was on the shoreline of the lake, so we listened all night to these howling sharkia winds, the crashing of the waves, and the tempest that was stirred up on the lake.

Even with modern boats, these storms are serious to navigate; but in this story, Jesus and His disciples are out in a boat, traveling across the lake. They don't have modern motors to help them, so you can imagine how terrifying these storms would be to them. This is serious! The waves were legitimate. The threat was real.

Often when we read this story in the Gospels, we tend to treat Jesus like a Superman. We see Him showing His divinity over nature. He is asleep in the boat, the disciples come to Him terrified, and all of a sudden Clark Kent removes his glasses and pulls back his shirt revealing the "S" on his chest. And when we do that, we actually miss the point of Jesus' message.

In the Gospels, Jesus performs His miracles for two reasons. The first is to punctuate a teaching. He'll teach something, then perform a miracle as the exclamation mark—putting it in bold, underlining it as if to say, "This miracle demonstrates that I am correct."

We previously covered the second way when we talked about the Kingdom of heaven: He sees His miracles and exorcisms as evidence that God has anointed Him and that God's reign is breaking through into the world. Those are the two ways He uses miracles in the Gospels.

So what is the point that Jesus is making here? Remember, He's asleep in the boat, and the disciples go to Him and wake him up. What's his response? "Oh, you of little faith."

Remember what I said earlier: That phrasing puts us into this ideology of, "Don't worry! God's got you." Why is He telling the disciples this? The waves were real! The threat was legitimate! He tells them this because they had forgotten that the God of the universe cares about them, even in the midst of a storm.

This demonstration of His power and authority is not about Superman showing off his S. It's about Jesus essentially saying, "Guys, even in a moment where there is a legitimate threat, you can never give way to anxiety and worry because that demonstrates that you do not trust God and His care enough for you. Relax!"

Never lose sight of the teaching that Jesus is trying to convey. At the conclusion of this passage in Matthew 6, He says, "The pagans seek after these things, but your Father knows that you need them all. But seek first God's reign, and all of these things will be taken care of." What does that mean? Our relationship with God is pretty simple: He bears responsibility for us. What we eat, where we live, and the needs of life, God bears responsibility for us. The Psalmist said, "I have never seen the righteous going hungry or his seed begging bread," (Psalm 37:25).

Jesus tells His followers not to seek after those things because those things bring anxiety and worry. Our responsibility is to seek God's rule and reign. We do that by passionately pursuing obedience to God every day, by seeking His reign in our life every day. In other words, if we take care of those things that matter to God, which is our obedience to Him, God will take care of us.

Can you trust that God's got you? Can you relax? Can you live in a state of staying relaxed, not worrying or being anxious? Let me be clear: Jesus isn't saying that you sit back and God will just take care of everything for you. It's an issue of focus. We have work to do, and we have actions and behaviors to walk out in obedience to God in our lives. But if we will focus on what matters to God, we can be sure that God will take care of us. Don't worry. Relax. God has got you.

Question What are you worrying about? Can you trust that God's got you? Can you relax? Can you live in a state of staying relaxed, not worrying or being anxious?

Family Chat Can you think of an example of what it looks or sounds like when someone is worrying? Can you give an example of what it looks or sounds like when you see someone trusting God?

Take Action Confer with your life group or accountability partner(s) about the things you are facing this season that are causing undue stress and anxiety.

Family Challenge Place a jar labelled "Trust Fund" in a common area of your home. Each time you notice you or someone else in your family feeling anxious about something—whether it's real or imagined—

discipline yourself to write a note and place it in the jar that starts with something like this, “Jesus, I choose right now to give You what I’m worrying about, _____, and I trust You with the outcome.” Sign and date it. When the jar is full, take some time as a family to read the things on the notes and talk about how you felt about the situation at that point in time—and how you are feeling currently.

Modified Challenge If you want, place a monetary value on the note, \$1 or 25 cents or whatever would be appropriate, and add money to the jar each time you catch yourself worrying about something. On the day you take account of what’s in the jar, use the money in a way that will bless someone else. For example, if there’s, say, \$10 in the jar, use it to make or buy cookies, and deliver them to a neighbor.