

Why do you worry?

“Questions Jesus Asked”

Matthew 6:25-34

Scott Currie

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Intro

(SHOW SLIDE 1) [Title slide]

Here we are on question number four in our series “Questions Jesus Asked.” This series is meant to invite us to enter the life of Jesus through his strategic use of questions so that we can think well, worship well and live well.

Ok. After putting together two messages in this series I realize even more the incredible complexity of Jesus’ questions. There are so many different angles, so many possibilities and so many contexts in which our responses might vary. As I mentioned last week, the questions Jesus asked require work.

I’ve also been reminded of how valuable it can be to do the work of sitting with Jesus – really sitting with him – seeing yourself with Jesus; looking into his face as he asks you each question and then watching him wait patiently for your reply. The nature of these questions does not change from generation to generation. The questions Jesus asked strike at the heart of what it means to be human and confronts us with choices to make between the kingdom, or rule, of God and the kingdom of the world. To choose wisely, that is, to work hard at identifying the options and then to still our heart to make our decision – to admit our decision – allows us to clarify the resources available to help us face the challenges in life.

(SHOW SLIDE 2) So here is the question from Jesus today: “Why do you worry?”

Notice that it isn’t, “Do you worry?” The assumption of the question is that of course you and I worry. There are all kinds of opportunities to worry. Michele and have now been away from our youngest daughter for over a month; the longest that we have been away from her together. She is currently a cabin leader at a bible camp in southern Alberta and is riding the rough waves of stress and fatigue that accompany the position of living with a group of girls at camp attempting to declare and demonstrate to them the difference Jesus makes in a person. We can be there on the weekends to help care for her and comfort her and provide strength for her. How is she really doing? Is she going to survive this summer? Is her faith going to be affected by the challenges that she encounters? Each of these questions points us in the direction of worry.

You have your own questions that do the same. There is never any shortage of opportunities to worry. The opportunity to worry is not what I think Jesus wants us to address today. His question to us today – Why do you worry? – asks us to consider whether there is any REASON to worry. That is, if we are under the rule of God – if we have received his invitation to repent of our sins and to serve him – whether there is really any reason to worry.

There is one other matter to address when it comes to dealing with this question from Jesus. We must also carefully consider our broken humanity. Worry and its related intensified versions of anxiety and despair can sometimes be mishandled when we open Scripture if we do so without an attending realization of the depth of our brokenness. Reading statements about worry here in Matthew and elsewhere in scripture can leave one with the impression that it's just a matter of stopping, right? Are you worrying? Well, just don't and if you can't, you don't have enough faith in God. Just trust God more.

Don't worry.

Trust God.

Ok, yes, this is what we are going to hear today because these are two necessary facets to any answer to the question "Why do you worry?" if, that is, you are submitting to the kingdom of God. However, sometimes, there is more of our brokenness at play. Here is what I mean.

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On August 12, 1996, Michele and I experienced a dramatic life change; the birth of our first child. I will NEVER forget that moment [...]

Amidst the joy and wonder of that experience lurked a much darker facet waiting to emerge. Unbeknownst to us, the birth of our first child instigated a series of events that resulted in Michele experiencing what is known as postpartum depression. She didn't realize what was happening and neither did I. Just like I will never forget the moment of the birth of our first daughter (and the other two as well), I will never forget the experience of learning about postpartum depression. I remember waking up with Michele many times to help her attend to our newborn because there were times when she was unable to control her emotions and accompanying thoughts. Things got bad enough that we visited the emergency room twice during the first few weeks of having our daughter home with us. Those emergency visits with the doctors were very helpful if only that we had something to call what we were experiencing. The one thing above all that I will remember about that time is looking into Michele's eyes and knowing that something was different. The look on her face - the helplessness in her eyes - compounded by my own complete lack of understanding is a frightening experience. I learned that there are times when it is impossible to force yourself, on your own, to stop worrying. Sometimes, we need to hear the question: "Why do you worry?" with a substantial measure of gentleness.

One of my favourite descriptions of Jesus appears later in Matthew. In chapter 12, verses 18-21, we read a quote from Isaiah 42 applied to Jesus:

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"Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles will hope."

Sometimes, special intervention is required. If you are concerned that special intervention might be needed in your situation, please speak with someone you trust. Please listen to your family, your friends, and your medical support system. These are all part of the resourcing that God can use to help you provide an answer to the question, “What do you worry?”

Sometimes, we need to hear that Jesus responds gently to our worries:

“Are you worried about death? That’s OK, I got this. I am the resurrection and life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.”

“Are you worried about hurt from others? That’s OK, I got this. In this world, you will have trouble, but I have overcome the world.”

Are you worried about the terrible mistakes you made in the past? That’s OK, I got this. If you confess with your mouth that I am Lord and believe in your heart that God raised me from the dead, you will be saved.”

“Are you worried about your poor health, about your physical or mental weakness? That’s OK, I got this. When the Kingdom is fully revealed, I will wipe every tear from your eye, mourning and crying and pain will be no more because they do not have any part in God’s Kingdom.”

When deep worry resides in our heart and mind, the implication of Jesus’ question does not change. Ultimately, there is no reason to worry when God has got our back. However, there are times when we need Jesus’ question to confront us (that will be the main approach I will take in the rest of my message) but there are also times when we need Jesus’ question to come alongside us in a way that does not break us like a broken reed or snuff us out like a smoldering wick. In each case, it does not take much force. If Jesus is like that, so should we in the case of others and in the case of ourselves.

[With all this in mind, let’s pray and seek God’s grace and insight into worry.]

Body

The first thing we notice about our passage is that it begins with a “therefore.” At the risk of repeating a bit of cheesy hermeneutical line, whenever we see this word, we need to ask “What is the ‘therefore’ there for?”

Context

(SHOW SLIDE 5) “Therefore!”

Verses 25-34 are part of a larger section that includes verses 19-24. Thus, the consequent – our passage on worry – is premised on the preceding section. Let me quickly summarize the preceding verses. We are presented with three little subsections each of which offers a choice of two:

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1. Two Storehouses (vv19-21)
2. Two Kinds of Vision (vv22-3)
3. Two Masters (v24)

[Reaffirming My Foundation: much of our work is right here]

[Storehouse = Where are you entrusting your future?]

- It is a matter of security: What or who do you trust for your future?
- It is a matter of value: What do you want the most? (vv19-21)

[Vision = What do you value?]

- It is a matter of vision: How do you see the world? (vv22-3)
- What are your cues?
 - The pressure to conform is not always obviously devious.
 - Conforming can be merely looking for cues (i.e., how am I doing?) based on worldly metrics (size of house, age of car, number of shoes, enough money saved, etc.).

[Master = Who do you serve?]

- That is the essence of today's message: we can start to avoid worry with a question: Who do you choose to serve? (v24)

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[If we try to say one thing (“I trust God.”) and yet act differently (storing up treasures on earth) we are creating dissonance in our life. If we want one thing but strive after something else, we create excellent conditions in our life for worry to incubate.

It is with these things in mind that Jesus then confronts the human propensity to worry about things that are not worry-worthy. He uses the word

(SHOW SLIDE 8) *merimnao*: [Some ways to understand its meaning:] “to care for”, “be anxious about”, “think earnestly upon”, “scan minutely”

It is tempting here to reduce this term to the term “obsess.” So don’t obsess over food, drink and clothing. To a degree this does cover it. The problem is our humanity, right. As humans we like to play the comparison game. “Well, I don’t think about this stuff as much as he does. He obsesses.” Or, “I don’t spend as much time as she does following influencers. She is obsessed.” To get ourselves off the hook is to find someone who just spends more time, or is more interested, or has more than we do and we call that obsessing. So, while there is a sense of obsession that is entailed in this term, I do not want us to settle there. Instead, I want to encourage you to think of it in terms of focus, priority, importance, and value. These are all loaded terms as well

What does Jesus teach? The text provides three “therefore” that partner with the term, *merimnao* to provide the structure:

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1. Therefore, do not worry about your life [as defined by] food, drink, and clothes (25).

(SHOW SLIDE 10)

2. Therefore, do not worry about food, drink, or clothes (31).

There is a subtle shift that arises from the logic. If we are to avoid worrying about life as defined by food, drinking and clothing then it follows that as distinct items, they are not worth the worry either.

(SHOW SLIDE 11)

3. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow (34).

The issues are:

- Magnitude: how much time are you spending? How much effort are you exerting?
- Priority: What matters to you? What SHOULD matter to you?
- I don't think it is appropriate to then conclude, don't care at all. That is not the point of Jesus' teaching. He is not saying, "Just chill."
- Jesus is precise with his illustrations: money (possessions), including food, clothing, time

(SHOW SLIDE 12) [Title slide]

First, what this is NOT saying. It does not mean that we shouldn't care AT ALL. It is not permission to go and eat and drink whatever you want, or that we are to live, eat, drink and clothe ourselves with just the basics; to eat just for the utility. [Do you know who Sylvester Graham was? Well, at least you have heard of the Graham Cracker, right?]

It also doesn't mean that we are to not find any joy in what we eat or drink or wear. Jesus is not here promoting a life bereft of these kinds of pleasure. Some places in Scripture suggest that it is ok to enjoy food, drink and clothes. Listen to the words in Ecclesiastes chapter nine:

Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do. Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

I know, we need to be careful with the book of Ecclesiastes (my favourite book in the Bible, for your information – maybe I'll tell you about it sometime). I'm not making a strong moral case – that we are thus obliged to always enjoy food, drink, clothing and hairstyles. I am just suggesting that I don't think Jesus is presenting an extreme view of food, drink and clothing that implies no pleasure. It is not wrong to sometimes eat, drink and dress for enjoyment. Physical pleasure is not always sinful just read the Song of Solomon.

The problem is that it can become your central concern or such that you obsess over what other people are wearing in terms of coveting or criticism.

- Teaching of content regarding food/drink/clothing (e.g., 1Tim6.6-8).
- The key is not "that disciples need not work – birds do not simply wait for God to drop food into their beaks – but that they need not fret [or to overwork their attention on the matter]"

Jesus tries to focus the issue by asking some further questions. Listen to these questions:

- Do you think that life is more than food and the body more than clothing?
- Do you think that you are more valuable than birds to God?
- Do you think that you can add to your life by worrying?
- Do you think that God can provide?

Conclusion

In the Kingdom of God, worry is USELESS and UNNECESSARY. Do you see that?

The Kingdom of God is being revealed right now.

Therefore, the Kingdom is the PRIORITY and the GUIDE.

Until the Kingdom or Rule of God is finally and completely revealed:

- Default to a combination of contentment and generosity regarding our things, our lives, our clothes, and what we eat and drink.

These rhetorical questions Jesus asked are still questions that invite a response. I may think that they are rhetorical but do you:

(SHOW SLIDE 13)

- Is my life more than food and my body more than clothing?
- Am I more valuable than birds to God?
- Can I add anything to my life by worrying?
- Do I think that God's provision is sufficient for me?

Here are some ways to respond (two parts):

(SHOW SLIDE 14)

How to Alleviate Worry

1. Check your foundations.
2. Answer the questions.
3. Seek help if you struggle to answer any of them.

(SHOW SLIDE 15)

How to Minimize Worry

4. Prioritize the kingdom/rule of God in your life through righteous living.

There is at least one place in Scripture where *merimnao* is used in a positive sense. Writing about the conditions related to being married and unmarried, he explains that if you are married you have the additional responsibility to worry (*merimnao*) about pleasing your spouse. However, if you are unmarried then the only things to worry about (yes, he uses this same word!) is “how to please the Lord.” That is just another way of saying, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

Don't prioritize, magnify, value, or spend too much time thinking about the rest.

Let me finish by offering one other quick way to think about this issue. If I was to ask one of your closest friends what would they say your life points towards?

(SHOW SLIDE 16) John the Baptist [pic]

[Isseneheim Altarpiece by Grunewald in the 16th century for a monastery in France]

Are we living to point at ourselves, are we spending our time worrying about ourselves? Are we "seeking the Kingdom" (following Jesus, pointing to Jesus)?