

Little Faith Lots of Worry, Lots of Faith Little Worry!

By Randy Anderson

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Matthew 6:25-30
Preached on: Sunday, September 12, 2010

First Evangelical Free Church
2601 W. 69th Street
Sioux Falls, SD 57108

Website: www.firstfreesf.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/firstfreesf

You guys are ready for prime time television.

Interview show, NBC, eight o'clock, dateline [?], very, very, very good.

Matthew six and we will this morning be looking at verses 25 to 30. But I want you to think of verses 25 to 30 as one of the ways in which Matthew 5:16 takes place. This is a big challenge for us for... on a scale. Some people have more of a tendency to worry than others and some less. But all of us, given the right set of circumstances and if when most people would be worrying you and I aren't, because we simply believe that God is and will take care of us. That shines like a light and that is Matthew 5:16.

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”¹

How trustworthy must he be if these people are trusting him under these circumstances? That is what we want to be seeing in our lives.

Let's stand, Matthew 6:25-30.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?²

¹ Matthew 5:16.

² Matthew 6:25-30.

And then the first phrase of verse 31. Therefore, given all of that, “Therefore do not be anxious.”³

Let’s pray.

Father in heaven, we ask that you would teach us from this passage how it is that we are to go about trusting you such that we worry less, are shaken less often, have less anxiety. But that is our prayer. Not just so that we can be comfortable, but so that we might shine as lights in the world and that people’s attention would be drawn to you as one who is so trustworthy that it gets their attention as they watch and rub shoulders with your people, trusting you. So that is our request today from this text.

Lord, we thank you for the great privilege of being able to be involved in a partnership with a church in [?]. Lord, we thank you that [?] could be up with us today and share a little about that. And we do just pray for those four families in our sister church there who are feeling discouraged, that you would use the ministry of that church and the ministry of our prayers to encourage them out of that, that they might yet shine as lights for you of an encouragement in spite of difficult circumstances, whatever those circumstances are in that place for the sake of the fame of Jesus’ name. And we ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Be seated.

There was a little piece in the *Wall Street Journal* this last week about some comments that Steven Hawking has made to the effect that he believes the universe has come or came spontaneously into existence with no specific causation, certainly no personal causation. It just came into existence.

Now I am not sure why that is big news because that has been being said for the better part of 150 years. In fact, one of the premier German philosophers of the last century, early last century Martin Heidegger, his whole philosophy is based off of that reality that he speaks of the existence of the universe as because through Einstein we know it is expanding. It is just expanding out. And so with that image Heidegger said it is like the universe has been thrown into existence, just thrown out.

But nobody threw it. And there is no reason for it being there. It is just there. It is just there being thrown out. And it is expanding and that is it. That is it.

And Heidegger wrote a great deal about the anxiety that comes from anybody who takes that seriously, if that is reality. Because that means we live in an accidental place. There is no personal purpose in it. And we are as accidental as everything else in the place. And so as we accidentally came into existence, we will equally accidentally go out of existence. And how do you think comfortably, hopefully, meaningfully about your life if that is the case?

³ Matthew 6:31.

Now, of course, very few people actually believe theoretical Atheism like that. It is a very, very small percentage. Most people in America believe basically what television tells you to believe about God. God exists. He more or less loves everybody the same. He could care less what anybody believes about him. He certainly has no views on sexuality of any kind, but people go to heaven to watch their children watch football after they are gone. That is so that, you know, it is pretty vague like that.

But that is not overly comforting because our consciences have built into us some sense that we answer to somebody. And to believe that you sort of answer to somebody, but to be filled with vagueness about what the standard is by which you answer and to be told that you really don't know much of anything about the character of the person you answer to, is not a comforting thought.

Now Jesus comes along and says, "Well, I will tell you what God is like. And I will tell you that if you come to God through me, if you follow me to God, God is such that you should just be able to quit worrying. The better you see him, the better you know him, the better you understand what has happened to you by faith in me," Jesus would say, "the clearer you will see you don't have much to worry about even though your circumstances may be quite difficult. You don't have much to worry about."

I state our thesis or Jesus' thesis here something like this, just broadly. We are being taught to notice and trust God here so that we can stop worrying. We are being taught to notice and trust God in such a way that we can stop worrying.

Here is, again, what Jesus says.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious.⁴

Don't be anxious.

Four emphases on why not to worry here. Number one, Jesus would have us be great noticers. Earlier in the summer in my Sunday school class I referred to—I know that is not a word, noticer, but it was used by one of the scholars being interviewed by Ken Burns in his documentary on Mark Twain where he said, "What made Mark Twain such

⁴ Matthew 6:25-31.

a great writer, America's greatest writer is that Mark Twain was a great noticer. As he watched people, all the idiosyncrasies that make people interesting would come into his mind and he could spill back out on a page and, therefore, he could just more or less paint people to the life and situations of life. And that," the scholar said, "is what made him so enjoyable to read. It all traces itself back into the fact that he was a great noticer."

Well, that is what Jesus has been talking to us about all the way through chapter six. He says, "Do you know what happens to you? When you are generous, you tend to be bad noticers because what you tend to do is notice whether people are paying attention to you while you give and hope that they are so that you can impress them and that is all wrong, short sighted. Who you ought to notice when you are generous is your Father who is in secret, who sees in secret and give for the glory of God. Give for the pleasure of God." He says, "Same thing when you pray. When you pray you should notice God. Don't notice whether anybody else is paying attention to you. Don't notice the wrong person. Notice the right person, God who is in secret and who sees in secret. And when you think about what is valuable and where you want your treasure to be, notice that nobody gets to stay on earth all that long. So this is a bad place to stack up treasure because no matter how much you get, you are soon leaving. You are soon leaving."

A number of years ago, over 26, 27 years ago I was up with some friends one summer evening waterskiing in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. And it still is to some degree, but Lake Geneva used to be where wealthy Chicago went on the weekend and so there is a lot of great homes on one side of the lake that belong to the Chicago aristocracy. My favorite was William Wrigley's house built way up on a hill, a beautiful brick mansion on a perfectly manicured lawn. And you just look up through these oak trees and this perfect grass to this mammoth structure from the lake up on top of the hill.

And the guy that was with me said, "Well, of course, Wrigley, he is long dead and he sold that house long ago to somebody else's corporation. So it is just a corporate weekend gathering now. Nobody lives in it. Nobody owns it. But they keep it up and the company brings guests and so forth for special events. That is what happened to it now."

It is like the child's book. You look up at this house and say, "That..." And it is magnificent. It is magnificent. I would love to get a tour through it. I really would. I would love to see what is inside of that place. It is magnificent.

But when you are looking at the house it is like that child's book. You know, *Where's Waldo*. But where is Wrigley? There is the house, but where is William Wrigley, II?

Well moths and rust, thieves got it, time got it. He is gone. He is gone. Now, his money is not all gone. The Wrigley's just sold out to M&M Mars two years ago for 23 billion dollars. So there is still a little Wrigley money around somewhere.

But the man who initially, you know, put little chewing gum on soap that he was selling and eventually found out that there was more money in the gum than in the soap, he is long gone. He is long gone.

Jesus says to us, "Notice that. Notice that."

Because the story of William Wrigley is the story of everyone.

And now notice the birds of the heaven to our why worry. How can you not worry if you live in a place where moths and rust and thieves get you for sure? How can you not worry in that place about particular things like having enough to eat, having enough to wear.

Jesus says, "Notice the birds." Jesus would have us notice God's relationship with birds. Look at the birds of the air."

This is God watching and God noticing through birds. It is not primarily bird watching. You have got to notice the birds, but you notice the birds for the sake of God watching, not bird watching.

Now in the first century, of course, they spent a lot more time outside than we do, walked everywhere, most people worked outside, birds, birds, birds, birds, birds all day long everywhere for most people. So if birds remind you of God you will be constantly reminded of God. So they are an excellent reminder. They are an excellent reminder.

I remember as a boy at certain times of the year when the starlings would be moving the trees out in front of our house in Rockford on 25th street would just fill with starlings. You would not want to go stand underneath those trees. If you looked at the sidewalk, you would know instantly this is a bad place to stand. Because you couldn't actually see any cement anymore, just starling poop everywhere, just filled with these trees. Sit on the front porch and listen to those starlings cackle and they made just an awful loud sound.

But it never occurred to me, it never occurred to me. How do all those birds eat? There is thousands of them in our front yard sitting out in those trees, the place is just black with birds. Who feeds them all? God does. Oh, yeah, feeds them here in Rockford, feeds them all across as they migrate. He feeds them all over the place. He feeds them north. He feeds them south. They are all gathered here. He is feeding them. It is mostly fruit and insects that he provides.

They all stay fed though they have never planted a field. They have never harvested one. They have got no barns to store things up and no bank accounts, no social security hopes for the future in retirement, nothing. And there they are.

Jesus says, "Just look at those birds."

And then he says to us, "Do you imagine that God values starlings more than you?"

I will tell you. He doesn't. Just read Genesis chapter one. You are a unique creation of God. You are made in his own image. He feeds them all.

“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father...”⁵ Not their father, your Father feeds birds. Your Father who feeds birds, do you think he is not going to feed you? He is not the Father of the birds. Your Father, he feeds the birds.

Don't you think he will feed you given you are more valuable.

And then it says, Jesus says, verse 27, “And, by the way, and by the way...” And this is the embarrassing moment. “And by the way which if you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?”⁶

What does worry accomplish for anybody? Now if you are cautious sometimes that can help you a little bit under certain circumstances, but caution and worry aren't the same thing. They link up once in a while, sometimes worrying people become cautious people in some ways, but they are not the same thing.

Worrying accomplishes nothing ever. No protection, no help, no aid, no wisdom, nothing, nothing. And Jesus says, “Notice that. Notice that.”

You have never gotten a single benefit in your life from worrying and so consider giving it up.

Secondly, Jesus would, or actually, thirdly, second from our text. Jesus would have us notice God's relationship with plants.

And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?⁷

And he not only clothes them, but he clothes them magnificently. They beat Solomon out who is known for his extravagance as to personal luxury and self aggrandizement and they beat him, they beat him.

You drive across South Dakota in the Spring time and, you know, look out over the plains and it would be impossible to estimate how many flowers are out there that nobody planted, that nobody takes care of. Nobody weeds them. Nobody fertilizes them. There they are by the billions they are out there wearing their impressive clothing.

⁵ Matthew 6:26.

⁶ Matthew 6:27.

⁷ Matthew 6:28-30.

A number of years ago in Rocky Mountain National Park, you know, you are driving up that road goes up to 12,000 feet and there is places you can stop and walk off to the side and walked off up one of those trails. And I am color blind so I don't now whether the flowers were blue or purple. It doesn't really matter. But there is these blue or purple flowers just all over the place. And there is a little sign about them up there, a little sign about them up there that lets you know these flowers are so resilient that when a foot of snow falls down on them in the Spring and then goes away, they are still there. Blow sleet across them. Sometimes the wind in the Spring, 100 mile an hour winds, thunderstorms coming across there. They are still there. They are still there by the millions. They are there looking just like this. You get down next to them and they are impressive.

And we are supposed to see God does that. God is clothing them.

Jesus said, "Think that way."

God takes them through the snow, through the storm, through the wind. And make no mistake about it. The storms come. The snow falls. The wind blows. I wouldn't want to be up there in 100 mile an hour wind of sleet at 12,000 feet. The plants are there. There is flowers are there.

And God does that to these flowers that are alive today and tomorrow are thrown into the burn pile. And then he says, "Will he not much more clothe you,"⁸ clothing and food being just what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer, daily bread, things that we need day by day by day by day.

Notice. He says, "Watch birds and flowers and when you see them, think God."

What is God's relationship to these birds and these flowers? He clothes them.

Will he not much more clothe us?

Fourth, and finally, Jesus would have us realize how little and how rarely we notice God helpfully. It is really true. Jesus would have us realize how little and how rarely we notice God. When it comes to God we are lousy noticers. He gets lost in our problems. He gets lost in our circumstances. He gets lost in our difficulties and the problem that drives our lousy noticing, Jesus labels here at the end of verse 30. He describes us this way.

"O you of little faith."⁹

Now that is a single word, that word little faith, a single word. It is not used very many times. Usually used of the disciples when they are in trouble. Matthew 8:23-26.

⁸ Matthew 5:30.

⁹ Ibid.

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep.¹⁰

Now there is the picture. There is where we often find ourselves. We find ourselves in a storm, not usually on a boat at sea. We find ourselves in a storm, our lives in a storm. The storm our health has disappeared. That is a storm. Our income has disappeared. That is a storm. Major relationships fallen apart. That is a storm.

And in the storm, for the moment, Jesus nowhere to be seen. He is off sleeping somewhere. Literally in this story he is literally asleep in the boat. They are up there struggling for their lives and Jesus is asleep.

And they went and woke him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.” And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.¹¹

Now if you put yourself in their shoes, you see, we don’t like Jesus a good deal all the time.

“Why are you afraid?”¹²

Why are we afraid? Just look around. The boat is sinking. That is why we are afraid. I thought it was patently obvious why we were afraid. The water is coming in. The boat has all... We know more about sailing than you do. At least experientially. We have spent more time on this place than you have. This is the kind of storm where you go down and don’t come to shore. That is why we are afraid.

And Jesus, I think, would say this.

“But don’t you trust your Father?”

Well, right now you are not doing such a great job with the water.

“Oh,” Jesus said. “No,” he said, “It is much simpler than that. It is much simpler than that.”

You say, “How so?”

He says, “Men, if your Father does not want you to get to shore, you are not getting to shore. I don’t care how you row. I don’t care how you work. You are not getting to shore, no way. On the other hand, if your Father wants you to get to shore you are going to sit on the shore and have some fish and have a nice time. Your life is in his hands.

¹⁰ Matthew 8:23-24.

¹¹ Matthew 8:25-26.

¹² Matthew 8:26.

You know that, don't you? Your life is in his hand. You don't always know what he is doing, but you can always know that he is doing it. It is your Father who runs all the storms in the world, always has, always will. That is what you know. Your Father, your Father, your Father. Your problem is as soon as a storm comes up, you forget about God instantly and that is because you have little faith. All of your knowledge of divine revelation becomes useless as soon as the storm rises because you can't think about it. All you think about is the storm. You just look around and see the waves and see the clouds and feel the wind and that becomes the only things that are real in the universe."

But that is never the only thing that is real in the universe. In fact, God is always more real than anything else and he created and sustains everything else. That is where you actually live. That is how you are actually to think. That is what disciples are supposed to see.

Now, realistically, of course, our faith is always imperfect, always, as long as we live. And so we will always have a tendency to worry a bit. Some more than others.

But there is an inverse relationship. And that is what Jesus want us to see. As faith deepens, as faith deepens, worry should lighten. It just does. If you see it, if you see reality for what it is, if you could see reality perfectly for what it is, then we could be like Jesus. He walks up on the deck with these guys and says, "Why are you guys afraid?"

He sees the same thing they do. Why are you guys afraid? It is the storm.

Oh, I see the storm.

And then he more or less says, "Let me show you how fast your Father can turn the storm off if he wants to. Peace be still." The storm turns off.

Now as you watch the lives of the rest of the disciples they do not get to learn. That is not a trick that they learn, storm stopping. No, for the rest of their lives as soon as a storm comes they say, "Ok, we learned this from Jesus. Stop, oh storm," and then it stops.

No, no, no. Most of them will be martyred. They die in the storm. They die in one storm or another. But thy die in the storm of their Father's choosing. That is where they die. And to know that, to look around and to know which is what we are supposed to know by faith. I only exist in the storms that my Father has sent me.

And he has purposes for good in every storm that he sends. Everything that I lose, every humiliation that I experience, good, good, good, good, don't worry. Don't worry. Just follow Jesus forward in the training program that he has taking note of such things as he has taken care of all these birds. Don't worry. He is taking care of all these flowers. He is clothing them. You are worth much more than them.

So how do you take little faith and turn it into larger faith? And in this we close?

Well, Paul just tells us.

“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”¹³

And so Sunday school starts today. Sixth graders in our curriculum they take a... they have a whole year on providence. And you could say they have a whole year on worry prevention. That is what providence is, worry prevention. If we believed in the doctrine of the providence of God as will be taught to sixth graders in Sunday school this year, we would just... if we believed it perfectly, if we believed it like Jesus, worry would be gone. It would just be gone. We wouldn't worry any more than Jesus did. We really wouldn't. We wouldn't.

Faith comes by hearing. Be a hearer so that you can live out what you hear. That is our calling. The people of God are called together by God. Worship, witness and wisdom for the sake of the world. The people of God are called together by God to practice, to embody, to be clothed in worship, wisdom and witness, clothed in the Word of God, worship, witness, wisdom for the sake of the world, so that people look in from the outside and see why don't these people worry like I do?

I am constantly aware of my Father who is in secret who sees in secret, who has made promises among them being that everything he brings my way is for my good. And he never leaves me and he will never forsake me no matter what is going on. Believe that. Hang on to that and worry less.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank you for your promise that you do never leave us, never forsake us. For your insight that you are taking care of creatures worth much less to you than we are all the time. And we, as your people, are not merely created in your image, but recreated in Christ, given your Holy Spirit, presenced with by your Word and Spirit all the days of our lives. May we learn to see our lives in such a way that we worry less and less all the time as we see you with greater and greater clarity all the time. Help us to these ends in Jesus' name we ask. Amen.

¹³ Romans 10:17.