

Freedom from Worry

Text: Matthew 6:24-34

Hymn: "What God Ordains Is Always Good" (*LSB* 760)

"I have a mountain of credit card debt," a man told his friend. "I've lost my job. My car is being repossessed. My house is in foreclosure, but I'm not worried about any of it." He said, "I hired a professional worrier. He does all my worrying for me so that I don't have to think about it." And his friend said, "Well, that's amazing. I didn't know you could hire a professional worrier. How much do those guys cost?" And the man said, "Well, he costs about \$50,000 a year." "\$50,000 a year! Where are you going to get that kind of money?" And the man said, "I don't know. That's his worry." Oh, would that it were that easy to cope with our worries—just hire somebody to do it for us!

For those people who sat there at the feet of Jesus and actually heard the Sermon on the Mount, we can understand why they might have had some worries. Just imagine their life in that primitive culture. Would their arid climate produce enough food for everyone to eat? Would the sheep produce sufficient wool to clothe yet another child? Would their health hold out in those days when a simple infection could kill you?

If these people could have been transported through time and could see us and all that we have and the abundance of the material things and the food that we have, they would say, "You folks don't have any worries at all. You're all set." And yet we do worry. Anxiousness, it turns out, does not discriminate between classes of people. Whether you are a third world earthquake survivor living in a tent city in poverty and squalor, or you are a first world multimillionaire living the posh life of wealth and privilege, we all find stuff to worry about.

I know that you probably think that the worries of wealth is a problem you wouldn't mind having. Are you sure? *Forbes* magazine published an article titled, "What Worries the Rich?"<sup>1</sup> And the article begins with these words: "Having real money doesn't mean you stop worrying. No, really." Then it goes on to list some of the things that rich people worry about. Unscrupulous financial advisors who rob them blind. Being sued. Being detached from their families because it takes so much time to manage all their wealth. And wealth doesn't take care of itself. Worry in your life doesn't have to do with how much or how little you have, but it has everything to do with which master you're willing to serve.

And that's why our Lord uses the word "therefore." There is a direct link between which master you're going to serve and how much you're going to worry. Is your master Mammon or is it God? The way you answer that is going to affect how much you worry in your life. And by the way, the word Mammon is a much better translation than the word money. Mammon is a Chaldean word that means avarice or greediness. And Jesus uses that name to personify your money and your investments and your material things when those things become a master to you, when they become your god.

Money is necessary. But it becomes Mammon when you start to trust it and you love it and when you would set aside godliness to get more of it, when you hoard it to yourself, even though your neighbor has genuine needs and the ministry of the gospel is starved for resources.

Clothes are necessary, but they become Mammon when we jam our closet so full of clothing that we can't even remember what we have in our closets. Or when we buy

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<sup>1</sup> "What Worries the Rich?" *Forbes.com*. [https://www.forbes.com/2007/05/22/wealth-rich-poll-biz\\_cx\\_lh\\_0523worry.html?sh=7c35ba784e9e](https://www.forbes.com/2007/05/22/wealth-rich-poll-biz_cx_lh_0523worry.html?sh=7c35ba784e9e). Accessed 13 September 2023.

our clothes as status boosters because it says some certain thing across the chest. Or when we would make fun of somebody else because of the clothing they wear, then it becomes Mammon to us.

Shelter is necessary, but it becomes Mammon when we use our homes as a measure of our standing in society, of how important we are, or to outdo the Joneses, or when the comfort of our home becomes so important to us that behind its cozy walls we forget about those who have no shelter.

Nothing wrong with material things until they become Mammon to you. And the acid test of whether or not money and material goods have become Mammon to you is really very simple. Just ask yourself, Do you worry about these kinds of things? Do you worry about running out of money before the month runs out of days? Are you anxious about your investments, whether the market is going to make or break you? Are you afraid you've gotten yourself so far into debt that you're not going to be able to climb back out again? Are you uneasy about the security of your 401K?

You know, given what our Lord teaches here about the Father in heaven taking care of the birds and the lilies, I wish that I could stand up here before you as a man of great faith and say that I don't worry about these things. But the truth is, I do. And the words of Jesus apply to me, too—"O you of little faith." And I'll bet you worry about those things, too. Don't we all struggle in this area?

I thought about this and I think maybe our problem boils down to this: You are only as secure as your god is reliable. If you have a reliable God, you have no worries. But if your god is inherently unreliable, then of course you're going to worry. So the very

fact that I am worrying about things shows that I am putting too much stock in Mammon. Why else would I worry?

And Mammon, it turns out, is about as reliable as a weather forecast in April. Everywhere you look in the news, Mammon is failing those who trust it. Money gets stolen by thieves, wasted by the government, wiped out by downturns in the market, devalued by the printing of more money and inflation, taxed by the IRS, eaten up by never-ending bills. Everything we have in this world can be taken from us in the blink of an eye, if God so wills. The Earth quakes, and the god of Mammon falls, and is nowhere to be found to help or to save his people. So yeah, it makes sense to worry if you have an unreliable god like Mammon.

But if your master is the reliable One who cares about even the birds of the air and who arrays the lilies of the field in colors more dazzling than King Solomon could ever have imagined, then your worries begin to melt away. Now the Lord doesn't give us any easy answers here about how to address whatever it is that's worrying you. He doesn't give us pat answers like, well you just gotta look at the bright side, keep your chin up, it's just money. He doesn't give us a catalog of the things that God actually wants us to have so that once we've amassed those things then we can stop fretting about the rest. He doesn't tell us to go to amazon.com and get ourselves one of those smooth worry stones that you can hold in your hand and rub your thumb over and feel better. You can't just pay someone to do your worrying. The only antidote to a worrying heart is a completely reliable God,

Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all of this other stuff will be added to you as well. We seek Him first because He is utterly reliable. He is the

one who gave us His one and only Son. Not only did His Word create the lilies and the birds, but His Word of grace has recreated us in the forgiveness of our sins, in the newness of life, and in the blessed hope of everlasting life. Not only does He clothe the lilies of the field, but in your baptism He arrayed you in even greater glory, in the righteousness of Christ, in the resplendent vestments of His glory and His holiness that cover over all of the sins, blemishes and stains of your life.

And not only does he feed the birds of the air, but in the Sacrament of his Table, He feeds you his very Body and Blood, which He sacrificed for you on the Cross. And as we use those gifts, our lives become oriented toward Him. And we begin to find release from our worries. There isn't a magic bullet that's going to slay all of the challenges and troubles of life. There are still going to be times when the month hasn't run out but the money has, times when you're going to have to decide between something you want and something you actually need. But look at the birds in the air. Your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than they? It's simply not consistent to have a reliable Heavenly Father and yet to worry.

An old comedian tells the story about trying to throw his trash can away. It turns out that a trash can is the one thing you can't get the garbage man to pick up. He had this old rusty trash can that he set out in the alley one morning, thinking the garbage man would understand that he intended to throw it away. But when he came back from work that afternoon, there was that old garbage can stacked right there next to the other ones. Next week, he turned the garbage can upside down so the garbage collector could see all the rust and the holes in the bottom of it. Surely the garbage man would get the message. But once again, the old beat up garbage can was still standing there

when he got home. Third week, he decides to take a hammer to it and put some serious dents in it before setting the trash can out. And this time, not only does the garbage man not take it, he actually tries to take some of the dents out of it.

How do you get rid of a trash can? How do you get rid of worry? Worry is a garbage can that gathers all of our anxieties and our fears and our uneasiness. We know we need to get rid of it, but the enemy just won't seem to let us. How do you get rid of it? You are only as secure as your God is reliable. It's not a gimmick that you need. It's not a pat answer. It's not more Mammon. It's a new orientation toward the one Master whose reliability has been sealed to us in the blood of Jesus. Seek first His righteousness and His kingdom, and all those other things will be added to you as well.

Pastor Brent McGuire  
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church