

BELPRES CHURCH

What Is It?

Matthew 6:25-34, Exodus 16, Deuteronomy 8:2-3

Speaker: Anthony Ballard

Disclaimer: This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.

Good morning. Those of you online, good morning. Good to see you. My name is Anthony Ballard and I'm the director of discipleship here. And I worry sometimes. Yeah, you can laugh. But I worry sometimes because every time when I'm preparing a sermon, there's two weeks prior to the sermon that I have insane writer's block and I worry that this is the time when I'm not going to have anything to say. And I'm going to have to call Pastor Scott and tell him, "We got to figure something out because I got nothing." Every time. And I swear every time, it's like, "This is the one where I'm going to mess up." It hasn't happened yet thankfully.

But all of us here have some type of worry because there's no shortage of things for us to worry about in our world. At the macro level, we could worry about the wars that are happening around the globe. There's wars that are happening that we don't even hear about in the news but they're happening, and there's natural disasters that are happening. And for some of us, we worry about politics in our communities, in our cities. And at the personal level, our needs also can become things that we worry about.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow laid out the human needs and our worries as a hierarchy of how we worry about things. And so we have our physiological needs, which are things like food, shelter, and clothing, our safety needs like things like our health. And then love. We all need love, friendship and family, and our esteem, prestige, and freedom. And then we have self-actualization which is the ultimate to become the most that a person can actually be. And I don't care who you are, where you're from. All of us fall somewhere on the hierarchy of needs. We might all be in different places. Even babies are on the hierarchy of needs because babies have needs and wants too.

Whether we admit it or not, our belief is that these things, if we seek these things the right way, we can actually achieve them. So we go to the right school, get the right education, then that will lead us to the right career. And then from there, we'll attract the right spouse. And then from there, we'll have the right prestige in the right social circles and all that stuff. And in some ways we've been taught to believe that and it's come true in some ways. In the movie Scarface, Tony Montana who's a gangster, he had his own hierarchy of needs. He said, "In this country, you got to get the money first. And after you get the money, you get the power. And after you get the power, you get the women." That was his hierarchy of needs, not Maslow's.

But we might not teach our children these things verbally but it comes out in how we live and how we prioritize our lives. The truth is actually in our actions. And so the purpose of this sermon series is called You Have Heard It Said, meaning that culture will tell us one thing and then we look to scripture and we find that Jesus tells us usually something totally different. And so how are we comparing and contrasting those two things? You've heard it said this, Jesus says that. That's how it goes. And today, we are talking about needs and worry because whether you're rich or poor, whether you're young or old, whether you're a baby or a senior, we all got worries. We all got things that we need but only one way that they can actually be provided for us. I want you to take a moment and I want you to look at this hierarchy of needs and what is the thing that you most need and worry about? Take a second.

Now that you got it, hopefully you got it, I want you to hear the words of Jesus and let this wash over you. Jesus says in Matthew 6:25, "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 are? Can any 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, 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 is tomorrow thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, you of little faith?"

Dang, Jesus. "So do not worry saying, 'What shall we eat?' 'What shall we drink?' or, 'What shall we wear?' for the pagans, that is non-believers, 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."

Man, I love the reactions every time I've read this so far. After I've read that verse, there's probably two reactions that you have. And the first one is if there's ever a passage where the preacher can sit down and shut up, this is it, huh? You don't need me to say anything

else. Jesus said it all right there. And then the second thing you're probably wondering is how is this guy wearing a suit and telling us not to worry about our clothes, right? I know you're thinking it. I expected that. But I'm going to tell you the same thing I told Pastor Scott when we went suit shopping. Jesus said, for real, Jesus said, he said, "Don't worry about your clothes." He did not say, "Don't care." So Pastor Scott, we're going to buy the Nikes and the suit and all this stuff because we care. We don't worry about this stuff.

But worrying and caring are two different things. Some Christians have taken this passage and passages like it to mean that we should not enjoy food, that we should try to eat as little as possible, or we shouldn't produce nice things or wear nice things because none of that matters. Only the things of the spiritual world matter. And that is not what Jesus is saying at all. But what he is saying is that people who believe in God and they also believe that that same God provides for all their needs that they might have. So you can care but don't pursue them so much that it turns into worry and anxiety because that is what people who don't believe in a God who provides do.

And as I said before, there's a lot happening in our world and there's a lot of things happening in your own individual lives that are worrisome. And I would be so bold to say that I would read this same passage in any part of the world that's facing extreme poverty, that's facing warfare and violence. And I would say this same passage would not be tone-deaf. And I can explain why. Because the people that Jesus was speaking to, they were the poor. They were the downcast. They were the oppressed. They were an occupied people. They lacked something at every level on the hierarchy of needs. They had every right to worry about their basic needs, their futures, and their safety. And they actually worried about the Roman Empire 2,000 years before it became a TikTok trend. And if you don't get that joke, find a young adult and ask them what in the world is he talking about. They'll know. You'll know what I'm talking about. Thank you.

So telling these people not to worry about food and their shelter and their clothes and safety, it's like telling them not to breathe. But still, Jesus says, "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" Today, we know the answer is no because worry and anxiety actually make us sick and it can even lead to death for people. So caring is good, worry is bad. Jesus says that the God of the universe cares, doesn't worry, but He caress for you more than the birds of the air. And I think that's kind of crazy because there's some really cool birds that exist out there.

I think for instance, I think blue jays are really cool birds. They're beautiful. Is the blue jay up there? That's a beautiful bird, right? God caress for you more than that beautiful blue jay. Someone on the sermon review team told me, "Don't use blue jays as an example because they're really mean birds and they're loud and they attack other birds and stuff like that." But that actually makes my point even better because God even caress for the annoying, loud, rowdy blue jays. Thank you, Jesus. So that means he definitely caress for you even more.

Worry does nothing for us so Jesus offers us a better way and he says to seek first the kingdom. The kingdom of God isn't just religion, but it's God's, the heavenly government come down to earth to live among us. Culture says that you can achieve the hierarchy of needs if you follow certain paths of success. But Jesus says if you put the kingdom first, you get the whole world thrown in the pot. Every spiritual need, every physical need is automatically a part of the deal. Jesus is offering us the greatest government assisting program ever and there's no catch to it, okay? So turn to the person next to you and say, "Get with the program." Online, type in the chat, "Get with the program." We're about to join this, the greatest government assistant program before this sermon is over.

There's three ways I'm going to share with you on how we can overcome worry and even get with the program. And the first one is to prioritize the kingdom. Prioritize the kingdom. Priority, first means priority. Whatever has priority in our lives is actually the thing that we're seeking and it actually shows what we believe to be true. So if we want to seek first the kingdom, we got to get to know King Jesus. There we go, King Jesus.

And there's different ways we can do this. The two simplest ones is prayer and reading the Bible or listening to the Bible. This summer, we did a sermon series on the Psalms where we talked about prayer and the different types of prayer we find in the Psalms. That sermon series is over but the call to prayer is not over. You could still seek the Lord in prayer. And the other way, for those of you who are engaging in our Bible reading plan, you can engage in that and that's a great way to get to know the king because it's all about the story of Jesus.

And I'm not just saying that because it's like the new shiny thing that BelPres is doing. I actually believe that it works and it helps us grow. As a preacher here, for me, one of the ways I grow most of my faith is during sermon prep. I have a cheat coat to spiritual growth, I feel like, because sermon prep does so much for me. While yes it can lead to some stress, but mainly I'm growing a lot in my faith. And that's because I'm reading a lot. I'm studying all these different passages and things that you don't even get to hear that don't even make it into the sermon. I'm learning all this stuff. And then I'm praying and I'm asking the Holy Spirit to make me a person who lives this out and is making something that's worth listening to for all of you. It is amazing what it does for my own spiritual growth.

And you might be saying, "Good for you, Anthony. Reading the Bible is your job, right?" It's kind of true. It is part of my job. But at the same time, that's the problem because it can become just my job rather than a means of seeking the kingdom. So Pastor Scott said to me one time, he said, "If you find that you're only reading the Bible to prepare for a sermon, then that is a bad sign." And so I'm using the Bible more as a way to impress you guys and sound good up here rather than a way to get to know the king.

That's the challenge for anyone who's a preacher or anyone who works in full-time ministry. It becomes work rather than the means to get to know the Lord of the universe. And so it's not so much for me in my personal life. Seeking the kingdom doesn't mean what I do the two months before a sermon is coming, but it's what I do tomorrow that matters. So now all of you can email me and make sure that I'm seeking the kingdom tomorrow morning after I can kick back and not have to worry about this anymore. But it's the time. It's not the time, actually, the time and the quality that we need to pay attention to and read the Bible because the time and quality of our reading and praying can fluctuate depending on a season of life. All that matters is whether or not we give it the priority in our life. So the first thing we do is we prioritize the kingdom by seeking first the king.

And second, you can remember who is responsible for you. That's how you overcome worry. Jesus, he makes this promise about seeking the kingdom and having our provisions. And I know that for us in the western world, that kingdom talk is still a little bit weird because we don't have lords and kings anymore and all that. But one of the things that really helped me was learning what kings and lords actually did when they were around. And in actual governments, the role of a lord or a king isn't just to make laws or command people what to do, although it is that. Don't lose that. But in the kingdom like Jesus is describing, the lord owns the land and is also responsible for the people and their livelihood and their wellbeing, the people who live on this land.

That's why Psalms 24 tells us that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it and all who live in it, meaning that Jesus is lord over this entire planet. Wherever you might find yourself, Jesus is the lord there. Psalms tells us that he owns the cattle on a thousand hills, which means that he is rich beyond what we can believe. And then Ephesians tells us that he's also rich in mercy, which means that he can forgive us of any sin that we can ever do. And there's plenty of mercy leftover. He doesn't run out of mercy. And James says that every good and perfect gift comes from God. It all comes from Him. He's the Lord of the land.

So there's a reason Jesus can even have the audacity to say that God will provide for our clothes, our food, our life, because he knows who's responsible for our very lives. A lord that doesn't provide for his people is no lord at all. In fact, he's a slum lord and Jesus ain't going to be a slum lord for any of our lives. It's in the interests of Jesus that he provides for his people and he's responsible for you. And for me, this changed everything. It changes how I pray because when I'm in need, I don't pray like it's my responsibility. I pray like it's the Lord's responsibility. I'm like, "God, your son is in need. Your daughter, my wife is in need. Show up and help us please because we need your help. You're the Lord who's responsible for our lives. Show up today." And He usually does. He often does or He tells me something else to do. That's not in my sermon script. Let me just stay on track. He shows up. That's the point.

So we overcome worry by prioritizing the kingdom, by remembering who's responsible for us. And then third, by eating manna. Manna, if you haven't heard of it, this is something that Jesus is he's talking about God providing for us because thousands of years ago before this moment, God had provided for his people in the most unusual way before. And in Exodus 16, it's after the Israelites, they had left Egypt. They were trapped in the wilderness and they were feeling hunger and they were lost. And if you've been hungry, which I'm sure you have, hunger can make you do and say some crazy things.

And so the people were so hungry and they were so tired of being lost that they went to Moses and they complained to him and they said that they would rather go back and be slaves in Egypt than stay here and be hungry. Because at least while they were slaves, they had food. They had enough to eat. They were slaves, but they had food. So they were willing to trade their freedom for a bite to eat. Can you believe it? Hunger makes you do and say crazy things.

But here's the thing, their mistake wasn't wanting to go back to Egypt. The mistake was going to complain to Moses first and not God. God had heard their cries in Egypt before himself. He would've heard their cries again. Moses was their leader but God was responsible for them. That's why in verse 4 of chapter 16, God is the one who responds to the people to Moses and He says, the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day, and this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day, they are to prepare what they bring in. And that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days."

And here's the thing, God actually did what he said he was going to do. He actually provided something from nothing. And it wasn't just food for food's sake, like some nasty cafeteria food to help them survive. He actually provided good stuff. It says that it was white like coriander seed and it tasted like wafers made with honey. Means they were eating king's Hawaiian rolls every day that God was providing for them. And this stuff was so unusual that the Israelites called it manna. And manna is a Hebrew word that means 'What is it?' What is it? They didn't have a name for it. "What is this stuff that we're eating?" They hadn't eaten it before. They had no frame of reference for it. It was just what is it? There's some branding for you.

But have you ever had something so amazing happen in your life that when you think back about it, you're not quite sure how to describe how it happened? That's a manna moment, a 'What is it?' moment. And the thing is they weren't supposed to save some for the next day. They were only supposed to gather enough for one day. They weren't supposed to stockpile it. They weren't supposed to invest it and make it grow to

something great for the next five years. One day God was going to provide and they had to trust that each day he was going to show up and provide for their life.

So what is it that you need from God? Is it something physical? Is it a family member that you worry about? Is it your own livelihood and life, your actual basic needs? Anything like that, you might need some manna. And so Jesus says, "Don't worry though about tomorrow because each day has enough trouble of its own." So we eat the manna that we have for today.

For those of you, some of you who know me, you know that I grew up in a city called Compton, California. And Compton is a city that is different from Bellevue in just about every way possible. If you know, you know. But there's also some good too that I won't go into now. But I also learned that the city of Tacoma got nicknamed to Compton. And let me tell you, even those are not at the same level, okay? Compton is its own thing. And so while growing up in the city of Compton, my family, we were a single-income household. My dad was the one who worked and my mom was committed to homeschooling all of us kids. And we lived in the lower end of working class, truth be told. We weren't doing well all the time financially. And I don't say that for any type of sympathy because I think we had a lot of advantages that other kids in Compton did not have just based on who our family was. But it's our reality.

And so there was a point though when my dad couldn't work because he got in a car accident and he was on disability. And my parents, they did a pretty good job at keeping financial concerns out of the minds of us as kids. They did a really good job actually. But there was two points in time where I knew that something was wrong and this was one of those times. And so my mom, she had the gifts and skills to cook really well. She had learned all this stuff from her grandmothers and aunts and everything, and they had poured it all into her and she ended up being the best cook in our family and most places that where we knew people.

And so when we lost our main source of income with my dad out of work, my mom did not panic and she did not worry. But she sought the kingdom. She sought the king of the kingdom. And so God responded to her and he did not send a check in the mail but he sent an idea, and that idea was for her to turn her cooking skills into a catering business. And as she did that, God also sent clients to provide in that time. And we had clients. She had clients that she had no business really having as just a person in Compton. There was some of the people that were her clients were celebrities like Magic Johnson, and she was doing the Super Bowl, Magic Johnson Super Bowl parties every year. That was one of our catering jobs. And I know now that throughout my childhood, whenever we had a catering job pop up, it was a time where my family needed manna and there was no other way that we were going to get it unless through that. I didn't learn this til much later.

And so during these times when she's making food for weddings, for parties, for celebrities, she would take extra of the food and she would make extra plates and give it to the homeless people who lived in our neighborhoods in our community. And we would have to go deliver them around the people. Because even in our time of need, there's still room for generosity. There's always room for generosity even in that.

And so as you're hearing this story, I hope that you're not thinking, "Wow, the Ballard family, they're so holy and highly regarded and everything." That's not what you should be getting away, taking away. Because the truth is, my sister and I complained a lot whenever there was a catering job because a catering job meant two things. It meant that we were going to have to clean up the kitchen after she was done cooking and we were going to have to do all the deliveries to the people in the neighborhood and stuff like that. Which when you're a kid, you don't want to do that. I wanted to play Nintendo. There also, when you're a kid working like that, there are no child protection labor laws for you either. So we were working all day. And let me say, the kitchen was dirty, all right?

So this story is not some thinly veiled American dream success story because God did not see fit to make us rich and turn my mom's catering business into some multimillion dollar restaurant franchise. In fact, God didn't make us rich and help us move out of Compton either. But in fact, he kept us there for a long time and we continued to have to be witnesses to the Lord in His goodness in our time there in Compton. And He used us anytime we got manna, it was a blessing for our whole block because everybody got to eat a piece of the manna that God was providing. So my mom, by the way, way her catering company, the name of her catering company was Manna From Heaven. And the reason why she named it Manna From Heaven is because whenever she would cook something, people would eat it and say, "Ross, this is so good. What is it?" And so that turned to her name, the name of her catering business.

And so this is my family, a picture of my family up there in our little apartment in Compton. And this was years after my dad's accident. And I want to let you know that you were looking at a group of very blessed people in this photo. We are blessed. I'm going to try it. I keep getting choked up last time. We're blessed because we had eaten manna, bread from heaven, for years up until this point. And it tastes good. And we were going to need manna for years after this photo was taken. We still need manna today. And look how cool I look by the way in that picture. I thought I was so cool at that time. I was like 14 or something. I thought I was killing it. Man.

Psalm 37. Psalm 37 says, "I was young and now I'm old. Yet I've never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging for bread. They are always generous and lend freely, and their children will be a blessing. I've seen the righteous hurting. I've seen them oppressed. I've seen them suffering. But I've never seen the righteous forsaken, never." So we have three ways that we can overcome worry in our lives. Prioritize the kingdom, remember who's responsible for you, and eat manna. Whatever it is that you

need, eat it. God will provide it. He rains it down from heaven. And you know that it's a manna story when it's something that you can't quite explain. That's a manna story.

So what is it that you need? Some of you here are worried about paying rent or your bills or your childcare. You worry about how you're going to afford that. Some of you don't worry about anything financially. You have everything you need and then some. You have the biggest house on the block. But let me tell you, if there's no joy in your home, you need manna too. Everyone in this room needs something from the Lord. And He is rich and He can provide whatever it is that you need.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 says, "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these 40 years to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commands. He humbled you causing you to hunger, and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." Because it's not the bread that matters. It's not the bread. Whatever the thing is, it's not that that matters but it's the one who can provide the bread that matters more than anything. And so Jesus declared that. He says, "I'm the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." He's the Lord who provides whatever it is that we need, that manna for our lives. He provides it freely and generously more than the birds in the air. He gives it to us.

So I encourage you, what is it that you need? Seek the Lord first. He's the king of the kingdom and He provides everything. And with that, I want to pray for all of us. And I want you to open up your hands like you need something. If you need something, my hands are open literally. Jesus, we believe that you provide whatever it is that we need. So Lord, I pray for every person here. If they need something physically, if they need something spiritually, if it's mental health, whatever it is, Lord, we believe that you are the God who provides. So we ask that You provide it for us. And we thank You that you are great. You are merciful. You are mighty. You are generous. And it's with that that every person who had a need said amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do you feel when you read this scripture (excited, angry, worried, etc....)? Why do you think that is? (Explain in your group and then take that response to Jesus in prayer this week.)
- As you read this scripture, where does it challenge your current cultural context?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Why is it so difficult to put aside worry and focus on God's priorities?
- When have you seen God provide "manna" in your life or your family's life? Where are you needing God to provide physical or spiritual "manna" today?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.