

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expository-times\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php)

pdfs are named: [Volume]\_[Issue]\_[1<sup>st</sup> page of article].pdf

## The Sermon on the Mount.

### How Jesus dealt with Worry (Mt. vi. 19-34).

BY THE REVEREND D. M. BAILLIE, M.A., CUPAR.

#### I.

To begin with, it is highly interesting to observe, as we cannot help doing when we read the Gospels, that Jesus did explicitly and repeatedly deal with the problem of worry. It is one of the perennial problems of human life, and, like the other human problems and ills, it was tackled by Christianity from the very beginning. The phrase which in the A.V. is rendered 'Take no thought,' and in the R.V. 'Be not anxious,' has sometimes been rendered, and not unhappily, by the colloquial English 'Don't worry'; and that phrase goes sounding through the New Testament, from the Sermon on the Mount onwards. 'Don't worry about food and drink and clothing,' said Jesus. 'Don't worry about tomorrow.' 'Don't worry about what you are going to say' when you are brought to trial for your faith. And Paul, who had learnt his Master's lessons so well, said to his Philippian friends, 'Don't worry about anything.' And another disciple counselled his fellow-Christians to 'cast all their worry on God.' The same word comes in so often, whether as noun or as verb, to show us how conscious those early Christians were of this problem and of its solution.

It seems quite plain from the Gospels that Jesus was greatly struck by the amount of worry there was in the world, spoiling human life, and interfering with the really high and noble interests of the human soul. He saw around Him men and women whose lives were being marred by caring care about the mere externals of life. He saw that a great many people were so obsessed by these anxieties as to have no leisure of mind left for finer things. And it was not only one class, but all classes.

Sometimes it was the poor He was thinking of and speaking to when He spoke of worry. There was plenty of poverty in Galilee. It was not very easy, in the lower ranks of life, to make a living and to keep a roof over the head of a large family and fill the mouths of hungry children. Probably Jesus knew that part of the situation by personal experience: He knew the circumstances that make people worry about provision for the morrow, since He was the eldest of a large family, and probably its chief breadwinner from an early age, if, as seems

likely, His mother was left a widow when the children were still young. Certainly Jesus had warm sympathy with the poor, and His words about their daily anxieties have the unmistakable note of compassion. Moreover, we must think that Jesus frequently had the experience of preaching to people who were so pre-occupied with the cares of the mere struggle for existence that they could not find leisure of mind to attend to the intangible realities of religion. There He was with a mysterious message about a coming Kingdom of God, a message that made big demands on the people that would accept it, calling them to high and heroic levels of conduct in preparation for the Kingdom. And how could the poor folk attend to all that? They loved to listen to Him, but then they had to go home and think of household needs—of where the money was to come from for next day's food, of how to eke out a small and uncertain wage for a large family, of what might happen if they had a period of unemployment, if 'no man hired them.' It was hard enough to make one's way through the world at all: how could they give their minds to an unpractical thing, that didn't bring in any money, like this dream of a coming Kingdom? That was how the poor sometimes felt; and Jesus could see it in their faces, and was very sorry for them: their lives were being so spoiled by worry about the mere business of making a livelihood, so impoverished and side-tracked and hindered from the enjoyment of the things that really make life worth living.

But sometimes when Jesus spoke of worry He must have been thinking, not of the poor, with their struggle for existence, but of the rich or those who were feverishly struggling to become rich. In the interpretation of the Parable of the Sower we find 'the worries of this world' put alongside of 'the deceitfulness of riches' among the things that choke the word of religion in the human heart; and whether the interpretation of the parable be accepted as representing the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus or not, this part of it savours unmistakably of His outlook. We sometimes say, with pity, that it is almost impossible for the very poor to find room in their lives for the interests of religion, but Jesus felt that kind of pity rather for the rich: it was for

them that salvation was almost impossible ! The greatest danger of all was that people should let their hearts be burdened with over-indulgence and drunkenness and worldly worries, and so be utterly unready for the Kingdom. Jesus saw around Him people who were so engrossed in the quest of wealth, so obsessed by what Tennyson calls 'the narrowing lust of gold,' that they were blind to everything most worth seeing. They had no eyes even for the beauty of the world around them, for the little sparrows rolling themselves in the dust and enjoying themselves in the sunshine, free from care, or for the wild flowers of the countryside, arrayed more gloriously than the fabulously rich King Solomon. It must have been of these people, as well as of the poor, that Jesus was thinking, even in the great passage about worry and care in the 'Sermon on the Mount.' This is plain in Matthew's version, where the passage against worry begins with the danger of laying up treasure on earth instead of in Heaven, and of trying to serve Mammon as well as God ; but it is still plainer in Luke's version, where the whole passage (separated from the 'Sermon') is so naturally introduced by the Parable of the Rich Fool, who (very unlike the birds, that 'have neither storehouse nor barn') was obsessed by the idea of enlarging his barns, whose worries were caused by his having so much of this world's goods. Upon such people Jesus must have looked with a profound pity ; they were making such a miserable thing of their lives.

And between these two extremes of the rich and the poor He saw all possible degrees. But in all the degrees there were so many people whose hearts were set mainly upon possessions ; and when people's hearts are so set, their degrees of wealth make little difference to their worries, for they are always poorer than they would like to be, and they strive to become a little richer, without limit. And so they become pre-occupied with 'the cares of this world,' which we nowadays call 'business worries,' and life becomes clouded over with anxiety. Jesus saw it all around Him. People were going about with care upon their faces, with worry upon their brows. People were going through life like that. They were being dogged by worry. And Jesus set Himself to deal with this evil.

## II.

How did He deal with it ? For one thing, He pointed out, simply as a matter of common sense, or perhaps we should say, of broad human wisdom, that worry never does any good. It doesn't help.

That is a lesson that one learns, though slowly and unwillingly, as one goes through life ; and Jesus taught it plainly. 'Which of you can add a cubit to his height by worrying about it ?' Does this perhaps carry with it the idea that worry does more harm than good, that it is bad even for the healthy growth of the body, that an anxious mind doesn't help the body's functions, but rather hinders them, that no one ever thrives on worry ? Probably Jesus' meaning was rather this : that the whole realm of things about which people are worried and anxious is such a tiny fraction of their lives, and makes so little difference. People consume themselves with care about food and clothing, and it really makes very little difference to their lives whether they get much or little of these accessories. All their feverish anxiety is about things that are the merest fringe of life. Life itself is a far bigger thing, mysterious and beyond our control, with fixed conditions that with all our anxious care we cannot alter. 'Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothes.' When with much worry you succeed in growing rich, your body (not to speak of your soul) is not any the better of all the trouble you took on its behalf. You are no better off than the sparrows who don't worry about it at all, and you will clothe your body in ugly garments which at their very best cannot compare with the beauty of the wild flowers that spin no yarn at all. How little all your fuss goes for ! How little you can really do ! How little difference *that* sort of thing makes ! Why let your life be spoilt by constant anxiety about it ? And as for the habit of going to meet possible troubles before they come, crossing streams before you reach them, 'worrying about to-morrow,' that is a foolish habit, which people must learn to put away. To take one day at a time, and deal with problems only as they arise, and refuse to waste time and strength in worrying about the contingencies of the future, is a fundamental and elementary secret of getting through life. 'To-morrow will take care of itself : to-day's troubles are enough for to-day.' These simple sayings sum up and deepen all that the ripest human wisdom has ever said about the foolishness and futility of the habit of worrying.

## III.

But that is only a beginning. For however futile and foolish the habit may be, and however clearly we see it, we may yet be quite unable to overcome the habit. That is what common sense perpetually replies to its own wise counsels on this subject :

granted that worry does no good, nevertheless it *will* come and haunt the mind and will not be driven away. How can we help having anxious and troubled minds when times are bad and cares are pressing?

It is here that we come to the heart of Jesus' teaching on the subject, namely, His counsel of faith in God.

There is no doubt that in our Lord's mind this lesson was connected with His appreciation of Nature, and we may well imagine that He found help in this region Himself when He was tempted to give way to anxieties. Nothing is plainer in the Gospels than His quiet sympathetic perception of the life of the world of Nature around Him; and it may be that when He was burdened with the cares of that large household at Nazareth He derived comfort and peace from the contemplation, some summer day, of the little birds and the wild flowers, and ever afterwards took that way of helping other people against their worries. Many a sage or singer of Israel had looked at the flowers of the field, which fade so quickly, and found in them a sad reminder of man's mortality. But when Jesus looked at the flowers it was with very different feelings: He was moved by the thought of their wonderful beauty, of the trouble God had taken to devise such beauty for flowers that were to bloom one day and perish the next; and this was to Him a source of glad and peaceful thoughts. 'If God so clothe the grass of the field, which is there to-day and is thrown into the oven to-morrow, will he not much more clothe you, O ye people of little faith?' The gist of it all is that worry can have no place in the hearts of those who really believe and trust in God. How could it? The Gentiles worry about food and drink and clothing: that is what makes up life for the godless world. 'But *your* heavenly Father knows you need all that. Therefore *you* make His Kingdom your first care, and all that will come.' It is curious how the distinction is drawn between 'the Gentiles' and '*you*,' precisely as in the passage about greatness and service, as if Jesus thought of the Kingdom as an *Israel* of God. But the main religious point is quite clear: that religion ought to save us from worry, that people who believe in God as their heavenly Father ought not to be obsessed by the cares of life, but should have care-free minds for the quest of His Kingdom; and indeed that those who really trust in God *will not* have anxious minds. Worry is a sign of 'little faith,' and the one cure for it is more faith. Dr. Abrahams quoted a saying from Rabbi Eleazar the Great (first century): 'Whoever has bread in his basket and

asks, What shall I eat to-morrow? is none other than those of little faith.' But whatever we think of the relation of this to the sayings we find in the Gospels, there was in the teaching of Jesus nothing more individual and characteristic than His diagnosis of unbelief or little faith as the source of all sorts of weakness and failure and worry among men, and His prescription of faith as the cure. To Him the secret of the untroubled mind was not passionlessness, suppression of desire, submission, resignation, but something much more positive and joyful and adventurous: it was faith in God. And it seems really to have puzzled Him that people who professed to believe in God should worry so much. He was continually surprised at that kind of thing. How could people keep on worrying about little things if they really believed in the Heavenly Father who feeds the birds and arrays the flowers and will much more take care of His children? The one unailing cure for worry was faith in God.

#### IV.

It is highly important to observe how much this faith involved, and to understand what this counsel really meant. When we are burdened with the cares of the world, in what sense are we to cast them upon God, and put our trust in Him? What are we to believe He will do for us? In what way will faith save us from worry? Here is a man who has set his heart upon 'success' and prosperity, upon climbing the ladder of wealth and position; and in the struggle he becomes a prey to anxious care, his heart is consumed with worry. What counsel does the Sermon on the Mount offer him when he seeks a cure for worry? The Christian counsel has sometimes been taken to be: Trust in God and carry on, and you will prosper, with the blessing of God which maketh rich. It has sometimes been reduced to a very worldly interpretation of the ancient Psalmist's counsel: 'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass'; as if faith in God were something that could be added like a talisman to the most worldly life, and as if the cares created for us by our most selfish ambitions could be daily cast upon God, that He might give us our hearts' desire and save us from worry as we seek for riches. But Jesus meant something very different. He meant such a faith in God as would lift us above our worldly cares by making us live for different things altogether. That is abundantly plain in the Sermon on the Mount, when it speaks of worry. We need not discuss the question whether Jesus was through-

out addressing those who had already left all and followed Him (a question which is complicated not only by the uncertainty about the setting of the 'Sermon on the Mount' itself, but also by the fact that in Luke the passage on worry is separated from the Sermon and forms a separate discourse). For the whole subject of worry is closely bound up, in this section of the teaching of Jesus, whether in Matthew or in Luke, with the question of the true and the false riches and the corresponding ambitions between which the human heart has to choose. The cure for worry is faith in God, but this faith in God involves a very revolution in a man's outlook. It means that he is no longer going to live for the kind of treasure that can be destroyed by moth and rust and stolen by thieves. So long as a man does live for these things there is no possible escape from worry. He can't cast these cares upon God, for God has no interest in keeping a man rich. He does not really believe in the Kingdom of God, but in the earthly treasure. He cannot know what it is to have that faith in God which frees our hearts for the seeking of His Kingdom. For a man who clings to the worldly outlook there is no end to worry. You can't have it both ways, for 'no one can serve two masters,' and 'wherever your treasure is, your heart will be there too.' You can't solve this problem at all unless you are willing to get your aim right—to give up the worldly aim, and live for the things that really matter: *everything* depends on getting your aim right. 'The lamp of the body is the eye: so, if your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is wrong, your whole body will be full of darkness.' All these sayings stand together in the passage on worry in Matthew, to show us that Jesus' solution of the problem of worry was no isolated specific for an isolated disease, but a part of His one great message about committing oneself absolutely to God. To live for petty and material things—that is the world's way, and it involves us in 'the world's worries'; but Christian faith involves and implies a different way. 'After all these things do the Gentiles seek. But *your* heavenly Father knows you need all these things: *you* seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added.' And that is an end of worry.

#### V.

There are two difficulties that may yet remain in our minds. In the first place: Can even this high doctrine of Jesus reasonably save a man from worry amid all the complications of the modern world?

Of course Jesus did not mean to discourage honest toil and forethought in the quest of a livelihood. But in the modern struggle for existence a man cannot, with all his forethought, even be certain of getting work and keeping it, and so being able to give to his family those worthy opportunities which even the most unworldly parent must wish his children to have. And in what sense can such a man, in bad times, be expected to put away all care and have faith that he and his family will not suffer? Well, this is not the kind of question that one can presume to answer glibly from an arm-chair. But let us humbly remind ourselves again that what we have here is but part of an all-round doctrine with which Jesus challenged all the difficulties of human life, that heroic doctrine of the omnipotence of faith which in many ways, apart from the problem at present before us, we find so staggering. Jesus taught that if only people would have faith in God all the obstacles and impossibilities of life would marvellously disappear. Perhaps we have hardly begun to take this seriously. But we are beginning to understand that in very truth faith can work wonders, and that no limits can be set to its achievement; and so perhaps we are more ready to believe that this counsel of faith is the very best and most practical advice that could be given even to an individual who has to struggle for existence amid the complicated evils of a materialistic modern civilization. And if the advice were to be *universally* carried out, or if all who profess to be Christians were to begin to live in the heroic spirit that Jesus commended, seeking first God's Kingdom, instead of their own advancement, in their daily avocations, it seems certain that not only worry but poverty and want would disappear from Christendom.

But then here is the other difficulty. When we do begin to care for God's Kingdom instead of our own enrichment, do not we inherit greater worries than ever, since there are no anxieties like those of religion and no burdens so heavy as those of the Kingdom of God? How can we help worrying about these things if we care for them? Well, there is no doubt that here too Jesus would apply His deep lesson of 'Don't worry,' and for a very deep reason. His followers should not think of the Kingdom of God with fear and anxiety, but with confidence and joy. 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.' They need not torment themselves with anxiety as to their defence of themselves or their faith if they should be haled to courts of justice. 'Don't worry beforehand as to what you are going to say, for what you should say will be given you when the time

comes—it is not you that speak, it is your Father's Spirit that speaks in you.' These spiritual cares also are to be cast upon God. Or rather (and here we come back again to the heart of the matter) it is just these cares that can especially be cast upon Him. So long as your cares are 'the cares of the world,' the anxieties of a selfish and worldly life, you are bound to be worried, for you have to bear them alone, since these are not God's cares and they can't possibly be cast upon Him. But when, with real faith in God, you begin to live for different

things altogether, your new cares of God's Kingdom are indeed far bigger than your old cares of the world, but then *they are God's cares*, and so you can have a quiet mind. From start to finish, according to Jesus, worry comes of living for the wrong things, and the other side of that is lack of faith; while the cure for worry is to commit oneself in faith to God and live for His Kingdom. And then:

I have no cares, O blessed Will,  
For all my cares are Thine.

---

## Literature.

### ANGLICAN ESSAYS.

STILL another composite work: *Essays on the Trinity and the Incarnation* (Longmans; 21s. net), by Members of the Anglican Communion, edited by the Rev. A. E. J. Rawlinson, D.D., Student of Christ Church, Oxford. This work, as Dr. Rawlinson explains, originated in the meetings for theological discussion of a group of friends who were all at one time engaged in the teaching of theology or of philosophy at Oxford. But Mr. A. D. Nock, who contributes the longest of the Essays, writes not from a theological nor a philosophical standpoint, but from the standpoint of an historian of religion. His subject is, 'Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background,' and it is a subject on which fresh guidance is always welcome. The author is in close touch with the important body of continental literature which deals with it, and is successful in presenting it in an exposition which is at once clear and cautious. It is interesting to find Mr. Nock suggesting, as Dr. Burch does in a recent volume (reviewed in another column), that the high place accorded to St. John the Baptist in the Mandæan literature is a reflection, not a contributory cause, of the high place occupied by Jesus Christ in the Fourth Gospel.

The other Essays, seven in number, are more closely connected with the main theme. The Editor writes on 'Hebraic Theism,' the Rev. F. D. V. Narborough on 'The Christ,' the Rev. K. E. Kirk on 'The Evolution of the Doctrine of the Trinity,' the Rev. F. W. Green on 'The Later Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity,' the Rev. F. H. Brabant on 'Augustine and Plotinus' and 'God and Time,' and the Rev. Leonard

Hodgson on 'The Incarnation.' All these essays, divergent as they may be from one another in matters of detail, are informed with the common conviction that Christ is not less than Divine, and Christianity involves a distinctive doctrine of God.

While the Essays, all seven of them, are useful contributions to their respective themes, and those by Dr. Kirk and Mr. Green are solidly informative on the doctrinal development as far as Augustine, Mr. Brabant's essay on 'God and Time' will be regarded by many as the most interesting, in respect both of subject and of style. He claims that his standpoint, which he puts forward in view of modern discussions, seems to be the one that is most in accordance with the main stream of Catholic tradition, namely, that 'the Time-process is real, but less real than the Eternal, dependent upon it, and, as it were, an offshoot of the Eternal, but to be re-absorbed into it, as it arose out of it; that Time is "the moving image of eternity," the growth-side of eternal fact, and yet with a certain freedom and contingency of its own (God letting His eternal decrees work themselves out through us).'

---

### MOFFATT'S COMMENTARY.

Dr. Moffatt's translation of the New Testament gave many readers a fresh insight into phrases and sentences and whole books which familiarity with the Authorized Version rendered obscure and opaque. It was itself a commentary, but it was felt that further comment was necessary in order to justify and even to explain the alterations, transpositions, and corrections of the old version,