

Matthew 6:25-34 – *Seven Desires of the Heart: to be Safe*

**Petra.** I found some fascinating history this week. We're seeing pictures of the ancient city of Petra, over 2000 years old, with buildings actually chiseled from out of the sandstone mountains! Now considered one of the ancient wonders of the world, Petra was once a great city located along the trade routes between the kingdoms of Arabia, and the eastern Mediterranean. The city eventually reached its peak population of an estimated 20,000 people.

Although much of the ancient city was literally carved from out of the sandstone cliffs of southern Jordan, the Nabataean tribe that inhabited it had constructed a wide array of tombs and temples, houses, great halls, altars, and even aqueducts. The Nabataean had established an advanced civilization that was located at the crossroads of the ancient Far East, and was a center for trade as various "spice" routes and trading trails of the time were all flowing through Petra.

What's interesting is that the main trail into Petra is through a crevice in the rock, nearly a mile long, before it opens up into a busy, sprawling city square. You can understand how this would serve as a strategic point of defense for the city itself!

But by the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Petra was virtually abandoned because first, the trade routes shifted away from Petra, and secondly, due to natural disasters from earthquakes and flooding. With all the planning the Nabataean tribe had put in place for their own security, surely they thought their place on the map would continue forever! With these grand buildings and ideal defensive measures, you would expect prosperity for thousands of years!



In fact, except for the few distressed natives of the area, this former capital city was lost to civilization for more than 5 centuries, until just 200 years ago. Even now, barely 5% of the ancient community has been unearthed by archaeologists, with many more mysteries yet to be discovered!

But do you see part of the priority for the people of Petra?

Security. Safety. Defensive military planning. Did you know that one of the seven desires of the heart is to be safe!

We can find this need to be safe expressed by people throughout the ages, from ancient Egypt, Greece or Rome – up to this day among the empires of China, Russia, America and the Mid-East. We pour billions of dollars into the global economy in order to build great networks of military power and espionage, to protect our food and power sources, and so much more!

We all understand the need to feel safe!

**Worry.** In fact, worry may be the most obvious reaction from our need to be safe!

Let's talk about worry because of our tendency to be afraid for our safety. The definition of *Worry* is a "mental distress or agitation resulting from concern usually for something impending or anticipated." In other words, worry is about *things that have not yet happened*. Worry is not an emotion, like grief is. Worry is a mental obsession. Someone once said, "Worry is like a rocking chair; it'll give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere."

Now it's natural to be worried or anxious when things are tough or unpredictable or when a solution to a problem is not clearly obvious. This causes us to replay possible outcomes over and over again in our minds. And being concerned can be positive when it propels us to action

such as seeing a doctor when we are sick. But worry is not like concern; worry immobilizes and is usually unproductive, but concern moves you to action.

Let's go back to our Bible lesson today. Jesus said: <sup>25</sup> **“That’s why I tell you not to worry about everyday life – whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to Him than they are? <sup>27</sup> Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?”**

First of all, Jesus is assuring us that we are more valuable to our heavenly Father than anything else! He’s also saying that worry is useless, wasted time – and we don’t have time to waste time! You are called to be Kingdom people; God’s people! **Why do you have such little faith? ...Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need!**

Jesus tells me that the idea of my worrying is due to a lack of faith! I’m not trusting in the Father! Worrying means we don’t believe God can look after the practical details of our lives, and it’s never anything but those details that worry us. You are to be people of hope! But unbelief begins as our little worries keep piling up.

We all want to be safe, to be free of fear and anxieties. 1) We want to know that we are *materially secure* – that we have food, and a place to live, and enough money to support ourselves. 2) We want to know that we are *spiritually safe* – that our God is a God who will not pull the rug out from underneath us; that He is a God who keeps His promises. 3) And we want to know that we are *emotionally secure*, that those around us are reliable, that the people who say they love us can be counted on to act kindly and graciously.

What do you think are some of the things people most worry about?

A professor of Psychology at Penn State who is an expert in the field of worry has found that the single most common source of worry is not the fear of war, financial disaster, holes in the ozone layer, AIDS, cancer, loss of a job, or divorce. But according to Dr. Thomas Borkovec, the single most frequent source of worry is other people’s opinions of our lives. “If this happens, what will they think? What will people say? Will I be laughed at? Will I be ridiculed?”

Now some of you are thinking, “I don’t care a bit about what others think of me!” So you’re in the clear there, right? But if you’re a small business owner or you’re an employee, you have to care a little bit about what others think, because those feelings and ideas show up now on a job performance report!

So worry is a very telling and destructive force in our need for safety.

**Materialism.** Our desire for safety can lead us into a paralyzing relationship with money. Let me define materialism: It is the attitude that physical well-being and worldly possessions represent the greatest good and highest value in life. Materialism conditions our soul to play life very safe and to be very selfish.

The danger to God’s people in the Church is that our desire to be safe can turn into selfishness as we withhold our money from the mission to serve God through compassionate, loving relationships with others.

Jesus said, **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in**

**heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** Matthew 6:19-21

Let me be clear: Wealth itself isn't the culprit. Owning nice things isn't a sin. But *materialism* is the idea that material possessions and our physical comforts and conveniences are more important than spiritual values.

It takes great courage to be dangerously unselfish. Trusting God demands courage on your part!

As people of faith, can we hear what Jesus is saying? <sup>31</sup> **“So don't worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’”** <sup>32</sup> **These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers,** (There's that idea of worry: *dominating the thoughts* of unbelievers!) **but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.** <sup>33</sup> **Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.”**

Jesus is trying to get our attention! Our safety comes, not from what we can do ourselves, but from what God will do for us. Isn't that what the red letters say? **“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.”**

The Nabataeans of Petra placed their security and safety in their cleverness and ingenuity, in their hideaway city, and that works for awhile. But we're fooling ourselves when we place our trust in earthly, temporary things: in the actions of politicians, in the weapons of war, and the discoveries of medical science. Surely you have to know that! Every great empire has eventually fallen. How much lasting security can we place on the lives of mortals? Possessions and people can disappear in a moment, but God does not change. Only He can provide ultimate security!

Can you embrace the creed with which we began today! <sup>2</sup> **The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety.** (Psalm 18:1-3)

When we begin to see life from God's point of view, we can be content; we can feel safe, knowing the security of God! In order to embrace this vision of faith, we will be helped along by detaching ourselves from the need to store up treasures on earth, detaching ourselves from the nonessentials, and focus on the eternal!

How can you find contentment? The answer lies in your perspective, your priorities, and your source of power. If God is your fortress and your rock, the One in whom you find protection, then you don't need to search any further for safety. The Bible tells us that God's protection over us is without limits!

**Witness of the Spirit.** I have said, from time to time, that we can know that we know that we know that we are saved, we are going to heaven after we die. That assurance of our ultimate safety is very much a part of our Christian faith! I don't know how many times I've heard people who surrendered their lives to Jesus as Savior and Lord say, “It was like a great burden was lifted from my shoulders!”

Well sure it was! That's bound to be your experience when the Spirit of God moves in to set you free from the clutches of damnation and hell! The Bible tells us to expect the testimony of God's Spirit in our own lives! “You are free! You are forgiven! You are born again!”

Romans 8:15-16 speaks to those who come to Jesus Christ: **You have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when He adopted you as His own children. Now we call Him, “Abba, Father.” For His Spirit joins with our**

**spirit to affirm that we are God's children.** The Spirit of God speaks to us in a depth of understanding that brings peace.

The Bible also tells us the truth about hope and the Holy Spirit: Romans 5:5 – **Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.**

It's the witness of God's Spirit, the assurance of salvation which Paul is describing: 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 – **It is God who enables us, along with you, to stand firm for Christ. He has commissioned us, and He has identified us as His own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment that guarantees everything He has promised us.** You see, the Holy Spirit is the first installment of everything God has promised, the rest we have yet to receive!

We could go on and on! We can know that we are ultimately safe for whatever harm might come our way because of 1) the witness of the Holy Spirit; and 2) through faith in Jesus Christ! Genuine, surrendered, sold-out faith in Jesus Christ includes faith in what God's Word, the Bible, speaks to us! The *expectation* we have in a priceless inheritance underlies the good news of the message surrounding Christ! (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Aren't you attracted to a God who will keep you safe through all the trials and troubles of this life until you are safely home at rest with Him in heaven? And if you are attracted by His message today, isn't this "attraction" evidence of a greater faith and hope?

We're closing with a song today: *Blessed Assurance!*

Is God's witness of the Spirit a part of your Christian story? If it's not, won't you surrender lordship of your life to the One who loves you and created you with a special purpose, Jesus Christ? Your heart is longing for the kind of safety only God can bring!

If you've not experienced the witness of the Spirit in your life, God wants to meet you in your prayer time. Will you make time for that right now?