

Whether we mean to do it or not, the words that we use can change how we think. Take, for example, the difference between someone saying that they had a good time and that they had a fantastic time. If you think about it, those two words, good and fantastic, kind of mean the same thing. They both mean that it was positive. They both meant that it was something they really enjoyed. But when we use that word "fantastic," it adds so much more to it. It changes it into something else. And the same is true the other way too. Sometimes we can use a word that causes a misunderstanding, even when we don't intend to do it. Take, for example, the difference between someone saying "I'm good" and "I'm fine." Now, in reality, those two words mean basically the same thing. Someone who is good, someone who is fine, they're both doing okay. But because we don't expect someone to say anything other than they're doing good, we think that they actually aren't okay. That because they said "I'm fine" that there's actually something wrong. We've caused a misunderstanding, even though we didn't intend to do it. So the words we use shape how we think, whether we like it or not.

This happens with the Bible too, Christians. Because we have to remember the Bible was not written in English. We all know that. But in that process of translating into English, you always have to make choices. What word am I going to use here? What best expresses what the Bible is trying to say? And every now and then, you'll get a translation which is perfectly fine, which is exactly what it means, but it adds something else and it changes the way that we think about what God is saying.

Take our Gospel reading, for example. The key word in this passage is "anxious." Jesus uses that word "anxious" no less than six times in the course of eleven verses. But being anxious or having anxiety means something very specific to most people. Anxiety is usually that feeling of being worried about something. I'm worried about what might happen. I'm worried about the days ahead. I'm worried about something that I have to do. Anxiety is like being stuck in a box and not really being sure how to get out. Or like being pressed in from every side and not really being sure when it's ever going to come to an end. And we've all felt anxious at one point in our life or another. And some people, of course, are much more prone to anxiety. Some people are just worry-warts. But anxiety is something that doesn't happen all the time. It comes and goes. Some people are hardly ever anxious. It seems like they're never, ever worried about anything. And even those people who are prone to being anxious have their good moments too. Those moments when everything seems to be going okay, when they aren't really worried about anything. And so because it comes and goes and it's not constant, that can lead us to think that what Jesus is talking about here only really applies to those moments. That it only really applies to those specific times in our life when we feel that way. Or maybe it applies to someone else and not really to me, because maybe I don't worry as much as that other person. But what Jesus is talking about here, Christians, applies to our entire life, every part of it, even those times when we don't feel particularly worried.

And the reason for that, Christians, is because that word that we have here as "anxious" certainly means that, but it can actually mean more than that too. And we see this by comparing it to other places where it also occurs in the Bible. One very good example of this is in 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul says: "I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife." What Paul is talking about there in 1 Corinthians 7 is marriage, and specifically who should and should not get married. Because he says marriage is a good gift of

God, but being single, remaining single as a Christian for those who can do it, is greater still. Because the single man can be focused entirely on God. His attention is not divided, whereas the married man has to care about other things as well. But not everybody has that gift. God doesn't give that gift to many people, and so there is no sin at all in being married.

But at any rate, we can see by what he's saying there that the word "anxious" means so much more than just being worried about other things. If I am anxious about the things of the Lord, then I want to please him. I want to do what is right. I'm concerned for what makes him happy. But if I am anxious about the things of this world, like my wife, then I want to make her happy, because that is what it means to be anxious: to be concerned about these things. So at any rate, the best way to understand this word is to see it as being concerned. Where is our focus? What is our main thought? What is our driving goal in life? That is what Jesus is talking about in our reading for today.

So let's look at the Gospel reading again. Jesus says: "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life." Again, "anxious" is just fine as a translation. There's nothing wrong with it at all. But let's change it to something else so that we see the full impact of what Jesus is trying to say. Let's change it to something like: do not let your main concern be about your life. Do not let your number one focus be about your life. And then think about it, Christians. How does that change how you think about what Jesus says?

Because then we can see that life is a good gift, right? It's a gift from God. And when we have these things, it's something that we want to keep, because it is such a good thing. And God in his wisdom has connected our life with physical things. We need things like food. We need things to drink. We need clothing. It's part of who we have been created to be. These are all good things. But like so many things corrupted by sin, it is so easy for us to become focused only on those things, to think that life consists in getting more of them. I need food to live, right? So I need to get more food or do whatever I need to do in order to buy it. I need to drink, so I better do whatever it takes to get more to drink, or I won't be living for very long! And my body needs clothing, so I better do everything that I need to do to get clothing, or I'm going to have a pretty rough time. And again, all of these things are fine, but we can become so focused on them alone that we forget about everything else. We can think that life consists in them and think that that is what the whole purpose of our life is: getting those things so that we can go on living.

But Jesus tells us: "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" Because as important as these things are, Christians, this is not the end of our life. This is not the goal of what we are doing. All of these things come from God. It is God who gives life, not food. It is God who cares for our body, not clothing. God must be our number one concern.

And Jesus gives us several examples to show us what he means. He says in verse 26: "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?" Birds do not plant, Christians. They do not harvest. They don't have tractors and combines. They don't have fields to take care of or crops to rotate to get a better yield. I know that you all are busy in the fields, right now, so you can appreciate just how much work goes in to that sort of work. You know how hard it can be. And yet birds don't do any of that, and they still have enough to eat. Even in winter they don't go without food, because God provides for all of their needs. And if God puts so much care and

concern in caring for birds that he ultimately doesn't care that much about, how much more will he care for you, whom he loves far more than many birds?

And Jesus goes on to say, verse 27: "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" Jesus tells us that our life is already determined. The number of our days has already been fixed by God. There's nothing that we can do to change that number. We can't make it longer. We can't make it shorter. We will live exactly the number of days that God has given to us. But Christians, the same God who numbers our days is the same God who knows how to bless us through them. So why should we be worried about what is to come?

And Jesus says, verse 28: "And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin." Flowers don't have sewing machines. They don't have fabric closets or clothing stores. Flowers do not quilt. They don't have tailors. And yet God clothes them with such beauty that we enjoy each and every year that our clothes are nothing in comparison. And more than this, Christians, flowers do not last. Most flowers last only a few weeks before they wither into nothing. They hardly last a season. And in Jesus' day, they were even gathered together and burned as fuel. If God is so willing to throw away such beauty on these things which do not last and about which he does not care about as much, how much more will he care for you, whom he loves far more than many flowers?

Christians, this is why our number one concern should not be about the things of this life--the food and the clothing, whatever it may be--because all of these things come from the hand of God. God knows what we need, and God knows best how to care for us. So as Jesus says: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Seek God first. Make him your number one priority, and all of these other things will fall into place.

But of course, we ask, how do we seek God? What does it mean to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness? We do it, Christians, when we go to the place where he has promised to be. Seek him in prayer, calling on him with all of your cares and concerns. Because as Paul says in Philippians 4: "Do not be anxious"--there's that word again!--"do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Seek him in his Word, Christians. Listen to his voice where he has promised you everlasting life. Because as Jesus says in Matthew 4: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." And seek him also here by gathering together as one, coming together to worship him in Spirit and in truth. Because as Jesus says in Matthew 18: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I also among them." That is what it means to seek God and his righteousness: to be in the place he has promised to be. When we do that, Christians, when we seek him, we will find life--true life!--in Jesus Christ, his Son.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, who knows all our needs even before we ask and who orders all our days for our good, lead us to seek after you above all things, because your kingdom is our greatest joy, and you are the one thing needful; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.