

Sermon on the Mount
MASTERING MATERIALISM (Part 3)
Matthew 6:25-34
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This past week I read an article about something that's going on at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City. It was back in the early 1990's that Nir Barzilai, who's now the director of the Institute for Aging Research at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, began to study human aging. He and his colleagues interviewed 500 people who had reached the ages of 95 to 112 years of age. They interviewed them as part of their research on the issue of aging. And they were surprised to discover that the key factor in longevity appears to be genetics and not lifestyle. Barzilai was interviewed and this is what he said, "When we started recruiting 100 year olds, we noticed something interesting. They have a family history of longevity. When we asked them, among other things, 'Why do you think you live to be so old?' They usually say, 'What do you mean? All my brothers and sisters are over 100,' or 'My mother was 102,' 'My grandfather was 108.' And then we say, 'Okay, tell us the truth. You ate yogurt your whole life. You were a vegetarian.'" Barzilai goes on to say, "But the interesting thing is we have only two percent vegetarians. We have none who exercised regularly, and thirty percent were overweight or obese back in the 1950's when not that many people were overweight or obese. Almost thirty percent have smoked two packs of cigarettes for more than forty years [not that I'm encouraging you to do that]."

But there's a point here. Why is it that these people lived to that age when others who live differently lived shorter lives? The answer is because God alone is sovereign over the length of your life. And that's exactly the point that Jesus makes in the verse in Matthew 6 that we come to this morning. Just to remind you, in the second half of Matthew 6, Jesus is addressing the issue of wealth and possessions, especially the danger of materialism. In Matthew 6:19-24, He helps us recognize the dangers that are inherent in wealth and possessions, whether you have them and want to keep them or get more, or whether you don't have them and you desire them. There are these inherent dangers, and we looked at those in detail in verses 19-24. In verses 25-34, Jesus teaches us how to overcome those dangers because often we are led into materialism by worry about our needs being met in the future. And so He's dealing with this issue of worrying about our future financial and physical needs.

Let's read this paragraph again. Follow along as I read Matthew 6:25. Jesus says,

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air,

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that they neither sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear for clothing?” For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Now as we’ve noted, this paragraph begins in the first part of verse 25 with Jesus’ simple command not to worry about the needs of this life. In verse 25 He says, “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on.” Jesus here just simply commands us as His followers not to worry about the things that sustain physical life on this planet – food, drink, clothing, medical care, whatever it might be. Stop worrying about your future physical and financial needs.

Now from the middle of verse 25 down through the end of this chapter, Jesus tells us why. He presents us with a series of arguments for not worrying about the needs of this life. We began last time to look at the first argument Jesus gives us, and it’s the argument from God’s character. Essentially Jesus says, “You don’t need to worry because you can trust your Father.” You see, the real problem that lies behind worry is a lack of confidence in God. Notice verse 28: “Why do you worry?” The answer to that question comes at the end of verse 30: “O, you of little faith!” You don’t have enough confidence in God, Jesus says. That’s the reason you worry. And why don’t we have confidence in God? It’s because we don’t really know what He’s like. And so Jesus here reminds us of what our Father is really like. He begins in the middle of verse 25 by saying, “Our Father gave us life. You can trust Him because He’s the One who gave you life itself.” Verse 25 says, “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” He’s arguing from the greater to the lesser. If God has been so good and so generous to give you physical life, to give you that body that you’re sitting in there this morning, do you really believe that He’s not going to be equally good to sustain that life, to give you the food and clothing that you need?

The second part of this argument from God’s character comes in verse 26, and it’s that our Father feeds all living things. Jesus picks one creature from all the created order and that’s the birds. Verse 26: “Look at the birds of the air – they don’t sow; they don’t reap; they don’t gather into barns [they work hard, but they cannot store up for the future, they cannot plan ahead], yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?” God feeds the wild birds that don’t have the capacity to plan ahead, that don’t have the ability to store up for the future that you do. God feeds them. In fact, as we discovered last week, this is just one in all kinds of examples Jesus could have given. He feeds every living thing until God decides it’s time

for that creature to die. You are not an animal. You are above the animals, far above the animals. You are a person made in the image of God. Do you think God would care for animals that are far below you in honor and status, and not care for you? Your Father will certainly feed you, Jesus says.

Now this doesn't mean that you won't go through difficult times, that you won't go through periods of your life not having enough – maybe enough to eat, maybe enough to pay the bills. That's not what Jesus is saying. Birds sometimes go hungry even though they're cared for by God. Birds sometimes even starve to death. Sometimes they are killed and eaten by predators. So Christ's example of the birds here doesn't mean that life for us is going to always be easy, always without trouble, we're always going to have more than enough. That's not what He's saying. He's saying that when you look at the scope of a believer's life, when you look at the total picture, yes, there may be lean, difficult times where you don't have enough. But you look at the whole picture and you'll see that God always provides for His own. God may choose for His own purposes to take you through difficult times, but He provides for His own – in His way, in His time, and according to His eternal purpose for each of us. So we don't need to worry because we can trust our Father. We can trust Him because He gave us life. We can trust Him because He feeds all living things and so He'll feed us as well.

The third reason that we can trust Him is because our Father has determined our lifespans. And this is where we left off last time. Let's look at verse 27: "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?" Now whatever translation you're using, you'll notice that there's an alternate reading in the margin of your Bible. And that's because there are a couple of complicating factors in this verse. First of all, the word that's translated "hour" in the NAS is actually the word "cubit." A cubit is a unit of measurement. It's the unit of measurement from the tip of the fingertips to the back of the elbow. That's eighteen inches. I measured mine last night. It's exactly eighteen inches.

But the real complicating factor here is not the unit of measurement for length, but it's the word that's translated "life." The Greek word translated "life" can refer to a person's height, to their bodily height or, as some of the older translations put it, stature. It [the same word] can also refer to the length of one's life or one's lifespan. So that leaves us with two possible interpretations of verse 27. Jesus may be talking about physical height. If He is, this is what He said: "And who of you by being worried can add eighteen inches to his height?" The other option is that Jesus is talking not about height, but about lifespan: "And who of you by being worried can add a cubit [or add a short distance] to the end of his life [to his lifespan]?" I think in context it's almost certainly the second of these options [why?] because the primary use of the Greek word translated "life" leans in that direction. The Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament [the Bible Jesus and the apostles used in the first century] – the Septuagint uses this word "life" that's translated "life" seven times. Six of those times it's about lifespan and one time about height.

Also when you look at the context here, few people worry about their height. Some of the shorter ones among us might worry about our height. Some of the taller ones among us might worry about our height. But for most of us, that's not an issue of worry. However, because of an obsession with extending our lifespan, many people become worried about their body's needs. And so that absolutely fits the context here better.

Also when you look at the parallel expression in chapter 12 of Luke's gospel [we'll look there a little bit later], our Lord uses these words and He describes it [whatever He's talking about here] as a "very little thing." Now adding eighteen inches to your height is not a very little thing, but adding an hour to the end of your life is a very little thing. So as most modern translations have taken it, Jesus is here more likely referring to adding a small period of time to the length of your life.

Verse 27 is another one of Jesus' rhetorical questions and it demands a negative answer. Jesus says, "Who of you by worrying can add an hour to your lifespan?" What's the answer? Not one of you. Jesus is saying not one of you by worrying, and then He literally uses a Greek word *dunamis*, which means "to be able" or "to have the power" – not one of you by worrying has the power to add a single hour to his life.

By worrying about what? By worrying about how long we will live, by worrying about what we're doing that's shortening our lifespan, by worrying about what we're doing or need to do that can lengthen our lifespan, by worrying about the length of our life. You can't add an hour. Solomon was right when he said in Ecclesiastes 8:8, "No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death." You have no authority over the day of your death so that no amount of worry can change it. You can worry yourself to death, but you can't add even a few moments to your lifespan.

Now Jesus here however is not primarily telling us about what we can't do. He's telling us about what God has already done. You see, Jesus is still teaching us about the Father here. Not only did He give us life. Not only does He sustain that life by supplying the food that we need. But the Father has already determined how long we will live. Now before we can look at this verse in more detail, we need to back up and look at the theology that supports it because the theological truths that lie beneath our Lord's statement in verse 27 are the twin truths of God's sovereignty and His providence. We use those words as Christians a lot, but what do they mean? Sovereign is what God is. Providence is what He does. Sovereign means that God is absolutely in control of everything. There is nothing out from under His control. That is what He is. Providence explains how God exercises that control in every detail of life to accomplish His purposes.

Now practically providence includes two things. And I'm just going to mention these. You can jot them down and think about them later. Providence technically includes, first of all, God's preserving everything He made. God preserves everything He's created. Psalm 36:6 says, "God preserves man and beast." The reason you are alive this moment, the reason your heart is still beating is because God is preserving the life that is in you. And the moment God wills to stop preserving your life, you're gone, I'm gone. That's preservation.

But providence also includes not only God preserving all things that He created, but God controlling everything He created to ensure that it accomplishes the purposes for which He created it. This is the primary focus of providence in Scripture. God made everything. He has a purpose for everything. And in His providence, He makes sure that everything accomplishes the purpose for which He designed it. Job puts it this way in Job 23:13-14. Listen to Job, speaking of God. He says, "God is unique and who can turn Him [that is, who can turn Him aside from His purposes]? What His soul desires, that He does [and then listen, Job personalizes it]. For God performs what is appointed for me, and many such decrees are with Him." Proverbs 16:9 says,

“The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.” **Proverbs 19:21** says, “Many plans are in a man’s heart, but it’s the counsel of the Lord that stands.” It’s the Lord’s decision that ultimately comes to fruition. In Daniel 4:35, Nebuchadnezzar learned this lesson. He says, “God does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’”

This is God’s sovereignty in His providence. And as believers, we love this truth, don’t we? And yet unbelievers find this truth offensive. Spurgeon said, “No doctrine is more hated by worldlings, no truth of which they have made such a football as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne.” Like it or not, God is on His throne. And there isn’t a stray molecule in this universe that’s out from under His control.

But let’s come back to how this truth connects with the passage we’re studying. How does God’s sovereignty and providence intersect with your life? Well, first of all, Scripture very clearly teaches that God was sovereign over your conception and your birth. Job understood this. Listen to how Job puts it in Job 31:15: “God made me in the womb.” In Psalm 139:13 David, speaking to God, says, “You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb.” God was sovereign over your conception and your birth no less than David, no less than Job.

God is sovereign over all of the details of your life – always has been, is now, and always will be. That’s a different message for a different time, but let’s come to this issue that we’re talking about in verse 27. God is equally sovereign over the timing and circumstances of your future death. Of course it’s future or you wouldn’t be listening to me, would you? What do we mean when we say that God is sovereign over death? First of all, we mean that God has established the normal length of human life. Thirty-five hundred years ago, Moses wrote these words found in Psalm 90:10: “As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away.” Thirty-five hundred years ago, the lifespan for those who survived infant mortality [who survived into their childhood and adult years] was seventy to eighty years. It’s still that today. And of course, we might tweak that in the future. We might through God’s common grace discover some ways to add a few years here or there, or we might face some epidemic in which a few years are taken away, but that is what God has sovereignly set. It’s been true for thirty-five hundred years and it will be into the future. God has established the normal length of human life.

When we speak of God being sovereign over death, we also mean that He has authority over the reality of death; that is, death belongs to God. Death is God’s tool. He is the One who brought it into play because of the fall and sin, and He is in control of it. In Deuteronomy 32:39 God says, “See now that I, I am He, there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death.” God says, “I’m in charge of death. It is I who put to death.” In 1 Samuel 2:6 as Hannah celebrates the character of God, she says, “Yahweh kills and makes alive; He is the One who brings down to Sheol [who brings down to the grave].” This is God’s business. In Psalm 104:29 the psalmist is talking about all the creatures God has made. And he says to God, “You hide Your face, they are dismayed; You take away their spirit, they expire and return to dust.”

There’s a beautiful poem that has been popularized even in song over the last hundred years from the words of Solomon. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 he writes, “There is an appointed time for

everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven – a time to give birth and a time to die.” What the songwriter didn’t capture is who is responsible for setting those times. In verse 11 of that same chapter, Solomon writes, “God has made everything appropriate in its time.” Death belongs to God. It is His judgment He brought on the human race and on all of creation, and He is in control.

But God not merely controls death in a general sense. When we speak of God’s sovereignty over death, we also mean that God controls the specifics of every person’s death. He has fixed the day and the hour of your death. Again, Job understood this. In Job 14:5 Job’s talking to God and he says, “Since man’s days are determined, the number of his months is with You; and his limits You have set so that he cannot pass.” In Psalm 39:4 the psalmist says, “Lord, make me to know my end and what is the extent of my days [how far my days will reach]; let me know how transient I am.” And of course, Psalm 139 puts it very explicitly. In Psalm 139:16 David says to God, “In Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.” David says, “Before I lived my first day, You had already determined how many days I would live.”

When you come to the New Testament, I love a statement that Paul just throws into one of his sermons. It’s kind of a passing statement, but it is absolutely filled with rich theology. I encourage you to mark it down and think about it in the week ahead. In Acts 13:36 Paul says, “David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers.” Folks, that’s your biography and that’s mine. As long as you are fulfilling the purpose of God in your own generation, you are here. But when the purpose of God for you in your own generation is done, then you will fall asleep as well as I will. God has a purpose and a plan, and we are living out that purpose and plan. Our months, our days, are already marked.

God has not only determined the very day on which you will die, but He’s also determined how. You know, we worry about those sorts of things, don’t we? Am I going to be susceptible to what my parents were susceptible to, or am I going to be in some way influenced by some dreaded disease or whatever? God’s already decided that. If I had time, I’d take you there, but jot it down. In John 21:18-19 Jesus is talking to Peter and He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.” And John adds this: “Now this Jesus said, signifying by what kind of death Peter would glorify God.” In those two verses, Jesus tells Peter when he’s going to die [it’s not going to be right away, it’s going to be when he’s old] and how he’s going to die [by crucifixion]. That’s the theological context behind Jesus’ statement in Matthew 6. God is sovereign over death. He’s established the normal length of human life. He is the One who owns death and uses it as He chooses. And He controls the specifics of every person’s death.

Now go back to Matthew 6:27: “Who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?” Now if you’re thinking [and I hope you’re thinking], you should have a major question in your mind right now. It should be a question something like this: “Tom, is Jesus saying that nothing I can do will affect the length of my life? Is the end of my life so fixed that nothing I do will either prolong it or shorten it?” No, that’s not what Jesus is saying. For example, if you choose to sin against God and you take your own life in the near future, then you shorten what the length of your life could have been without your sin. If you have cancer that’s curable but you refuse to

follow the treatment plan, you may very well shorten the length of what your life could have been if you had had the treatments. So our decisions affect the length of our lives to some extent. However, Scripture clearly teaches as we've seen in the references we've looked at that God is sovereign over the timing of our death. So how do we reconcile those two things? The answer is what theologians call concurrence. Don't be scared of the word. Let me explain it to you. Essentially concurrence says God is really acting and making decisions about you and your life, and you at the same time are really acting and making decisions about you and your life, and God is supervising all of that to ensure that it accomplishes His purposes. In other words, God is the first and primary cause, but God uses secondary causes. You see, providence doesn't deny that we really act for ourselves, we really make decisions. Nor does providence deny that God has established natural laws that govern our universe. There is cause and effect. There is act and consequence. But these secondary causes – the actions of men, the working of the natural laws – God superintends to absolutely guarantee that they fulfill His plan.

Let me give you what I think's the best illustration of this. It's what happened with Jesus at the cross. Let me ask you a question. Who killed Jesus? It's a trick question. Listen to Peter in Acts 2:23: "This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God [God killed Jesus], you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death [you killed Jesus]." It's not either-or; it's both-and. Those people who were behind Jesus' death consciously wanted Him dead. They desired His death. They schemed His death. They executed the plan to secure His death. But behind it was God's eternal plan and God was making decisions too. And together God was ensuring that His perfect will was accomplished.

Listen to Acts 4:27. This is in the prayer of the disciples: "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel [they're the ones who killed Jesus], to do whatever Your hand [God] and Your purpose predestined to occur." No, it was God's plan. You see, God takes all the contingencies of free human decisions and natural law and He weaves them all together to ensure in the end that His eternal plan comes to pass.

Now when it comes to the length of our lives, here's how concurrence works. If we are reckless and irresponsible with our lives, God may choose to factor that in determining the length of our lives, but He doesn't always do that. Sometimes in God's providence, the people who are the most reckless with their lives end up living the longest. But through the system of consequences that God has built into the moral universe, God often factors recklessness into His plan. Not infrequently, the reckless person dies before his time. If on the other hand, we are reasonable stewards of our lives – we're not reckless, we're not irresponsible – God often chooses to factor that into His plans about how long we will live. But again, He doesn't always do it that way. Sometimes the person who's a good steward of his life and of his health dies young. But often in the sovereign purpose of God, the reasonable steward enjoys a normal length of life. You say, "Well, wait a minute. So what do I do?" The answer is you avoid both extremes. Don't be reckless and irresponsible with your life and health. On the other end, don't worry about how long you're going to live as though you were ultimately in charge, because you're not. Jesus says, "No one by worrying about the length of his life can add a single cubit [a single short span] to the end of his life." In fact, let me put it this way. If you're trying to be a reasonable steward of your life, then in the circumstances God has placed you, you are perfectly safe until God's time.

I love what General Stonewall Jackson is quoted as saying. He said, “My religious belief teaches me that I am just as safe on the battlefield as I am in my bed. The Lord has already appointed the day of my death so I need not worry about that. I live my life and prepare myself so that I will always be ready to meet my Lord when death does overtake me.” Listen. If it’s not God’s time for your death, you are in no danger. Read Psalm 91. I love that psalm where he talks about it. Listen. If it’s not God’s time, a thousand might fall at your left hand and ten thousand at your right hand, but you’re going to survive. Plagues come – it’s not going to touch you if that’s not God’s plan and purpose.

On the other hand [listen very carefully to me], you can constantly worry about and take extreme measures to preserve your life and, if it’s God’s time for your death, nothing you can do will prevent it. My favorite illustration of that is King Ahab. You remember Ahab? You know, the prophet Micaiah comes to him and says, “I’m predicting disaster for you. You’re going to lose the battle. You’re going to die.” Ahab didn’t like the news obviously so he has Micaiah imprisoned and he said, “Feed him bread and water until I get back safely.” And Micaiah says, “If you get back safely, then the Lord hasn’t spoken by me.” So what does Ahab do? He comes up with this extensive scheme to protect his life. And so he encases his body in armor. And then he disguises himself so that nobody will know he’s the king. He’s sort of removing the target off his chest. He thinks he’s going to be safe. He’s got armor and he’s disguised. How could he be safer? I love 1 Kings 22:34 because it says this: “A certain man drew a bow at random.” I mean, you can see how this happened, right? It’s the battlefield and the chaos of the battlefield. Here’s a guy who doesn’t want to be there. The last thing in the world he wants to be is in this battle. He’d rather be home with his family and tending his crops. And he’s just there. And so he doesn’t aim. He doesn’t even look where he’s shooting. He just pulls his arrow and shoots. And God directs that arrow, the text says, “into the joint in Ahab’s armor” – between the breastplate and the coat of chainmail, and that arrow finds its mark. And a few hours later, Ahab is dead. Listen. The bottom line is if it’s God’s time for you to go, you can take whatever measures you want to try to extend your life, but the arrow’s going to find you.

Jesus says, “Who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?” Now what was Jesus’ point? Well fortunately, we don’t have to guess because a few months later Jesus preaches a similar message. He uses this same expression and He applies it. So turn over to Luke 12. Here’s what He meant. Luke 12:25 says, “Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life’s span? [There’s our identical statement and then He says this]. If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters?” If by worrying you can’t add a single hour to your lifespan [a very little thing], then don’t worry about the remaining issues of life. God can take care of those. Don’t worry about the length of your life.

Now let me apply this directly to us. Let me just sort of meddle here a little bit. What are we tempted to do in our culture, in our lives, out of fear or worry about the length of our lives and our future deaths? Here’s a little list I made. First of all, I think we’re tempted to be preoccupied with slowing or reversing the effects of aging. We live in a culture that just doesn’t want to get old, and people do odd things to keep from getting old. I hate to tell you this, but it’s going to happen. It’s part of the curse God has designed into His creation and you can’t prevent it. You can either age gracefully or you can age not gracefully, but you will age and eventually your body will decay and you will die. That’s God’s judgment on the fallen world. As Christians, we

experience grace. God has forgiven our sins. We're His children. But you can't stop that reality; it's going to happen.

A second way we sin I think in this way is we become preoccupied with exercise. Do you know the Bible talks about exercise? In 1 Timothy 4:7, Paul says, "Discipline yourselves [the word for "discipline" is the Greek word from which we get the word "gymnasium"; he says exercise yourself] for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline [or bodily training or bodily exercise] is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." Notice he doesn't say exercise has no profit; he says it has little profit. So put it in perspective. Don't become preoccupied with it. Here's a question to ask yourself: do you spend more time exercising your body or more time exercising your soul to godliness? In the desire to prolong our lives, we can become preoccupied with exercise.

Thirdly, we can become preoccupied with the latest food fads that claim to promote health and longevity. You know in my lifetime there's been this steady stream of health and fitness fads that have captured the imagination of professing Christians. I think the massive vitamin and mineral industry has been built largely on the backs of Christians. I'm not saying you shouldn't take vitamins and minerals. If you want to take them, fine. But don't you for a moment believe that you are adding an hour to your lifespan.

Then there are those miracle foods and elixirs that promise better health and longer life. And they've always been around. I remember when I was a kid my parents forced me to watch Lawrence Welk which, if there is a purgatory, that would be probably pretty close – and there isn't one of course. But there was an ad on there that my mom saw and thought was great. There was this thing called Geritol that you could take and it promised better health. It promised, you know, everything. And so she got the idea to give that to me. And for a few weeks, she said, "Oh, you won't even know you're having it. I'll just mix it with your orange juice." You know, there's this black, gooey stuff changing the entire color and consistency of my orange juice. And I choked it down, and who knows what it really did to my insides during those weeks. But it kept coming.

I remember when I moved to California we listened to Christian radio some and there was an ad on Christian radio constantly about Royal Bee Jelly. You know it's the food the queen bee eats and this is the secret to your health and longevity. They forgot to mention that the queen bee lives for six years. You see a problem with this? Or the juice of certain berries. You know, we've gone through one berry after another. This exotic berry and the juice of this exotic berry – you know, this is going to be it. This is going to give you what you're hoping for. Now it's essential oils. I promised my wife I wouldn't say what I wanted to say about that.

And then there are a lot of food fads that promise a longer and healthier life that if you'd just abstain from certain foods. You know, these people, well-meaning people, will say that all Christians who are serious about being stewards of their bodies should eat absolutely no...you fill in the blank. It's been sugar, fat, gluten, carbs, and other things. Well-intentioned Christians will tell you that meat from clean animals listed in the Mosaic Law – that meat is inherently healthier. And so if you'll only eat the meat from the clean animals, you're going to live a longer, healthier life. The problem with that, of course, is that both before Sinai and after Sinai God said all meats are clean.

One of the current fads among Christians is the Daniel Diet. Churches are doing this. You know, if you'll, like Daniel, eat only vegetables and fruits and whole grains and legumes, and if you'll only drink water, then you're going to be healthier. The problem with that is neither our Lord nor His apostles ever followed any such plan. Read the gospels. Read the book of Acts. In fact, Paul warns us that teaching that tells Christians to abstain from anything God has made often has its source in demonic theology. Read 1 Timothy 4:1-5. And in fact, in that passage, Paul says, "Whatever God has made is to be received with thanksgiving and enjoyed."

I want you to turn to James 4 as we finish our time together, because James deals with this issue. In verse 13 he says, "Come now, you who say [and here's a businessman with a business plan], 'Today or tomorrow [this is when he's going to start] we will go to such and such a city [here's the place he's decided to launch this business], we'll spend a year there [here's the timeframe] and engage in business and [at the end of that year] we're going to start turning a profit.'" There's his turnaround time. He's got this business plan. The problem isn't that he has a business plan. The problem is that he hasn't acknowledged or submitted to God's providence. Verse 14: "You don't know what your life will be like tomorrow. You're just a vapor that appears for a little while and vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills...'" By the way, it's not just saying it; that's not the idea. You don't have to keep saying this every time you speak. The point is you have to believe this in your heart – if the Lord wills. And now James touches on two huge areas in which we especially need to submit to God's providence. Notice he says, "If the Lord wills, we will live [we will continue to exist if the Lord wills] and we will do this or that [our future activities are conditioned on whether or not God wills]." It is solely an act of God's will that keeps us alive another minute and when He decides our life here is done. And it is solely an act of God's will that determines whether every single decision and plan we make will come to fruition.

Sinclair Ferguson, writing about this issue, says,

Your life is in the hands of your Father. He has designed it. He knows the end of it from the beginning. He plans each step of the way to fulfill His purpose for you and through you. You will have all you need to fulfill that purpose. And when that is accomplished, you will be taken home to be with Him. Why worry when He has your life in His hands? Your worry [Ferguson says] is a sign. It's a sign that you do not adequately know Him or that you do not trust Him or that you have not yet yielded to Him as you ought.

Jesus says stop worrying about how long you're going to live. "Who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?" And, by the way, Jesus should know because He's the One who determines it. Jot this in your notes. In Revelation 1:18, Jesus says, "I am the living One; I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever [listen to Jesus], and I have the keys of death and the grave." Your Lord holds the authority over the timing of your death and the circumstances of your death. Trust Him. Let's pray together.

Father, forgive us. Forgive us for putting confidence everywhere else but You. Forgive us, Father, for becoming distracted from Your kingdom, by chasing the dreams of a longer life by something we do. Remind us, O God, that our times are in Your hands, that You are sovereign over death, that our Lord holds the keys of death and the grave. Father, I pray that You would help us to live in the light of these truths – to have confidence in You, not to worry about the length of our lives or our future but to entrust ourselves solely to You.

And Father, I pray for those here this morning who are not followers of Jesus Christ. Lord, may they be shaken to their core with the realization that Jesus Himself holds the key to the timing and circumstances of their deaths. And may, before that point comes, they acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord until they stand before Him as Judge. We pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.