

Introduction

In 1997, Dr. Richard Carlson wrote a best-selling book with a rather intriguing title, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff – It's All Small Stuff*. He notes in his book, **"Without question, many of us have mastered the neurotic art of spending much of our lives worrying about a variety of things all at once."** To assist us in not worrying, he then advises, **"Don't sweat the small stuff . . . It's all small stuff."**

In one sense that's true, but in another larger sense, it isn't. On the contrary, in Matthew 10:26-31, Jesus teaches us that it's all big stuff and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Father God Knows

I begin with verse 29, which implies something mindboggling about God. Jesus observes that sparrows **"fall to the ground."** The Greek word translated **"fall"** there connotes **"light"** upon the ground. We've all seen sparrows and other birds land on the ground, take a few quick steps, and fly off again. That is to what Jesus is referring, and notice what He teaches in that regard. Scientists estimate that there are approximately 100 billion birds in the world. Well, Jesus teaches that not one of them ever lights on the ground apart from Father God.

That means two things. First, because He's omnipresent, He is always present with His entire being where every bird lights on the ground. Second, because He's omniscient, He knows everything there is to know about every bird lighting on the ground. I threw popcorn on the ground for the birds. God was there when each bird lighted on the ground to eat it. He also knows how many kernels of popcorn each ate, and even which ones each ate.

Having made that point in verse 29, Jesus goes on to apply it to human beings, to you and me, in verse 30. On October 31, 2011, the 7 billionth person was born in the world – in Manila, a baby girl. According

to Jesus, God knows how many hairs are on the head of each and every one of the 7 billion people on earth.

Verse 30 is a proverb of sorts that points us to two larger truths. First, Father God is always present with His entire being wherever every person, including you or me, is. We are literally never apart from Him. Second, He knows everything there is to know about everything every person ever experiences or does. The number of “**every’s**” there makes clear how absolute His knowledge is.

About five months ago, someone told me that so and so, who doesn’t even attend our church, tells people I don’t preach from the Bible. God was there when she told me that, filling me and the space around me. And He knew literally every thought I thought, every feeling I felt, and every word I spoke in response – and still does.

That illustrates Jesus’ message in verses 29-30. God (including the Son and Holy Spirit) knows firsthand everything there is to know about everything we experience and do.

God Cares

But He doesn’t just know. He cares as well. In verse 28, Jesus states that God destroys the souls and bodies of some people in hell. In verse 31, He states that people are valuable to Him. Those statements clearly imply that He cares. A mother wept as she told me about her son’s mental illness. A father resonated with pride as he told me about his one year-old son’s first step. God cares even more deeply than that. Everything we experience and do impacts Him - affects Him for good or ill. It delights or disgusts Him. It pleases or pains Him. That’s the truth and its implication is profound.

In Richard Attenborough’s movie *Gandhi*, Gandhi and a white clergyman are walking together on a boardwalk, contrary to South African law at the time. As they are, a group of loutish young white men confront and threaten them. But suddenly, the mother of the ringleader yells at them from an upstairs window and tells them to leave the two

men alone, which they do. As the Gandhi and the clergyman proceed to walk on, the clergyman rejoices over their good luck, saying nothing of God's protection and care. Puzzled, Gandhi exclaims, "**I thought you were a man of God.**" To which the clergyman replies, "**I am, but I don't believe He plans His day around me.**"

It's a cute line and the audience laughs, but in reality, the clergyman's response is sadder than it is funny. Giving him the benefit of the doubt, he probably thought he was honoring God's greatness. But what Jesus teaches in verses 28-31 is this. It's precisely God's greatness, His omnipresence and omniscience, that allows Him to "**plan His day**" around us. He has a life and a vital part of that life is being involved with us in everything we experience and do.

Do you realize what that means? There's no small stuff in our lives. God knowing and caring makes it all big stuff instead. That's the reality and it's a compelling one that does two things.

Kills Complacency

First, it kills complacency.

In 1973, internationally acclaimed psychiatrist Karl Menninger wrote a book with an arresting title, *Whatever Became of Sin?* One of the answers is that people, including Christians, have trivialized it. They've essentially gotten used to the sins they're committing. On the one hand, they themselves have been committing them for years. On the other hand, most of the Christians they know have too. So, they develop a cavalier attitude toward them. They think the sins they're committing aren't that big of a deal. And since they aren't that big of a deal, they don't make a serious effort to eliminate them from their lives.

But this text kills that kind of complacency. The ungodly hated and attacked Jesus because of the things He preached and taught. In verses 24-25, He points out to His disciples that they would do the same to them. After that, He exhorts them in verses 26-27 to preach and teach everything that He did anyway. He then goes on to declare in verse 28

that they and we shouldn't fear the ungodly because the most they can do is kill our bodies. But we should fear God. We should anticipate that He can harm us by killing our bodies and souls in hell forever. We should fear Him, in other words, more than anyone or anything in the universe.

What Jesus teaches here implies another detail relating to verses 29-30. God not only knows and cares about everything we experience and do, He assesses it as well. He determines the morality or immorality of everything we think, feel, say, and do, and rewards or punishes us accordingly. We experience either gain or loss as a result - now in this life and/or forever in the life to come.

Some years ago, my wife and I went out with a Christian couple to a buffet. The cheaper children's price was for children under 12. So, this Christian couple told the waiter that their 12 year-old son was 11 in order to get it. It was no big deal they thought, but in reality it was. God was there and knew, cared about, and assessed what they did in order to hold them accountable for it. I would never do that for several reasons, the primary of which is that I fear God.

There's an old axiom that says, "**When the cat's away, the mice will play.**" We've all viewed or experienced that axiom and its implications worked out in real life. Lethargic workers come alive, for instance, when the boss comes in. Or children get their hands out of the cookie jar, when a parent comes in. Why? It's because there's accountability. Accountability kills complacency and that's what verse 28 is about. Don't take this the wrong way, but when it comes to God, the cat's never away. He's always present, knowing, caring about, assessing, and rewarding and punishing everything we think, feel, say, and do. So, let's think, feel, speak, and act accordingly. As Paul said it, let's be urgent in season and out of season to be and do what is good.

Transforms Life

The reality that it's all big stuff does a second thing. The first is that it kills complacency. The second is that it transforms life.

There's something that every person desperately needs. It's something that's necessary to us both spiritually and psychologically – so much so that one author calls it **“spiritual oxygen.”** He means, and rightly so, that it's as essential to our souls as oxygen is to our bodies. Without it, life is miserable at best and unbearable at worst. What is that something I'm talking about? It's a sense of meaning.

Sadly, many people don't have that. What isn't meaningful is mundane and that's how many view their lives. Listen to a poem written by a young woman named Esther: **“I get up, do some things, then I go to sleep. I get up, do some more things, then I go to sleep. Why? The structure of life has no meaning, no purpose. I'm studying. But for what? I go to work. But why? I do the same mundane things every day. Day after day, never ceasing. Why? I do not know. I cannot explain. All I know is that it causes great pain. I wish for this to stop, to stop and to never start again. To lie in the sun and know that it will never end. But no, I must carry on in my repetitive and mundane life.”** Esther isn't unique. Many if not most people don't have a sense of meaning in their lives.

But just because they don't sense it doesn't mean it isn't there. Let me ask you a penetrating question. What makes something meaningful? Take the Super Bowl, for instance. It's considered a highly meaningful event but why is it? It's because so many people care about it. 111 million people watched it last year making it the most watched television program in history. But what if only 111 people watched it? It would be considered not meaningful. What makes something meaningful? It's that it's cared about. We normally assess how meaningful something is by how many people care about it.

But in reality, in objective terms, what makes something meaningful is that God cares about it. He is the dominant reality of the universe. So, if He cares about something and all 7 billion people on earth don't, it's utterly meaningful. If all 7 billion people care about something and He doesn't, it's utterly mundane. My point is this. If God cares about

something, then that something is objectively and utterly meaningful.

But just what does He care about? Verses 29-30 tell us. It's everything we experience and do. Those verses make clear that nothing is too small to matter to heaven. That defining truth colors all the teaching of Jesus. Nothing is too small to matter to heaven whether it's the lighting of a sparrow, the number of hairs on our heads, an idle word, a cup of cold water, the repentance of one sinner, and so on.

Let's think of this in terms of a verse we read, Psalm 56:8. I wrote a note in my Bible beside this verse, "**God's attention to the details of our lives.**" Here, the detail is the tears we shed. According to the Psalmist, God memorializes each and every one of them. I had my grandson "Z" at the Boardman Park and saw a little boy bump his head on a slide and begin to cry. God memorialized each and every one of his tears. His bumped head, in other words, mattered to heaven. What that means is this and it isn't just nice talk. That little boy's bumped head is objectively every bit as meaningful as the Super Bowl is, if not more so.

Derek Kidner captures the very heart of this matter. Referring to verses 30-31, he writes, "**If God cares as much as this, nothing can be pointless.**" He's right. Nothing we experience or do is pointless. Whether it's taking out the trash, gossiping, watching a good movie, doing someone a favor, and so on, God cares about it. That in turn makes it objectively and utterly meaningful. So, let's live our everyday and routine lives accordingly – with enthusiasm, vim, and vigor.

Conclusion

I close this morning with the refrain of a familiar and well-loved hymn: "**I sing because I'm happy. I sing because I'm free. For His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me.**" That life-altering truth kills complacency and transforms life. But it does so only if we routinely take it into account in our thinking and life. So, let's do just that. Let's bring what Jesus teaches before our minds and keep it there. It's all big stuff!