

“Cross Eyed” (Cross Roads Week 3)
(Matt. 6:34)

- **Vision**

- It's the 3rd Sunday of Lent, a season of reflection and repentance that prepares us for *resurrection*. Easter is coming! Today in our journey on the **Cross Roads**, we're talking about something *no one* can relate to: *worry*. We get “**Cross Eyed**” when our life gets out of focus, or when we focus on the wrong things. Jesus has plenty to say about worry and fear, because it's a very relevant part of our experience in this fallen world. What we find is that, for Jesus, a lot of it comes down to *perspective* and *focus*. I don't know about you, but I constantly need to return to His teachings on this subject. Before we dive in, *let's pray...*
- Speaking of *perspective*, have you ever thought about the marvel of our vision? God's creation of human eyesight is a marvel that gives us an amazing capacity for visual perception. You know, different creatures have different ways of seeing the world: some animals can see ultraviolet light, some see by infrared (heat detection), some have a panoramic view (almost 360 degrees), some have night vision. For humans, our night vision and peripheral vision aren't the best, but we can see a much wider range of color and detail than most, and our binocular vision, (2 eyes facing forward) helps us with depth perception and hand-eye coordination. You can see how this works just by holding up your finger: what happens when you're eyes are out of focus? You see 2 fingers. But when you focus your 2 eyes on your finger, your brain merges the 2 slightly different visual fields into 1. When I was a kid I had glasses for just one year in 3rd grade, but we realized my issue wasn't my eyesight but my focus, so I got “vision therapy” for a couple years where they trained my eyes and my brain to see better.
- One of the things that makes humans amazing is not just the “hardware” of our eyes but the “software” of our minds—we have this incredible capacity of memory and self-consciousness and imagination that allows our eyesight to do so much more. We can “time travel” to the past with our memories, we can “see” into the future, at least in our imaginations. Other creatures don't really have this capacity.

And this can be a blessing and a curse, because it can put our focus on things that lead to joy, satisfaction, and truth, but it can also get us fixated on things that lead to worry, anxiety, and falsehoods. It all depends on your focus and your perspective.

- The famous Christian philosopher, Blaise Pascal, wrote: **“All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone.”** That was in 1654! So many issues come from getting our lives *out of focus*, or getting ourselves *focused on the wrong things*. So many issues come down to our *perspective*. And here’s where Jesus comes in.

- **Don’t Worry About Tomorrow**

- Last week, we looked at Jesus’ teachings on *forgiveness* in the Sermon on the Mount, His most famous sermon where He taught all about life in God’s Kingdom in Matthew 5-7. Today, we’ll look at another part of that sermon where He talks about our propensity to *worry about our lives*, and gives us a much better alternative to as God’s children in God’s Kingdom.
- Jesus said: **“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?...Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?...But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matt. 6:25-34)** Leave it to Jesus to be *simple and profound, frustrating and liberating, easy and hard*, all at the same time! I hear these words of Jesus that I’ve heard so many times and I’m thinking: *Yes, Lord that’s what I want, I know it’s true!* But at the same time, it can be *so hard* keep this in mind in the day to day, when all the pressure’s on and you can’t seem to catch a break. It’s like, *I believe Lord, help my unbelief!*
- We looked at this a bit before in our *Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* series: when Jesus says, **“do not worry”** it’s the Greek word *merimnao*—which means ***anxious, care, worry concern***. Sometimes in the N.T. it’s used in a positive sense, like when we’re showing proper concern for our brothers and sisters’ well-being, showing

concern for each other out of love, or when our hearts are burdened by the things that break God's heart. But most of the time, it's used in a negative sense for when we are *worried* about the wrong things, in the wrong ways. This is powerful to me: when you dig deeper into the meaning of this word, it has the implication of **being pulled apart, being drawn in opposite directions, like "going to pieces"**. I think that's such a powerful depiction of what anxiety does to us: we're distracted, divided, pulled in different directions, torn, pulled apart by all sorts of competing concerns and desires and allegiances— instead of being whole and centered and grounded on the one thing that really matters.

- You've probably heard the famous story of Jesus visiting the home of Martha and Mary in Luke 10: Mary broke protocol for the women and sat at Jesus' feet, taking in *every word* He said; but she left her sister Martha to do all the work, hosting this big group of honored guests. Martha got herself worked up about it but Jesus lovingly said: **"Martha, Martha...you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—indeed only one."** (Luke 10:41-42) Only one thing is needed, only one thing. One thing is *necessary*. Baloo sings about "The Bare Necessities" in the Jungle Book, but Jesus says it's not even plural, *it's just one thing*.
- Back to the Sermon on the Mount, He says, *seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well*. It's not that the things we worry about *don't matter*—life, survival, food, clothing, desires and longings—God sees, God knows. God cares. But Jesus says *don't worry about these things*. The *one thing* you need to worry about is His presence, His reign, His Kingdom—start with that, and all the other things will come together. But when you get focused on all the what if's, all the not enough, all the fears, all the other needs—you get pulled apart, and you miss the main thing.
- When I'm at my best, I'm a person of One Thing, I'm a pastor of One Thing: I can keep my laser-focus on the Kingdom of Heaven, and when I do that I walk in peace, because I know that my Father in Heaven is the creator of all, the redeemer of all, the Lord of all, so I do not have to fear, come what may, everything will be ok in the end. But I confess, at times I greatly struggle with worry. Life gets so full, it

gets so over-complicated, there are so many needs, demands, and unfinished tasks—at home, at work, on the outside, on the inside—that I can get *pulled apart*. I can get anxious. And if I'm not mindful, it can be like a current that pulls me away from shore and it gets to the point where it feels almost like, I don't even have a choice anymore—I just get *pulled into the chaos* (without and within). But it just takes one Word from Jesus, one touch of His grace, to restore perspective, to restore my focus. The challenge is whether I have the courage and the will to slow down and quiet down long enough *to hear His voice* and *let Him* put my life in perspective. *“You can't add a single hour to your life by worrying...Don't worry about tomorrow, tomorrow will worry about itself...today's trouble is enough for today...be here, be now, with me, I am giving you grace for this moment...tomorrow's grace will come tomorrow...”*

- **Train Tickets and Kitchen Crumbs**

- Corrie Ten Boom, the Dutch evangelist and Holocaust survivor, has a great story of how her father taught her to deal with worry. She tells the story in her book *The Hiding Place* about how she went through a season of crushing anxiety about the future as a young girl—she feared what would happen if her father ever died and left her alone, or what she would do if she had to face trials or persecution, and all sorts of fears. She confessed to her father one night at bedtime, *“I'm afraid I'll never be strong enough.”* He sat on the edge of her bed and thought, then he said this: *“Corrie, when we take the train to Amsterdam, when do I give you your ticket?”* Corrie replied, *“Just before we get on the train.”* Her father said, God's grace works exactly the same way. He doesn't give us the strength to face the trail ten years—or ten days—in advance, because we don't need it yet. Our Heavenly Father gives us our “ticket” exactly when it's time, He gives us grace for *this moment*, for *this day*, that's what we need. We don't have to worry about what's coming down the road, what we might face or not face tomorrow—we just have to seek God's grace for the troubles of today. And He's so faithful to meet us here, to provide for us here.
 - I can get all stressed out and worked up about all the unfinished business, all the stuff, little things and big things, that I miss what's right in front of me—I miss the

blessing, the beauty, the faithfulness of God even though it's right in front of my face. I need God's help to constantly readjust my focus and give me perspective: that today's all I need to worry about, and that in His eternal Kingdom I have *everything I will ever need*, now and forever.

- This is something we have to learn. In this fallen world, in our sinful nature, fear and anxiousness come naturally to us. God's peace that surpasses understanding is a supernatural grace of His Kingdom that we have to learn to live by and lean on daily. And we can. We can practice this, no matter how many times we get off track, we can get back on the cross roads with Jesus and let Him renew our perspective, renew our minds.
- I was cleaning up the kitchen the other day, with all kinds of things on my mind, feeling like I had too much to do. And as I often do, I noticed how many crumbs the kids had trailed all over the floor, even though we just cleaned it up the day before. And I huffed and I puffed and I buzzed around with my trusty Black and Decker hand vac, between the cracks and under the chairs and on the counter and in places I never thought crumbs could get. The kids were already on the bus and I was by myself. And the thought hit me: *all these crumbs, all these crumbs are the aftermath of things I can be incredibly, profoundly grateful for*. And the only thing I could worry about was how much I had to do. So, I started thanking God, *thank you God for these crumbs!* Because it means we have healthy, lively, happy kids, it means we have abundant food to eat, it means we have a full house with joy and vitality—and there might come a day when things are a lot cleaner and quieter than I want them to be, there may be times when the cupboards are less full when they are today. *Thank you God for these crumbs!* I was shouting it over the vacuum cleaner and by the end, I more than half meant it! And that morning, God displaced my stressful striving with peaceful dependence. With gratitude, and trust.
- Walking the cross roads with Jesus gives us perspective that changes how we see the world: it allows us to find peace in the midst of all the noise, to find gratitude in the midst of all the troubles, to seek His Kingdom as the First thing and the One thing that is necessary. In this world, we need that so very badly right now. What

will you do this week, and throughout this Lent, to renew your focus on *the one thing* that matters most?

- We want to give you time as we finish to *be quiet*, to release all those noisy thoughts and worries, and sit at the feet of Jesus. Hear Him say, *don't worry about tomorrow, today is enough*. Receive His grace *for this day*. Place your focus *fully on Him*.