

Scripture Reading



Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵"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 important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

²⁸"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Message

“The Good and Beautiful Life: Life Lived with Faith & Hope”

Howard Hughes was a big-time businessman who dabbled in oil, entertainment, and the aviation industry. Some of you knew of him when he was alive and flying the “Spruce Goose”, others of you learned about his younger years through the movie like “The Aviator”, perhaps you read about him in books; or perhaps some of you have never heard of Howard Hughes.

Howard Hughes was a billionaire in a time when being a millionaire was a rare feat. And today he serves as a primary example for Jesus teaching from his Sermon on the Mount.

With more money than he could ever spend, we might imagine such a billionaire's life by picturing Hughes sitting by a private pool, and sipping drinks with little umbrellas sticking out of them, or flying off to warm vacation spots or racing fast cars on the speedway. But instead, for the last 25 years or so of his life Howard Hughes was the poster child for worry and anxiety.

- he was overwhelmed by worry that people were out to get him,
- his fear for others caused him to live in hotels where he would rent out the entire floor.
- those closest to him describe his sitting alone in a pitch black room for long stretches of time, refusing to allow anyone to come and see him.
- Being exceptionally worried about germs; those who did need to visit with

Hughes had to follow his specific instructions including turning door knobs with tissues and opening doors ever so slightly. His worry led to severe stomach problems.

-And, on rare occasions when Howard Hughes would venture out of the hotel his drivers were only allowed to take smooth roads and never to exceed 35 miles per hour; 2 mph if they had to cross over railroad tracks. So great did Howard Hughes worry that he would get into a car accident.

Howard Hughes serves as a prime example of Jesus' teaching today because of the paradox so evident in his life; that the more successfully he got; the more money he accrued, the more worry and anxiety festered in his soul. Materialism breeds worry because your heart tells you that you never have enough, and what you do have, can easily be lost.

Source: Bryan Lorittis, "Why Worry?", Preaching Today.com

This week's teaching of our Lord's builds on last week's teaching; that there is good reason for us to avoid avarice; the excessive love of money. For just as Jesus' teachings caused us, last week, to acknowledge two treasures and two eyes and two Masters; again this week Jesus is calling us to act on the choice we have to made between two and only two options.

- If you choose money; corruptible treasures... if you choose to have a "bad eye", that is to act in a stingy manner toward others,.... if you choose to call money your Master; then your life will be characterized by living in darkness. But,

- If you choose to live with faith and hope in God, the treasure that is incorruptible; the Kingdom which will last forever,... if you choose to have a "good eye", deciding to live a generous life,... if you choose to call God your Master; then your life will be characterized by living in the light.

Matthew 6:25 begins with these words

“Therefore I tell you....”

Because last week Jesus told us we must choose to either define life around money or around God, and **this week we hear Jesus describing a blessing that is ours as we live by faith and hope in God.**

Therefore, if you have chosen God as your Master, Jesus says this is how you will live:

1. Don't Worry about Your Life

Sometimes I wonder if God isn't giving us a new and wonderful way to draw people into the Christian faith, because I wonder what would happen if a Christian simply faced his neighbor and said, "How would you like to have a life where you would never have to worry again?"

My guess is that such a statement would immediately make most Americans think they were about to hear of a new "get rich quick" scheme. After all, most people still believe that if you have enough money you won't have any worries!

And yet, isn't that what Jesus is calling us to; to discover and celebrate life without worry?

So central and emphatic is Jesus teaching "not to worry" or "not to be anxious", that within this one teaching Jesus repeats this imperative/command three times. **The good and beautiful life God wants us to experience is a life that is free from worry.** Wouldn't that "sell" to people in our neighborhoods if it was presented in the right way? Jesus even gives us three very practical examples. He says,

- do not worry about food,
- do not worry about drink,
- do not worry about clothes

Most people worry about these things, but when your faith and hope are in God you are not to worry about such things in life.

Do we grasp just how attractive this teaching of Jesus can be to others?

When you go home today and turn on the television, or listen to the radio or read a magazine, or the Sunday newspaper; would you count how often the world calls upon you to think about food, drink, and clothing? (I know that the world called you to think about a lot of other things as well, but focus, if you will, on just these basic necessities of life.)

I mean, such ads would make sense if we were starving, thirsty or naked, but we're not are we? Just take note today!

The current "back-to-school sales" campaign should be enough to make my point; but, if you would, take note throughout this week how often the world is trying to convince you that you need some kind of food or drink or clothing you don't have. Take note of how advertisers are convincing you, so that they can get your money, because **today they're using a lot of fear.**

Jesus says "don't worry about life", while our world is saying "worry that you don't have the tastiest food, the healthiest food, the most convenient food, or the lowest calorie food you don't have.

Jesus says "don't worry about life", while our world is saying "worry that you don't have the newest sports drink, the most nutritious smoothie, or the water taken from super-secret underground caves beneath Mount Fuji in Japan that you don't have.

Jesus says "don't worry about life", while our world is saying "worry that you don't have the latest fashion, the "right color" iPod, or the most expensive footwear that others have.

Advertisers want you to fear what life will be like if you don't have what they want to sell to you. They want you to worry, because worrying will get you to do what they want you to do.. consume, consume, consume.

But Jesus says, "don't worry about life."

Perhaps you have noticed that it is not just manufacturers and advertisers who want you to worry and feel fear & anxiety; it is also the news media and politicians. Newspapers, magazines, evening news and candidates all play on people's fears to get what they want; whether it is ratings, your support or you vote.

Did you know that **when the nation's murder rate declined by 20% between 1990 and 1998, the number of murders stories on network newscasts increased 600%**. It has been called by some as "**the Fear for Profit Syndrome**". **Media executives, advertisers and politicians all join together to use fear to motivate and manipulate us.**

Citation: TGBL, p. 173

We live in a culture of fear which says "worry about what you don't have, be anxious about all that can happen to you", because if we do their sales or their ratings are going to go way up, and they will achieve their ambition, to earn more money or gain more power. This is how the world operates what it chooses to worship money over God.

But as followers of Christ who have chosen God as our master, we live counter-culturally. Our Lord says, "do not worry about life." And, what a blessing that is!

Step back with me and consider this question: "Why does Jesus follow up a lesson on materialism with a lesson on worrying?"

It is because Jesus understood that the more one has, the more there is a tendency to worry. Jesus understood that materialism breeds worry. And yet we are so blind to the truth that America is one of the richest nations in the world, and yet issues like worry and anxiety and depression are on the rise among us. Did you know that:

- stress and anxiety will significantly affect over 19 million Americans this year,
- 33% of Americans will suffer job burnout in their lifetime,
- 70% of Americans will find themselves unhappy with the job because of stress at some point in their life,
- 73% of Americans worry specifically over money.

Forget Howard Hughes; look at yourself and look at the person next to you. Worry has become as much a part of our lives as breathing, and it's taking its toll upon us.

We all have heard about the correlations between stress and illnesses. **Statistics tells us that 85 % of people who visit a doctor are ill because of stress and worry.** It's not germs or viruses, 85% of all illness is stress-related.

A physician-researcher from the University of Washington divided cancer prone groups of mice into two groups. He puts one group of cancer prone mice under high stress and another group of cancer prone mice under low stress. In the high stress group, 92% of them developed cancer; in the low, stress free group, it was 7%. 92% verses 7%. Stress had the power to suppress the immunity system in those cancer prone mice.

What might it do in you? What difference would worry-free living make in your life?

Today, our Lord Jesus invites us to live a good and beautiful life: He implores us to choose God as our master, and then he says, "now, don't worry about life."

2. Difference between Concern and Worry

To more fully understand Jesus' teaching we need to differentiate between concern and worry. **Concern deals with observation, thought and action.** As human beings, God has empowered us to take notice of things which then generates questions, which in turn generates decisive actions. **Worry is “unproductive”.**

We are legitimately concerned about our health when we feel dizzy, and so we take action and go to see a doctor and to make changes the doctor recommends. That is good. Concern leads to action. But worry just stew in its juices.

Today, many people have legitimate concern for their jobs, and out of concern they take actions. They talk to our supervisors; they develop more skills; they develop relationships that may lead to other job opportunities. This is good. Concern leads to positive action; “ownership of one's life”. But worry just festers in the darkness.

Worry begins when concern and actions stop. So when Jesus says:

- do not worry about food,
- do not worry about drink,
- do not worry about clothes

He is not saying that we should dismiss motivation to obtain food, drink and clothing. Jesus is not, in any way promoting a welfare mentality.

When Jesus makes his point with his “lesser-to-greater” argument in verses 26-30 (the “how much more” argument), he causes us to notice that since God feeds birds, and clothes flowers, “how much more” will He care

for us; we are not to dismiss the activity (actions/busyness) of birds and plants to be “fed” and be “clothed” by God so completely.

For you see,

3. A Key to Not Worrying is Cooperating with God.

When we work in cooperation with what God gives us, whether it is the energy/ability God has given birds and plants, or what abilities and opportunities He gives to human beings, we have no reason to worry. Just as God gives birds and plants the resources necessary to experience a good and beautiful life, so too does he gave each one of us the resources necessary to experience a good and beautiful life.

But in stating that, we also need to acknowledge that

4. Another damage of worrying is how it affects others

While it is very typical of us to focus upon the negative effects that worrying has upon our lives, one of the greatest damages caused by worrying is that **our worrying blocks other from receiving what God wants to give them.** Not only can worrying block our joy of generosity that comes when we share the blessing of "extra" in our lives, but worrying also blocks distributing the basic necessities God has planned for those who are hungry and thirsty and naked.

We are the resource God has given to some to help meet their basic needs.

You have heard me reference a Christian stewardship study in the past which claims that, in America alone, if every professing Christian tithed

their income to the work of God in this world, that world hunger would be eliminated.

Again, while calling us not to worry about world hunger, Jesus is calling us to be concerned. He is calling us to take notice, he is calling us to ask questions and to seek answers. And finally, he is calling us to action; he is calling us to participate in his kingdom's work by sharing our "extra" with those in need, whether they are our neighbors on our street, or neighbors around the world.

When God frees us from worrying, our good and beautiful lives become a greater blessing to others.

It's our choice: If we choose to put our faith and hope in the ways of this world by worshiping money, we would have plenty to worry about. If our faith and hope are in human governments, institutions and programs, then we should worry, because as hard as we work, one day, sooner than you think, everything will perish for our world is corruptible. Having chosen a life centered on money, Howard Hughes had reason for his anxieties.

But if we choose to put our hope and faith in God; and, as Jesus exhorts us, to:

....seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,

then

all these things will be given to (us) as well.

You see, **God's kingdom works; it is “forever”, it is incorruptible.**

With eyes set on kingdom priorities, God will provide for you and he will provide for this world, as we give ourselves to him. There is no need to worry because God is in control.

Today we are invited to a blessed action that is possible for all who have chosen to live out their faith and hope in God:

The Apostle Paul declares;

Philippians 4:6

“Have no anxiety about anything but in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

The Apostle Peter affirms;

1 Peter 5:7

“Cast your anxieties upon God for he cares about you.”

Jesus simply says to those who are living out their faith and hope in God,

“Do not worry about your life.”

AMEN

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