

SERMON TITLE- "Christianity Applied: Don't Worry"

TEXT- Matthew 6:19-34

PREACHED AT- Neighbourhood Church

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This past week we went through another of the cancer journey challenges. After meeting with the radiation oncologist it was decided that Janet go for a MRI to try to determine why there is weakness and pain in her legs.

For non-cancer people any scan like that has worry attached to it- but when cancer is part of the story the level of anxiety multiplies many times. That is exactly what it did for us. Suddenly worry becomes a big thing.

We are doing a series of sermons that we have called, Christianity Applied. The sermon question for this series is- "What difference does what we believe make in actual daily living?"

Everyone agrees to that in principle, of course, but the actual temptation for all of us is to be quite happy with a warm feeling on Sunday that doesn't interfere too much with how life generally unfold for the rest of the week- unless of course something bad happens and we need it fixed. Obviously that isn't the right way to look at things but somehow this less than perfect way of doing things has a way of winning.

Our series is supposed to help us actually move beyond this.

We are looking at this question through template set out by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. At one level having 8 weeks to cover 3 chapters of the Bible- should be more than enough. In fact if you were to simply read the whole sermon it probably wouldn't take 20 minutes.

What we quickly find however is that there is a whole lot to cover and so we have to skip around a bit to make sure we cover most of the bases.

So when the MRI news became part of our life I immediately thought about Jesus' words on that subject-

**Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life . . .
Matthew 6:25**

I also remembered that in one of Ryan's first sermons here, I dealt with this subject. But since this is a subject that can stand a few looks and because worry is a living part of our lives- I thought that dealing with it here and now would be very appropriate. This is not a theoretical issue for us- we live with it 24/7 to lesser and greater degrees.

Since this sermon series is about making Jesus' teaching part of our lives- here is an issue when an application is needed. From that end the timing is perfect and we will move slightly out of the order of the SOTM to deal with the matter of worry and Jesus' instructions regarding it. We are in a season of life when worry is a very real issue for us.

But I want to also be very clear that the teachings about worry are not just for people facing cancer- this teaching affects everyone one of us at one time or another.

For many people the big worry hanging over their heads at present is the state of the world economy. Not surprising with huge swings in the stock markets around the world. Most people here don't live their lives directly connected to the fortunes of the TSX or DJIA but the impact of huge swings in assets do ripple through the economy and suddenly job sites are shutting down and car lots are not selling their cars and mills stop cutting timber- and people face big crunches.

And worry goes beyond that as well. It is part of families as family members we love face various challenges. Worry is just a fact of life.

And if you know about worry then you also know that it has a life of its own.

So what does Jesus say about worry? It is not ambiguous in fact when Jesus addresses this issue He repeats the same phrase several times-

These boil down to several instructions-

**Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life . . .
Matthew 6:25**

**Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?
Matthew 6:27**

And why do you worry about clothes? Matthew 6:28

So do not worry, saying 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' Matthew 6:31

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Matthew 6:24

Jesus could hardly be clearer- worry is something that Kingdom people are not to just let run its course. We are told in no uncertain terms to stop worrying.

And the summary of His instruction is-

Don't Worry

So how do we do that? is the natural question. We are going to see what Jesus says to that- but before we do a point that must not be overlooked-

God's Heroes Worried

Alongside of such a clear statement instructing us not to worry we need to make sure we understand the context into which Jesus is writing. God's people do worry and worry.

Why is this an important note? Because the last thing we want to do in response to such a clear command is to somehow feel like we have to put on a worry-free attitude to make the point. I believe that we as Christians have good reason to be far more cheerful than others but not at the expense of fooling ourselves or others.

As I came up with the title of this sermon "Don't Worry" it was partly in response to a song that many of us know- "Don't Worry Be Happy." This is not about putting some sort of plastic cover over our troubles and pasting on a smile.

In fact a great many of God's heroes worried a lot. The greatest example of "worry" writing comes from the Psalms. On one of my "worry" days I was listening to my Bible devotions and the Psalms were on.

**I am bowed down and brought very low;
all day long I go about mourning.
My back is filled with searing pain;
there is no health in my body.
I am feeble and utterly crushed;
I groan in anguish of heart.
All my longings lie open before you, O Lord;
my sighing is not hidden from you.
My heart pounds, my strength fails me;
even the light has gone from my eyes.
My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds;**

my neighbors stay far away. Psalm 38:6-11

And it goes on. That is a worried man.

Worry is a big issue in life and there are seasons for each of us when the avalanche of worry threatens to just sweep us away.

And so when we approach Jesus' teaching on this matter it is not as some kind of leper that other Christians need to keep away from- but rather from the companionship of those who understand that this is a very big deal.

So what are we to do once we understand both that God's people will find themselves worrying and that this is not OK?

Jesus' teaching are part of a big package and so it is that place we started-

**Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life . . .
Matthew 6:25**

is actually the conclusion of a prior discussion the most basic of which included Jesus teaching His followers how to pray. This is what we are going to look at next week. Each week we send the children out with the repetition of the Lord's Prayer. Next week we are going to look more deeply into that. Obviously that is one of the pieces that the "therefore" is built on.

Just like anger and pain, worry is a response that God has placed into us that tells us something is not right. What we are supposed to do when we feel pain, for example is find out what the problem is.

A couple of weeks ago I came home and sat down on a footstool that I had sat on many time. This time however I felt a sharp pain in my backside. I did not just keep sitting there but stood up and after a little investigation discovered that one of my daughters has pinned it together and that these pins were sticking straight up. I found the source of the pain.

That is why pain exists, that is why anger exists, that is why worry exists. Something is wrong- better check it out.

And Jesus has given a checklist prior that His conclusion follows from.

We will look at 3 points of that checklist today. It begins-
Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For

where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21

#1. Are Your Treasures In The Right Place?

One of the current stock market stories that isn't helping anyone's peace of mind is that of a man called Bernie Maddoff. BM was one of the most trusted men on Wall St for decades. Like Warren Buffet he put together investment packages for people and for a long time these investments paid handsome returns. These funds were considered so stable and lucrative that people were clambering to buy in. Those who did considered themselves the lucky one.

All this came to a crashing end just before Christmas 08 when it was revealed that BM had been running a massive ponzi or pyramid scheme and that those who invested possibly would lose everything.

The problem- their treasures were in the wrong place.

Once a story like this goes out anxiety fills everyone. How do you know if the place you put your treasures is in a BM fund or not?

What Jesus reminds His followers of as the first order of the checklist is- if you are worried- do a quick summary of where your treasure is located.

Of course with earthy treasures there is always an inherent insecurity. There is only a degree of security that needs to be assessed and measured. Any treasure on earth cannot escape decay, oxidization and human corruption. These are the facts of life that we live with all we can and should do it mitigate them.

But when worries come Jesus' followers are to make sure that they truly understand what "eternal security" is. God repeatedly reminds us that we are on a program that goes beyond the matters of this life. We must never allow the consciousness of that escape us.

This is where the worry checklist begins. Make sure you understand where your treasure is.

But then Jesus goes on to another check-

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! Matthew 6:22-24

#2. Are You Seeing Things Correctly?

Worry comes with a crisis. When a crisis comes our beings go into crisis mode. In crisis mode we see things differently. This is not always bad and in fact for otherwise healthy people the crisis sets of an emergency response mode in the brain that is designed to help us through the crisis.

There are times when fear takes over that our beings surge with adrenaline.

There are times when the pain is overwhelming that our bodies go into shock.

During time like this we actually see and experience things differently than normally. Our eyes see things differently.

These are often helpful- but not always and sometimes how we are reacting and what we are seeing is seriously flawed. We attack those who are trying to help us and we fail to step away from obvious disaster.

And what is the implication of Jesus' instruction here? When a crisis comes- check you vision. Are you seeing things correctly?

How does one do this? A simple way is to ask trusted people around you an easy question- "This is what I see. Do you see the same thing?" If they are trusted friends they will give you their take on what you are seeing.

This is a simple test that I have become convinced we exercise very rarely. We go on the mistake assumption that as long as no one challenges our way of seeing things everyone agrees with us. In fact those who truly love us also trust us and when we say we are seeing things- they hope that we are right and they are wrong. [It is why the Bible tells us to listen to our enemies because they will often tell us the truth about ourselves because they are not inhibited by liking us].

I am also convinced that a huge number of disasters could be avoided if we were more in the habit of doing an "eye check."

But Jesus adds another test-

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. Matthew 6:22-24

#3. Do You Have A Spilt Personality?

We all have split personalities. The most obvious split is between our natural desires and what we know is right. These are not

always in conflict but run on 2 different models. The human body has needs that it wants fulfilled- and that is all.

On the other hand we have a mind that knows some things are right, some are wrong and some are all mixed together.

That's life- but Kingdom people are set apart because they have chosen to make God the Master.

There are all kinds of subjects that Jesus could have chosen to illustrate the split personality challenge but money works so well and He has already brought it to the table and will continue to do so.

Money represents the drive to fulfill the needs of our beings. At the end of the day it takes money.

And what does Jesus tell us? You can only have one Master without big conflicts happening.

When those conflicts come- things start to fall apart.

When things fall apart worry sets in.

When worry sets in an important thing to check is- have I become conflicted. Have I come to the place where 2 masters are competing for their place of power?

So what's the fix? Recertify the right Master.

But for many of us worry has already taken hold- to use a phrase that Ryan brought with him "That train has already left." In some ways what Jesus has said is a reminder not to get onto that train in the first place because once it takes off there is a sense that we are along for the ride.

But are we? The worry journey is not as simplistic as getting off an on a train and I believe what Jesus says next is there to help us get off that train- if we are on it.

I think that what Jesus says next pertains particularly to those whose train has already left-

**Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life . . .
Matthew 6:25**

Just a quick reminder that just because you are on this train- doesn't mean you have to stay there. So here's why you should do . . . **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? Look 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? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Matthew 6:25-27

Jesus now addresses some very specific things that we worry about. The first is the biggest one- life.

If there is one thing that has a way of putting all the other worries into their places is the worry about life. It is why the word "cancer" sends terror through the soul.

And what does Jesus say to those of us who are worrying our hearts out?

Worry Doesn't Extend Life- So Get Off The "Worry" Train

This train isn't going anywhere good. There is no amount of fretting that will change anything. This is an empirical fact that somehow the human mind can't quite accept. There is something within us that tells us that something substantial is taking place when we grind things over and over in our minds.

Why is this the case? Because there are things that are very good about thinking things over and over again. When, like many people, I wake up in the middle of the night and can't sleep I try to figure out stuff. For me it often involves writing a sermon but during the time when I was building my log cabin I would think about the various joints of the logs. For the most part I would forget my great solutions when morning came but I am convinced that the energy spent there was not wasted.

But thinking through the night did not lift a single log off the ground and will not, Jesus says, add a single hour to our lives. Worry doesn't change any facts and actually destroys the worrier.

Get off the Worry Train.

But Jesus does an interesting shift of emphasis. From the BIG ONE- the fear of losing life Jesus moves to what seems comparatively trivial-

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If 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? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or

'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Matthew 6:28-31

I deliberately said, "seems comparatively trivial." For the sake of simplicity I have simplified something that rarely is so simple- and Jesus doesn't. In this paragraph He mixes everything together- from life and death to the latest fashion statement.

And in doing so Jesus describes how the package actually works out in our brains- it is all mixed together.

Now when He does do He does not give the latest fashion statement the same kind of credit as life and death- but takes the ordinary things of life that we do fret about and talks about them.

At this point I want to share something that occurred to me as I mulled this passage over during a week when worry was and is part of life.

What is Jesus saying here? What I occurred to me is the following- Jesus Is Saying-

God Has Given You The Capacity To Handle This Anxiety

The reality of life is- we don't always get good news. Sometimes the stock market crashes in really big ways. Sometimes what the medical tests reveal is not good news. Sometime clothes wear out and God's people don't get enough to eat.

It seems to me that what Jesus is telling His followers is, God has given you the capacity to take this journey on.

What is the deep worry? I can't handle this crisis. It is just too big.

But if I am right in this, Jesus is telling His followers- those who have gone through the steps He has laid out- "No, you can do it. You have been given all the tools by God Himself. Just as the lilies have what they need to grow naturally in the field, you have been given the resources to walk through this crisis.

This is a quick statement of a challenging issue but at the end of it Jesus comes back to where He began- what is our focus?

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. Matthew 6:32-34

Worry is real, powerful and God's people are not immune to it. In fact the Scriptures are full of the worried cries of His people but

as His people we are not left without His hand and direction on us in this journey.