

With that song in mind (“Don’t Worry, Be Happy”), hear the Word of the Lord. READ Matthew 6:19-21, 25-34

Is that reading comforting, or convicting? I suppose it depends on if you worry or not! Jesus says, “do not worry.” Perhaps Jesus inspired that song the choir sang.

The choir’s singing the song “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” is very appropriate because worry is universal, crossing all social, political, and economic lines. Those who have money worry that they may lose it; those who are poor worry about not having enough to survive. Read the newspaper and you will see that business people, politicians, educators, and students worry. Even my cat worries that her feeder will not open! The church worries about whether we will have enough money to survive and how to go about spreading the gospel. Worry, worry, worry.

But, Jesus calls believers – you and me – to a “no worry” zone; Jesus calls us to trust that as we live for Him, God will take care of us.

The last three weeks we have been talking about First Things First from our Wednesday night “Conversation with God” series. The Bible teaches that believers are to live distinctive lifestyles. Our lives must reflect certain priorities. We are to abide in Christ. When we live connected to Him our lives become filled with purpose; as God uses our talents to reach out and bless the world with the good news. Then, we learned to value the kingdom of heaven because it is so fantastic that it’s like finding a precious jewel that we must have. The future is a real place which is prepared for us, and so we pour our energies and focus into it.

Today’s lesson teaches us how to live day to day, trusting our Heavenly Father in such a way that loosens that tight grip of anxiety with which we seem to go through life. We accomplish this by doing something really simple, although we believe it to be very hard – turning your life fully over to Jesus Christ. Some never learn the joy of doing that, but it is a joyful thing.

So how do we do it? How do we learn to let go of worry and trust God? Can we actually live without worry?

Jesus saw a great crowd of people one day so he went up the mountain and sat down and began talking to them (Mt 5:1). You have probably heard about it – the Sermon on the Mount. And, people were amazed when they heard His words. None of their teachers taught like this. The difference? Jesus focused on the heart. Perhaps His sermon should be called “The State of the Heart.”

During this sermon, Jesus addressed worry. He began by talking about money and possessions. Jesus took a logical approach to explain the source of worry. He said, “Don’t hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or – worse – stolen by burglars.”¹ It just doesn’t make much sense.

Secondly, He said, earthly treasures will grab your heart. And that’s not good.

¹Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*

So, is that what this is all about? Is Jesus saying materialism is bad? Is this a call to poverty?

No, it's not a call to poverty or to quit our jobs or to not save money. But it is a call to lessen their importance. Possessions and savings don't guarantee happiness or success, or even a good future.

Jesus said, instead, stockpile treasure in heaven, a place where it makes sense.

- In heaven, there is no loss
- No fear of a stock market crashing or interest rates below 1%
- No foreclosure or need to file for bankruptcy
- No worrying about having enough money to pay the rent or school loans
- No thieves to take it away from you

No. Jesus says heaven is a safe, secure place to accumulate your fortune. So He calls us to be fully committed to God's will and purposes first.

The next step, Jesus says is to trust God and stop worrying. You can be carefree. God knows you need food and clothing and if you seek the kingdom above all else, God will supply all those things you worry about so much.

Now how does that happen?

Paul's advice is this: "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And God's incredible peace will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." God hears and responds.

Does loving God first mean things won't go wrong? No! In this world we will have trouble. But the Psalmist says, "Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper, or fret about their wicked schemes" (37:7).

- When need arises in your life, Jesus says, God will take care of you if you depend on Him.
- When things go wrong, God will do His best for you, if you lean wholly on Him.
- It means when you devote yourself to God first and try to accomplish something, God will take pride in you.

A woman named Mary Crowley experienced that very thing. She married young, but by age 21 she was left to support herself and her two young children. She had little formal education and it was 1937 – jobs were extremely scarce. But she had a strong commitment to Jesus Christ and faith that God would help her provide for her family. Living in Sherman, she convinced a department store to hire her. Later she moved to Dallas, and eventually, through prayer and her power of persuasion, she raised money and got the loans to found her business, Home Interiors, which eventually grew to be a multi-million dollar corporation employing thousands of women like her.

Mary's life mission was to honor God and to bless and serve others, so from the beginning her company was structured to be generous. Even when profits were very meager, she told the board, 'I know we don't have much, but what we have, we're going to share.' Every employee received a bonus. She traveled the nation training women on how to be independent Christian women and adapt their work schedule to their most important priority, the Lord. She donated to her church, funded cancer research centers, and built homes for troubled youths. Mary Crowley stored up treasures in heaven; and yet she had a full, productive business.

This is not a call to poverty; it's a call to priority.

How did she do it? Mary said, "Every evening I turn my worries over to God. He's going to be up all night anyway."

Don't cling to your worldly treasures. **What good is it if we are like everybody else?** Give them to God, trusting He will take care of you. Then use your assets to store up treasures in heaven.

But how do you know for sure God will take care of you?

You blatantly believe God's word. (Read Psalm 139) This is how God sees you.

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You are acquainted with all my ways, even the way I sleep. Before I speak a word, O LORD, you know it completely.

God, you see, is constantly near you, interested in you, and God loves you. *God hems you in, behind and before, and lays His hand upon you simply because you belong to Him.*

- God does this even if you are not perfect.
- Scripture doesn't demand that you be sinless for this to happen.
- The Bible doesn't say God loves you if and only if you perform. God loves you even if you hate Him at times.

Perhaps you think, "My life is just too dark." It's not too dark for God. In fact it says if you run to the deepest, darkest sinful place, God is there. You can't escape Him! If you run from God for years, you can't get away from Him. God's love for you is so strong and powerful, no matter how low you get, God's hand is still there, ready to hold you fast, ready to lead you out.

There's more.

God formed you and knows you inside out. You will never be hidden or unwanted or unknown. It was God's will that you be born. In fact, God knows at this very moment how long you will live, and God is waiting to receive you because you are precious to Him.

Jesus says invest in that. It's worth it. When you focus on God it's a wonderful, exciting heart-filled adventure.

What do you want to lay up for yourself? Something that lasts for this lifetime? Or something that will not only last forever, but also relieves your worries on earth? Today fully devote yourself to God's purposes and say with the Lord, *I'm not worried, I'm happy.*

AMEN