

“TREASURE (#4): DON'T WORRY 'BOUT A THING”

(Matthew 6:25-34)

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[LaGrange First U.M.C.; 10-29-17]

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1. Read CEB Text: Matthew 6:25-34 and Pray.
2. Here in 2017 -- well into the 21st-century -- there's a plague that's infecting many people in America (including perhaps many of us!). In fact, it's so widespread that it could even be labeled an epidemic!

A--It's called **WORRY** -- a condition of mental distress and agitation that strangles our focus and keeps us distracted from what we really need our attention to be on. <sup>1</sup>

1--More than 40 million people today are clinically diagnosed with some kind of anxiety disorder, to say nothing of the countless more of us who deal with lesser kinds of worry each and every day.

2--We worry about our families, our finances, our futures, and even about how all of these things relate to and affect each other.

3--And even though worry and anxiety are not new phenomena, the wide *variety* of things that we have to worry about, and the *intensity of feeling* that we experience through them today are certainly unique. <sup>2</sup>

B--No wonder, then, that our culture often writes songs in an attempt to alleviate and overcome worry and anxiety.

1--Whether it's Bob Marley's "*Don't Worry 'Bout a Thing*," <sup>3</sup> the Beach Boys' "*Don't Worry, Baby*," or Bobby McFerrin's 1988 hit "*Don't Worry, Be Happy*," the mantra of a more carefree, happy existence is one that we *all* long to adopt.

2--And yet, as comforting as it may be to have someone sing a "don't worry" song, it doesn't change the fact that worry *isn't* easy to rationalize our way out of.

--II--

3. Well, for the last few weeks, we've been sharing in a stewardship series called "TREASURE," <sup>4</sup> in which we've been taking inventory of *where* we spend our time, energy, and money *so that* we can do a better job investing them in the work of God.

A--And as come to the end of this journey, today we turn to a scripture that invites us to consider the connection between our "earthly treasure" and *worry* .

B--Consider, for example, that -- long before Marley and McFerrin wrote their pop tunes -- here in Matthew 6, we find Jesus delivering his own advice about how to properly deal with worry and anxiety.

1-- "*Don't worry about your life,*" he says in Verse 25, "*what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you'll wear. [For] Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothes?"*"

2--He goes on in Verses 26-30 to talk about how God takes care of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

3--And then in Verse 34 he ends by urging us, "*Therefore, stop worrying about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself.*"

4. Now, it's no accident that Jesus' discussion here in this passage about worry appears just a few verses *after* his discussion about money, possessions, and other treasure.

A--As I've said the last three weeks, Jesus is concerned about our *hearts*, which -- by definition -- means that he's concerned about what worries us.

1--As author Jacob Armstrong puts it, "*Jesus recognizes that there are other things in our lives that demand our attention and cause us concern. He recognizes their importance. He just wants to help us understand the proper place that each of these things should hold in our hearts.*"<sup>5</sup>

2--It's almost as if -- by its very *context* -- Jesus is saying in these verses that if we put our heart-felt trust and hope in *GOD* (rather than in our "earthly treasures" or in the things we think we need), then we won't *have* to be a slave to worry or anxiety any more.

B--And yet, are these words here just another care-free, pollyanna "*Don't worry, be happy*" song? I don't think so.

1--I don't think he's suggesting that we can talk ourselves *out of* anxiety and *into* happiness.

2--Nor do I believe he's saying that we can use pure logic to *just move on!*

C--No. In these verses I think he's **inviting us to consider at least two things**:

--III--

5. First of all, Jesus is inviting us both to understand and acknowledge that the root cause of most worry and anxiety is our mistaken need **to be in control**.

A--When we think that happiness and contentment in life are all 100% dependent upon US, then it produces anxiety, stress and worry because we're working all the time to achieve these alone and all by ourselves.

B—One author says that "*Life is uncertain,... dangerous & wild. Worry will come, [and that] when we look at our greatest treasure, we will feel anxious about caring for it*"<sup>6</sup>...

C--...Which is why in Verse 27 Jesus rhetorically asks, "*Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life?*"

D--The obvious answer, of course, is "none of us!" *None* of us gain anything by worrying — it doesn't solve our problems or give us more time, and all it does is produce stress, anxiety, and damage to our bodies and souls.<sup>7</sup>

6. So, to counteract this human tendency to think that our happiness is 100% within our control, Jesus in these verses also invites us to **embrace a different perspective** (GOD'S!)

A--He knew that if we would but take the energy and emotion we've been giving to *worry* and redirect them, we'll be much better off!

1--For instance, in Verses 26-30, Jesus points us to beautiful things that we know God takes care of: birds and flowers.

2--And he says (essentially) that just as God made and values *them*, so God made and values *us* — that just as God takes care of His creation, so He will take of *us*, His "treasure, so quit fretting about the individual needs and cares of life!"<sup>8</sup>

3--And then in Verse 33 he directs us instead to "*desire first and foremost God's kingdom and His righteousness, & all these things will be given to you as well.*"

B—In other words, he's pointing to the birds, the flowers, and to God in order to give us a different *perspective* on life — to say that though life is uncertain, when we live by (and out of) a deep and abiding trust and hope in GOD, then worry and anxiety have no place to establish a foothold, even in the midst of that uncertainty.

C—And so, in the context of all of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, all of this means that as we share our gifts and treasure (time, energy and money) *with God*, we are acknowledging the priority of GOD in our lives, thereby revealing our trust in HIM and not in those *earthly* treasures.

D--As Jacob Armstrong writes, "*As we learn more and more about the treasures of God, we put less and less stock in the treasures of the earth. We begin to invest our time, energy and money into the things of God; and we find freedom from the things that used to hold us in the grip of worry and fear.*"<sup>9</sup>

--IV--

7. So, what is it that's causing worry and anxiety in YOUR life?

A--Whatever these things are for you *and for me*, our worry may be a sign that we're trying to hold onto them too closely -- trying to control the direction and outcome of things over which we ultimately have NO control.

B--And yet, if we'll choose to see things from GOD'S perspective -- the one who *knows* our needs and is willing to help us fulfill them, but with *Him* at the helm instead of *us* -- then I think we'll find freedom from worry and anxiety.

1--We'll find that "*when the things of God become what we truly treasure, [then] other things... [don't demand as much from our hearts...]*"

2--"*As we give more and more of ourselves to God, [we find that] our treasure is more and more IN God, and not in the things of the world"* <sup>10</sup>

8. PRAYER: "*You know the things that cause us worry and anxiety, and our human tendency to allow those things to control our lives and our hearts. Help us to trust you more and more deeply, so that we don't have to worry about the needs and cares of life, but instead to know that you will empower and equip us find ways to ensure that those things are taken care of. And Lord, as a sign of our trust in you, let us commit ourselves today to give generously and sacrificially in the coming year to your kingdom through the work of your church, so that others may come to know you, and that your glory may be seen in our world! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*"
9. [COMMITMENT/RESPONSE TIME... Invite Ushers forward to pass out response/commitment "cards" and privacy envelopes; Remind all of online card availability...]

### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Worry can be defined as being anxious or uneasy about something uncertain or potentially dangerous. With that definition, we can see that not all worry is bad. In fact, some worry can be quite helpful, since it serves as a survival mechanism that keeps us out of trouble. But when most of us talk about worry, we are talking about that irrational, purpose-lacking, unhelpful stream of thoughts that plagues us rather than protects us., that hinders us rather than helps us. Worry may grow out of an innate instinct for survival, but it can grow into a destructive force rather than a life-giving emotion.

<sup>2</sup> It was the ancient Greeks who actually first identified that concept of phobias (things we are afraid of). But they didn't identify nearly the number of phobias that we tend to suffer from today. Psychologists have categorized as many as 500 phobias, and according to the estimates of some health professionals, as many as 50 million individuals in the United States suffer from some kind of phobia (<http://www.unexplainedstuff.com/Mysteries-of-the-Mind/Phobias.html>)

<sup>3</sup> Also known by the title "*Three Little Birds.*"

<sup>4</sup> This series is based on the "**Treasure**" stewardship program by Jacob Armstrong (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), and many (if not most) of the concepts and ideas in my series of sermons come from the books and other resources in and of this program.

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Armstrong, Treasure: A Four Week Study on Faith and Money (Daily Readings) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob Armstrong, Treasure: A Four Week Study on Faith and Money (Daily Readings) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Practically speaking, worry actually *adds* to our problems by causing us to *lose* precious time focusing on worry *about* our problem, rather than on how God wants to help us *solve or walk with us through* our problem. Jesus tells not to worry but then also points us to God, who truly holds time and life. Worrying won't add a moment to our lives, but trusting in God will allow us to embrace the time that God has given us here.

<sup>8</sup> He says "*notice the birds of the air*" and the "*lilies that grow in the field*". When we move too quickly through our lives, we may not notice the birds; but with God's perspective we see them, with their beauty and value. In the same way, Jesus wants us to notice the lilies of the field. Most of us simply pass by flowers as we move from place to place. But with God's perspective, we see their beauty and their value. We see how God feeds the birds and dresses the flowers. And if these are of worth to God, WE are of even MORE worth!

<sup>9</sup> Jacob Armstrong, Treasure: A Four Week Study on Faith and Money (Daily Readings) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), p. 98. Now, does any of this mean we should just sit around all day and twiddle our thumbs, with no thought of work? Of course not! Armstrong explains it this way, "*Jesus does not say that [by trusting God] we are exempt from hard work and obligation... [only that] we simply need to acknowledge that our part in the job is relatively minor and that, ultimately, these things are in God's control and not ours*" (Armstrong, p. 97). In other words, when our treasure is in God, then all of those other things (family, finances, future) fall into their rightful place -- a place beneath God in our allegiance and attention.

<sup>10</sup> Jacob Armstrong, Treasure: A Four Week Study on Faith and Money (Daily Readings) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), p. 98.