

WINNING THE WAR OVER WORRY

Several years ago, Bobby McFerrin recorded a little song entitled, “Don’t worry—Be Happy.” Here, in part, is what he said: “ain’t got no place to lay your head, somebody came and took your bed. Don’t worry, be happy. The landlord say your rent is late. He may have to litigate. Don’t worry be happy.”

Now, who in this room buys that? Everybody worries, sometimes. To be concerned is to be human, yet, worry can be a problem. For nineteen million people in this country worry is a chronic mental illness. The fact that we humans remember the past, anticipate the future, and make choices about the present adds stress to our lives. The Biblical word for worry means to choke or to strangle. When worry becomes a noose around our necks, we have a problem.

According to a survey by U.S.A. Today, we Americans worry about work, money, children, health, marriage and parents. Jesus said, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food and the body more than clothes.” Yet we do worry, oh, how we worry.

We worry about food and clothes. In America, where we produce enough calories to meet the needs of every man, woman, and child, twice over, we continue to worry about food. Meanwhile, Americans eat more food, more often, in larger portions than ever before in the history of the world. Some of us are already wondering what we will have for lunch.

When Jesus said, “Don’t worry about the clothes you wear,” he was talking to people who had to make yarn in order to weave cloth from which a single garment was made. There were no department store clothing sales in Jesus’ day. Houses were not built with his and her walk-in closets, yet, how many of us have opened a closet and lamented, “I just don’t have a thing to wear”?

We worry about health and wholeness. To say that I am not concerned about my health would be a bald-faced lie. One day when Jesus passed the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem, he encountered a man who had been an invalid for thirty –eight years. When Jesus learned that he had been there for such a long time, he asked the man, “Do you want to get well?” the invalid responded, “Sir I have no one to help me. When I try to get into the pool someone else goes down ahead of me.” That’s what worry will do to you; it leads to pity, agony, and despair.

We worry about relationships and responsibilities. We’ve got kids to raise, jobs to do, marriages to maintain, and none of it is getting easier. Mary and Martha invited Jesus to dinner one night. They

were excited to have this leader of growing fame in their home. You know how it is when you have someone over for dinner. You want things to go right and there are a thousand things to do at the last minute after the guests arrive. That's what caused Martha to lose it. While she was scurrying about trying to get dinner on the table, Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet, feasting on the conversation. Without thinking, Martha exclaims to Jesus, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me." But Jesus replies, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better."

How can we handle the worries of life? What are some thoughts that might free us? Jesus specifically mentions three. First, know your value. In verse 24 we read, "You are much more valuable than a bird. Two sparrows are sold for a penny. You are worth more than sparrows." The robin said to the sparrow, "I wonder why these anxious human beings rush and worry so?" the sparrow replied, "I think it must be they know no heavenly father like the one who cares for you and me."

God is not out to hurt us. God wants to help us, protect us, feed us, and love us. He's on our side when pain abounds. When trouble persists, he stays around. "Like a Bridge over troubled water," he lays himself down. God cares for his own.

Second, accept your limitations. Verse 25 says, "Who of you by worrying about it can add a single hour to his life." Think about it. Worry is like a rocking chair; it gives you something to do, but it doesn't get you anywhere. I know that is hard to swallow. We are used to getting things done. If it's broke, fix it. If it's old, replace it. If it's needed, do it. I like action-packed doers of the word. That's what I love about this church. Yet there remain illnesses that won't heal, problems that can't be solved and people who won't shape up. That's frustrating! When I have things closing in on me, I am comforted by the prayer Reinhold Niebuhr taught us to pray:

God, grant me the serenity

To accept the things I cannot change,

Courage to change the things I can

And the wisdom to know the difference.

Third, and last. Take the longer view. Verse 31 says, "Seek God's kingdom first, and all these things will be given to you as well." Fifty years from now it's not going to matter if you get the grass cut, the laundry done or the beds made. Your golf score is not going to determine your place in glory. Fifty years from now nobody is going to remember a single word I said today. But, fifty years from

now the children we are baptizing this year may love Jesus. Fifty years from now someone will still be singing the songs of praise that we sing now. Fifty years from now somebody might enter heaven's gates because you took time to care.

God delivers us from narrow-mindedness. He saves us from short-sightedness. He forgives us for squeezing him into our kingdom molds instead of being transformed into his kingdom goals. When we fix our minds on things eternal, then, and only then will life make sense and our worries will be ended.

People say that a day of worry is more exhausting than a day of work. Some people handle worry by eating chocolates, others have a stiff drink. There are web sites that will worry for you if you will pay the price.

I have a better idea. Why don't we bring our worries to the Lord and leave them there. Why not trust in the lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding? Why not discover today that Jesus cares?