

When did worrying ever help anyone? # 6 in “The Greatest Sermon in History”

Message for Sunday, July 10, 2016
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Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34

The Greatest Sermon in History is the message given by Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 5-7. This series aims to apply Jesus’ timeless truths to the situations that people face today.

PART ONE

1) Don’t worry about tomorrow

The apostle Paul dealt with more trouble in the few years he appears in the Bible, than most of us deal with in a lifetime. Here’s part of what he learned from it all:

Philippians 4:6-7, New Living Translation:
Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God’s peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

To illustrate that, let me tell you a story passed on by Max Lucado... Once there was an old man who lived in a tiny village. Although poor, he was envied by all, for he owned a beautiful white horse. Even the king coveted his treasure. A horse like this had never been seen before — such was its splendor, its majesty, and its strength.

People offered fabulous prices for the steed, but the old man always refused. “This horse is not a horse to me,” he would tell them. “He is a friend, not a possession. How could you sell a friend?” The man was poor and the temptation was great. But he never sold the horse.

One morning he found that the horse was not in the stable. All the village came to see him. “You old fool,” they scoffed, “we told you that someone would steal your horse. We warned you that you would be robbed. You are so poor. How could you ever hope to protect such a valuable animal? It would have been better to have sold him. You could have gotten whatever price you wanted. No amount would have been too high. Now the horse is gone, and you’ve been cursed with misfortune.

The old man responded, “Don’t speak too quickly. Say only that the horse is not in the stable. That is all we know; the rest is guessing. If I’ve been cursed or not, how can you know? How can you judge?”

The people argued, “Don’t make us out to be fools! We may not be philosophers, but great philosophy is not needed. The simple fact that your horse is gone is a curse.”

The old man spoke again, “All I know is that the stable is empty, and the horse is gone. The rest I don’t know. Whether it be a curse or a blessing, I can’t say. All we can see is a fragment. Who can say what will come next?”

The people of the village laughed. They thought that the man was crazy. They had always thought he was a fool; if he wasn’t, he would have sold the horse and lived off the money. But instead, he was a poor woodcutter, an old man still cutting firewood and dragging it out of the forest and selling it. He lived hand to mouth in the misery of poverty. Now he had proven that he was, indeed, a fool.

After fifteen days, the horse returned. He hadn’t been stolen; he had run away into the forest. But not only had he returned, he had brought a dozen wild horses with him. All were magnificent animals, worth a great deal. Once again the village people gathered around the woodcutter and spoke. “Old man, you were right and we were wrong. What we thought was a curse was actually a blessing. Please forgive us.”

The man responded, “Once again, you go too far. Say only that the horse is back. State only that a dozen horses returned with him, but don’t judge. How do you know if this is a blessing or not? We see only a fragment. Unless we know the whole story, how can we judge? If you read only one page of a book, can you judge the whole book? If you hear only one word of a sentence, can you understand the whole sentence?”

“Life is so vast, yet you judge all of life with one page or one word. All you have is a fragment! Don’t say that this is a blessing. No one knows. I am content with what I know. I am not worried by what I don’t.

“Maybe the old man is right,” they said to one another. So they said little. But deep down, they knew he was wrong. They knew it was a blessing. Twelve valuable horses had returned with one horse. With a little bit of work, the animals could be tamed and trained and sold for much money.

The old man had a son, his only child. The young man began to train the wild horses. After a few days, he fell from one of the horses and broke both legs. Once again the villagers gathered around the old man and cast their judgements.

“You were right,” they said. “You proved you were right. The dozen horses were not a blessing. They were a curse. Your only son has broken his legs, and now in your old age you have no one to help you. Now you are poorer than ever.”

The old man spoke again. “You people are obsessed with judging! Don’t go so far. Say only that my son broke his legs. Who knows if it is a blessing or curse? No one knows. We have only a fragment.”

It so happened that a few weeks later the king engaged in a war against a neighbouring king. All the young men of the village were required to join the army. Only the son of the old man was excluded, because he was injured. Once again the people gathered around the old man, crying because their sons had been taken. There was little chance they would ever return. The enemy was strong, and the war would be a losing struggle. They would never see their sons again.

“You were right, old man,” they wept. “God knows you were right. This proves it. Your son’s accident was a blessing. His legs may be broken, but at least he is with you. Our sons are gone forever.”

The old man spoke again. “It is impossible to talk with you! You always judge when you don’t really understand. No one knows. Say only this: your sons have gone to war, and mine did not. No one knows if it is a blessing or a curse. No one is wise enough to know. Only God knows.”

That old man was right. We have only a fragment. Life’s troubles and tragedies are only a page out of a grand book. We must be slow about drawing

conclusions. We must reserve judgement until we know the whole story.

I don’t know where the woodcutter learned his patience. Perhaps from another woodcutter in Galilee. For it was the Carpenter who said it best:

Matthew 6:34, New Living Translation:

“So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

PART TWO

Introduction to reading Matthew 6:25-34.

We’re going to read in the Gospel of Matthew some of the things Jesus said about worrying. As you listen, I want you to call out the number of times you hear “worry.” Let’s see how high it goes.

Read Matthew 6:25-34 out loud.

How many times? I counted six! I think Jesus is saying something crucial here. Something we need to pay attention to.

2) The true amount of worry

Have you ever been driving at night in the fog? It can get so thick that you can barely see where you’re going, and you have to slow right down to be safe. Here’s an interesting statistic: if you could collect all the fog from 25 acres of land, from the ground up to 100 feet in the air, and if you squeezed it all together, it would barely fill a drinking glass with water.

That’s what worry is like. If we could see into the future and if we could see our problems in their true light, we could put them in their proper place. If all the things most people worry about were reduced to their proper place, you could probably fit them all into a drinking glass, too.

3) Not worrying is very practical

As we’ve seen before in this series, Jesus is very practical in his teaching. It’s the same here. Having an attitude of not worrying is *very* practical and sensible.

In one psychology study, they found that up to 40% of our worries are about things that have *already* happened! A doctor who specializes in internal medicine said that his patients could be free of half

of their stomach troubles if they could only put the past behind them and get on with life. How often do you say, “If only I had...”? That type of worry doesn’t solve problems; it only makes them worse.

In another study, worriers were asked to write down their worries over a two-week period. Here’s what happened:

- 85% of their worries never happened.
- Of 15% that did happen, for most of them they either found that they handled it better than they expected, or that it was a positive learning experience.
- Only 3% of their worries were actually any kind of trouble.

According to that research, 97% of our worries are useless. If I discovered that our car was burning gasoline at an efficiency of only 3%, you can bet I’d get a new car mighty fast.

Let’s look at those 85% of worries that never happened. Fred Smith was the founder of FedEx, the courier company. He always had a terrible fear of going to the dentist: the pain would be unbearable. Yet one time he simply *had* to see a dentist to have some work done on his teeth. The dentist was surprised to see Fred walk in with a stopwatch in his hand. “What’s that for?” the dentist asked.

Fred replied, “I don’t like having dentists work on me, so I’m turning this into an experiment. I’m going to run this stopwatch when I hurt, but only then. I’m not going to run it when I *think* I’m going to hurt, or when I *expect* to hurt, but only when I actually hurt.”

After the appointment, Fred looked at the stopwatch. There were four seconds on the clock. He had expected something painful, and something painful had happened. But Fred had expected an hour of torture. It turned out his pain had lasted less than five seconds.

Much of what we worry about is like that. We blow it all out of proportion. When the problem actually arises, we find that we were all upset over some little thing.

So, *not* worrying is actually very practical!

4) When did worry ever help you?

What about the 15% of things we worry about that do happen? Ask yourself, “How did my worrying help me to deal with this problem?”

Did it make the problem go away?

Did it provide any solutions?

Did it make me feel any better?

Many of you have a lot more experience in life than I have. Let me ask you: in any situation you’ve ever faced, has worrying about it ever helped you even one little bit? I would love to hear about it.

We could use our time and our energy and our emotions much better if we accept the situation, deal with the problem as best we can, and go on from there.

Suppose I had a friend who tagged along with me wherever I went. But instead of being helpful, or even friendly, he always got in the way. Whenever I suggested doing something different, he would say, “You can’t do that. Don’t even try it.” Whenever I met someone new, he would whisper, “Don’t trust strangers. They’re all out get you.” Whenever I faced a difficult situation he would say, “Forget it. You don’t have a chance. It’s hopeless.”

I would finally turn and say, “You are working against me, not for me. You’re not my friend at all. You’re my enemy! Get out of here!” Worry is not your friend. Worry is your enemy. It never helps you; it only works against you. So don’t let it tag along with you; tell it to get lost!

5) Freedom from fear and worry

Let us be clear about this: when Jesus tells us to not worry, this is not to be taken as a philosophy of life. That is, it is not an option that you can discard if you don’t like it. This is the commandment of our Lord.

But it is more than that.

If we see it only as a commandment, it can be a crushing burden, impossible to accept. Instead of helping us, it can destroy our faith.

Instead of that... look at this command of Jesus as a promise of hope, a message of good news. It

changes fear into freedom; it gives us joy instead of worry.

Near the end of that passage, Jesus says this:

Matthew 6:32-33, Good News Bible:

Your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things. Instead, be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things.

Jesus does not tell us what we ought to do, but are unable to; he tells us what God has given us and promises to give still more. This is the very Gospel of Jesus Christ.

6) Smile instead of worry

If you're not going to spend your day worrying, what will you do with all that extra time and energy? Be careful not to replace it with something else just as negative, like cynicism or jealousy. Try humour instead. Joke about the things you used to worry about.

Here's a story about another Fred, a young boy who didn't like to wash his hands — not that that's unusual for children. When little Freddy got his hands dirty, he simply splashed water on them — not enough to wash the dirt off, just enough to loosen it. Then he wiped his hands on the towel, where the dirt gladly found a new home. Freddy's mother was a particularly neat housekeeper, and warned Freddy to stop doing that.

One day Freddy made the mistake of drying his wet, dirty hands on one of mother's new, white towels. As soon as she saw it, she got hold of Freddy and tried to flatten him where nature had curved him.

Father, observing this, thought it would be funny to grab the towel and hide it. Three years later he had the towel framed and presented it to his wife as a gift.

You might imagine what happened. Mother looked at the muddy handprints, and with big tears running down her face she exclaimed, "Aren't they sweet! Aren't they sweet!"

Lots of times the things we worry about today we can laugh about tomorrow. And that's something worth giving thanks for.

Next Steps:

- Write down all the things you worry about.
- In prayer, give that list to God. For example: "Lord, I'll make a deal with you. *You* worry about these things, and I'll focus my energy and time on loving and serving you and the people I can help."
- Enjoy life once again!