

DON'T LET WORRY WEARY YOU!

Today's Text: Lk 12: 22- 34

Extracts:

Then [Jesus] said to His disciples, “Therefore I say to you, *do not worry about your life, what you will eat, nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. ...And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? ... But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom*” [Lk 12: 22-23, 25- 26, 31-32]

In 2006, when he was 56 years old, Jon Matthews from Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, UK, was diagnosed with mesothelioma, a cancer linked to asbestos.¹ He was told that he had a few months to live. Matthews had a choice between the fear of imminent death and the hope of living longer than predicted. He placed two bets, each with a £100 stake at odds of 50/1, that he would be alive in June 2008 and in June 2009. In his own words, “I wasn’t that fussed because everyone has to die some time. But the interesting thing for me was how long it would take-would it take weeks or years?” He beat the odds and collected a winning of £5,000 twice (in June 2008 and June 2009). But, on Tuesday, 4 May 2010, he died, barely missing a third wager for £10,000 that he would have collected on 1 June 2010!

According to those close to Matthews, he had fun and enjoyment for the extra four-year leash on life that God gave him. He did not weary himself with worry like most of us faced with less serious issues of life would do. In a similar situation, most of us would give up on life and living, blaming God or the enemy for “inflicting” us with such a death sentence. But is that the right attitude?

In this week’s study, Jesus told His disciples that they should not worry about their lives-what to eat or what to wear; that worrying will not add a cubit to anybody’s stature. But why are we so messed up, staying awake all night or losing concentration while driving? What is it that is eating us up? What can we do to avoid or minimize worry before it wearies us? Those and more are the issues that we shall examine in this week’s study.

¹ Based on “Man who bets to beat cancer dies,” *BBC News*, 2010/05/11; http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/england/beds/bucks/herts/8674598.stm

1. Background: Fear can be a tormenting spirit or the beginning of wisdom!

When we feel anxious about something unpleasant that may have happened or may happen (or may never happen!), we are said to be worried. That suggests that worry is closely related to fear, that is, an idea or thought or somebody that we dread or reverence. *What we do with fear is what matters.* For example, we can choose to fear God, that is, by treating Him with reverence and obeying Him in everything. That is why the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom [Prov. 9: 10], “to hate evil, pride and arrogance and the evil way” [Prov. 8: 13]. On the other hand, we can choose to worry about it. In that case, fear becomes a tormenting spirit that can drive us far away from faith in and love of God [1 Jn 4: 18]. That is the weapon that the devil uses against believers. Worry can wear us down both physically and spiritually. For example, in affliction, the Psalmist cried out, “Because of the sound of my groaning, my bones cling to my skin. ... I lie awake, and I am like a sparrow alone on the rooftop” [Ps. 102: 5, 7]. Such worry is the issue addressed by Jesus in this week’s Bible text [Lk 12: 22-34] which is similar to what He taught during the Sermon on the Mount [Matt. 6: 25-34].

Why do we engage in something that we know will drive us far away from a close relationship with God? Why do we fret or feel so anxious about ourselves, family, work, future, health, etc, when we know it will not work? It is because we do not understand the implications of what we are doing to ourselves. Would you do something if you knew that it was injurious to your health or your hereafter? Certainly not! That is why you must listen to the Master’s teaching on the subject and pay particular attention to the following major points:

a) *Why you should not worry at all*

Jesus said to His disciples, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about your body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing” [Lk 12: 22-23]. He added, “Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?” [v. 25]. Jesus is saying to them and to us that it is a futile exercise to worry because it cannot change our circumstances for the better.

A human being is body, mind and spirit in one. Even when the physical body dies, the spirit lives on forever in heaven or hell. Therefore, when we worry only about what we eat, drink or wear, we are only thinking of the physical body which will die one day and decay. So, what are we doing for the more important part of human life on earth- salvation? An anxious person cannot pray with concentration or even trust God to deal with his/her situation. That is well captured in the book of Isaiah where God said to the anxious people of Israel, “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength. But you would not, and you said, ‘No, for we will flee on horses’ - Therefore you shall flee! And, ‘We will ride on swift horses’ - Therefore, those who pursue

you shall be swift!” [Is. 30: 15-16]. So, to focus on our earthly needs to the detriment of our spiritual aspirations is misplaced priority and it wearies.

Much more, worry does not even solve the problems that we are afraid of. Just as worry cannot add a cubit to your stature, neither can it solve the problems making you afraid. For example, the children of Israel in the wilderness complained against the manna from heaven and “yielded to intense craving” for Egyptian delicacies that they were missing. They said, “Our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes” [Num. 11: 1-6]. God answered their concerns and gave them quail “and the people stayed up all that day, all night and the next day” gathering meat for their bodies. For their unbelief, the Lord struck them with “a very great plague that killed thousands of them [vv. 25-35]. Which would have been better for them- remain alive on manna for forty years with trim and fit bodies or be dead within a day from a plague? That is why we should be anxious for nothing [Phil. 4: 6].

b) *Only God knows what you need!*

Using the analogy of ravens and lilies, Jesus demonstrated to His disciples why they should rely on God instead of worrying themselves to death. The raven is an unclean animal [Lev. 11: 15] and yet God provides for its needs even though it neither sows nor reaps [Lk 12: 24]. The lilies of the field grow in the wild but God takes care of them and even Solomon in his glory could not match the beauty of lilies in bloom [vv. 27-28]. So, if God could be so concerned with the lower species of His creations, why not humans that He created in His own image and likeness?

The problem is that we know what we *want* but not what we *need*. God’s promise is to supply “all our *need* according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” [Phil. 4: 19]. God will provide food for your body but you may not like it. He says pork ribs are not good for you [Lev. 11: 7] but that is your favourite dish! Jesus had nowhere to lay His head and yet He slept soundly during a sea storm [Mk 4: 38] but you want to sleep on a feather-bed in the best mansion in the most exclusive neighbourhood in the city where you live! God wants to transport you from one point to another but you want a private jet! So, how can you be satisfied even when God has provided for your *needs*? Therefore, ***we are not stressed by lack but by greed!***

c) *So, your only worry should be for the kingdom of God*

Jesus told His disciples to seek the kingdom of God, and all those things that they worry about would be added to them because it is their Father’s good pleasure to give them the kingdom [Lk 12: 31-32]. The word of God

says that the kingdom of God is not meat or drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit [**Rom. 14: 17**]. Without the Holy Spirit, nobody can call Jesus Lord [**1 Cor. 12:3**] and those who are led by the Spirit of God are His sons and daughters [**Rom. 8: 14**]. Therefore, when you give your life to Christ, you can put your worry on Him and His Father will take care of your earthly needs which then become re-ordered to take second place in your life.

Peter gave up fishing to follow Jesus full time. Thereafter, he did not need to worry about his mother-in-law's sickness because Jesus healed her [**Lk 4: 38**]. When they confronted Peter to pay the temple tax in Capernaum, Jesus paid for both of them [**Matt. 17: 24-27**]. In like manner, you can afford not to worry about earthly things because before you even know what you next need, God has already provided it [**Is. 65: 24**]!

In conclusion, Jesus reminded us to put our hearts where our treasure is [**Lk 12: 24**]. If you want to keep worrying, put your hearts on earthly treasures that cannot last. But if your treasure is on the kingdom of God, your hearts will focus on eternal life in heaven and you will have no need or reason to fret about your future [**Matt. 6: 19-20**]. In the next section, we shall examine how you can wean yourself from worrying so that you can reach where Jesus is expecting you to be.

2. How to wean yourself from worrying

The word of God says that what is not of faith is sin [**Rom. 14: 23**]. Worry is of fear of uncertainty and lack of trust in God; therefore, it is sin that you should get rid of. In order to do that, it is necessary to first examine the circumstances that you currently face, which could be one or more of the following, among others:

a) *Matters that you can ignore*

There are certain matters that you worry about that you ought to completely ignore. For example, there are certain fears that you entertain of things that may or may never happen. Even if they were to happen, you would not be hurt. So why should you fret about such things?

For instance, Moses brought word from God to the children of Israel that all the firstborn of Egypt would die on a certain night but that they would not be affected as long as they marked the two doorposts and the lintels of their houses with the blood of the lamb [**Ex. 12: 13**]. The event was surely going to happen but it was not going to hurt the children of Israel. So, why should they spend sleepless nights worrying about it? In like manner, you should stop worrying about issues that do not apply to or hurt you. Why should you take analgesics for somebody else's headache?

b) *Worry that you needlessly invite!*

Sometimes, we go out of our way to invite worry to disturb our peaceful lives. As an African proverb puts it, trouble was fast asleep and pride woke him up! For example, why should you max out your credit card (i.e., reach the maximum limit) when you know that you may not be able to pay the monthly charges? Why should you eat the foods that you know will certainly make you obese? Why should you have an adulterous affair and then refuse the unwanted pregnancy or STDs (sexually-transmitted diseases) that could follow?

Without first seeking God's approval, David took a census of Israel and thus invited God's wrath. So, God sent a prophet, Gad, to offer David three things out of which he should choose one: seven years of famine or to flee before his enemies for three months while they pursued him, or three days' plague in Israel [**2 Sam. 24: 1-13**]. That was self-inflicted worry! Therefore, be careful what you ask for. Those who get involved in gossips and rumour-mongering find themselves in a similar situation.

c) *Matters that will certainly make you worry*

There are certain events that you know will certainly happen and they will hurt you. For example, think of the people on those planes that were crashed into the New York Trade Center on 9/11 (November 11, 2001). They knew for sure that death was imminent. In like manner, there are people who find themselves in a very helpless case during a natural disaster or ethnic or religious war or destitution. The end is not if but when all will be over. What should you do in such cases where worrying is so attractive!

It is the ripe moment to listen to Jesus who has said, "Do not fear, *little flock*, for it is your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom" [**Lk 12: 32**]. At such moments, God expects you to trust Him to meet you at that dire point of need. A few examples from the Scriptures will make it quite vivid:

- The children of Israel found themselves sandwiched between the Red Sea ahead of them and the Egyptian troops pressing hard on them from behind. We are told, "*They were afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.*" Moses assured them not to be afraid but to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord that He would accomplish for them that day, adding, "The Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again, no more forever. *The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.*" In deed, God split open the Red Sea for them and they passed safely on dry land while the Egyptian troops drowned when the sea closed back [**Ex. 14: 10-31**].
- The armies of several nations (Moab, Ammon and others) surrounded Judah to battle against Jehoshaphat. We are told, "*Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all*

Judah.” He brought virtually everybody in the country to the temple to pray and ask for God’s help. There and then, God spoke through a prophet and assured the king “not to be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude” for the battle was not his but God’s. The Lord added, “You will not need to fight in this battle.” So, Jehoshaphat’s army was led by praise singers and, without throwing a single weapon, the enemies destroyed one another [2 Chron. 20: 1-25]!

- After King Herod had killed the apostle James, he put Peter in jail, hoping to also kill him after the Passover. He was bound with chains between two soldiers “but *constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church*. In spite of the certainty of his coming death in a few days thence and the pains of the chains on his hands, *Peter was fast asleep!* That night, God sent an angel that loosed all the chains on him and the prison gates and set Peter free. In fact, the angel “struck Peter on the side and raised him up” [Acts 12: 1-10]! That suggests that Peter was in a deep sleep and not worried at all! He trusted his Father in heaven to deliver him out of his afflictions.

From the forgoing, we can conclude that, in certain circumstances, we will be *tempted to worry* because those who desire to live godly in Christ will face persecution [2 Tim. 3: 12]. However, knowing the God we serve whose only begotten Son is our Saviour; we have no reason or need to. Instead, we should cast all our anxieties on Him for He cares for us [1 Pet. 5:7].

3. Conclusion: Wean from worry and lean on Jesus!

On that first Good Friday 2,000 years ago, Jesus was on the cross from the third hour (9.00 a.m.) to the ninth hour (3.00 p.m.) [Mk 15: 25, 34-37], a period of six distressing hours. Yet, none of the words He uttered during that agonizingly slow period were curses. Instead, He prayed for His enemies, provided for His mother’s welfare and submitted to His Father’s will. Therefore, He can sympathise with our weaknesses because *He Himself was in all points tempted as we are and yet did not sin* [Heb. 4: 15].

Worry will raise your blood pressure and put your health and life at risk. But Jesus has set you free from worry by inviting those who labour and are heavy-laden to come to Him and find rest [Matt. 11:28]. So, wean yourself from worry and lean on Jesus!

Don’t let worry weary you.