

INTRODUCTION

We are continuing the series through Matthew as we focus on the Miracles and Parables of Jesus. Jesus was a great teacher because He used simple word pictures like light and salt to teach deep spiritual truths. In our passage today, Jesus used the pictures of flowers and birds to talk about how to live without worry.

If Jesus was teaching this same message in 2009, He might employ another familiar metaphor: a computer. Worry messes with your mind the same way a computer worm infects your computer system. I don't understand everything about computer worms, I just know one got into my computer a couple of years ago and ruined the hard drive. A computer worm gains access to your computer and makes your computer run random programs repeatedly using up all the RAM until you can't perform simple tasks like email and word processing. Here's how the anti-malware company, EMSI, describes a computer worm: "A worm not only infects and manipulates files, it makes clones of itself. It can use the system transmission capabilities to travel from machine to machine. A worm can open your email address book and dispatch one clone each to each of the addresses listed. Our only clue sometimes is that the PC and the internet are suddenly inexplicably slow."

There is currently a malicious computer worm on the prowl called the Confiker worm. It has infected millions of computers and it even grounded the flight operations of the French Navy when flight plans couldn't be downloaded. The Confiker worm is so pernicious that Microsoft is offering a \$250,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the person or persons who created the worm.

Your mind is the most amazing computer God ever created, but it is susceptible to faulty thought processes like a computer infected by a worm. Like an insidious computer worm, worry burrows into your mind and messes up your entire thought process. It generates thoughts of anxiety and fear which replicate themselves and spread to other areas of your life. Worry breeds more worry. Fear gives birth to greater fears. But Jesus tells us how to rid our minds of the worry-worm.

Imagine for a moment there is a Non-Worriers Hall of Fame. It exists for individuals who lived a worry-free life. As we walk through the Non-Worriers Hall of Fame we meet the inductees. First, there's Alfred E. Neuman, the gap-toothed guy from *Mad Magazine*. His motto was, "What, me worry?" Then there's the singer, Bobby McFerrin from the 1980s who recorded that song with the catchy lyrics, "Don't worry, be happy!" There are also three animal characters in the Hall of Fame: Timon, Pumbaa, and Simba from the *Lion King*. They sang, "Hakuna Matata ...It means no worries for the rest of your days. It's our problem-free philosophy."

All of those characters are nice, but the founding member of the Non-Worriers Hall of Fame is Jesus of Nazareth. In Matthew 6:25-34, He laid the foundation for a worry-free life. His words are much more powerful than just the silly lyrics of a song. His words come from the heart and mind of God Almighty. Let's read them:

Matthew 6:25-34. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food,

and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

I believe the most common sin among Christians is the sin of worry. Sin is doing anything that God says *not* to do, and Jesus said, "Do not worry." Through the years I've known many Christians who would never cheat, lie, steal, or commit adultery, but they are chronic worry-warts. They wring their hands and are constantly stressed-out over bad that they think may happen. Worry can't add a single hour to your life, but it *can* add many hours of misery to your life!

In the computer industry, when a worm is discovered, there is a rush to design software to detect and remove the harmful worm. For instance, Microsoft has issued a patch to detect and remove the Confiker worm from your computer. But unless you download and install the patch, it won't do you any good. In this message, I'm going to offer you some free software (Jesus-ware) that can remove the worry-worm from your mind. This Jesus-ware is guaranteed to remove the worry worm, but unless you download and install these truths, they won't do you any good! Here are three truth patches you need to download if your mind is full of worry.

(1) With Jesus, I don't have to fear the future

Jesus started this passage by saying we don't have to worry about whether we'll have food to eat, something to drink, and clothes to wear, the basic necessities. In our wealthy culture, there are not many of us who worry about whether or not we'll eat, drink, or wear clothes. We worry more about what we eat, drink, and wear. We worry, "Should I eat a Chick-fil-a or a Papa Murphy's?" We worry, "Should I get a café latte or a mocha? Venti, or Tall?" "Should I wear the black pants, or the khaki?" Decisions, decisions. The truth is that most of us worry about so much more than the basic necessities of life. We worry about terrorism attacks, gas prices, and the stock market. But whatever you worry about, Jesus said that worry is a sin.

If you want Jesus to remove the worry-worm from your system, you've first got to identify what worry is. If you look up "worry" in the dictionary you'll learn worry means "to torment oneself with disturbing thoughts." Our English word "worry" comes from the German *wurgen*, which means to strangle. Worry is self-strangulation of your mind! You do it to yourself—other people may frustrate you, but they can't "worry" you—you're the only who can torment yourself with thoughts of fear and anxiety.

The worry-worm makes you fear possible bad things in the future by creating a repeating "what if?" program that asks, "What if I lose my job, and what if I can't pay my bills, and what if they foreclose on my house, and what if I become a homeless person, and what if I can't find anything to eat, and what if I die of starvation?" Do you see the damaging pattern? Like replicating computer process, your mind gets stuck in fear mode.

This kind of agonizing analysis creates paralysis: you're afraid to do anything. Someone said, "The greatest mistake in life is constantly fearing you'll make one."

Worry is a continual fear that the worst case scenario is going to come true. For most people, that would be death. For instance, some people are afraid of flying in airplanes. It's not that they're afraid of flying; it's that they're afraid of dying in an airplane crash. But for a Christian, death isn't a worst case scenario. Jesus said, "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more." (Luke 12:4)

In the first 300 years of the Christian faith, many believers were persecuted, tortured and killed simply because they were followers of Jesus. Christians were actually called atheists, because they refused to bow down before all the Roman deities including, the Emperor who was considered divine. Every year each Roman citizen was required to say, "Kaiser estin kurios." which translates as "Caesar is Lord." But the Christians refused and proclaimed, "Iesous estin kurios." "Jesus is Lord." Because of this refusal to believe they were executed as atheists.

One great pastor was a man named Justin. He was later given the title Justin Martyr because he was executed by the Romans when he was in his sixties. As he stood on trial before the Roman authority, he made an amazing statement about how Christians shouldn't fear death. Justin Martyr said, "You can kill us, but not hurt us." He understood that for a Christian, death isn't the end. Instead, death means we are ushered into the presence of Jesus. Paul wrote, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21) Christians aren't to long for death, but we aren't to fear it either.

Most of the terrible things we fear MIGHT happen never do, so why waste time worrying about them? President Calvin Coolidge was one of my favorite presidents, because he believed in small government so he did very little as president. He once said, "When you see trouble coming down the road toward you, nine times out of ten, it will run into the ditch before it reaches you!" So, since Jesus has already taken care of the worst case scenario, you don't have to fear the future.

Sometimes people say to me, "Pastor, I don't worry, I'm just concerned." That's good, but you've got to know the difference between sinful worry and Godly concern. The difference is that worry sees the problem, while concern seeks a solution. Sinful worry always involves fear that makes you weaker, whereas concern employs faith which makes you stronger. Worry always fear what might happen. But concern trusts what God will do. The second truth patch of Jesus-ware to remove the worry-worm is:

(2) I have a loving Father who knows my needs and cares for me

We're studying this parable because Jesus used the images of birds and flowers to illustrate the

futility of worry. As Jesus spoke these words, I can easily picture a flock of sparrows flying by, as Jesus points to them and says, "Look at the birds. They don't worry, and God the Father feeds them." I've stood near the very spot where Jesus stood and read these words many times. I always pause and ask people traveling with me to listen. When I do, we always hear dozens of birds chirping away in the bushes and trees. It's as if they're saying, "Amen! Amen!"

Then Jesus waved His hand at the side of the hill and said, "Look at these flowers! Have you ever seen anything manmade more beautiful than this? They don't worry about what they wear, and they are more beautiful than Solomon." Solomon was the wisest, wealthiest, wittiest king in Israel's history. He was #1 on the Israel best-dressed list forty years in a row. Yet Jesus said Solomon looked like a hobo compared to those beautiful flowers.

Jesus didn't worship creation or nature as some people do today. He said the beauty and wonder of nature only points us to a loving and caring Creator. If God goes to the trouble of feeding little birds and clothing little flowers, He will take care of us, too. He said in Luke 12:6-7, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

Just believing in God isn't enough to get you into heaven. James 2:19 says, "You believe that there is one God? Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder." The most important thing for you to know *isn't* whether there is a God, but what is God really like? Is He some heavenly grandfather who sits in a rocking chair on the backside of the Universe laughing as He watches the events of earth take place like a cosmic reality show? Or is God a war-like general who is enlisting an army of kamikaze soldiers to kill all the infidels?

Jesus came to planet earth to teach us what God is like. He taught us that when we talk to God, we can call Him, Abba, which means "Daddy" or "Papa." Jesus taught us that God loves you and cares for you like a perfect Father who loves His children. In Luke 15, Jesus taught that God cares so much for one wayward person that He is like a shepherd who was willing to leave the 99 other sheep to go and find the one lost lamb. Do you feel like that lost lamb today? God is searching for you to rescue you and save you. Jesus taught that God cares so much for you that He is like a woman who lost a coin and she turned her house upside down looking for that single coin. And Jesus taught that God is like a Daddy with a broken heart when one of His children rebels and runs away. And that He is the kind of Papa who, when He sees that same child returning to Him, breaks into a run to grab him up in His arms and hug him. That's what God is like. And when you realize you have a Father who cares for you and has even numbered the hairs on your head, it makes it impossible for you to worry.

Years ago I learned a little poem about two birds who were talking to each other. It goes like this: "Said the robin to the sparrow, 'I'd really like to know; Why these anxious human creatures; rush about and worry so?'" Said the sparrow to the robin, "I think that it may be; That they have no loving Father; Such as cares for you and me!"

So the first two truth patches for the worry-worm is to realize you don't have the fear the future, because you have a Loving Father who is going to take care of you. The third truth patch to remove the worry-worm from your system is:

(3) When I focus on seeking God, I can't focus on worry

I mentioned in the last message that your mind can only focus on one image at a time. If you're mind is infected with worry, it focuses on fear. But when your mind is energized by faith, you focus on God. Remember, Jesus didn't speak these words to the general human population. The Sermon on the Mount isn't a manual on how EVERYONE can be happy. He spoke these words to His disciples. And He contrasted the way people who didn't trust God lived with how those of us who worship God live. He said, "Do not worry saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:31-33)

Matthew 6:33 is my life verse. Early in the ministry I glanced into the Bible of a sweet elderly lady who loved the Lord and His Word. I noticed in the margins of her Bible she had written "T&P" in several locations. I asked her what that meant and she smiled and said, "I write that beside of promise of God. T&P means 'Tried and Proven.'" I have written "T&P" beside Matthew 6:33 and you can too.

It's probably no coincidence that this week as I was studying for this message on not worrying that I would learn on Friday the results of my prostate biopsy. Many of you know I was diagnosed with a low grade of prostate cancer six weeks ago. Over the past few weeks I've been diligently seeking God, and I have found that when I focus on Him I can't focus on my cancer! I can only imagine how I would be afraid if I didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I received a good report Friday. Throughout this process I can assure you that I haven't worried. All along, I've been assured that whatever happens, God is going to take care of me and my family and that He is going to be glorified.

Are you are still allowing the worry-worm to infect your mind? In the four gospel accounts, we only read about one person to whom Jesus actually said, "You worry too much." Do you know who it was? He didn't say it to the doubting Thomas, or the impetuous Simon Peter. He spoke those words to a woman named Martha. In Luke 10 we read about a visit Jesus made to the home of Martha and her sister Mary who lived in Bethany just over the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem (that's why we have a Bethany Suite, with two rooms named Mary and Martha). When Jesus arrived at the house, Martha was busy in the kitchen making lunch while her sister Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to what He had to say. Martha got upset because she was doing all the work while her sister was just sitting there listening to Jesus. Finally, in exasperation, Martha stormed into the room but she didn't speak to her sister. Instead she confronted Jesus. She asked Him, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" (Luke 10:40). Have you ever been going through a frustrating time and asked God the same question, "Lord, don't you CARE?" Jesus *does* care. The answer Jesus gave to Martha's question is a powerful word about worry that all of us need to hear.

One of my favorite paintings is of this scene done by the Dutch master, Johannes Vermeer (who also painted "The Girl with the Pearl Earring"). Martha can be seen leaning over to Jesus as if she was hoping He would say, "Martha, you're exactly right, Mary get up and help her." But instead Jesus said, "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about MANY things, but only ONE thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41-42) Mary's mind was infected with the worry-worm.



Christ in the House of Mary and Martha
Johannes Vermeer
c. 1654-1656
Oil on Canvas

There are thousands of tired, irritated Marthas in our churches today. They are living on the edge of burnout. When I was a kid I remember seeing a guy on television perform a stunt where he

would take dinner plates and spin them on the top of flexible poles. He would get one spinning then he would go to another pole and spin a plate on it. This would be repeated until he would have 20 or 30 plates spinning at one time. He would have to dash from one pole to another to give a turn. You could see one plate starting to wobble and almost fall and he would rush and spin the pole just in time. By running madly from pole to pole he could keep thirty plates spinning at the same time. Does that sound like your life?

CONCLUSION

A few years ago there was a movie entitled "City Slickers." The plot of the film revolves around three city boys' decision to spend a vacation together going on a cattle drive. There's a tough old cowboy named Curly leading the cattle drive. One day he has this conversation with the character played by Billy Crystal. "You city folk. You worry a lot. You spend fifty weeks getting knots in your rope and you think two weeks up here will untie them for you. None of you get it." He pauses a minute and then he goes on, "You know what the secret to life is? ... One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that, and everything else don't mean nothing." As Curly rides off Billy Crystal's character yells, "That's great, but what's the one thing?" Curly turns and says, "That's what you've got to figure out."

Curly and Jesus were saying the same thing. Jesus told Martha she was worried and agitated about MANY things, but that only ONE thing that was really necessary—and Mary had found it. What is it? Look at Mary—she knew. It is sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to Him. That's exactly what Jesus was telling Martha, and it's exactly what He's telling us today.

There can only be one first in our lives, and the one thing in life that really matters is seeking the kingdom of God. Remember, we learned a few messages ago that the only thing you need for a kingdom is a King. So to seek the Kingdom of God means that you seek to have a personal relationship with the King, Jesus Christ.

Will you download and install this truth into your life? Sometimes new software asks, "Do you want to install this software now or later?" Don't wait. When you install it, this is what will come up on the screen of your mind. You'll hear God saying, "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)

When you find the worry-worm moving through your system trying to disrupt your thought processes, just sit down at the feet of Jesus and look into His face, and "be still and KNOW that He is God." That's the one thing in life that will remove the worry-worm from your mind. In the name of Jesus, receive God's truth right now and install it in your mind and you can walk through life free from the worry that robs you of your joy and peace!

OUTLINE

(1) With Jesus, I don't have to fear the future

Definition of worry: "To torment oneself with disturbing thoughts.

Jesus said, "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more." *Luke 12:4*

(2) I have a loving Father who knows my needs and cares for me

"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." *Luke 12:6-7*

(3) When I focus on seeking God, I can't focus on worry

"Do not worry saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans RUN after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek FIRST his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these THINGS will be given to you as well." *Matthew 6:31-33*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes