

# No Worries?

Readings: Isaiah 49:8-16; Matthew 6:24-34

Of all the commands in the Bible, and there plenty there are perhaps few that are flouted as much as the one that is repeated 3 times here by Jesus "Do not worry" (24,31,34).

In fact the very things that Jesus says not to worry, about our life, what we eat, what we wear, are the very things that our adverts constantly tell us we have to worry about, are we getting all we should out of life, are we looking after our health, are we eating correctly, are we checking the contents, is our cooking up to Master Chef standards, do we look fat in this, is it in fashion. These are things that many of us do worry about and our society wants us to so that we can be good consumers.

And there are so many other things to worry : the rising cost of living and the lowering of community standards; climates that change and relationships that never seem to; life which seems so short and sermons so long. If you weren't worried you probably are now, and that is worrying for given the topic we are thinking about we now should be worried about worrying. As the old church notice blooper goes: "Don't let worry kill you – let the Church help"

Well I hope that today being at Church will help with worry, that we will understand why Jesus keeps repeating this command and learn how we may be able to start keeping it.



*"I can't worry about that now.  
I'm worrying about something else."*

## WHY NOT WORRY?

As we look at what Jesus teaches we can see that Jesus answers the question about "Why not worry?" on a number of levels.

### Worry doesn't work

At the base level Jesus reminds us that worry doesn't work, it doesn't achieve anything. As Jesus says "can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?" (27) When something bad happens does any one think "This is my fault, I should have worried more"?

More than that Jesus reminds us there are always more things that we could worry about, things which we have no control over when. As the old version put it "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." (KJV)

We could say then that given this worry is not wise, so stop it.

### Not wise

Given that Jesus is giving wise advise it is interesting that there are many links in this passage to biblical wisdom literature, something reinforced by the reference to Solomon, the patron saint of wisdom.

As with so much of the wisdom literature Jesus encourages his listeners to take an example from nature, to look at the birds of the air and the grass of the field.

#### Take a look at nature

Before we consider what he teaches from these examples it is worth noticing something about the way that biblical wisdom teaching works. In the way that the Bible teaches wisdom it is not only about imparting information, a transfer of knowledge, but the way in which you get wisdom is also part of the wisdom. I find it interesting that Jesus in the midst of teaching about not worrying suggests doing things which almost universally in and of themselves help people with worry, taking the time to look at nature. He doesn't say learn from the birds and grass but go and look at them. It is amazing how when we stop and take the time to smell the roses how different the problems that we face can seem.

It is also interesting to note the Jesus was the kind to look at the birds and the grass, to take time to enjoy nature. Whilst not wanting to say that this is the main teaching of the passage it no doubt would be good for us to slow down and look at the birds and grass.

#### God looks after the birds and grass

Old Testament wisdom also encourages us to look at nature. "Go to the ant you sluggard, consider its ways and be wise." (Proverbs 6:6) Good earthy wisdom about hard work and making provision, which reminds us incidentally Jesus is not saying don't put effort and planning into life but rather don't get caught in wasteful and paralysing anxiety.

What then is Jesus saying we should learn from nature? If we are not careful we might think he was teaching "Don't worry, look at nature it seems to get on alright without with worrying, so you shouldn't."

But something far more profound indeed theological is going on here. We are to look to the birds who do not chase after wealth not as an example of honest hard work but to note that our heavenly Father looks after them, he sustains them, and if he does for them will he not for us.

Like wise with the grass this argument is almost identical, the grass which seems so ephemeral is clothed by God gloriously how much more can he do that for us.

The same argument is being used in v25 as we are told to not worry, the God who gave you life and gave you your body, which is more important is perfectly capable of dealing with the lesser issues.

We see here a biblical cosmology which is very different from how many people view the universe. God is not absent as he is in either an atheistic or mechanistic view of the world, he is not the great watchmaker who set everything running and then left it alone, he is not the creation itself. Throughout Scripture our heavenly Father is the creator God who remains intimately connected with it and working within it, all things live and move and have their being in him.

To not recognise God's intimate sustaining in creation and to not live in the light of this is a matter of faith. Notice the rather odd intrusion of "you of little faith" in this passage (v30). To worry, to be anxious ultimately according to Jesus, is not just a failure of wisdom, it is a failure of faith, it is a refusal to trust God.

### **WORRY AND FAITH**

This reminds us that as we look at this passage Jesus is not just giving a guide for successful living, how to live without stress and anxiety, "Don't worry, be happy". This instruction forms part of the Sermon on the Mount, part of Jesus' teaching to his followers as to how to live as God's people having already come before him with a humble heart and seeking to be salt and light in the world.

Jesus has also been teaching about priorities and the dangers of wealth, which can be so alluring but ultimately is so illusive, and where is our heart. This leads to where our passage starts. "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate

the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth”

There is a call to put the things of God first, to live out what Jesus has just taught his disciples to pray, that God’s kingdom come and will be done comes before our daily bread.

Now if we take God as our master, as our Lord, then we are entrusting our well being to him. That is why as we have seen over the past few sermons we need to look carefully at the text, notice how verse 25 starts. “Therefore” It is on the basis of having our heavenly Father as our Lord and master that we do not need to worry about what we will eat or wear. And Jesus goes on to demonstrate the nature of God so to show why we do not need to worry. It is not that what we eat and wear do not matter it is just that God knows that and we should trust him with it.

Why do we find this so hard to do, why do I find this so hard to live out, to put him first. To my shame, our shame what Jesus is teaching is that I do not trust him, I do not trust our heavenly Father and I put my concerns before his concerns. I seek my own comfort before what the passage calls “his kingdom and his righteousness”, the new way of living which Jesus has been teaching of priority of truth, reconciliation and transforming love.

The call of this passage is to trust God, a God who is active in this world that he will look after us as we get on about his business. Will we be people of little faith or will we truly serve the one master our heavenly Father.

## **CONCLUSION**

As we conclude: a few points of application.

### **Eating and wearing matter**

Jesus telling us that we should not worry about what we are to eat or wear does not give us licence to not worry about whether others have anything to eat or wear. In fact as we seek first God’s kingdom we should be the first to be seeking to share what we have with those who have little especially our Christian brothers and sisters. This seems a much better thing to do than ask why do some Christians not seem to have enough. We may be the practical answer to that concern, God’s way of providing. This applies locally as well as in the big issues of our day.

### **All these things will be given to you as well**

We also need to consider that well known phrase “all these things will be given to you”. Some of us may struggle with this, certainly there have been Christians who have suffered lack in this area. This is a hard question to deal with in this limited time but let me make a few comments.

Firstly despite my own failings I need to say that God has been faithful to this promise for me. As I have sought to be faithful to him and put his kingdom first, sometimes with people questioning the wisdom of doing so in giving up a lucrative career in architecture, there has always been enough provision for me and my family and for that I am grateful. There are many other Christians who have given up far more than I who can bear testimony to God’s faithfulness to his promise.

Secondly we could ask does putting trust in wealth have a better track record for providing what it promises? Global financial crises, unexpected events, natural disasters and so on show the lie to the promise of wealth.

But how does what Jesus says here fit with some of the things that do happen particularly as we reflect on events in New Zealand this week? We need to remember who is saying this: this is Jesus who has the cross looming over him in the future. He trusted God and put his kingdom and his righteousness first before his own concerns and it cost him not only his clothes but his life. But God who sustains creation revealed himself as the God of new creation and resurrection that he remains faithful beyond this

life. This may not be easy but the call is to us of little faith to trust his good purposes for us in all the chances and changes of this fleeting world and not to worry.

### **Putting this into action**

Lastly how do we start doing this, how do we take little steps of obedience in this matter. This teaching by Jesus comes immediately after his teaching on prayer which points us in the right direction.

Prayer, stopping and putting ourselves in God's hands is the best way that I know of to remind ourselves that God is not absent but present with us and that he is in charge. As we say the Lord's Prayer we realign ourselves with our master, resisting the call and temptation of the world and wealth and trust him to provide our needs, daily and eternal. In prayer we put the little faith we may have into action and may find that it grows.

The Apostle Paul put it this way: Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)