

Sermon Text for November 18, 2018

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Deuteronomy 14:22-23, Matthew 6:34

“What, me worry?”

We have made it this far on stewardship month, I never thought I could preach three weeks on stewardship, but we are just about there. I do need to say that I have fielded more questions on the details and logistics of tithing this time around than I have in other years. You have told me that your family is discussing it at home. I need to tell you that when January comes around and you do take up my challenge to tithe you will be equipped with stories and miracles of God’s provision and faithfulness, and I want to hear them. I want to be able to share with this body how you are experiencing the fullness of your relationship with Jesus Christ even, maybe especially, in that area of your life.

And that is what it comes down to. Over these weeks we have seen the primary purpose of tithing is so that every person here can have a complete and full relationship with Jesus Christ built on trust and obedience. We saw how in this one area, our finances, we usually fall short and simply don’t trust. This is why Jesus speaks about it so much because he knew we would struggle with making an idol out of our material things.

Over the weeks we heard real life experiences of how God can and does reveal himself to us when we obey him fully, especially in that area of our life. If tithing is a command, which again today in Deuteronomy we find another Scripture which states that the Lord requires tithing, so if it is a command as we have seen over these weeks, then when we follow that commandment we see God revealed fully.

Last week we coined the thought that worry is our form of worship to a god who is not Jesus Christ. We spoke specifically about mammon but we all worry about other things more than money: our jobs, our kids, our reputation, our country. Worry and anxiety is a reflection that there is another master in our life who has taken the place of the Lord and so because of our little faith and trust in the provide-ence of God, or the providence of God, we worry.

Alfred E. Neumann said it best and repeats the words of Jesus when he says: What, me worry? But how do we live our lives without worry? Our goal as a church can be found in Colossians 1:28: so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. And that means mature in every area of our life. How do we do that with our finances? Let’s read and see.

READ SCRIPTURE

I know that for some I am that foreign Russian pastor, but every year around Thanksgiving I have to pull out my credentials. On my mother’s side my great, great, great and

so on grandfather was William Brewster, also known as Elder Brewster who was the pastor of the Mayflower. So I guess I would put up my American credentials up against anyone. Also, we do have some native American in my family, again on my mother's side, and no, I will not do a DNA test to prove it. This past week my brother called and wanted to confirm that we have Viking blood as well, since my dad was Dutch and the Vikings would often come down and have their way with the Dutch, he is convinced that we have Mayflower, native American, and Viking in our heritage. I'm not so sure about the Viking.

But the pilgrims when they fled England took a step of faith not knowing how they were going to survive. They survived by the generosity of the native American's and their hard work. In Jamestown, the failed colony of around the same era, the law was that if you don't work, you don't eat. Many point to the pilgrims and other reformed Protestants as the ones who began what was defined as the Protestant work ethic which is unique to the United States according to Max Weber.

So when we begin a sermon today against worry and speak about the importance of having a trust in God with the primary Scripture of Matthew 6:34 stating that you shouldn't worry about tomorrow, those of you who are driven entrepreneurs and embrace the protestant work ethic, I understand why you are worry. You could object and say: but it is hard work which made this country and it is hard work which has kept my family afloat, and it is hard work which allows me to make the income that I am currently making. I would say yes, and it is absolutely hard work that the Lord requires of us. None of what we have read over these past few weeks should be interpreted as this preacher saying you don't have to work hard, just trust in the Lord and zap, the Lord will provide as you are watching Monday Night Football.

When we read pretty much all of Matthew 6 we hear Jesus, our Savior, speaking about God providing without the need for the lilies of the field or the birds of the air having to toil or spin. So the question could come up when you say do not worry, do you really mean don't work, just sit back and relax and God will do the work? Is that what I'm saying, does it sound like something I would say? Is that in character of what you think I believe, or what you think the Bible might say?

Let's look at a different Scripture which addresses this topic of what is required of us as we live our lives, even while we are commanded not to worry. I think we will see that if we are able to do that which Scripture commands not only in Matthew, but also here in Thessalonians which is a more how to guide, then we can indeed live our lives without worshipping through worry. Turn to II Thessalonians 3:6-13. I need you to turn to that and listen carefully. So the

Thessalonians were thinking Jesus is coming back at any moment so we don't have to get jobs, just like Paul had said elsewhere, because Jesus is coming back at any moment, it is better to not get married. They were thinking we don't have to worry about what we eat or what we wear because this church community will care for us. Paul puts an end to that line of reasoning in this Scripture. Our lack of worry ought not produce an aversion to work.

While the foundational premise for both Deuteronomy and Matthew is a promise that God will provide, Scripture continues to encourage us to a work where we are using the gifts and the skills that God has given us to the fullest. Paul says no to just assuming that God will provide and an encouragement to not worry is actually not a charge to sit around and wait for God's providence. We have a part to do, don't worry, God will do His part and provide.

Our part is to ensure that we are good stewards. When we follow through on Matthew 6 and seek first his kingdom and his righteousness we do not adopt an otherworldliness view of economics and money, but we assess their usefulness in relation to other more serious matters, such as the deprivation of the poor. I wish you could have seen the machine in motion yesterday as we took in 3,000 pounds of food. The way our church worked together for a common good was amazing. No one questioned if the people who were receiving the food were worthy to receive it or not. We just all worked together to make sure that our clients had food. No one was worrying about having enough, because it was pouring in.

Look at our Matthew Scripture. This passage does not mean that food, drink, clothing and other such necessities will come to the disciple automatically without work or foresight. It addresses only the problem of anxiety about these things. Jesus is telling us that if worry is your worship then you will be obsessed by it and you will not leave room for the miracles of provision that God has promised. If you sit around and wait for it then you will not be allowing God's Spirit to work in a way that is life giving.

Let's break down for a minute Matthew 6:34. The term worry can also mean anxiety and a literal translation of this word that Jesus uses can mean: to be killed by one's mind. Worry allows our mind to suck the life right out of us. Another literal translation can be to be pained by thinking. Worry is a pain in the mind. What did you think I was going to say?

It is almost as if every day makes us suffer in a special way so don't worry about tomorrow. This term worry is used 6 times in these few verses in Matthew 6. Jesus is telling us that just as the present is fully under God's control, so is the future.

Another place where the same Greek word for worry is used in the New Testament is I Peter 5:7. These Scriptures help us understand more about what we are supposed to do

practically with worry. Cast all your worries, your anxiety for him, because he cares for you. Is it enough to know that you have a Savior who not only would die for us while we were yet sinners and so redeem our lives, but we have one who tells us to cast our worries about our lives on him, and he will lift us up because simply, he cares for us.

Remember what Jesus says in just the next chapter, in 7:9, What father will give a stone to a child who asks for bread or a snake for one who asks for a fish. He cares for us, Scripture assures us.

You know, as you prepare yourselves this week for Thanksgiving it is a great time to take inventory of our lives and identify how God has taken care of us. The times that we worry can never outweigh the great faithfulness of God. For Christians of every age, anxiety is incompatible with a lifestyle focused on God's kingdom. Anxiety and worry need not govern the disciple who has known the grace of the kingdom. Amen.