

“Why Do You Worry?”

Dear friends, Greetings this morning in the name of our Lord Jesus.

Let's start today with a question. We're in week three of this series we've titled “Quest.” Based upon the many questions Jesus asks throughout his ministry, it's a series that puts in front of us (today), some of the same questions he asked of his followers back then.

In fact, if you go through the four gospels (those stories of Jesus' life), in his ministry, that's exactly what he does. Jesus was far more likely to ask a question than he was to give an answer; far more likely. We even went so far as to say (in week one) that if you're looking for an Answer Man in Jesus, you'll probably be disappointed, because Jesus doesn't always do that. Jesus asks far more questions than he gives answers – far more. But (we also said), if you're willing to face and be honest about the questions he asks, you might find yourself on a “Quest” you didn't see coming.

So, let's start today with a question. And, to be clear, it's not my question. It's Jesus' question. It's not a question he asks only of you. It's a question he asks (also) of me...and it comes to us from Jesus.

Here's the question: “Why do you worry? Why do you worry?” (Be honest.) You know you do. You know you have. You probably do more of it than you'd like, spend more time with it than you should. (Be honest.) Why do you worry? Why do you worry?

It's interesting how it (often happens), as I was preparing for this message this past week. I had to laugh at the way God (so often) works. I was getting ready for this message, thinking about what to say, how best to say it, trying to come at a (somewhat) familiar topic (this whole idea of “worry”) in ways not quite so familiar.

Do you know what I did, getting ready? I found myself worrying about what I might say. The topic (today) is all about “worry.” Jesus tells us not to do it. So, what did I do? I found myself worrying about what to say about how to not to worry? (I had to laugh.)

Now, as I think about it, it sounds funny (even to me) when I say it. And it makes sense that, (when I tell it to you), you'd find it funny, too. After all, it was not your problem. It was my problem. It wasn't yours, (although, if I came up with nothing), it would be. But it wasn't. It was mine to figure out. So, to you, as you look at it, (from a distance) it probably is funny. There's good reason to laugh.

But, what if it was you? What if (let's say), next Sunday, you're the one that's on? You're the one (next week), asked to stand up here and give the message. This week, it's my challenge. Next week, it's yours. This week it's an assignment given to me. Next week, it's an assignment given to you.

Now, some of you would love it. (I know you would...that's why I don't ask you!) Others of you...I don't know? But, let's say, if you were the one on (next week), same topic as today, (and your mind was going blank), do you think you would worry about what to say about how “not to worry”, especially when it's so much easier said than done?

There are a lot of things (in life) I've seen others worry about that I've never worried about, until they happened to me. I never worried about taking tests in school (when I was younger), until I was (in school) and starting taking tests. I never worried about being the one kid (left out) on the playground, until the day came when I was the one kid left out.

I never worried about dating, until I started to date. I never worried about driving, until I started to drive. I never worried about paying the bills, until they were mine to pay. I never worried about being married and raising kids, until (my wife and I) were married and started having them. I never worried about preaching, about leading a church, until I was called to preach and to lead a church.

Anyone else relate? Anyone else able to track what I'm saying? Someone else's problems have never caused me to worry. I don't worry about what's happening in your life. (I don't.) I pray about it (if I know about it), but I don't worry about it. Raising your kids, paying your bills, taking (your tests) and wanting to fit in? (I don't worry about it, in your life.)

Do you know what I'd tell you (when it's your problem)? I'd tell you not to worry about it! (That's what I'd tell you.) There's nothing to worry about. (There isn't.) Give it some time, try to relax, when all is said and done, it's all going to be OK." (That's my advice.) It's that easy. As long as it's your problem and not mine. But when it's mine, it's not so easy. When it's yours (for you), it's the same thing.

"Why do you worry?" I find it interesting (in the gospels) that Jesus' longest discourse (on a human emotion) is about worry. It's the longest discourse he gives. It's the one emotion (of all the emotions there are) that he takes on.

I find that interesting, given all of the emotions he could have taken on. He could have talked (at length) about sadness or about grief, or about fear or loneliness or shame. He could have talked about excitement or happiness or joy. There's a lot he could have said about any of those things (we experience), but he doesn't. He mentions them, (he acknowledges them), but the one he takes on (at length) is worry. And (what he does is), he tells us not to do it. He tells us not to worry.

Three times (in the text we read today), Jesus says it straight up. (He says), "Do not worry." The other time, (he says it), the fourth time, he asks us why we do. "Why do you worry" (he asks)? (Why do you get so worked up?) That's what he wants to know.

I started thinking back on some of things I've worried about over the years. As I was thinking, I realized that it ends up being quite a list, and quite a range of things (about which) I've worried.

Do you know what I realized, when I did that? Do you know what I found? I found (I realized) that many of things I worried about, (as it turned out) and as it played out, there was nothing to worry about. (There was nothing to worry about.) And there was nothing to worry about, because so many of the things (I've worried about), never happened. I was so worried about what might happen if they did happen, but they never did, so there was no need to worry.

Do you know what else I realized...and I'll bet you've realized it, too? Do you know what else I found? I found that the times I've worried about things happening, even if they ended up happening, (I realized) that even if they (actually did), my worrying didn't help. (It didn't help at all.) All it did was cause me to be worried.

"Why do you worry?" "Why (with so many things, in your life) do you get so worked up?" This whole "worrying thing", it's fascinating. (Jesus gets it. He knows we do it.) It's fascinating, how it works.

It's not as easy as saying "Don't do it." Sometimes, when we say "Don't do it," that's when we actually start. I wasn't worried about my kids going to Middle School until I heard someone talking about what can happen during those years, and told me not to worry. I wasn't worried about the turbulence on that airplane ride, until the pilot came on and told us not to be worried about all of the bumps.

Have you ever noticed that, how worrying can breed more worrying, how getting all worked up (over something) can get us even (more worked) up than we first were? (Am I alone in this?)

Jesus tells us not to do it. He tells us not to worry. And he does it, not by just telling us (not to do it), but by showing us how it works, giving us an example. He gives a couple of examples.

He says, "Do not worry about what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Look at the birds of the air (Jesus says); they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." (There's one example.)

Then he gives us another. (He says), "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor of spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon, (in all of his splendor), was dressed like one of these." (There's another.)

Jesus doesn't just tell us, he gives us examples. He says, "Here's how it works." (He says), "Here's what God has done." Why do you worry about what you will eat, what you are going to wear? Why, when you see the examples of how God works, do you think (in your life) that he won't? (Great question!)

And then he says...do you remember what he does? What he does is, he doesn't just tell us (and then give examples), what he does is, he asks us. He doesn't give us the answers, he asks us to answer for ourselves.

Maybe you noticed. Alongside this one main question ("Why do you worry?") are a series of five other questions. They're different questions. They're rhetorical questions. They're questions where the answers are implied, but the answers (being implied) are left (finally) up to us.

Do you remember the rhetorical questions Jesus asks, implied answers, but answers finally up to you? Here's what he asks.

"Why do you worry?" "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" (Good question.)

"Why do you worry?" "Are you (in your life) not of more value (to God) than the birds of the air (in theirs)?" (I hope.)

"Why do you worry?" "Can any of you (he asks), by worrying, add even a single hour to your life?" (It hasn't happened yet.)

"And why do you worry (he asks) about clothing (and a long list) of other things in your life, when you know and believe (in your heart) that God truly cares?" (That's a great question.)

And then, (finally), "Why do you worry?" "If God so clothes (the grass of the field), and cares for every one of the birds of the air, will he not much more clothe you (and take care of you), O you of little faith?" (I wish he hadn't asked.)

Jesus doesn't give us the answers, but he gives us the answers. "Consider the lilies" (he says). "Go on a walk and look at the wildflowers and see how beautiful they are." Take a lesson from them. No one watered them. No one was worried about them. Yet God cared for them, he took care of them, and just look at how content they are.

"It's the same with the birds" (he says). (Have you ever noticed the birds?) Flying around, having fun, moving from one tree (and nest) to another. They're not worried about what to wear. They're not concerned about what to eat. They're beautiful and they're well fed, and God knows everyone.

"Why do you worry?" One of the great missionaries from the 20th century, E. Stanley Jones, made a powerful statement. In talking about how anxious people are (in this life), he said, "Worry is (a form of) atheism." (Worry is form of atheism.) He went on to say that (when we worry), our worrying implies that (we must believe) there is no God, at least not a God who cares for us. (He said), worry says, "It's all about me." He said, (worry sings), "I've got the whole world in my hands." If we act that way, then maybe (we think) it's true. If we live that way, then maybe in some (small ways), we are.

Martin Luther tells the story of a time in his life when he was consumed with worry. One day, his wife (Katie) starting wearing black clothes...everywhere she went. (It went on for days.) When he finally asked her why, (she said), "I'll tell you why. The way you've been acting (and worrying), I started to believe that God had died." She made her point. Luther stopped worrying and started praying.

Sounds a lot like the encouragement from the apostle Paul, in our second Bible reading this morning. "Have no anxiety about anything (Paul says), but pray about everything." (That's how we're to live.) Sounds a lot like Jesus, in the words of our text. "Consider the lilies of the field (he says)." (Just look at them.) Consider the birds of the air, and ask yourself if you think God knows any less about you?

Jesus doesn't answer the question for us, "Why do you worry?", but he does tell us that we shouldn't, and when we do, (he also tells us) where (and to whom) we should look.

And so, let me close with this. Do you know what I found out (once again) this past week? I realized that this sermon (about which I was worried) actually did come together and happen. And not only did it (come

together and happen), but my worrying didn't help. All it did was cause me to be worried. All it accomplished was a little more anxiety than I would have liked.

Do you know what I'm going to do, next time I'm worried? Instead of being anxious, I'm going to pray. And after I pray, I might just take a little walk.

"Look at the lilies," (Jesus says). "Just watch the birds (and take note). If God cares for them, will he not also care for you?" (Rhetorical as it is, it's a great question.) "Why do you worry?"

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for your teaching ministry and for the ways in which you challenge us to rethink some of the ways in which we come at life. We thank you for your encouragement and for your promise and for the assurance you give that (in all things) there is no reason (for us) to worry. Lord, help us to bring our worries to you, to learn from what you've said (to us) and what you've asked (of us), and to learn the lessons from what we see. Help us to trust, help us to believe, help us to know (deep down) that what you've done and what you've promised is all we need. Lord, we give our worries to you, in your name. Amen.