

September 10, 2017

The Radical Sayings of Jesus

Do Not Worry

Luke 12:22-34

Opening words: Today, I begin a new sermon series called *The Radical Sayings of Jesus*. You know the truth. Most people read the Bible selectively. There are certain things we have read in the Bible countless times. We love those passages because we find comfort in them. However, there are passages in the Bible we have never read because we find them hard to understand or harsh to our ears. It is true of the entire Bible, including the Gospels. We try to ignore certain words from the Master. The truth be told, there are certain things we wish Jesus had never said. They are just too radical. This is the problem: We can't dismiss those words, because they came from Jesus. We must not just understand them. We must apply them to our daily lives. Today's radical saying of Jesus is a fine example. Today, Jesus tells us not to worry.

The numbers are not pretty. Worries, stress and anxiety are various degrees of the same problem. We are our own worst enemy. Did you know, 43% of all American health issues can be traced back to stress and worry. Did you know, 74% to 90% of all visits to a primary care doctor are stress-related. Stress has been linked to heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, mental illness and suicide. An estimated one million workers are absent on an average day because of stress-related complaints. Five hundred and fifty million work days are lost annually in America because of stress. Did you know, 43% of all employee turnover is related to stress. How many hours of sleep have you lost due to your worries? How many holidays or family gatherings have been ruined by your worries? Today's topic is relevant because Jesus tells us not to worry. Our scripture reading for today is Luke 12:22-34. Let me call this message *Do Not Worry*.

Luke 12:22-34 ²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷ "Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰ For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. ³² "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the

poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

They tell me along the rural paths in India, there are shoulder-high posts with a shelf on top. They call these posts a Soma Tonga, which means "resting place." Travelers on foot often carry heavy loads. When travelers come upon one of these posts, they place their heavy loads on the shelf to rest. When Christianity spread to India, the new converts started calling Jesus, "My Soma Tonga." Jesus was the one who gave them rest. Jesus was the one who shared their load. Jesus was the one who gave them strength. I like that simple illustration. If you can understand this simple illustration then you can understand this morning's message. If you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves today in the twelfth chapter of Luke. This section of Luke begins in the previous chapter. Jesus is in Judea. It is a busy section of scripture because the author clusters various teachings of Jesus together. The teaching on worry is just one of many topics the Master covers. However, Jesus's teaching on worrying grabs our attention because everyone worries about something. You are not alone. Can I make a confession? I struggled writing this message on worrying and began to worry I couldn't do it. I must ask you this next question:

What are you worried about today? Is anyone here worried about your health? There is an imperfection in your complexion and you are afraid it is skin cancer. Or, you are about to celebrate your birthday. You are now the exact age your father was when he died. You are afraid you are going to die in the next 365 days. Or, your left knee hurts and you don't want to have an operation because you don't want to go to a rehabilitation center. They are creepy and smell bad. Is anyone here worried about finances? You live on a fixed income and life seems to be getting more expensive. Or, you just got out of college, can't find a job and your student loan grace period is running out. Or, your children are growing fast. They are now in high school and you haven't started saving for college yet. Is anyone here worried about the weather? The weather is great in Ohio but it isn't so great in Florida this morning. We just collected for Hurricane Harvey and now there is Hurricane Irma. How many people do you know who live in Florida? Some are worried about global warming. They say that is why these storms are so massive. Is anyone here worried about the future? The world can only support so much population. Is anyone here worried about the future of America? The face of America is changing. Caucasian Americans will soon be a minority. Does that fact make you anxious? Is anyone here worried about the future of our world? How would you handle the North Korean situation? Our society is filled with worried and anxious people. Study after study tell us it is true.

In 2016, Chapman University of Orange, California, polled Americans and asked them their greatest concerns. According to them, these are Americans' greatest worries:

60.0%	Corrupt Government Officials
41%	Terrorist Attacks
39.9%	Future Personal Finances
38.5%	Government Sanction on Firearms
38.1%	Death of a Loved One
37.5%	Economic Collapse
37.1%	Identity Theft
35.5%	Affordable Health Care

Do you want more numbers?

Several years ago, USA Today asked Americans about the greatest source of stress in their lives. This is what they found:

36%	Work
22%	Money
10%	Children
7%	Health Issues
5%	Marriage
5%	Parents

It is interesting to note that only 5% said they had no stress in their life and only 17% said they had little stress in their life. So, when Jesus says not to worry, his words fall on deaf ears. Worrying is one of the things we do naturally. If you will admit you have worries, say, **"Amen!"** Verse 22 is the perfect example of why you must read the Bible in context. Today's scripture lesson is not about eliminating our worries. Today's scripture lesson is about controlling our worries. Let's look at the scripture one more time.

What is Jesus really trying to say? Jesus knows not worrying is impossible. It is the impossible goal. It is just part of the human experience. However, Jesus also knows the dangers that come along with too much worry. Leo Buscaglia once said, *"Worry will never rob tomorrow of its sorrow, it can only sap today of its joy."* Jesus doesn't want you to worry, because he wants you to enjoy every day of life. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Look at the text through a different lens. The text is more about controlling our worries than it is eliminating our worries. Jesus mentions three things we should never forget the next time you are overcome with worry. Each one will lower your stress. Let me look at these three quickly.

First, the next time you are overcome by worries, remember you are valuable to God. You are so valuable God came into the world to have a relationship with you. That is why we celebrate Christmas. It is a time to stand in awe of the Incarnation. God became one of us. It is obvious, but Jesus said it. You are more valuable than a raven. You are more valuable than a lily. You are so valuable to God that Jesus, the Incarnation of God, died on the cross so God could spend eternity with you! Never forget it. You are valuable to God! If you think you can remember that, say, **"Amen!"**

When was the last time you read this story? Jesus was coming for a visit. There are a million things that must get done, so Mary and Martha are working hard. The problem begins when Jesus arrives. There are those last-second things that must be done. Martha continues to work hard but Mary stops working to listen to Jesus. Martha goes to Jesus to express her frustration, but her words fall on deaf ears. He reprimands Martha for her poor priorities and praises Mary. That story teaches us one major point. Filling your life with good things isn't good enough. The driving force in your life must be the best thing, Jesus! That is what Jesus is saying again in the scripture lesson for today.

Second, the next time you are overcome by worries, remember to seek the Kingdom of God first. It is easy to fill our lives with good things. I see it all the time. There is nothing wrong with celebrating birthdays. There is nothing wrong with spending time with family and friends. There is nothing wrong with looking fashionable. There is nothing wrong with eating a delicious dinner. There is nothing wrong with watching football or baseball. There is nothing wrong with reading a good book or listening to your favorite tunes. There is nothing wrong with any of those things. The problem is, those things are only good. They will not sustain you during life's worries. They are not the best thing. The best thing is God, who never fails. Jesus is our Soma Tonga. That is why Jesus said to seek the kingdom of God first! We need rest from our worries. If you think you can remember that, say, **"Amen!"**

When my children were young, we ate dinner together every night. It didn't seem like a big deal then, but it does now. It has been years since the four of us ate together. The menu changed but it was the same every night; we talked about the various things that happened throughout the day. Everyone talked. The girls talked about their friends. They talked about their teachers. They talked about what they wanted for their birthdays and Christmas. Often, they would talk about their worries. If I said it once, I said it a million times, 90% of the things we worry about never happen. I don't know where I came up with that wise advice but it is true. Just think about it. Most of the things you worry about don't happen. Jesus was right! The best you can do is the best you can do. Your worries don't change anything. In the end, the best thing you can do with your worries is trust God.

Third, the next time you are overcome by worries, remember to live life one day at a time. Looking ahead and guessing about the future can be overwhelming. You know it is true. Most of the things we worry about never happen. Most of the things we worry about are out of our control. Don't let tomorrow's worries rob you of today's joy. Never forget it. Live one day at a time. If you think you can remember that, say, **"Amen!"**

My wife, Kathryn, is a proud graduate of Vanderbilt University. I am extremely proud she is a Vanderbilt graduate. It is an outstanding academic institution. Her days in Nashville were filled with all kinds of wonderful memories. She tells the story of being in

a history of Methodism class. Like all classes at the Harvard of the South, it was demanding. The only saving grace in that class was the announced quizzes. The professor announced there would be a quiz on a certain day, covering a certain amount of material. There were numerous quizzes throughout the semester. As expected, the professor announced a quiz would be issued during the next class covering a certain amount of material. Only a fool wouldn't study that material for the next class. Kathryn isn't a fool, so she planned on studying the night before the quiz.

Just as she opened the book to study the assigned material, a friend called and needed to talk. She was a young woman by the name of Marion, but everyone called her Shug. Kathryn said to come and thought she would only stay a few minutes. She had to study for a quiz. When Shug arrived, she began to talk and a short time later, her words became emotional. Shug talked about her boyfriend. Shug talked about their relationship. Shug talked about their physical relationship. Shug, it pains me to say it and I never met her, talked about her abortion. Shug talked about her grief. Shug talked about her shame. Shug talked and Kathryn actively listened. She listened for a long time. After all the words, tears and emotions, Shug left. Kathryn was exhausted. She looked at the clock and the hour was late. It was too late to study for the quiz. She was too spent to study for the quiz. She went to bed and tried not to worry about the quiz. She tried not to worry, but not worrying was impossible. She prayed for help.

When she got to the history of Methodism class, she was sick with worry. Then, the miraculous happened. The professor walked in and announced to the class there would be no quiz that day. He simply changed his mind. According to Kathryn, it was the greatest announcement in the history of Vanderbilt University. That leads me to an interesting question. When was the last time you worried about something that never happened? Worrying is a part of life, but our worries can be controlled. Never forget it. In the end, God is in control. Leo Buscaglia once said, "*Worry will never rob tomorrow of its sorrow, it can only sap today of its joy.*" I know that quote is true because I have lived it. If that is your story too, say, "**Amen!**"