

Surviving the Credit Crunch II

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 October 2008

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] Here's a little song I wrote. You might want to sing it note for note. Don't worry, be happy.

Maybe you want to join in. It's acapella, so it would fit very well with our own particular tradition. It was actually the first acapella song to reach number one in the hot Billboard 100 in the States. A song by a fellow called Bobby McFerrin, 20 years ago. Although the title of the song, and what is most memorable, these four words, don't worry, be happy, were words that Bobby picked up from an Indian mystic called Meher Baba. And I don't know if I'm pronouncing that correctly or not. Well, Meher Baba was a mystic who lived last century, the 20th century, and laterally in his life he came to consider himself an incarnation of God. However, immortality crept up on him and he died in the 60s. So I don't know where that left his self-perception is. He's the one who we are told first coined that phrase, don't worry, be happy. Now I wonder is that a Christian sentiment, regardless of our thoughts about the song? Is that a Christian sentiment? Well, at face value, this exhortation not to worry we are going to be considering in the passage that we've read. Be happy. Are we not called to a life of joy and rejoicing?

But maybe there is one thing, one very important thing missing in that catchy phrase, don't worry, be happy. The fundamental thing that's missing is that we're not actually given any foundation as to why we should be happy. We're not given reasons for being happy, nor are we given reasons for not worrying. We're simply told in a very glib, though memorable way, don't worry, be happy.

Well, Jesus does a lot better on this front. He, we will find, also tells us not to worry, but he gives us several reasons for not worrying. And in the passage that we've read, Jesus is continuing to instruct us concerning our attitude to material possessions. We've been considering that last Sunday evening. And we continue with this theme that we've given the following title, surviving the credit crunch. How do we survive in times of material need and financial crisis?

Well, in this passage, or the manner in any case that I'm going to be considering this passage, is as follows. First of all, to consider one don't that we have in the passage. You remember that last week we were thinking about three don'ts. Well, this evening there's just the one. One don't.

[3 : 16] But that one don't, which is don't worry, is then followed by six whys. Or, to put it another way, six reasons that Jesus gives for not worrying. And then finally we have one do. An alternative to worrying. What should we do? Well, let's think of it in this way. First of all, one don't. In verse 25 we read, Therefore, I tell you, do not worry. Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or about your body, what you will wear. And then we have that don't repeated at the end of the passage. The two prohibitions, in a sense, sandwiching the whole passage there in verse 34. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Now, this is seemingly a simple enough command. Easy enough for us to understand. It's not in very profound or deep or difficult language. Don't worry. Do not worry.

But even though it is simple at one level, in order to be clear about what Jesus is saying, it's probably helpful and necessary to stress three points about this command. Don't worry.

The first one, I've really given the game away because I've already been using the language, but I lay stress on it now. The first one is that Jesus is indeed commanding. There is a command here.

This is not a helpful suggestion that Jesus is making. Jesus isn't saying to his people, well, you know, worry isn't really that great a thing to do. And if I were you, I wouldn't worry. Or try not to worry because, well, you know, it doesn't really achieve very much. And so, that's my advice to you.

No, Jesus is commanding here. There is an imperative. He is saying, do not worry. He is ordering us not to worry. Now, that is important to stress because we know that if we disobey a command, that has a name in Scripture.

[5 : 29] And we know what that name is, isn't it? It's sin. And so, to worry in the way that has been forbidden is sinful. It's not just that it's not a very clever thing to do. It's not just something that maybe will cause us more problems than it solves. It is actually something that Jesus is forbidding us to do.

So, that's the first thing I just want to stress. The second thing I want to stress is that Jesus here is specifying or he specifies those things about which we are not to worry. And really, the only point I'm making here is that in this passage, we don't have a blanket condemnation of all worry.

Now, we can argue as to whether worry is ever legitimate, but all I'm saying is that in this passage, Jesus is specific. He says those things about, he mentions those things about which we are not to worry. Now, what are we forbidden from worrying about? Well, essentially, the passage is concerned with material possessions, about the food we're going to eat, the clothes we're going to wear. These are the things that we are told that we are forbidden from worrying about.

And then at the end of the passage, it is more expansive, you could say, considerably more expansive because in the final verse, we read as follows, therefore, do not worry about tomorrow.

So, there it's talking about the future, about what tomorrow holds. And we're told that that is something that we are not to worry about. The third thing I want to say, just to clarify this command, do not worry, is that Jesus is not forbidding legitimate concerns over these things.

[7 : 17] It's not a sin to be concerned about our pension. It's not a sin to be concerned about how we are going to provide for the material needs of our family. It's not a sin to be concerned and to make provision for these things in other parts of Scripture. Jesus himself commends those who take care to provide for their own. Indeed, those who don't are worse than infidels, he says.

So, a legitimate concern surrounding these things is valid. What is being forbidden is that degree of anxiety and worry that disables us and paralyzes us and is born of a lack of trust in God? It's maybe at the heart of the issue. Worry becomes sinful when it reflects a lack of trust in God. And that is what Jesus is saying we are not to do. Now, before we go any further to think about the reasons that Jesus gives for not worrying, it's good even at this point just to ask ourselves, well, what about us? Do we worry about these things? Do you worry about material possessions? Do you worry about how much money you have? Or maybe more likely how much money you don't have? Do you compare yourself with others and think, oh, well, if only I had what they had, if only I earned what he earned, then, well, life would be different.

Is this something that preoccupies you and concerns you and worries you? Are you worried about the car you drive or the car you would like to drive? Do you worry about the weekly shopping? Do you worry about the house you want to buy or the extension you want to build? Do you worry about tomorrow?

What's going to happen at work? Will you still have a job at the end of the month or the end of the year? Do you worry about your pension and that pension fund that has plummeted with the plummeting stock exchange?

Does that worry cause you anxiety and stress? Are you on edge and irritable concerning these things? Well, Jesus says to you and he says to me, don't worry. So, there's one don't. But now we're going to continue and this will occupy more of our time considering the reasons that Jesus gives for not worrying. And I've identified six reasons that Jesus gives. But before we even look at these six reasons, let's just notice this, that even in giving us reasons, we have demonstrated the tenderness and the care and the concern of our Lord for us. You see, we've been considering this morning and last week, and it's a theme that runs throughout Scripture, even if we hadn't been considering it, that Jesus is Lord of all. He is sovereign over all. And when Jesus commands and his people simply have to obey. So, Jesus would have been in his right to simply say to us, do not worry, period. That is the command. Obey my command. There was no requirement on Jesus to give us reasons, to give us encouragement to obey. But such is his concern for us. Such is his desire to help us obey. That he gives us a series of reasons. And that very fact that he gives us reasons is an encouragement to us. That very fact that he wants to make it as easy as possible for us to obey is a demonstration of how much he loves us, how and how much he wants to help us live a fulfilled and full life, free from worry and anxiety and the illness that so often accompanies these things.

[11 : 07] Well, let's think about the reasons that he gives. Now, maybe just to help us remember the reasons, and really that's the sole purpose of doing it in the way that I'm going to do it now. And we could imagine a conversation between Mr. Worry and God.

Now, Mr. Worry, I think we all know Mr. Worry from the Mr. Man books. He's always worrying about everything. So, Mr. Worry, you may not be aware of this, not a lot of people know this, but Mr. Worry has become a Christian. And so he's concerned to obey God. And so he addresses God with this question.

And he says, God, how is it that I am going to stop worrying? You see, God, that's part of who I am. That's part of my identity. And I need help. I want to obey you. How am I going to obey you? How am I going to stop worrying?

And God, being the gracious God that he is, gives an answer to Mr. Worry and to the Mr. and Mrs. Worry that may be present this evening, if indeed there are such present as I'm sure there are.

And what response does God give to this question? How am I going to stop worrying? Why should I not worry? He gives the following response. And he gives six reasons.

[12 : 28] And let's look at each briefly in turn. The first reason that God gives and that Jesus gives in this passage is the following one. Because life itself is such a wonderful and glorious gift to be enjoyed.

In verse 25.