

“BE WORRIED OR BE THANKFUL”

Matthew 6:25-34

Thanksgiving Sunday

,By Pastor YAU

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INTRODUCTION:

1) It's easier to sing than do: On the way back from sending our son Franklin to college in New Jersey, there was a hit song on radio in those day in 1988, titled as “Don't worry, be happy!” Driving those many hundreds of miles home to Dallas alone, leaving our son away from home for long term the first time isn't something I can say I don't worry. There are so many things I can worry with good reasons: How is he going to handle everyday life? How about food and laundry? How about his schedule and grades? What kind of people he may meet at that very liberal campus? Will there be Christians he could group with and anyone will look after his Christian life? Although he made good grades in high school, but this is college, and how will he handle all the work and paper, and projects, and tests and exams? Who will take care of him if he get sick? How about his nutrition needs without Mom's cooking? These are the few I still could remember that all were whirling on my mind every mile of the trip home. Twenty-seven years later today, seeing him got married and has his own family with three kids and how he is managing his life, family and work, I can understand that my worries for him in those days were not just pointless but even stupid. But that is exactly most of us do in our life time: We do worry.

2) Our Lord truly understands: After encouraging the rich not to worry on accumulate wealth on earth, Jesus turned to encourage the poor not to worry about their everyday needs. Arriving in the US with a family of 4 on a student visa, and about \$2,000 in the pocket, aiming to go to graduate school, that isn't something you don't have to worry about. Through those next few years, I don't remember how many things we worried everyday, had no confidence in handling any of them. I guess most of us don't need to worry if we have too much money and don't know where to put them. Most of us worry if we have enough to meet the everyday needs, and if not, what else can we do to solve problems come with unmet needs. In fact, regardless of how much or how little we may have, we always can find things to worry about. The fact we worry is because we are so finite, powerless and even afraid to face the unknown of life tomorrow and the day after. This is part of being human and no one in history is able to fight and win over that. The Chinese saying is so true on this: If you don't have anything to worry about today, you certainly have things to worry about tomorrow.

JESUS SAID WE SHOULD NOT WORRY: “Therefore, I tell you, do not worry.” (6:25, 31, 34) Jesus is not suggesting a man not prepare for life—that he be lazy, shiftless and thoughtless with a don't care attitude. God will not pamper license, slothfulness and lack of initiative, effort and planning. A person has to look after his responsibility. He has to work in order to eat. (2 Thess 3:10) God expects us to work extra so we are able to help others. (Eph 4:28) He must be diligent in looking after his affairs. But Jesus is talking...

1) Not preoccupied with things: Many people fall into the trap of centering their life, mind and thought, energy and effort on increasing material possession, not just for basic necessities but for luxury of life. A child of God is not to be entangled in the affairs of this world. He is not to be groping for more and more. He is not to seek first things of this world, but the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

2) Not be wrapped up by the world: Many suffer anxiety, stress, sleepless night, indulging in pursuits without end. They can't enjoy life with what they have, even sacrificing their family and health.

3) Not depend on possessions: Many children of God can't have faith in God but in things they have. These people can't find time, heart or energy to seek things God loves to see in them like spiritual growth, service and getting close to God. They replace God with wealth, or only wealth because they cannot serve God and wealth at the same time.

4) Don't forget about eternity: Many Christians had lost sight of eternity after they were saved by the grace of God. The rich fool in Luke 12 is a good warning. What is wrong in him isn't because he has so much, but he shifts his focus of life from eternal life to this life. So many people live their life like there is no eternity.

WHY IS WORRY BAD IN CHRISTIAN LIFE?

1) It is unfaithful to our Master: “No one can serve two masers. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (6:24) When we are preoccupied in worry things of this world, we are naturally unfaithful to our Master, God. We need to be faithful to God and honest to ourselves that when we fill our hearts and attention on things of this world and worry about them, there isn't much room for God, and that is unfaithful to God.

2) It is unnecessary to our Father: “If you, then, though are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (7:11) We say we know God is our

Father, but how much we really believe that He knows what we need and will always provide more than any and all earth fathers do to their children.

3) It is unreasonable to our faith: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, also trust in me. In my Father's house are many rooms.” (John 14:1-2) Although Jesus was talking about the heavenly mansion that is huge beyond measure, it shows us the tremendous resources God has in providing our needs so we don't have to worry if He can or will provide. No little one will need to worry if his earthly father has or will provide his need, why is it that we don't have that same faith in our heavenly Father?

4) It is unwise to waste life in worry: “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” (6:27) By extension, who of us by worrying can make bad things go our way? Can we see what future may hold? Or make things happen or prevent them from happening? Save our body from getting sick? Through our practical life experience, we can never stop bad things from happening by our worry. And if they are not coming, our worry is a waste of time and energy in nothing. Someone said: “Worry is like a rocking chair. It gives us something to do, but it doesn't get us anywhere.” That is not a wise choice in life.

HERE IS THE BETTER WAY: (Phil 4:4-7)

1) It begins from our focus: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice.” (4:4) Rejoice, *chairete*, isn't about an emotional state of being happy but a choice of attitude, an inner, deeply seated condition that is opposite of worry. Paul isn't naive about problems and burdens of life. He had more than his fair share of those things. Instead of allowing his emotion to be crushed under the weight of pain and hopelessness, he chose to rejoice in all his circumstances. The secret is “in the Lord.” If we focus our life on things that surround us, or in people who mistreated us, or on our own ability for a better future, we certainly have a lot to worry. But Paul refused to do that. Instead, he focused his life and its future in the Lord, his God, the Almighty and loving, and all powerful, to handle all his circumstances and to provide all his needs. When he looked to God, his heart was filled with confidence and hope, so naturally joy flows through every vein of his heart and brain. This is the difference between us and Paul. What and where is your focus of life?

2) Then it's about our attitude: “Let your gentle spirit be known to all men.” (4:5) *Epieikes*, “gentle spirit” here, may be translated in 13 different English words or phrases because there isn't one word that may encompass all the meaning of this Greek word, according to John MacArthur, Jr. a modern day famous Bible scholar. He suggests a compound word “gracious humility” in

this context. This is about the attitude we have on ourselves and to others. In most cases, we believe that we deserve lot better than where we are in that situation, be it a difficult job, a ridiculous boss, an unbearable marriage, a lingering physical condition or anything else that makes us feeling hopeless or helpless. The fact is the more or higher we think of ourselves, the deeper we will sink into self pity or resentment against everything and everyone including God. Paul suggested a better attitude: Be humble in our heart and gracious to all others. Attitude is the key to a joyful heart or a crushed spirit.

3) Don't forget the secret weapon: “God is near. In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.” (4:5b-6) People become worried, anxious and fearful because they don't know that God is near them, close to them, sees their situation and has a plan for them. Most people who are in despair believe that God is too far away, can't see their problems or needs. Paul suggests that we tell God in prayers, make known to him our situation. This doesn't mean God doesn't know without our telling him. But it means we know God is near and he will handle everything. In our good days, we believe God is near and all powerful and loving. Why can't we believe God the same way when we are in deep waters? People in the world lose heart in desperate situation because they have to face it on their own. But we have the word of Jesus: “Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me, I will never cast him out.” (John 6:37) We have this secret weapon. We have God to go through every situation in our life. Never forget that.

4) We also have secret protection: “And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.” (4:7) Worry and fear is a state of the mind in unknown situation that creates a sense of insecurity. But we have the best guards in all circumstances to give us the peace of mind and joy in the heart, and that peace comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. Many Christians never know how to draw protection from Jesus in time of confusion and fear. Paul said that this peace isn't comprehensible to people in the world, but only to those in Jesus Christ. “Guard”, *phroureo*, in both noun and verb forms, refers to special force soldiers who were trained mainly to protect the most important people or military sites. In our case, it is our heart and mind. Do you feel safe now?

YOU CAN DO BETTER THAN WORRY

1) It's a matter of choice: Many people who make worry as a large part of their life say: I just can't let go of this. That is a lie from Satan who will do all

they can to pull us away from our Almighty God by imprisoning us under the yoke of worry. When Peter focused at the fearful storm and the rolling waves, he was afraid and beginning to sink, then he cried to Jesus: “Lord, save me! Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.” (Matt 14:30-31) The choice is if you want to look at the danger of the storm of life or if you want to focus on the love and power of Jesus. This choice is yours. People of the world have no one to help them in time of storms, but we have Jesus to hold our hand and deliver us from danger. Can you live more like people of faith than people of the world without God.

2) You can do better than worry: No one in human history is immune from storms of life, and many got drawn in them without hope. Jesus didn't promise us life without pain or smooth sailing. In fact, he told us “In this world you will have tribulations (suffering, pain, sleepless nights), but he told us not to be afraid because he has over come the world. “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart (be courageous)! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) With Jesus by our side, we certainly can do better than worry.