

Matthew 6:24-34
February 27, '11

"A COMMANDMENT NO ONE KEEPS"

OF ALL THE MOVIE PORTRAYALS OF JESUS, BOTH SACRED & SECULAR, I THINK MY FAVORITE IS THAT OF AN OBSCURE ACTOR IN A BRITISH FILM ENTITLED "SON OF MAN."

JESUS CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED AS SHORT & SQUATTY.

HIS APPEARANCE IS VERY AVERAGE AT BEST.

FRANKLY, HE'S NOT MUCH TO LOOK AT.

IN THE MOVIE'S PRESENTATION OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, JESUS IS WALKING AMONG THE CROWD, SAYING ALL THE THINGS THAT WE FIND IN MATTHEW 5-7.

THE PEOPLE ARE LOOKING AT HIM RATHER SKEPTICALLY WHICH IS PROBABLY ACCURATE CONSIDERING THE THINGS THAT HE SAYS IN THAT SERMON.

FINALLY, IN A MOMENT OF ABSOLUTE FRUSTRATION, JESUS BURSTS OUT, "*LISTEN TO ME! LISTEN TO ME! I WANT YOU PEOPLE TO LISTEN TO ME!*"

NOW YOU MIGHT THINK THIS IS A MONTY PYTHON-TYPE HUMOROUS TAKE ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST, BUT IT'S NOT.

IT'S A FASCINATING & VERY WELL-DONE MOVIE.

AND IT'S PROBABLY FAR MORE ACCURATE THAN MOST FILM VERSIONS OF JESUS ARE.

I THINK JESUS HAD TO EXPERIENCE TIMES OF TREMENDOUS FRUSTRATION AT THE PEOPLE'S RESPONSE TO THE MESSAGE HE CAME TO PROCLAIM.

BECAUSE THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS AREN'T MEANT TO HOLD US DOWN BUT TO LIFT US UP.

THEY AREN'T INTENDED TO STIFLE US BUT TO CHALLENGE US.

THEIR PURPOSE ISN'T TO MAKE US FEEL GUILTY BUT TO FILL US WITH HOPE.

I THINK IT'S ODD, THOUGH, HOW WE RESPOND TO THE COMMANDS OF CHRIST AS WELL AS ALL THE COMMANDMENTS WE FIND IN SCRIPTURE.

WE HAVE A TENDENCY TO TAKE A "PICK & CHOOSE" APPROACH TO WHAT WE FIND IN THE BIBLE.

WE DETERMINE WHICH TEACHINGS ARE IMPORTANT TO OBEY & WHICH ONES AREN'T, BASED ON WHAT WE'RE ALREADY DOING.

WE HOLD UP THE TEACHINGS TO WHICH WE ADHERE AS BEING OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE & TRY TO PERSUADE OTHERS THAT OUR WAY OF THINKING IS RIGHT.

"IF YOU'RE A TRUE FOLLOWER OF JESUS, THESE ARE THE THINGS YOU'LL OBEY - THESE ARE THE COMMANDMENTS YOU'LL KEEP."

I THINK IT'S FASCINATING, THOUGH, THAT SOMETHING JESUS PUTS A GREAT DEAL OF EMPHASIS ON IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT IS SOMETHING WE QUICKLY CAST ASIDE AS BEING INSIGNIFICANT.

WE TREAT IT AS IF IT'S A COMMANDMENT THAT'S NOT ALL THAT IMPORTANT TO KEEP.

I'M TALKING ABOUT THE COMMAND JESUS PROCLAIMS IN THESE VERSES WE'VE JUST READ – THE COMMANDMENT “*DO NOT WORRY.*”

HE DEVOTES 10 ENTIRE VERSES TO IT!

HE MAY GIVE THAT MUCH ATTENTION TO ANOTHER COMMANDMENT, BUT IF HE DOES, I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS!

HE USES THE WORD “WORRY” SIX TIMES IN THESE TEN VERSES.

IT'S OBVIOUSLY SOMETHING HE CONSIDERS VITALLY IMPORTANT.

AGAIN, THOUGH, THIS ISN'T MEANT TO HOLD US DOWN OR STIFLE US OR MAKE US FEEL GUILTY.

ITS INTENT IS TO LIFT US UP, TO CHALLENGE US & GIVE US HOPE.

AT FIRST GLANCE, THOUGH, IT'S A PRETTY RIDICULOUS COMMAND, ISN'T IT?

SOMEONE FACETIOUSLY HAS SAID, “*WHEN INTERPRETED IN A SUPERFICIAL MANNER, THIS STATEMENT COULD ONLY HAVE BEEN SPOKEN BY A SINGLE GUY LIVING A CAREFREE LIFE ON THE BEACH IN SUNNY GALILEE!*”

THERE SEEMS TO BE SOME TRUTH IN THAT, THOUGH, DOESN'T THERE?

IT'S PRETTY RIDICULOUS TO THINK WE'RE NOT GOING TO WORRY.

WHAT MAKES WORRY WORSE IS BEING TOLD NOT TO WORRY!

IT SIMPLY ADDS ONE MORE THING TO YOUR LIST OF WORRIES!

YOU WORRY THAT YOU'RE GOING TO WORRY WHEN YOU'VE BEEN COMMANDED NOT TO WORRY!

IT CAN BE A VICIOUS CYCLE.

I THINK WE HAVE TO TRY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT JESUS IS TRYING TO TELL US HERE.

REMEMBER, HIS TEACHINGS ARE TO LIFT US UP, CHALLENGE US & GIVE US HOPE.

I THINK THE CONTEXT OF THIS COMMANDMENT IS IMPORTANT.

ONE MIGHT WONDER WHY THE FIRST VERSE WE READ IS INCLUDED IN THIS PASSAGE AT ALL.

IT SEEMS COMPLETELY DISCONNECTED TO THE OTHER 10 VERSES.

“NO ONE CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS; FOR A SLAVE WILL EITHER HATE THE ONE & LOVE THE OTHER, OR BE DEVOTED TO THE ONE AND DESPISE THE OTHER. YOU CANNOT SERVE GOD & WEALTH.”

A SINGLE VERSE THAT FOCUSES ON THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF SERVING 2 MASTERS FOLLOWED BY 10 THAT FOCUS ON WORRY.

BUT I THINK THIS VERSE HAS TO BE INCLUDED IN THIS PASSAGE SIMPLY BECAUSE THE NEXT VERSE BEGINS WITH THE WORD “THEREFORE.”

IN OTHER WORDS, “BECAUSE OF THIS, THERE'S THIS.”

NOW WE CAN UNDERSTAND THE “THEREFORE” CONNECTING VERSE 24 – THE WARNING AGAINST PUTTING WEALTH & STUFF BEFORE GOD.

OR WE CAN EXPAND OUR THINKING & CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY THAT JESUS IS CONNECTING EVERYTHING HE'S ALREADY SAID IN THE SERMON WITH THE COMMANDMENT TO NOT WORRY.

“YES, THESE ARE ALL DIFFICULT TEACHINGS. IMPORTANT, BUT DIFFICULT. BUT DON’T LET IT GET YOU DOWN. DON’T OBSESS OVER THESE THINGS I’M TELLING YOU.”

NOW THAT MAKES SENSE BECAUSE THE MEANING OF THE WORD “WORRY” THAT JESUS USES HERE IS “*BE PREOCCUPIED WITH*” OR “*ABSORBED BY*.”

HE’S TELLING US NOT TO BE EXCESSIVELY CONCERNED.

DON’T GIVE AN INORDINATE AMOUNT OF ATTENTION TO ANYTHING OTHER THAN SERVING GOD & TRUSTING IN GOD’S UNCEASING PROVIDENTIAL CARE AT EVERY MOMENT OF YOUR LIFE.

LET’S FACE IT.

WE’RE GOING TO WORRY.

WE ALL DO.

WE WORRY ABOUT PERSONAL THINGS – OUR JOB, OUR HEALTH, OUR FINANCIAL STABILITY, OUR GROWING CHILDREN, OUR AGING PARENTS.

WE WORRY ABOUT THE WORLD & HAS THERE EVER BEEN A TIME THAT CALLED FOR MORE WORRY ABOUT THE WORLD THAN THE PRESENT?

IF YOU WANT TO STOP WORRYING ABOUT THE WORLD, YOU HAVE TO BE SURE NOT TO TURN ON THE TELEVISION OR OPEN A NEWSPAPER.

I THINK ONE OF THE THINGS JESUS IS TELLING US IN THIS PASSAGE IS THAT WE REALLY DON’T ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING BY WORRYING ABOUT IT.

IT’S BEEN SAID THAT WORRYING IS LIKE A ROCKING CHAIR.

IT GIVES YOU SOMETHING TO DO BUT IT GETS YOU NOWHERE.

SOMEONE ELSE SAID THAT MAKING MOUNTAINS OUT OF MOLE HILLS DOES NOTHING BUT EXHAUST THE MOLES!

THE PSALMIST OFFERS VALUABLE INSTRUCTION WHEN HE SAYS, “*CAST YOUR BURDEN ON THE LORD & HE WILL SUSTAIN YOU.*”

JESUS HIMSELF SAID, “*COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO ARE WEARY AND CARRYING HEAVY BURDENS AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.*”

WHAT THOSE PASSAGES TELL US IS THAT GOD IS BIG ENOUGH & POWERFUL ENOUGH & STRONG ENOUGH & COMPASSIONATE ENOUGH & CARING ENOUGH TO HANDLE EVERYTHING THAT CAUSES US WORRY.

GOD PROMISES TO SUSTAIN US IN ALL THE DIFFICULTIES WE ENCOUNTER.

HE’S BIG ENOUGH TO SHOULDER OUR LOAD.

NOW THAT MAY SEEM TO BE TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.

BUT THE ASTOUNDING THING IS – IT IS TRUE!

GOD OFFERS THE PROMISE THAT IF WE WILL CAST OUR BURDENS UPON HIM, HE WILL SUSTAIN US.

JESUS ASSURES US THAT IF WE COME TO HIM WITH THE LOADS WE CARRY, HE WILL GIVE US REST.

THESE ARE PROMISES FROM GOD & WE CAN'T PICK & CHOOSE WHICH PROMISES OF GOD WE'LL BELIEVE ANY MORE THAN WE CAN PICK & CHOOSE WHICH COMMANDMENTS OF GOD WE'LL KEEP.

WE CAN GIVE OUR WORRIES TO HIM & HE WILL GLADLY RECEIVE THEM.

THERE IS SOMETHING ELSE WE CAN DO AS WELL.

NOT ONLY CAN WE CAST OUR BURDENS UPON GOD.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, WE CAN CAST THEM ON ONE ANOTHER.

WE CAN BRING THOSE WORRIES TO THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH, TO THE BODY OF CHRIST.

HERE, AMONG FELLOW STRUGGLERS – THOSE WITH THEIR OWN TROUBLES AND TERRORS AND SLEEPLESS NIGHTS - GOD'S LOVE IS REVEALED.

IT'S SO IRONIC: GOD KNOWS THE NEEDS OF EACH ONE OF US.

WE ONLY KNOW OUR OWN - UNTIL WE SHARE THEM WITH SOMEONE ELSE.

AND WHEN WE DO, LO AND BEHOLD, WE DISCOVER THAT WORRY IS SOMETHING COMMON TO US ALL.

IN DIFFERENT WAYS, AT DIFFERENT TIMES, TO DIFFERENT DEGREES.

BUT AS WE COME TO SHARE THOSE WORRIES WITH SOMEONE ELSE, WE DISCOVER IN POWERFUL WAYS HOW TRUSTWORTHY GOD'S LOVE IS.

AND HOW TRANSFORMING!

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU HEARD SOMEONE SAY THAT THE CARING THEY EXPERIENCED FROM THEIR CHURCH IN A TIME OF TROUBLE MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO GET THROUGH A DIFFICULT ORDEAL?

YET WE SO OFTEN HESITATE TO DO SO.

WE'RE AFRAID TO BE OPEN & HONEST – AFRAID TO SHARE OUR WOES & OUR WORRIES.

SO WHAT IS IT WE FEAR?

SEEMING WEAK? OR UNSUCCESSFUL? OR NEEDY? FRIENDS, THAT'S US!

ALL OF US.

WE ARE ALL – EVERY ONE OF US AT TIMES - WEAK, UNSUCCESSFUL & NEEDY.

AT DIFFERENT TIMES, WE ALL GO THROUGH DIFFICULTIES – THINGS THAT CAUSE US CONCERN, THINGS ABOUT WHICH WE WORRY.

AS WE SHARE THOSE WORRIES, WE WILL EXPERIENCE THE BLESSING & THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE FORM OF A BURDEN LIFTED, A FRIENDSHIP DEEPENED, AND MAYBE EVEN A NEW PERSPECTIVE TO CONSIDER.

WILL IT CAUSE YOU TO GET RID OF YOUR WORRIES?

PROBABLY NOT.

BUT A BURDEN SHARED IS A BURDEN EASED.

THERE IS A STORY RABBI HAROLD KUSHNER TELLS OF A MOTHER WHO SENDS HER YOUNG SON OUT ON AN ERRAND, AND IT TAKES HIM A LONG TIME TO COME HOME.

WHEN HE FINALLY GETS BACK, HIS MOTHER SAYS, "WHERE WERE YOU? I WAS WORRIED ABOUT YOU."

THE BOY SAYS, "OH THERE IS A LITTLE BOY DOWN THE STREET WHOSE TRICYCLE BROKE AND HE WAS CRYING BECAUSE HE COULDN'T FIX IT, AND I REALLY FELT BAD FOR HIM SO I STOPPED TO HELP."

THE BOY'S MOTHER ASKED, "ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL ME YOU KNEW HOW TO FIX HIS TRICYCLE?"

TO WHICH HER SON REPLIED, "NO, I JUST SAT DOWN AND HELPED HIM CRY."

THAT'S WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR SOMEONE ELSE.

YOU CAN SIMPLY BE THERE IN THEIR NEED.

YOU CAN HELP GET THROUGH THEIR WORRIES & THEIR STRUGGLES.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE ANSWERS.

MAYBE ALL YOU CAN DO IS SIT DOWN WITH THEM & CRY LIKE THAT LITTLE BOY DID WITH HIS FRIEND.

IN DOING SO, YOU BECOME THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF THAT PERSON – SHARING THEIR BURDEN & SHOULDERING THEIR LOAD.

IN THIS PASSAGE FROM THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, JESUS DOES COMMAND US NOT TO WORRY.

BUT I THINK HE ALSO TELLS US NOT TO WORRY ABOUT WORRYING.

DON'T BE CONSUMED BY IT...DON'T BE OBSESSED BY IT.

DON'T LET THE PROBLEMS & CONCERNS OF THE DAY GET THE BEST OF YOU BECAUSE THERE'S NO NEED FOR IT.

THE PROMISES OF GOD ARE SURE.

CAST YOUR BURDENS UPON GOD & HE WILL SUSTAIN YOU.

TURN TO JESUS WHEN YOU'RE WEARY & WORRYING & HE WILL GIVE YOU REST.

WITH THE ABSOLUTE ASSURANCE OF THOSE PROMISES, MAY YOUR SOUL BE STILL BECAUSE THE LORD IS ON YOUR SIDE.

MAY YOU – WITH THAT ASSURANCE - PATIENTLY BEAR GRIEF & PAIN.

IN EVERY CHANGE YOU ENDURE, BE ASSURED THAT GOD WILL REMAIN FAITHFUL.

NO MATTER WHAT LIES BEFORE YOU, BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN YOUR MIDST, YOUR THORNY WAYS WILL ULTIMATELY LEAD TO A JOYFUL END. AMEN.

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