

The Brown Street Beacon

*"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,
holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)*



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Marketing the Church

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We are living in a time when outward success is preferred over faithfulness; when size is more diligently sought after than genuine commitment; when theology takes a back seat to methodology; when preaching the Gospel gives way to drama, special music and pop psychology; when pragmatism transcends sound biblical teaching; when poor doctrine is tolerated but a long sermon is not; when a sermon is judged, not by its content, but by the way it makes you feel; when the sermons are more fluff than substance; and when God must be packaged delicately if He is to be sold to today's very discriminating consumer.



We are living in a time when levity is preferred in the pulpit over rebuke, when worship must be more rollicking than reverent, when sophistication is more sought after than humility, when society has greater influence than the word of God, when the accommodating people in sinful lifestyles is called "ministry" and rebuking them is called "legalism," and when church members are more familiar with the "12 steps to recovery" than they are with the "5 steps to salvation."

What a state of affairs! Oh, how far we have traveled down the winding treacherous road of pragmatism (if it seems to work for the moment, never-mind whether it's scriptural). Why have so many churches taken this detour? Why do we find ourselves struggling with these issues today?

I believe it is because we have forgotten just who it is that is sovereign. Somehow we have bought into the marketing strategy that says, "The consumer is always right." Thus, our primary concern has shifted from pleasing God to pleasing the masses. Therefore, we hear the continual cry for the need for change, for as man's needs change so must the church. This is the reason that worship services are becoming more entertainment oriented. This is the reason for the preoccupation with the length of services. And this is the reason more and more faithful Christians are complaining about never hearing the plain, straightforward, distinctive preaching they used to hear.

John MacArthur, in describing this situation in his book, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, stated: "Almost nothing is dismissed as inappropriate: rock-n-roll oldies, disco tunes, heavy metal, rap, dancing, comedy, clowns, mime artists and state magic have all become a part of the evangelical repertoire. In fact, one of the few things judged out of place in church these days is clear and forceful preaching."

Not Worth the Worry

Bubba Garner

Though it changes frequently, David's favorite movie right now is *The Lion King*. That's the one that features the song "Hakuna Matata," which the lyrics translate "means no worries for the rest of your days." No worries. Wouldn't that be nice? But we live in what is commonly called the Age of Anxiety, where "no worries" seems like an impossibility.

Apparently, the problem of worry is not unique to our generation or Jesus never would have devoted such a large section to this subject in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:25-34). And in the Parable of the Sower, He identified "the worries of the world" (Mark 4:19) as thorns that grow up along side the seed and eventually choke out its life.

But before we are too quick to sympathize with Jesus' audience, notice what things they were worried about. "*What will we eat?*" and "*What will we drink?*" and "*What will we wear for clothing?*" (Matthew 6:31). They were anxious about where their next meal would come from and whether or not they would have clothes to put on the backs of their children. If Jesus had to get on them for worrying about the necessities of life, what do you think He would say to us about the things that occupy and distract our minds? I offer these reasons as to why worry is, in fact, not worth the worry.

Worry sets your mind on the world. Jesus introduced this topic after saying that you "cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). That makes for an easy transition to worry, because the devil doesn't care if your mind is carried away by riches or by anxiety, just so long as it is carried away from God. We are quick to see that we can lose our soul because of greed. But the same sermon warns about the dangers of anxious care. Either way, you're setting your mind on things below and not on things above.

"Do not be anxious...but seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:25, Matthew 6:33). If you want assurance of provision, you don't seek things, you seek God. When you secure your relationship with Him, making spiritual sustenance your priority, He will provide the daily bread. It's amazing what happens to the worries of the world when you focus first on the kingdom of God.

Worry won't let you live by faith. Worrying about food, drink, and clothing are things that the "Gentiles eagerly seek" (Matthew 6:32). Jesus called them "men of little faith" (Matthew 6:30), because they acted like the Lord didn't know or didn't care what their needs were. They were in covenant relationship with God but were demonstrating less faith than those who didn't know Him at all.

Consider the sparrows, five of which were sold for two cents. "And yet not one of them is forgotten before God" (Luke 12:6). If the smallest and humblest of God's creatures are given such rich provision, what will He do for the pinnacle of His creation, for those who have been made in His image? And what about the lilies of the field, generally used for kindling? If the God of heaven has tended to the flowers whose life is but a breath and a sigh, will He not clothe with righteousness those whose destiny is eternal life? Surely a God who has given Jesus to satisfy our spiritual needs has the strength to handle the everyday problems that come our way. You cannot serve God and mammon. Neither can you live by faith and worry.

Worry is worthless. Having worried and fretted about something, what good does it accomplish? What has it changed? Anxiety is a useless endeavor. "Who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life" (Matthew 6:27)? Worry doesn't lengthen life, it tends to shorten it. You can "worry

yourself sick” for sure. But what about the tragedy of stressing over things that may never happen while missing what is happening right in front of you?

Our time here is short enough as it is, a “vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away” (James 4:14). That vapor is often abbreviated even more when what little time we do have is wasted away with worthless worry. If you can do something about it, then do it. If it is out of your hands, turn it over to God. Life is still under His control. He can add length to your days and promise a place where there is no more night. That’ll be worth it.

“No worries for the rest of your days.” Maybe that’s not just for fantasies and fairy tales after all.