

Warrior or Worrier – Part Two

Dealing with worry through the armour of God

Preached by Elder Roland Taylor • Bethel Baptist Church, Macclesfield

Hello and welcome to the sermon podcast for Bethel Baptist Church, Macclesfield. We hope this sermon encourages and inspires you. Hopefully, you will join us for our Sunday service, Sundays at 10:30. We would love to meet you in person. Today's sermon is Warrior or Worrier, part two, by Roland Taylor.

Are you a warrior or a worrier? This is part two, continuing what I said last week. I did ask you to remember, to memorise something last week, and I hope that you all did, as it involved an alliteration of three W's. So, what was it? "Worry weakens warriors." I find it very difficult to say, "worry weakens warriors." And the thing that I was concerned about is what happens to us and our lives as Christians with the worry that we sometimes carry.

Ian read to us a passage where Jesus talks to his disciples about worry, and Jesus says, "I tell you, don't worry." And he goes on: why do you worry about clothes? Why do you worry about what you'll eat or drink? Who of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to your life? He says, don't worry. Well, that's very good advice, but it's not so easy to put into practice.

There's an advertisement — I don't know if you've seen it. There's a father and a son looking out of the front window of their house at the son's brand new car in the drive, and behind them, coming over the house, is a big flaming meteorite that lands on the car and smashes it. What does the father say? He says, "Don't worry, son, I'm with..." and the name of a motoring organisation. What Jesus is saying here is: don't worry, you have little faith. Worry isn't a good way of spending your time. Why not, instead, spend it building up your little amount of faith? So when the big meteorite smashes your brand new car — "don't worry, son, I trust in God." That's where I'm putting my trust, not in a motoring organisation. I trust in God. You put your effort not into worrying about the mess on your drive, or the fact that you've got to go to the insurance company and make a very improbable claim — you just spend the time putting your trust in God. Don't worry. I'm putting my trust in God.

And last week we looked at Psalm 73, a Psalm written by Asaph. Asaph was a man who seemed to have got himself worked into a state over a particular problem, and he got to the point of starting to think that being a follower of God, being righteous, was a waste of time, because people who were wicked just seemed to get away with so much, have such easy lives, and made his life a misery. He got to the point of almost slipping — almost thinking that his faith in God and his attempts to live a righteous life were a waste of time.

We're going to carry on this morning, and look at worry and how we have to deal with it in our lives. Before we do that, let's look at the armour of God. And there they are — Hilda on the left, and Walter, looking worried, on the right. Now, what is the armour of God? You may like to pick your Bibles up and look at Ephesians chapter 6.

What's the first piece of armour? The belt of truth. If you're wearing armour like Hilda is, what job does the belt do — apart from holding her skirt up? Well, that's the main job of the belt — it holds everything in place. If you're a gentleman, it stops your trousers falling down in battle, which is quite useful. It's one of the reasons Napoleon's invasion of Russia failed — it was so cold that the tin buttons on his army's uniforms changed state and fell off, which meant they were trying to conduct a retreat in the middle of winter while holding their trousers up by hand, which wasn't very successful. So the belt of truth, the belt of God's truth, holds everything in place. If you're wearing that belt, you're well placed to live a life as a Christian, because it holds everything in place. Poor old Walter has, what do we call it — the elasticated waistband of uncertainty, not the belt of truth.

What's next, after the belt? The breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate of righteousness is not something you create for yourself out of your own efforts — it's something God gives you, and it's a major protection. Hilda's wearing hers, and Walter's got the flannel shirt of “I hope I'm good enough.” Hilda's got the breastplate of righteousness — a major protection.

After the breastplate, what's next? Your feet shod with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. Look at her boots — she's ready for anything, because she knows this gospel of peace and is ready to speak it to people. What's Walter got? The carpet slippers of not being ready for anything — he's not even ready to take the dustbins out.

After the shoes, it's the shield of faith. She's carrying hers, and it's big enough to do the job. The shield of faith protects you from the fiery arrows of the evil one — you lift it up above your face and you're protected. And Walter — well, probably his shield of faith is left under the bed. He hasn't picked it up this morning, and it's not going to do him very much good.

After the shield of faith is the helmet of salvation, which protects your head. Again, it's given to you — your salvation is not the foil cap you've made up to stop the aliens influencing your thoughts, it's the helmet that God has given you. God has given you your salvation, and no one's taking that away. Hilda's wearing hers, and Walter — well, we don't know where his is. It might have some flowers in it in the back garden.

After the helmet of salvation is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Hilda's got hers, and she looks ready to use it if necessary. For Walter, his sword of the Spirit is in the umbrella stand — he's certainly not holding it. Hilda is ready to do what Christians have to do, which is to stand, to withstand the evil one, to stand and pray all the time, or pray often. That's what Christians are called to do, and to do it, you need to be equipped as she is. If you're not equipped, it's not going to happen. Because what can Walter do against the fiery arrows of the evil one? Is Walter going to remember to pray on every occasion? Probably not.

We'll come back to the role of the armour of God in a minute. But what does worrying do to you? It's not any positive help at all — nobody can add even an hour to their life by worrying. But I don't think worry is a sin. I think it's something that happens to us humans, that we have a tendency to worry, and the problem arises from what we do because we're worried.

There's a verse quoted in the New Testament that comes from Psalm 4: “In your anger, do not sin.” The Psalmist recognises that we get angry, and says don't let your anger lead you into sin. I

think it's the same with worry — in your worry, do not sin. Don't let your worry lead you into sin. Because, like Asaph last week, he was carrying this burden of worry, and it was getting to him.

He says, “But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” He goes on to say how good a life the wicked have. “Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain I've washed my hands in innocence.” So he'd almost slipped — so worried about how easy a life the wicked have and how they persecute the righteous that he's getting to the point where he thinks it's a waste of time to have kept his hands pure or washed them in innocence. But Asaph goes on to recognise that “if I had said, I will speak thus” — if he'd actually said that it's a waste of time to keep his hands pure — “I would have betrayed your children.” Asaph recognises that his worry had taken him nearly to the point where he'd said something he shouldn't, where he had betrayed the children of God. He nearly got there, but not quite.

Then Asaph went into the sanctuary, and God showed him what the fate of the wicked was — that their prosperity, everything Asaph was worried about, is all they have. They have no relationship with God, no future. When what they have disappears, that's it — they have nothing. But for Asaph, when the things he has, his possessions, disappear, he has God.

Where does our worry lead us to? Does it cause us to lose our trust in God? You're worried about something, and you begin to think, “well, perhaps God hasn't quite got a grip if he's letting this happen to me.” Or does it lead us to think God doesn't care because of this thing I'm worried about — does God care for me like he says? Or does it even lead us to take shortcuts, to do things we shouldn't do, just to try and deal with our worry?

There's an incident in Samuel's life when Saul is appointed the first king of Israel. Samuel sees this as a betrayal of God by the people; he warns them that if they get a king to rule over them, he'll take all sorts of things from them, but the people don't listen. After Saul has been appointed king, Samuel says to him — this is in 1 Samuel, starting in chapter 10 and going to chapter 13 — “Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do.” This was important, because the army was being led by a new king, and they needed to win their victories the right way — Samuel tells Saul to go to Gilgal, wait, they'll do the sacrifices, and then God will lead him into battle.

But Samuel was delayed. In chapter 13, “the Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore.” So while Samuel's away, Saul's waiting for the battle, and the Philistines had this uncountable army — it's so large. “Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. So he said, 'Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings,' and Saul offered up the burnt offering. Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.”

So Saul was worried about his army — he could see the Philistine army, it was massive, he was worried his army was evaporating and men were sneaking off, and he thought, “we're going to

lose.” So he doesn’t wait for Samuel, and he makes the offerings himself. “What have you done?” asked Samuel. Saul replied, “When I saw that the men were scattering and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash, I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord’s favour.’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.” “You acted foolishly,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you.” God wanted the victory to occur after the sacrifices had been made properly, so it was clear to everybody that the victory came from God, not from Saul. Saul got worried, he panicked, he saw his army evaporating, and so he did it himself. Samuel says, “You acted foolishly, you’ve not obeyed the command God gave you.” Saul’s worry led him to take a shortcut which involved disobeying God — and that’s the danger of carrying a burden of worry with you. It’ll lead you to do the wrong things.

So how do we deal with worry? We need to find a way of dealing with it. Worrying over something, I don’t think, is a sin — it’s important that it doesn’t lead into that. So how do we deal with it?

In 1 Peter chapter 5 verse 6, he says this: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, stand firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering.” Humble yourselves under God’s mighty hand — that sounds like someone who is feeling the pressure. God’s mighty hand is on them. Peter is saying, accept that. Humble yourselves under God’s mighty hand, that he might lift you up in due time. So what God is doing in your life, the thing causing you all this worry, is temporary. It’s something God is working through, and he himself will lift it in due time. While this is going on, cast your anxiety onto him, because while this is going on, he cares for you.

So don’t be worrying — be self-controlled and alert. Don’t spend your time going over and over in your head what’s bothering you. Spend the time instead being self-controlled and alert, because the enemy is on the prowl, looking for people to devour. Spend your time resisting him, standing firm in the faith, because you know your brothers throughout the world are going through the same thing. Cast your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Don’t spend the time worrying — hand it over to God. Spend your time on the important things, like being alert, being self-controlled, resisting the devil.

So how do we do that — how do we cast anxiety onto God? If you’re really worried about something, it’s not particularly helpful for someone to say, “don’t worry” — particularly if they follow it up with, “it will all be the same in a hundred years’ time.” Telling somebody not to worry isn’t really a solution for them. So how do we not worry? Because if we don’t manage to cast that anxiety onto God, we’re in increased danger of the evil one attempting to devour us. If we can’t cast that worry away, if we carry it around with us, it just makes things more dangerous for us.

So there are three things — I’m sure there are more, but I’ve got three this morning that we need to do. The first is in Philippians chapter 4: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.” What Paul is saying is: guard your minds, and

be careful what you put in. If the news worries you, don't watch it, or watch it once a day — ration yourself. And of course, after you've watched the news and got worried, cast that care onto God, pray about it, bring it to the Lord. But the news is there twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week — don't try to watch all of it. Being aware of what is happening in other parts of the world doesn't really contribute to anything except your level of worry. If you're the sort of person who worries about what's going on in the world, ration yourself. Don't fill your mind with things you can't possibly do anything about, that you haven't got enough time to pray through — just once a day, and then pray, but no more. If you're worried about the youth of today and how badly behaved they all are, then stop watching police documentaries. It's very difficult to get an accurate picture of what's happening in this country by watching the television — all you see is the exciting stuff, the car chases, the police shouting at people and handcuffing them. If that worries you, stop watching it. You won't be any more ignorant of society by not watching it, but you will save yourself a whole load of worry. So be careful what you put in your heads.

Paul also says this: “Rejoice in the Lord always.” In fact, it's so important, he says it again — “I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” So don't be anxious about anything, and this starts to be of use to us. First, rejoice; second, don't be anxious, but pray — pray with thanksgiving, make your requests to God. So something worries you — hand it over to God. Rejoice, and pray with thanksgiving. And what's the result of that? Paul goes on to say, “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” That's what we're after — guarding our minds.

So: cast away your anxiety, pray with thanksgiving, rejoice, and the result will be that the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds — a peace you won't be able to understand, because you won't know where it's coming from. So we can be careful about what we put in our minds. If we start to worry about something, we make a point of rejoicing in God, thanking him, and praying about that thing, and the result will be that the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. You do what you can, and God will do the rest, if you take it to him in prayer — but it's not just prayer, it's rejoicing and thanksgiving as well.

The third thing is, finally, Ephesians 6: “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God.” God has given you all this protection, and you're not wearing it. “Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.” If you were trying to sneak up on someone to try and do them harm, you wouldn't want to mess with her, would you — she is equipped, whereas poor old Walter isn't.

Now, that just pushes it one step further back, because if this is how we are to deal with worry, by putting on the armour of God, how do we put it on? Hilda's managed it, but Walter hasn't — so what have they done differently? How do we put on the armour of God?

I was looking through the New Testament for where the words “put on” or “clothe yourselves with” turn up, and I made a list of what we are to put on as Christians. In Romans, we are to put on the armour of light — that's Paul saying what he later says in Ephesians, put on the armour of light.

He says we are to put on Jesus — that's two verses after "put on the armour of light." In Ephesians 4, put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Put on the full armour of God, in Ephesians 6. Again in Colossians 3, put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator. Two verses later: put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. And two verses later: above all, put on love.

So there are things as Christians we are to put on, like you put on your — well, I've got my jacket, which I only wear on Sundays, but I put it on this morning. So how do we put this stuff on? I think it comes down to reminding ourselves daily that we have a new self, that we have the armour of God, that we have compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience — and we have to remember. It's no good just having read it and knowing it, and being able to write it down if somebody gave us a test. We have to know it.

Some of you will have heard of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones — he wrote a book on spiritual depression. One of the things he said — he actually instructed you, not just if you think you're suffering from depression, but just generally — he says, in the morning, go and stand in front of your mirror and quote Psalm 42 verse 5 to yourself: "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why are you so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God." So every day, part of your spiritual routine is to address yourself and say, "why are you such a miserable so-and-so? Put your hope in God and praise him, my Saviour and my God." And he recommends that you do just that.

We need to remind ourselves that we have the armour of God, that we carry the shield of faith, that we don't forget it. Have you ever, when you feel tempted, said to yourself, "I am carrying the shield of faith for the express purpose of extinguishing the fiery arrows of the evil one"? It'll certainly confuse whoever's tempting you. But you have to remind yourself — you have to tell yourself in the morning that you have the armour of God at your disposal, that you will wear the helmet of salvation, that you'll wear the belt of truth, that you carry the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, and you've got your gospel boots on. I think you all know this, but if you're like me, you just sort of get edged out, because you forget. And so when you come up against something that worries you, you're ill-equipped — you're like Walter, you haven't got it with you. So remind yourself — perhaps first thing, remind yourself during the day, remind yourself when you go to bed.

And if you're one of these people who, like me, wakes up in the middle of the night and worries about stuff, remind yourself then. Psalm 63 verse 6: "On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night, because you are my help. I sing in the shadow of your wings; my soul clings to you, your right hand upholds me." If you wake up in the middle of the night, do that. Don't worry.

So if we forget, like Walter, how God has blessed us, that he has equipped us to be effective children of God, then our worries can drag us down. They can lead us into sin. So we have to remember that we need to put on the armour that God provides, so that we're properly equipped and able to stand. Amen.

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