

Sermon—February 27-28, 1999
Rich Nathan
Christ Confronts the Culture
Matthew 6:25-34

Christ Confronts Y2K

In the passage that we are going to look at today, Jesus himself gives us a command three times, in which he says, “Do not worry.” And then in three other times he asks the rhetorical question: why are you worrying? So three times we hear “do not worry; do not worry; do not worry” and, then, “why do you worry?” “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to their lives?” “Don’t worry about tomorrow.”

Now there are two things converging in the next nine months that, I believe, will raise the anxiety level of many Americans to a fever pitch. I think the decibel level from the screaming videos of TV preachers as they mass market their hyped-up message through carefully crafted advertisements and the decibel level of the websites and books and magazine that are already in production – the decibel level will get so loud that the simple words of Jesus, “Do not worry, do not worry, do not worry” will all be but drowned out in the noise, in the hype, in the confusion surrounding the unfortunate convergence of two events.

One event is what I call the Millennial Madness – the end-times furor that is already beginning to heat up as we, this next year, enter the new millennium. And coupled with Millennial Madness is the very real technological problem that has been labeled Y2K. And, frankly, I believe that unless individuals are deeply rooted in a biblical way of responding, unless Millennial Madness and Y2K are approached maturely and wisely, we are going to watch more and more people just ping off the walls, make disastrous financial decisions, injure themselves and their families, and, perhaps, get disillusioned enough to walk away from the faith.

Let me first handle Millennial Madness. You probably read in the papers just about a month ago that the Israeli government ordered the deportation of fourteen Americans who were believed to be part of this Millennial group called “Concerned Christians.” This group is based in Denver, Co. It is alleged that these Christians from America were going to perform some sort of extreme and violent act in the streets of Jerusalem at the end of the year 1999 in order to hasten the coming of Jesus. Israel is taking these various millennial groups quite seriously. They are spending millions and millions of dollars in beefed up security around various sites in Jerusalem, especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque, often referred to as the Dome of the Rock in order to make room for the rebuilding of

the Temple. But they are putting various kinds of motion detectors and security forces on high alert. What they don't want in Israel is some replay of the Waco, Texas standoff between the FBI and David Koresh and his Branch Dividian followers. They don't want another Solar Temple, the people in Switzerland and in Quebec that killed themselves; or Heaven's Gate, or any one of the other tragic and violent movements that have occurred mostly in America over the last 20 years. And around the turn of the millennium, this stuff just begins to heat up.

I have spent the last couple of weeks reading a history of millennial movements and the hysteria that they generate. Just a little over a decade ago an engineer from Southern California put out a pamphlet that went all over the world called "The 88 Reasons Why the Lord Had to Return in 1988." And he unsettled lots of folks. And, then, before that, of course, during the 1970's Hal Lindsay wrote a best-selling book. It sold 35 million copies and translated into 50 languages called "The Late Great Planet Earth," in which he basically predicted that the events of Matthew 24, the Armageddon and the return of the Lord, were going to take place within 40 years of the founding of the nation of Israel. Since Israel was founded in 1948, he predicted the return of the Lord also in 1988. And he thought that the biblical characters that are sometimes depicted as Anti-Christ characters, Gog and Magog, he associated them with Russia and with Moscow, no matter that there isn't a hint of linguistic evidence to associate Gog and Magog with Russia and Moscow. No matter that there isn't a hint of historic evidence or ethnic evidence to associate the two. If you go through Hal Lindsay's book, The Late Great Planet Earth, you will discover that he is batting exactly .000 in predicted prophecy. Nevertheless, his fertile imagination regarding how the end-times are going to play out has affected an entire generation of Christians in America who believe that the Lindsay scenario is one that is taught in the Bible when it is virtually entirely false from beginning to end.

But this isn't the first time in American history that we are seeing this type of end-times fervor. The greatest outbreak of it took place in the 1840's. There was a man named William Miller who was a church-going farmer and who believed that God spoke to him from Daniel 8:14 where it says that "after 2300 days the Temple will be cleansed" and he believed that God showed him that each day was to be interpreted as a year. And so calculating back from the supposed date of the prophecy, which he came up with as 457 BC and adding 2300 years to that, he said that the Lord was going to return in the fall of 1843. And he preached hundreds of messages throughout New England about the return of the Lord in 1843 and caused an enormous stir. 50,000 people became followers of William Miller. And at least a million others, according to press accounts, believed that there might be something to what William Miller was saying. And many thousands of people sold their farms and homes and moved out to the Midwest waiting for the return of the Lord.

Well, it didn't happen in 1843 in the autumn as William Miller predicted. And he said that he had miscalculated and he figured it to another date in 1844. And

when it didn't happen, he said it was definitely going to happen three months later in 1844. And that didn't happen either. And it led to what became known in American church history as The Great Disappointment. Thousands were disillusioned. Thousands more, who had sold everything and really put themselves in a terrible position financially, ended up having to go bankrupt. And there are stories of formerly prosperous farmers and businessmen who were reduced to begging because they had given up everything waiting for the return of the Lord.

The most tragic cases took place in 1666. In 1666 the year that contains in it the number of Anti-Christ, 666, it seemed that the whole world went mad. In Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church decided to change the liturgy. The Russian Orthodox hierarchy changed in that year the number of fingers that a person was to cross themselves with and also changed the pronunciation in Russian of the name Jesus. Well, a conservative sect within the Russian Orthodox Church believed this was a clear mark of Anti-Christ and in Russian villages all over the country, these so-called old believers locked themselves in Russian Orthodox Churches and set them on fire preferring to die in the cleansing flames of church fire rather than submit to anti-Christ.

In London in 1666 thousands of residents were convinced that the end of the world had come because the plague struck London and in addition the city was hit by an enormous fire. Unfortunately, some Christians hindered the rescue efforts of the local citizens believing that the fire was a judgment from God and to try to put it out was a work against God.

Now my reading about the various millennial movements that have taken place really throughout Christian history tells me that there are 6-7 common elements and that when you see these elements you ought to proceed with great caution. First, there has been a recurring theme that history is working in a 6000-year pattern, which many people believe that the world was created 6000 years before the particular date for the return of the Lord. Sometimes they will break up history as 2000 years from creation to Abraham; 2000 years from Abraham to Christ; and 2000 years until the return of the Lord. But you will see the 6000-year time frame mentioned over and over again in the millennial movements. So depending on what date they pick to start, it always ends up that the final year is the 6000th year and then we are going to enter the Sabbath Year, the millennial kingdom. You see that over and over again.

The second recurring theme in millennial movements is the theme of Jubilee. That somehow they have calculated that this year, next year, 5 years from now is the Jubilee Year and it may be the 69th Jubilee Year mentioned in Daniel or the 100th Jubilee Year from the Exodus. Just last year I remember folks running around saying, "O, did you realize that this is the Jubilee year and that all these events are going to take place?" None of them did. But that didn't prevent people from putting out videos and marketing material to Christians.

A third recurring theme in the millennial movements is a key on certain dates like the turn of centuries or the turn of the millennium. Well there was a millennial madness at Y1K – the turn of the first millennium. Thousands of believers gathered at St. Peter's Basilica waiting for the end of the world. And Christian knights and kings all gathered in different fields believing the Lord was going to come. Certain dates – one's containing 666 have been significant – 1666; 1500; the year 2000.

Then the fourth element that is a repeated attempt to name someone, usually one's enemy, as anti-Christ. Some candidates seem more likely than others like Adolph Hitler or Mao Tse Tung. But among the various people that have been called the anti-Christ have been such folks as John Kennedy, who suffered a head wound and was supposedly being kept alive on a Greek island where he was going to then return from. It made sense to some people because he was a Catholic. Various presidents at different times have been called anti-Christ including Ronald Reagan and George Bush.

I just received a manuscript from someone who asked me to endorse their book and they named Bill Clinton as the anti-Christ in their book. And this was a serious attempt to interpret the book of Revelations. Throughout history various Popes have been called the anti-Christ, different kings, etc. So the fourth element is this regular naming of someone as the anti-Christ.

The fifth is what my dear friend, Steve Robbins, calls "slide rule prophecy." You look at current events and run the slide rule of scripture against the current events and say, "Look, there is the fourth bowl of wrath and over there is the second trumpet; and over here is the breaking of the fifth seal." All of these are images from the book of Revelations.

The sixth element is the prevalence of predicted prophecy. Someone claims to have a prophetic gift, someone that has searched the scriptures out, says that the Lord has spoken to them and that a disaster is going to occur in 3-5 years. They set a date. And this is not just a recent phenomena. This has gone on through church history. In 1524 these prophets predicted that London would be destroyed by the flooding of the river Thames. Thousands and thousands of Londoners fled from the city for weeks waiting for this flood of the river and it didn't happen. This has been a common element.

And the seventh element is that throughout the history of the church people have frankly recognized that their particular country, their particular age was an evil age and it deserved to be judged. So that if you look at America today with its sexual immorality and its financial and political corruption and its millions of abortions and its drug abuse and its serial divorces, and its mass proliferation of pornography and on and on and on, you say, "Well, if anyone is a likely candidate for judgment, it's us."

You say, "Rich, given the history of predictions that have so far batted .000, given widely varying interpretations of key biblical texts by sincere Christians, why is it that people don't approach these things with great humility? How do people still get a following? Why does anyone listen? I mean a little walk through history ought to provide us with some caution. How do these people get away with it? What do they tell their followers when their prophecies don't come about? Why don't folks haul these guys out and stone them or say, 'Hey, next time just shut-up. We are tired of the hype. We are tired of the lunacy. The next time you are thinking of producing another book, pamphlet, tract or video in which you predict the end of the world or you name someone to be the anti-Christ, or you say you are certain that the end is just around the corner, put a sock in it.' How do folks get away with it given Christian history in which all these people have batted .000? What do they tell their followers when the prophecy doesn't take place? When the prediction doesn't happen?"

Well, just as there are common elements that run through these millennial movements, there are common ways to explain the obvious non-fulfillment of a prophecy. One of the ways is that people say that the prophecy was fulfilled spiritually, not physically.

So for example when William Miller said that the Lord was going to return to cleanse the Temple in 1844, some of his followers said that the Lord did return, but he returned to his heavenly Temple to spiritually cleanse it. And this interpretation of the cleansing of the spiritual Temple in 1844 gave rise to a movement called "The Seventh Day Adventist" movement.

Sometimes people will say that the prophecy was physically fulfilled but it was fulfilled in a different way than what was prophesied. For example the asteroid did hit the earth, but it hit it in a different way and it was called Mt. Vesuvius and all the stuff that was spewed out into the sky was the sign in the sky.

Sometimes people say that the Lord was planning to return, but because people prayed and repented the Lord relented and decided to withhold his judgment. Certainly, we see that there is some give and take in God's judgments in, for example, the book of Jonah. But that is a way around the non-fulfillment of prophecy.

Sometimes people say that they miscalculated. They forgot that the biblical calendar is a lunar calendar and not a solar one. Or they forgot to take into account Leap Years or on further study the date of a particular decree wasn't 457, it was 453 or 459. And so they reset the dates.

Sometimes the people use what I call "weasel words". They will say something like, "I am not saying that George Bush or Bill Clinton or Al Gore is necessarily the anti-Christ, but anyone who has eyes to see can tell that George

Bush or Ronald Reagan or Bill Clinton has all the characteristics of the biblical anti-Christ and it would shock me if, indeed, the rapture doesn't take place in the year 2000." And then when it doesn't, the person says, "I told you that I wasn't saying that such and such a person was the anti-Christ."

What does all of this mean, friends? All of this from Christian history ought to communicate to the church that we need to be very conservative, extremely cautious in our pronouncements regarding the correlation between certain events and what we read in the scriptures. That the wisest approach is the approach of profound humility and the church ought to hold prophetic people and hold leaders and the sellers of books and videos accountable by simply refusing to listen any longer when a person has predicted once, twice, three times various judgments that do not take place or various kinds of movements that do not occur. The church should rise up as one man and say, "We will no longer listen to you since you have not taken responsibility by repenting of error, acknowledging that you were wrong, but instead used one of the classic dodges – it was fulfilled spiritually, it was fulfilled physically in a different way. The church should simply stop listening and give itself to the main and plain things in the Bible.

The main and plain – the Lord is returning. We need to pursue holy lives. The main and plain – we need to love each other. The main and plain – we need to give ourselves to feeding the poor and praying for the sick, preaching the gospel, sending out missionaries. The main and plain – we need to raise godly children. Help those who are hurting. Strengthen weak marriages. And as far as the rest of it goes, we proceed with caution.

Now that is one of the elements that plays into what I think is going to be an increasing fervor, an increasingly unsettled element in the Christian community and in society as a whole. The second element is, of course, Y2K. What is Y2K?

Well, in the 1950's and 60's, for those of you who are not familiar with this – although I think by now virtually everyone in America has heard something about Y2K. In the 1950's and 60's when the computer world was young and computer memory storage was expensive, programmers developed a convention for marking the passage of time. It is the same convention that many people use today for dating their checks. They use two digits for the day, two for the month and two for the year. And dropping 19 from the year was convenient because it saved 2 bytes of precious RAM every time it was used.

Now everyone knew back then what would happen if this little shortcut was still in use in the year 2000. The two digits would roll over like the speedometer on an old Chevy and the computer would think that it was a hundred years in the past. Programmers knew it. They spoke to their managers, but everyone said, "Don't worry. When the millennium rolls around all of this will be ancient history." But the code stuck and it became wired right into the heart of Koba, which is the

common business language that still serves as the digital workhorse of commerce and industry. And this way of setting dates also crept into embedded microchips found in everything from VCRs to power plants. And because many processes are date sensitive, computers might become baffled when they hit 01-01 – January 1, 00 believing that the date is actually January 1, 1900 and so the computer simply could crash or spew out matters of meaningless data. Or give erroneous calculations.

You say, “Well, what’s the problem?”

Well, computers affect just about every aspect of American life. For example, if our power grid system, the electrical system and water purification systems that deliver water to your home and to your office and to the church – all of the power plants and water purification systems are computerized, if the computers shut down these plants could shut down. That would mean no power or no water supplies. We could have a problem with telecommunications. If the computers that run the phone system shut down, then you get no dial tone in your phones and no ability to communicate by phone or by using the phone system.

Transportation could be affected. Many people think about airline transportation and the computers on board planes, but the entire railway system in America is computerized and so if the computers go down the switching devices that are used to run the rails and control where cars go would also be shut down. If the railroads stop rolling, then the coal that is needed to fire the coal burning power plants would not be delivered and all of this stuff is interrelated.

I mentioned before the embedded chip problem. There are embedded chips in everything from super tankers to elevators to the machines that determine how much radiation a cancer patient is going to get. These chips literally have computer codes burned into them. So in systems where dates are critical, these embedded chips could create chaos or shut a machine off or deliver too much radiation. So the oil could stop flowing in a pipeline where the chip is embedded in a pipeline or a super tanker coming from the Middle East that brings the oil we need might have embedded chips which could also create problems for the shipment of oil.

And of course, the financial system is entirely dependent upon computers. So if you have a problem with the running of the computers you could have a major problem where checks won’t clear, or electronic transfers of money won’t happen. Or where you can’t use your credit card because the machines don’t recognize them or say that the cards have been cancelled 98 years ago.

Regarding government services, as the government has looked at various agencies many of the agencies have not spent sufficient amounts of time scrubbing their lines of code. We are talking about literally billions and billions of

lines of code that have to be changed from the 2-digit system to a 4-digit system. There aren't enough programmers to scrub all the lines of code, so what do we have?

Millennial predictions on the one hand and genuine technological problems as a result of the way computers have been programmed on the other. And all of this converging on January 1, 2000 when millions of people are going to be dancing in the streets in Times Square and in London, England and celebrations are planned in Hong Kong and the Hotel rooms have been booked for Tahiti and Bora Bora. And then you open your Bible and what does it say to you? Matthew 6:25, "Therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or about your body and what you will wear."

The other day, literally, I was sitting there with my open Bible on my left hand side reading through Matthew 6 – Do not worry. Do not worry. Do not worry. And then I was reading article after article about Y2K and all of the Millennial Madness. My anxiety was rising and rising with every article and then I would look back to this text, "Do not worry." It was, to say the least, a very challenging morning for me emotionally.

Well, this morning in continuing this series on Christ Confronts the Culture, I am going to talk about Christ Confronts Y2K. Let's pray.

Now, I don't think there is anything more crucial for us to keep in mind when we read these words "Do not worry, do not worry, do not worry" than to remind ourselves about who it is that said these things to us, especially as some would say that there is a very real prospect of a significant economic setback, or the clashing of various systems at the beginning of the year 2000. It is so important for us to remind ourselves who it is that tells us not to worry because this is not the counsel of a guy who sang that song a few years back, "Don't worry, be happy." The one who spoke these words to us, "don't worry" lived anything but a carefree life. When Jesus spoke these words it wasn't as if he looked into his own future and saw bright days ahead. When Jesus talked about not worrying, he was already facing lots of opposition from the religious community. He told us not to worry as he, himself, stood in the shadow of the cross. Jesus knew that in his future, that the tomorrow he said was going to bring worries of its own – his tomorrow contained in it darkness, beating, rejection, betrayal, torture and hanging on a cross. The most important thing for us to remember as we look at this text and reflect on its relevance for January 1, 2000 is remember who it is that spoke these words to us. These are not the words of a super wealthy person who sits on an island with a well and gas supplies and a fence around his estate armed with guards – plenty of food and water – saying to us as he sits in his Jacuzzi, "don't worry, everything is going to turn out alright."

These words "don't worry" were spoken to us by a person who looked into the future and could see the darkness coming, who was entirely vulnerable to being

hurt and wounded. When we remember that it was Jesus who said these words, we come to an understanding that worry is not the product of our outward circumstances or what might or might not happen in the future. Worry is a condition that comes from inside of us. It comes from inside the heart and we bring this condition to our circumstances whatever they might be.

You might not be able to do a great deal about the timing of the return of the Lord or the fixing of every computer in America. But we can do something about our worry. Jesus believes that worry and anxiety are entirely subject to your control. And I want you to see his teaching method. Three times he said, “therefore, I tell you do not worry [v. 25] about your life, what you will eat or drink...[and then in v. 31]...do not worry saying, ‘what shall we eat or drink’...[and then in v. 34 he says]...in case you didn’t hear me the first time, do not worry about tomorrow.”

Let me put it slightly different. Many of us think that the only way we can be free from worry is that if the future is trouble free. Sure, I can be free from worry, if as I look at the future everything is going to click along for me financially and the economy is going to stay in great shape and we will all have our jobs and keep making money. And if all the services that we need and all of the comforts that we are used to will still be provided. So when I listen to your message, Rich, and I hear you say “don’t worry” are you saying that Y2K will be just a bump in the road and to forget about it?

I am not saying anything of the kind. What I am saying is that the absence of worry does not mean an absence of problems. Jesus doesn’t say to us, “Don’t worry, all of your future circumstances will absolutely turn out to be pleasant.”

Brothers and sisters, if life was meant to be trouble free, why do you think Jesus talks to us so much about worry? People don’t worry if they experience no pressure, no stress, no testing. Worry is the result of experiencing the press of life. And life is full of trouble. That is why Jesus says in v. 34, “Don’t worry about tomorrow because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Do not worry. Do not worry. Do not worry as you read the websites and the morning paper. Do not worry.

Why is he repeating himself? Jesus is a master teacher and I think of those of you who have to communicate in some setting with children – maybe at school or perhaps you communicate at work and do a presentation. You are involved in speaking at a church. Jesus is telling us that we need to repeat ourselves over and over again because people do not get the message right away. I am continually amazed at how often I get done speaking about a subject and have someone come up to me and raise exactly the point I spent on my message.

They say, "Well, I just don't understand X." I just spent the last 20 minutes covering it. But we are all like that. I am like that.

And repetition is particularly important when we are dealing with the issue of worry. Worry comes to us as a power that grips our minds. It is almost like a vise grip. If you have every spoken to someone who is in the grip and power of worry, what you find as you talk with them is that they seem to be unable to hear the truth. You say, "Do you have enough food now?" And their answer is "yes, but I don't know if I will have enough for tomorrow."

Do you have enough money now?

Yes, but I don't know if I will have enough tomorrow.

And no matter what you say, there is this "yes, but" response because worry confuses the mind. Do you know that the Greek word for worry or anxiety literally is to have a divided mind? It speaks to us of a person who is distracted and only paying attention to what you are saying with part of their minds, but there is this distraction going on. It is like you are talking with someone, but their baby is in back crying and they are distracted. It is like trying to communicate with someone, but they have one eye on the TV or they are listening to the radio. They are not able to hear unless you say it over and over again.

So we pray to God because we are not atheists. And we say to God, "God, give me this day my daily bread" but then the other half of us is saying, "but I have to plot and plan and get stressed out about where my daily bread is coming from." So Jesus says, "Friend, your mind is divided. You are distracted." He really understands how we are wired and what our emotions are like.

Now, I believe that Jesus offers us very practical help in dealing with our overburdened hearts. He doesn't simply say to us, "Don't worry. Sure you will face trouble, but just don't think about it." The Lord is so kind that he offers us practical means, ways for us to fulfill his commands. Let me share with you one of the chief means that God has given to us to deal with our worry over the future. It is called the Church.

Anxiety grows when we are alone, isolated. When we think that we have to face the future all by ourselves. But the Lord, in his grace, has given us a church family so that we can walk together into the future, whatever it holds.

Let me put some meat on what that means. We have formed here in the church a committee that will stand as a clearinghouse of information and recommendations to all of you regarding getting ready for what could potentially come our way as a result of Y2K and various computer problems. On the committee there are folks who are responsible for Y2K compliance in different organizations around the city. So we have someone who is responsible for Y2K

compliance at a multi-national corporation. We have someone who is responsible for Y2K compliance at a utility. We have someone who is responsible for Y2K compliance in county government, in state government, and in banking and finance. We have consultants who are working both at the private and government sector and both in the military and civilian sectors. We think we have put together an excellent committee of folks who are quite aware of all of the various problems and issues. They have been given this charge: we want to put out for you a regular newsletter that will provide you with the following information on a continuing basis over the course of the next year:

- 1) We want to give you Y2K updates from a reasonable source because truly the voices out there are getting more and more hysterical. So we want to provide you and your family and friends with information from a reasonable source on Y2K – various updates and current news that you can trust.
- 2) We want to provide you with individual and family recommendations concerning the kinds of preparations that the committee thinks are warranted.
- 3) We want to communicate ways that we, as a church community, can minister to each other and to the larger world.
- 4)

Listen; let's not make Y2K another exercise in selfishness and self-indulgence. God has given us the Christian church. Listen to what early church did. I want you to read this text with me in Acts 4:32-33.

“All the believers who were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and much grace was upon them all.”

V. 34 is key. There were no needy persons among them. That's what I want to have said as our legacy regarding Y2K. Not only that we would mind our own individual families and homes, but also that there would be no needy person among us. That's going to be our slogan. What an opportunity for us to practice the kind of Christian community that many of us have longed for. What an opportunity to minister to those in need.

Want to write two things down on your refrigerator?

- 1) Do not worry.
- 2) No needy person among us.
- 3)

Our commitment to each other must include our willingness to sell stuff, to give stuff away. And I will tell you this as your pastor, I will make a personal commitment to you and invite you to make a personal commitment to each other over the course of the year that if we need to sell stuff that we own, if we need to

sell cars, if we need to sell things – we will do it so that there are no needy persons among us. I see Y2K as a marvelous opportunity, friends.

And, obviously, I don't know if it is a bump in the road, or something more serious. But if it is more serious than just a little blip on the radar screen, I will tell you I am not going to be one who is running around with my head cut off, nor am I going to be one who is just protecting my stuff with ammo and guns, building a bunker out in my backyard. If someone, as a result of Y2K, is hungry or cold, or needs help with heat, then me and my family are going to share.

And so we are going to put this committee together to give you sound, wholesome, good, reliable Y2K updated news, to provide you with individual recommendations for your own individual preparedness and so that you might have something to share with another. And to make recommendations regarding the way that we, as believers in this church, can practice community better and use this as an opportunity to reach our neighbors and friends for Christ.

I know there are quite a number of you who have ideas and thoughts and you have been tracking some of the websites and some of your thoughts are good and some not so good. In either case, there will be an opportunity for you to send your thoughts to the committee. Our first newsletter will probably be coming out in the next month. **DON'T SEND YOUR Y2K INFORMATION TO ME.** It will just get lost. That is why we are having a committee of experts and they will be able to review and digest what you want to send. In the newsletter there will be a place to send your stuff.

How do we deal with worry about Y2K? Practice Christian community.

How do we deal with worry about Y2K? Increase your little faith. Jesus says in v. 30, "If that is how God clothes the grass of the field which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more cloth you, O you of little faith?"

That phrase "you of little faith" is actually one Greek word – Oligopistoi – it literally means "little faith". Jesus is saying, "Will he not feed and clothe you, little faith." Will God not feed and clothe you, faith midgets. Jesus ten times to his followers calls them "faith midgets". We might combine those and call fidgets or faith dwarfs. Faith munchkins. He is saying to us that the reason why we are constantly in the church worked up into a lather about predicted coming events is because we are faith munchkins.

You say, "Rich, how do I stop being a faith munchkin? How do I stop being a faith midget?"

Faith munchkins are people who compartmentalize their faith. They squeeze their faith into only one area of their lives, maybe the area of salvation. Faith

midgets say, “Well, I have enough faith to believe that Jesus’ death on the cross is enough to pay for my sins and to earn for me the right to go to heaven, but I never really stretch my faith, I never really apply my faith to other areas of life like my finances, the future, healing for my family or provision for my family.”

If you have enough faith to believe that God can save you from your worst problem, sin, then surely you can have enough faith to believe that God can save you from a computer problem, a programming error. If you are saying that God will meet you with open arms in eternity despite all the ways you messed up in this life, why do you think God’s arms aren’t open to you right now? That you can run to him with every problem. The Bible continually says to you, “Cast all your cares on him, for he cares for you.”

Do you know the problem with faith munchkins? We don’t think deeply enough about God. Who is this father who takes care of the birds of the air? Who is this God who clothes the grass of the field that is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire?

Do you want to increase your faith? Take some time to think deeply about God. Is God really in control of the future? If Y2K turns out to be a very big deal, then he has given us a golden opportunity to reach out in love to people who have needs, to practice Christian community, to learn how to depend on him so that our prayers for daily bread will be real and fervent.

Faith munchkin, what do you think about God your Father? Is he a good provider? Is he faithful? Is he reliable? Can we trust him?

Faith munchkin, do you understand what Jesus is saying here when he tells us that we are more valuable than the birds that God our Father feeds? If you are struggling, take out a sheet of paper and begin to write down verses from the Bible that tell you about God’s love and care and how it is that your Father thinks of you. How precious you are in his sight. How precious your children are in God’s sight. And how precious your grandchildren are. How passionate he is. To build in your trust and dependence:

- #1 - Practice Christian community.
- #2 – Increase your little faith.
- #3 – Live for today.

Jesus says in v. 34, “Do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

This is a very simple cure for worry – just think about the issues you need for today. Live for today. Jesus is saying a day’s own trouble is sufficient for the day. You see, there are two very different ways to think and to live. We are always going to face troubles. There isn’t a trouble free zone in life where we

say no pressure. You have entered the problem-free zone. All of life has stress to it. There are two very different ways to deal with stress and pressure. The first way is to add up the total of every bad that has ever happened to you or to someone you love in the past or someone you have heard about and combine it with everything bad that might happen to you or someone you love in the future. You take the sum of that – everything bad that has ever happened to you in the past, everything bad you have ever heard about, and everything bad that might happen as a result of Y2K and add all of those worries and all of that hurt together and put it in a huge sack and carry it on your shoulders right now. Throw into the sack past hurts and disappointments, times we prayed and didn't get an immediate answer, and we throw in future potential problems – problems with heat, food supplies, computers, potential lay-offs and business closures. Add all that together and carry these two huge sacks of past problems and future concerns on our shoulders.

Or we follow Jesus' counsel, "Carry today's problems on your shoulders alone."

Which will be the lighter load? Carrying today's problems or everything that happened in the past and everything that could occur in the future? Jesus is saying today's troubles are enough. Today's troubles are heavy enough. Live in today.

Now, don't misunderstand. God is not against reasonable planning. God is not against reasonable forethought. But he is against anxious thought about tomorrow.

You say, "Rich, what is reasonable planning and reasonable forethought regarding Y2K?"

Well, as I said, we are going to provide you with recommendations for reasonable preparation and reasonable forethought. But reasonable planning and forethought does not include anxious hoarding and we will strongly recommend that you not do anything that you won't want to live with if Y2K turns out to not be very serious. But instead turns out to be a speed bump. In other words, unless you want to live in the country far from fellowship and far from your job, unless you want to make a major move and live with the consequences of all of that don't sell your house or your stuff and move out of town. Reasonable provision means that you don't stress yourself out financially buying a bunch of survival gear. It means that you don't store up weapons or ammo and build a bunker in your backyard.

Reasonable planning and provision may include providing some alternative heat source in case there is a utility problem – having some kerosene heaters, maybe some wood or a wood stove. Reasonable provision might include having some alternative light source – hurricane lamps, battery-powered lights.

Reasonable provision might include some food storage and water storage. All the stuff you can use anyway whatever occurs with Y2K.

But if you are not able to be at peace today because you are anxiously thinking about tomorrow, you have gone beyond reasonable provision. And if you are putting your family's present joy in jeopardy, then you are also violating Jesus' command to let the day's own worry be sufficient for today.

Cure #4 – Remind yourself repeatedly of the promises of God and cling to them. Throughout the Bible, God our Father makes us a promise over and over again to meet our needs. You can take that to the bank – if they are still open. God your Father over and over again promises to meet your needs. In v. 31 Jesus says, "Don't worry, saying what shall we eat or drink or what shall we wear? The pagans run after these things, but your heavenly Father knows you need them. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given you as well." I promise, the Father is saying, that I will meet your needs.

And in case we miss that, God repeats the promise in Philippians 4:19, where he says, "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

And since we need repetition and we don't get it, God repeats himself again in 2 Cor. 9:8 where he says, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things and at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

God has made several solemn promises to meet the needs of his children. Worry, anxiety about Y2K says, "God, you are a liar. Despite the fact that you stand in front of me and swear to me that you will provide for me, I don't believe you. I can't believe you. I think you are untrustworthy."

That's the essence of worry and we need to repent of that. We need to say, "Lord, I am so sorry for calling your integrity into question. I am so sorry that I have not believed your Word. I choose to believe it and I embrace your promise that you will meet all my needs."

Now, we need to quickly say what is not promised. God doesn't promise to meet all of our wants, except as our wants are converted into his wants and delight. God doesn't promise that we will be able to keep charging up our credit cards, that we will continue to be able to drive 7000-pound cars and have \$5000 BBQs. God doesn't promise that.

But he makes us a solemn promise to meet our basic needs for food and clothing, for shelter.

Jesus also doesn't promise to meet our needs apart from our activity. This is important. Some people think that the Lord says, "Consider the birds of the air, consider the flowers" that God is saying that you can sit back and not study and God will give you an A on your final exam, just trust him and you will get an A. If you are unemployed, relax and wait by the phone, someone will call you. We have heard about you and that you are unemployed and we are calling to offer you a job. I know you haven't applied or been out on the street putting out resumes and filling out applications, but we are just coming to you.

God doesn't promise to meet our need apart from our activity. If you look at the birds, consider the fact that birds are very busy. You don't ever see a lazy bird. You don't see that many fat birds. They work all day long in finding their food. As Martin Luther, the Reformer, said, "Birds of the air just don't sit around with their mouths open waiting for a worm to drop in."

And so our committee is going to be making recommendations for families and individuals regarding reasonable preparedness for Y2K. It is important that each of us be active, not frenzied, not frantic, but active.

Last point. The cure for worry about the future, the cure for worry about Y2K, Jesus says is worry about something bigger. Jesus tells you to worry about something bigger and better than Y2K. He says, "The pagans [in v. 32] run after all these things." The survivalists, the militia groups, the New Age people, the people who don't know God are running out to the country and are heading for the hills. The pagans run after all these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But you, beloved children, seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

The cure for worry about the future and the cure for worry about Y2K is worry about something bigger and better. Worry grips the mind and you can't think about anything else. Jesus understands that and he understands how strong the grip of worry is. Do you know what he says to us? "Well, if that is the way your mind is wired, don't worry about something as silly as Y2K, worry about something bigger. Worry about God's kingdom and God's righteousness."

Say to yourself, "I am going to concern myself as I think about Y2K with using this as an opportunity to spread the kingdom of God on my street, among my neighbors, with my family, and my friends. If the nation gets a little stressed, if Columbus gets a little stressed, then that will be an open door and an opportunity for the spread of the gospel and I am going to worry about how we can best spread the gospel on January 1, 2000." Let that grip you.

Let the spread of righteousness grip you. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Do you want to worry about something? Worry about sin in your life. Worry about sin in your children's lives and seek the spread of

righteousness in your family. That's where you should be concerned. Concern yourself with the spread of righteousness in our community and in our church.

Do you want to get rid of worry about Y2K? Worry about something bigger. Worry about something better. Worry about something more worthy. God has promised to meet all of your needs. The church is here so that there will be no needy people in our midst. God has made you all kinds of precious promises. Don't be a faith munchkin. Think deep thoughts about God. No need to fret as you look forward toward the future. No need to worry. Absorb yourself in God your king and he will take care of the rest.

Let's pray.