

Matthew 6:25-33

25 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

28 'And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin.

29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.

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 clothe you – you of little faith?

31 So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?"

32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Do not worry about your life

Matthew 6:25-33

I. **This is a good topic for Harvest.** The passage we heard from Matthew 6 is a small section of the sermon on the mount, Jesus's most important teaching. The reading starts with the word 'therefore', and the preceding sentence is this: *You cannot serve both God and Money. Either you'll hate the one and love the other, or you'll be devoted to the one and despise the other.* The word used for money is actually 'Mammon' which is thought probably to have been a reference to the Syrian God of Wealth. Whether this is true or not Mammon is still a recognisable idea. There's a distinction between money as a necessity, and wealth, or even the idea of wealth, which too often has control over us. To quote Douglas Hare's commentary on this: 'to God belongs one hour on Sunday. Mammon gets the rest'. Remember that money is a human invention. God didn't give Adam and Eve a tenner and declare that it was good.

Jesus is talking here about how God provides for us. God provided enough of everything. The earth *contained* all we need. Note the past tense *contained*. I'll come back to that. Planet earth is a treasure trove of all types of plants, food and minerals, natural resources which are still being discovered. Look up graphene, for instance, a new material which is one atom thick. And people have been provided with the necessary skills and talents to make progress, in every area from Art to Zoology.

And so it's a logical step from this to say that because God has provided and will provide, we don't need to worry. And Jesus points at birds who thrive without having a plan, and grass which is 'clothed by God'. *So are we not more valuable than these?* But there's a massive disconnect here because people do worry. If there's any hint of something we rely on not being available, and you know what I'm talking about, we panic and think only of ourselves. Jesus would say that worry is pointless.

27 *Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?*

The root of so many of our worries is excess consumption. This is why I said the earth *contained* all we need, because that's no longer the case. According to a study by the World Wildlife Fund, more than a third of Earth's natural resources have been destroyed by humans in just *thirty years*. By 2030, we will need 2 planets to provide the resources for our consumption and absorb our waste. We only have one. God's first commandment was to look after it. And we didn't do too badly until the invention of the combustion engine and modern banking. But the constant economic growth we expect cannot and will not continue indefinitely.

Annette spoke last week about how the love of money causes so much evil. Making money has become an addiction for the rich. We make and sell and consume ever more stuff. And there are now a significant number of *individuals* in the world accumulating obscene amounts of money at the expense of the majority.

1% of the world owns half the money. 50% of the world owns 1% of the money.

This causes many millions of lives to be primarily focused on nothing more than how to survive. I said that the idea of wealth can control us, but at the moment, even in this country, poverty has more control over more people than ever.

The establishment are quite happy to maintain the status quo on all this. Morality doesn't apply, only whether something is "legal". So we're left, most of us here who are actually in the top 10% if not 5%, and who are in fact rich, wondering how we respond to the levels of injustice we've helped to create.

We might think Jesus had it easy in an undeveloped ancient society with much less pressure, but of course that was far from the case under Roman occupation. Palestine was not much different then than it is now, still struggling just to survive.

We now have an entire insurance industry built on our worry about what might happen in the future.

So how is it that Jesus can expect us not to worry?

Well, this is the conclusion to a section where Jesus is teaching about how we must put God first in everything. Store up your treasure in heaven. Not easy if you don't even believe in God. The atheists' bus poster said 'There is probably no God, now stop worrying and enjoy life'. So they half agreed with Jesus! We've turned away from faith. Faith in God at least. There are still plenty of things we do put our faith in.

And so we understand why there's so much available space in our churches, although don't get me wrong, the church is far from blameless, quite the opposite at times. But if the world accepted Jesus' message, and acted accordingly, it would affect our behaviour, particularly towards other people. Love your enemies, forgive those who do you wrong. We do well to listen to Jesus because he is how we know what God is like. The bible makes absolutely no sense without him.

How could God let the world get in such a state? Well, He gave us the resources and the skills and the brains and we misused them. He gave us beauty, energy, mystery and excitement and we made *them* our god. And so Jesus focuses on our response to God, how we should live, the fact that there is nothing we have which is not given by God. So when we look for answers there's surely only one place to find them.

v 31 ...don't worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" 32 Everyone runs after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

The answer to all this is given in the final verse:

33 ...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. In other words put your faith in God as your absolute first priority, and it will follow that all your needs will be provided. Not that we don't need to do anything to provide for ourselves, quite the opposite. The disciples dropped everything to follow Jesus, but this was for a specific purpose.

We have been given the world both to work in and to enjoy, to be fully engaged, not to withdraw from as some Christians have believed, but we need to be aware of what it is that's most important.

To quote Bishop Tom Wright here: 'Put the world first and you'll find it gets moth-eaten in your hands. Put God first, and you'll get the world thrown in'.

We have to believe that God the Father, in his love for us, also created the solution to our broken relationships with Him and with each other. To turn back, follow Jesus, be forgiven, and set free to live life as God intended. This is the gospel, the good news the whole world needs not only to hear, but to act on.

Amen.