

So this year our aim as a church is “Speaking the truth in love we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ” (Eph 4:15). We have been doing things that help us to grow and hopefully through the autumn we will continue. However we know it is not plain sailing and that there are things which prevent our growth as followers of Jesus. Some things cause us to be stunted Christians.

You may remember Jesus’ parable of the sower and the four types of ground that the seed, which is God’s word, fell upon the path where it stood no chance of growing, the shallow soil where it would not last, the good soil where it really took off and was fruitful and the soil where there were weeds and thorn bushes which choked the plants and stopped them from growing. Of this seed Jesus said, “The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature” (Luke 8:14).

Life’s worries can stunt our Christian growth and it is that word worry which is at the heart of this passage we have today from the Sermon on the Mount.

In v25 and again in v34 Jesus clearly says “do not worry”. Our response may well be, easier said than done, but surely we must listen to Jesus. Here is our God who knows all about us, about life, about eternity and he says worry hinders our growth as Christians and prevents us from enjoying the fullness of life Jesus came to bring.

I am not today going to be like the medicine man in the wild west and offer a miracle cure. I am going to ask us to take seriously God’s word and seek to apply it to our own lives so that, at the human level, we might worry less, which surely has got to be a good thing, and spiritually so that we can grow up in Christ which I know has got to be a good thing.

In the first part of our reading Jesus gives us some reasons why we worry and in the second part some antidotes to worry.

1. The reasons why we worry v19-24

a. our ‘treasure’ is in the wrong place v19-21

we have all I’m sure played the game of if your house was on fire and you could rescue just one thing what would you rescue. The emphasis is upon thing and what thing is most valuable to us. Here Jesus talks about storing up treasure on earth and centuries later we have no problem understanding what he means.

Recently Jenson Button and his wife Jessica Michibata’s villa in St Tropez was burgled and among the things stolen was her engagement ring worth £250,000 – we’ve all been there haven’t we. One writer says this: “why have a £250,000 ring in the first place? It’s just asking for trouble. I inherited my mother’s diamond ring, which is titchy and worth peanuts compared to Jessica’s, but I still

wouldn't dare wear it outdoors. What if I lost it? And, around here, the odds are that someone would wrench it from my finger, or simply chop my finger off. I don't even dare have it in the house, in case burglars sniff it out, so it's hidden away in the bank..... My mother used to wear it bravely, but, as she grew older and sicker, the ring became more of a burden, causing nothing but worry." It sums up in part what Jesus is saying here about the worry of having possessions. But he is saying that if our life is focussed on such earthly things then we have got a wrong perspective. He's not saying it is wrong to have things, nice things even expensive things but that ultimately that is not what life is about and ultimately these things are not lasting.

It raises some pertinent questions, what is your 'treasure'? What in life do you count as really important? What do you dream about or perhaps better what do you day dream about?

If our treasure is in the wrong place it will cause us worry rather than help us grow up in Christ.

b. we think about life the wrong way v21-23

Again the metaphor Jesus uses is clear. If our eyes are good we see clearly but if they are not then we struggle as if in the dark. He was not talking about physical sight but inner or insight seeing things with God's eyes.

We have all been to the opticians and been asked, "which line can you read?" The question is true spiritually which line can you read? Can you read the line which encourages us to store up treasure in heaven? Can you see its importance and relevance? If we only see the things around us as important we will worry and we will not grow.

c. we serve the wrong master v24

basically Jesus is saying that if our treasure is earthly then we have made it our master and we are serving the wrong master. God has made us and he has made us for himself but what often happens is we turn from worshipping the creator to worshipping the creation, "They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25). Instead of serving God whose service is perfect freedom, we become slaves to what God has made. As such our loyalty becomes compromised and leads to uncertainty and anxiety.

We need with a good eye to be able to see that all the gifts of this life are given by God as blessings to us but they are not to become our masters.

Here it seems is our problem in that we don't see the world with God's eyes and the things of the world seem so attractive to us. They become our treasures and our masters. They become more to us than they should and as such they choke our spiritual lives. They stunt our growth and they cause us anxiety.

It is in the light of these words that he continues "therefore I tell you do not worry".

2. The antidote to worry v25-34

The antidote is to be found in part in what he has been saying – hence the “therefore”.

So what did Jesus say to help these people live lives that honour God and store up treasure in heaven?

a. see the bigger picture – what Jesus was saying here is there is more to life than..... you insert whatever it is. Have you noticed that when you worry about something it can become all consuming and it can seem as if your whole life and happiness is centred on resolving that one issue and everything seems related to it? Here what Jesus spoke about was the very necessities of life and while many of us may not worry about those necessities we do worry about the practical things of life. To those who worry about their image Jesus reminds them that the body is more important than that clothes we wear. And when Jesus says life is more than or more important than.... he is bringing in the heavenly perspective. There is more to life than what we see and experience here on earth.

b. look at the nature of life – the point that Jesus makes here is that worrying doesn’t actually achieve anything. I remember my Mum had a little plaque which said “remember today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday and it isn’t too bad is it?” Well today may not always be better than our fears but the point Jesus is making is that worry achieves nothing, v27 “who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”

Worry we are seeing can become all consuming and it achieves nothing. However if that was all Jesus said it would not prove much of an antidote to worry. We may know these things but it doesn’t stop us worrying.

What it does seem to show us though is what we are doing when we worry is we are taking our lives out of God’s hands and putting our lives under our own control, only, as we so well know, we often do not have the ability to control the events of our lives. So what is the answer to our problem of anxiety and worry?

c. turn to the God who is able

What Jesus is suggesting here is a change of thinking in terms of firstly looking at the bigger picture and recognising the nature of life. But also in these verses he gives us three other pointers to move us from focussing on ourselves and our own plans, which can produce anxiety to a focus on God which can produce peace as Isaiah reminds us, “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.” (Isa 26:3)

There are here three things to help us with that transfer of focus and its accompanying shift from worry to peace.

i. your heavenly Father knows v32. God knows what we need. He understands us as humans and he knows our needs. A good few years back our son Philip effectively destroyed the engine on his car.

Talking with him later it appears a red light appeared on the dashboard but he didn't know what it was or what it meant, so he carried on. He didn't know he needed to keep the water in the radiator topped up and it ran dry. He had no idea what a car needed to keep going other than petrol. The engine was destroyed.

Friends our God knows what we need to keep going in life. Here the talk is about the basic necessities of food, drink and clothes. God knows what we need.

ii. your heavenly Father gives, v26. Jesus encouraged the disciples to look at the way God provided for the birds and then recognise that they as humans were much more important and therefore could depend upon God's provision. V33b "all these things will be given to you as well."

All we have our very life is given to us by a God who knows what we need. The question is do we trust God to give? The verse from Isaiah which we looked at earlier spoke of peace from steadfast minds which were trusting in God. Often our anxiety can be a sign that we are not trusting God and so a main part of Jesus antidote to worry is to encourage his disciples in their trust of God and their expectation that he will provide for them. That expectant trust is summed up in some key words in this passage.

iii. seek first the Kingdom of God v33. It is when we bring our lives under God's authority as King that we can begin to be free of worry. What Jesus is saying here is that as children of God we should be seeking to align our wishes with his. We should be putting God first in everything.

While I was at a church in the centre of London which had a rapid turnover of people I became aware that people who were preparing to leave the church were uncertain and sometimes anxious about where they should live when they moved. As a result we devised a 'Leavers' course to prepare people either for returning home, which could be anywhere in the world, or to a new situation. As part of that course we looked at this verse and asked what it meant in that moving process. I tried to explain that in practical terms it would mean putting finding a church at the top of the list and then working down from that rather than putting a house or a school first. That was taking this verse on trust that if we seek God's kingdom he will provide the other things he knows we need as well.

Having said all this we may still be saying yes but what practical steps might I take tomorrow that will help me move from worry to trust?

Well I'm not wanting to offer a trite I have all the solutions answer here but what Jesus seems to be saying is that we need a change in our thinking from seeing ourselves and our goals as the centre of our lives to putting God and his kingdom there.

Some of what I will say now has come from this book, 'Living without worry' by Tim Lane.

The key in obeying Jesus command not to worry is prayer. In one sense that is an obvious and perhaps trite thing but if we are going to 'seek first the kingdom' and if we are going to allow God to

be King in our lives and grow in trust it will only be as we pray. We can do it on our own or with others is there is something specific that causes us to worry. This is God's answer to worry, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:6-7)

That is God's promise, bring it to me in prayer recognising that I know your needs and give good gifts and leave it with me.

Is that possible? One of the big things we do worry about is suffering. Jesus faced with the suffering on the cross turned to God in the prayer. There in the garden of Gethsemane he prayed. Lane writes this, "Think how differently we would think if when a loved one suffered we did not worry but resolved to show godly concern; so that we wouldn't lie awake filled with anxiety but instead in dependent prayer that God would bring our loved one to repentance or grow them in grace.

Suffering will happen it is meant to drive you to God not to worry."

What is being suggested here is what Peter called his readers to do, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7)

As Lane points out "worry tempts us to think God does not care or he is not in control. This is not an innocent thought – it is a form of treason".

This is one example of something that causes us worry but what we see is that Jesus is suggesting we turn from ourselves and our agendas to God and his agenda, we see his kingdom.

If we do this then dramatically over night all our worries will disappear – actually no they won't. As we saw earlier in the series when we were thinking about loving our enemies these are huge things involving real change in our lives. Jesus clearly believed it is possible to love our enemies and to live without worry but we have to trust and we have to act before the change comes. That change may come slowly as I suggested a couple of weeks ago like a child learning to write.

Jesus word to his disciples then and to us today if we are his followers is 'do not worry'. We need to take that word seriously if we are to live his life. It will mean having our hearts and eyes right so we seek God's kingdom rather than the things of the world. It will mean learning to trust God in the ordinary things of life rather than trying to sort them out ourselves. But if we do this it can mean peace rather than anxiety.