

## Overcoming Anxiety (5)

Read Matthew 6: 25-34, meditating on v 34 for a few more moments, then pray;

*Heavenly Father, thank you for your care which surrounds me. As I continue to walk through life with you, may your words of promise and hope strengthen my faith and my sense of security in your eternal love and peace, through Jesus Christ my Saviour, Amen.*

We come to our final consideration (at least for now) of how the Christian faces and overcomes anxiety – and we are returning to the teaching of the Master himself, Jesus Christ. Our approach today will focus on the final words from the Lord Jesus on this vital subject. For the third time in the space of a few moments Jesus instructs his disciples **not to worry** (25, 31, 34);

*Therefore, **do not worry** about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:34)*

Jesus tells his followers not to worry about **tomorrow**; instead he wants them to trust in the care, goodness and provision of *their heavenly Father*. (26 & 32) In effect Jesus is saying, “Now that you are my disciples, trust in my Father and your Father for your future, and stop worrying.”

We know that anxiety is fixated with the future or with **tomorrow**. An anxious person is worried about the future; future events, potential future problems and difficulties, future work or unemployment, payment of future bills, managing future healthcare issues and uncertainties. Will I have “enough” for tomorrow? Will I have enough money to pay for food, clothes, rent, repairs to my home, provision for those I love and care about? This is not to say that **today** can’t have any serious concerns or worries, but most anxiety is stirred up within us by thoughts about the future, the tomorrows. You may be just about managing today, but what about tomorrow? What will happen when you are old? What if you fall sick? What if your savings run out? What if your investments fail? If you require proof that our comparatively affluent society is saturated with anxiety and fear, you only have to recall the ridiculous and excessive panic buying that took place earlier this year.

Worry and anxiety are mostly centred around **tomorrow**, but they are actually experienced **today**. The major problem with this is that your “todays” become blighted and spoiled by your anxieties about tomorrow. You never really live in the joy of each day. You never really experience what Jesus refers to as “*abundant life*”. (John 10:10). Jesus wants us to know and enjoy a life with peace in the Father’s love and care. Anxiety can and does choke daily living and serving. (Matthew 13:22) As Charles Spurgeon wrote;

***Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, but only empties today of its strength.***

Anxiety means that you never live effectively or freely each day. Your energy and strength are constantly compromised. The truth is, as Jesus teaches here, anxiety is useless, futile, a waste of time and energy, and it adds nothing to your life – either its quality or its length. *Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?* (v27) In fact, the tragic irony is that anxiety and constant worrying can shorten your life. Anxiety not only impairs your mental wellbeing; it can also have a significant effect of your physical health and potential life span. Stress is a killer. It kills joy and peace, and your ability to fully and freely live, work, give and serve. Anxiety never strengthens you for tomorrow it only weakens you for today.

Jesus Christ offers anxiety free living. He does not however offer you *trouble* free living. **Each day** will have troubles and challenges (v34), but he will provide the grace you need for each day you live and

for every trouble you face. His grace will always be sufficient, and his power will be made perfect in and through your weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:9). The Lord is your Shepherd. God ensures that you lack no good thing. (Psalm 23:1)

So how do we handle the challenge of anxiety? Let me remind you of what we have already learned in the previous 4 sermons on this subject, applying the lessons to today's text. (Matthew 6:34) I will then conclude with Jesus's final argument which centres on nurturing a **one day at a time** approach to living and spirituality.

**Firstly**, as Jesus's followers, we must above all things remember and rejoice in the fact that God is now our *heavenly Father*. (v 26 & 32). Knowing the God who is from everlasting to everlasting as *our Father* makes all the difference because we know this awesome God holds our life and all our future days in His omnipotent hands. He is the God and Father of our today and tomorrow. Just as our Father has provided for our every need in the past, so He will provide for our every need in the future. Therefore, there is no need to be anxious about tomorrow. The God who is behind us also goes before us, and will be with us, to supply us with grace for every trouble and challenge. We are of infinite value to our Father. (v26) All we need do is concentrate on seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness (6:33) and **all the rest** of the things we need we be provided by a faithful, caring and protective Father.

**Secondly**, this kind and faithful heavenly Father, has given us **the gift of prayer**. This is the main resource and tool we have to face and overcome the anxieties of today and tomorrow. As Paul writes so powerfully;

*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 minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)*

As Christians, we can enter the holy and loving divine presence of our Father through his Son, and we can offer to him *every single* concern and anxiety in prayer. All the concerns of the present day, and all the anxieties of the future can be shared with our Father in prayer. We can "cast all our anxieties upon him" - the God who continually cares for us. (1 Peter 5:7). His shoulders are infinitely broad. He will care for us because we are part of the special flock "under his care." (Psalm 100:3) What is more, as we pray openly, honestly and with confidence, trusting in our Father's care, He will generously pour upon us and within us His own guarding peace which transcends all human understanding. This peace is available to us every day, for each day and for each tomorrow. We only have to pray in order to access this supernatural peace and enjoy its fruit.

**Thirdly**, we must remember and give thanks that we have **the Lord of peace himself with us!**

*Now may the Lord of peace himself (Jesus) give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all. (2 Thessalonians 3:16)*

As Christians, we walk *each day and live each day*, in the presence and with the presence of the Lord of peace himself. God who is perfect peace in nature and essence is with us. We live in relationship with Him who is Peace – the God of peace. As such, we need never fear about either today or tomorrow.

**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)**

The Lord Jesus, whose love, power and compassion never change, is with us in every circumstance and situation we find ourselves. All our days are in his faithful hands. Therefore, there is no need to

be anxious about the future. The worrier might protest and assert, “*Jesus was with me yesterday, and he is with me now, but will he be with me if this or that happens in the future?*”. And the answer to that question? Yes, He will! Jesus will be with us until the end of the age; until the moment we die and then beyond death forevermore. We are eternally bound to Christ and his love. There will never be a separation from his love. (Romans 8: 38-39) We have his word of promise. NEVER will I leave you or forsake you. (Hebrews 13:5). Why doubt this word of promise? Why not trust in the fatherly care and provision of God?

Sadly, this is something that so many in our nation do not have. They do not know God as Father, nor as ever-present God of Peace. In that sense, so many are “on their own”, dependent solely on their own strength, ingenuity and resources. Crucially they have no ever-present Divine Help, Hope or Refuge. There is no living knowledge or experience of God as heavenly Father. Our nation, and much of our population has turned its back on God and is now without hope or God. God has left people to their own ways, wisdom and devices. He has withdrawn His unwanted grace. As a consequence, anxiety levels have risen and will continue to do so. Gary Collins writes in his book *Overcoming Anxiety*;

*When man turns from God and becomes his own god increased anxiety becomes inevitable.*

Adam and Eve disobeyed God and then felt acute anxiety and subsequently hid from God. Until men and women return to God – peace is not possible. As the great Augustine wrote; “You made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.” This is because we are made in the *image of God and for God’s pleasure and glory*. Our society has a major problem with anxiety and fear because it has purposefully turned away from the God who is Peace. The more that people rebel against God and dig their heels in – the more their anxiety and alienation will worsen.

Now finally, and very importantly, living without anxiety means living **one day at a time** – and trusting God our Father for the grace and peace needed for that day. Jesus is teaching in this final verse of this section on anxiety, that you must not worry about tomorrow but instead focus on the present day – for that day has enough challenges and concerns of its own. We need to understand the importance of living life in the simplicity of one day portions! We must not be always racing ahead, getting ourselves tangled up in the unpredictable nature of what lies ahead. That’s a recipe for stress and fear.

Now that does not mean that we never *consider* the future, that we never plan, that we never save some money, or that we don’t invest in a sensible pension scheme; but it does mean that we do not become obsessive about the future and how we will manage. Our heavenly Father will provide. Let me just give you an example from my own life and ministry.

As a Church Leader and Pastor, I concentrate on the tasks of the present day, a day which I view as a gift from God. God gives me challenges each day and I seek to faithfully serve Him each day. But I also have one eye on a future vision for the Church – and that is where a good deal of my praying is focused. I pray about today’s challenges and tomorrows potential opportunities. I try not to worry about either, but place all into the hands of the Father who is faithful and will direct and provide for his Church.

That is how we must approach all our days and all our living. It is so important to take one day at a time in the kingdom of God. Every new day is a great and special divine gift. Every day must be embraced and lived to the glory of God. Our attitude must be: *This is the day that the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it.* We must say to ourselves every morning; *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning.* We must enjoy the unique mercies and blessings of each day. God is with us. The following hymn by John Keble is so poignant and relevant and we must live in the light of its sentiments;

*New every morning is the love our wakening and uprising prove;  
Through sleep and darkness safely brought, restored to life and power and thought.*

*New mercies each returning day hover around us **while we pray**;  
New perils past, new sins forgiven, new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.*

*If on our daily course our mind be set to hallow all we find,  
New treasures still, of countless price, God **will provide** for sacrifice.*

*Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be, as more of heaven in each we see;  
Some soft gleam of love and prayer shall dawn on **every cross and care**.*

*The trivial round, the common task will furnish all we ought to ask.  
Lord, help us, **this and every day**, to live more nearly **as we pray**.*

Do you see what Keble is getting at? Living today (each day) prayerfully, gratefully, contentedly and with hope. We must understand that there is an important **daily** aspect to our discipleship. Take the prayer that Jesus taught us for example;

***Give us THIS DAY our DAILY bread.***

We take one day at a time in our journey with Jesus and throughout our earthly pilgrimage. God provides for today as you serve and honour Him today! Remember how God provided for the children of Israel in the wilderness. The manna and the quail were provided daily. (Exodus 16:4) The Israelites had to learn to live in the light of God's daily provision. They were not to be anxiously thinking and questioning, "*Well we have it today, but will God provide it next week and next year?*" They had to learn to trust their heavenly Father for each new day. Can we do that? Can you do that?

God provides for the daily needs of his children. He knows exactly what those needs are. (v 32 and Matthew 6:8) Don't worry about tomorrow insists Jesus. My Father will provide for you as you trust and obey. Understand also that our discipleship, our walk with Jesus under his Lordship is a **daily** challenge;

*If anyone would come after to me, he must deny himself and take up his cross **daily** and follow me.  
(Luke 9:23)*

Discipleship is to be understood and embraced as a daily walk with Jesus. We repent each day. We walk by faith not by sight, and we do so one day at a time. We are called to honour the Lord each day by fulfilling our vows to Him in every way;

*Then will I ever sing praise to your name, and fulfil my vows day after day. (Psalm 61:8)*

Hopefully you can see that approaching each day prayerfully and in the right spirit enables us to place less emphasis on tomorrow and tomorrow's concerns. Offer the current day to God in prayer, and live for God's glory during that twelve hours of daylight. (John 11:9) Again, because prayer is important in combating anxiety, it is important to start the day in prayer, offering thanks for new mercies and praying about the concerns and tasks of that day. Ending the day well is also important – again praying and offering to God all that you have been through during the day, and thanking Him for his faithfulness and grace during the tougher parts of the day. Thank God for His sufficient grace!

*It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love **in the morning** and your faithfulness **at night**. (Psalm 92:1)*

We can see why the Psalmist had this spiritual philosophy and outlook. He prayed as we should;

*Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:12)*

The Psalmist knew that life was short and fleeting and that it contained many troubles and sorrows, and each day and year needed to be viewed with realism and trust in God. (Psalm 90:9-10)

We can either live oppressed by anxiety most days, anxiety about tomorrow, or we can live each day to God's great glory knowing with confidence that God will provide for all our needs for that particular day, and every future day of our lives. Jesus concluded his teaching on anxiety by commanding his disciples not to worry, but to take a day at a time, as he did in his own earthly life and ministry; and to totally entrust their future days to their heavenly Father.

This is the path we must take – living a life of daily trust in *our heavenly Father*. This is especially needed during any time of personal or community crisis. The seriously sick or dying individual has to take one day at a time. Their circumstances demand that approach. During a national crisis like a war or a pandemic, we too must live a day at a time – and seek to live each day to God's glory – not worrying about what may or may not happen further down the line. In war time Britain – people had to live one day at a time. That was the sensible way to approach life with its threats, scarcities, challenges and uncertainties, and our forebears were grateful for their daily rations and provisions.

If we are to truly live life without anxiety, it must be approached in one-day segments and in the comforting knowledge that we dwell under the sheltering care of Jehovah Jireh - God our Provider, and with the ongoing presence of Jehovah Shalom – God our Peace.

Blessing and praise to God our Father – the Father of all compassion and care, and the God of all peace. This God will be with us - and **all our days** are in His faithful hands.

**Amen!**