

Harvest Sermon 25.10.09  
Matthew 6.25-33

ANXIETY is out for Christians!

Easier said than done of course. We live in uncertain times and have all kinds of pressures on us. I remember being very anxious before a minor operation a few years ago (...)

Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus specifically and repeatedly warns his followers against anxiety – especially anxiety about material needs. Why does he give this warning?

1. Anxiety is ILLOGICAL

...for a believer in God. Right through the Bible it is clear that God is the creator and sustainer of life, the provider for all he has made. God's creation is not futile and he can be relied on to nourish and nurture the life he has created. Simple observation of nature, of God's provision for birds or wild flowers (26-30) demonstrates this provision in action. At its best our efforts at gardening/farming and our work in general works *with God* in this provision. Sadly we are often not observant or we imagine that it is our own cleverness which is keeping us on top of nature and healthy, safe, protected. This is an ILLUSION! Any security we make for ourselves is fragile... but this should not make us anxious because God can be trusted.

2. Anxiety is INEFFECTIVE

It doesn't actually work! We all know this and yet we continue proving it with regular 'experiments' in our daily lives (e.g. *ineffective anxiety about weather, interest rates, whether our hair will go grey...*) Anxiety doesn't improve our chances of safety or success – on the contrary it often has a negative effect – making our hair go grey quicker etc.

3. Anxiety is INSULTING to God

Perhaps that is too strong a word? If I say I trust God but then worry continually about how I'm going to afford food or clothes, this is not just illogical and ineffective, it is an INSULT to my Father in Heaven. My anxiety must mean either that I doubt God *wants to* provide for me (denying his love) or that he is *able to* provide (denying his power). Earlier in Mat6 Jesus taught his followers to pray "give us this day our daily bread". If we pray this prayer, as you and I do day by day, week by week, and still remain anxious about this provision, we insult God by doubting him.  
*(a bit like being invited to a friend's dinner party and turning up with a Chinese takeaway meal for yourself!).*

Summary so far

The ANXIOUS lifestyle is not worthy of Christians – Jesus says it is the way of Gentiles (v32) – here meaning people who have no relationship with God. If we have a godless, acquisitive, materialistic lifestyle, we put ourselves at odds with the planet and its maker. As Christians we must guard against this.

Anxiety is wrong – agreed?? But *in practice* it is hard to avoid.

### What's the secret?

A carefree, irresponsible lifestyle which disregards our own and others' needs? Obviously not! Is there an alternative way to motivate ourselves for godly living and responsible stewardship? Have a look at verse 33...

*Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

What does this mean? It means consciously, purposefully offering each day, each decisions, each relationship, each political situation, each lifestyle choice to God and asking "how can I put into practice my gratitude to God, my allegiance to God in this situation?"

It is about putting God's kingdom first and leaving the rest to him.

### Finally

Jesus tells his followers not to be anxious. St Paul backs him up when he writes

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, 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. (Philippians 4.6-7)*

But PLEASE don't go away feeling guilty about the times when you do worry! That would be a vicious circle.

Putting your faith in an invisible and often silent God is not easy, even if you have been a believer for a long time and have seen God at work in your life. But these verses teach that anxiety can be overcome through prayer. As we learn to leave our fears in God's hands through prayer we will experience peace. Not through our own strength but through the reassurance of the Holy Spirit living in us.

I have a relatively stress free life and so really I have no right to tell you to live without anxiety. Many of you have far more pressure and stress than me...  
*But not more than Jesus*, as he took on all the powers of evil at the greatest possible personal cost and ultimately defeated them.

Jesus is our model as well as our Saviour and we need to follow wholeheartedly his pattern of prayerful obedience, of passionate advocacy on behalf of the weakest and poorest members of society, and of joyful, anxiety free, selfless service. What a role model! What a Saviour who graciously includes us, with all our imperfections, in his Kingdom work!