



Seeking First (Matt 6:25-34)

Worry. It's something we all do to a greater or lesser extent. Why do we worry? Usually it has something to do with the fear of the unknown or a fear that something bad may happen.

Mysophobia is fear of "dirt."
Hydrophobia is fear of "water."
Nyctophobia is the fear of "darkness."
Acrophobia is fear of "high places."
Taxophobia is fear of being "buried alive."
Xenophobia is fear of "strangers."
Necrophobia is fear of the "dead."
Claustrophobia is fear of "confined places."
Triskaidekaphobia is fear of the "number 13."

Sometimes its fear because we can see bad consequences possibly ahead of us. And what does it cause: anxiety, stress, paranoia. Let's hear what some doctors have said about this sort of thing.

Dr. Robert Anderson thinks stress is behind 90% of illness. Dr. John Schindler wrote that of 500 admitted to a clinic, 77% suffered emotionally from C.D.T.'s (Cares, Difficulties, Troubles of Life).

Researchers have estimated that we perform a great deal of "unnecessary" worry. Things for which we worry can be broken down as follows:

40% Things which never happen
30% The past which cannot be changed or corrected
12% Needless worry about our health
10% Petty miscellaneous worries
8% Real and legitimate worries

Listen to what Jesus said about worrying:

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 important than food, and the body more important 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 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not

labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor 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, O you of little faith?

It's pretty profound. Worrying can never change anything, but God gives us a different perspective to the most common of modern human conditions: worry and stress - and usually about the routine things of life, let alone real crises.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's the German Christian who was executed by the Nazis said:

Anxiety pushes God out of the picture of life, and is the result of a life that sees bread as a reward, not a gift.

What is this telling us? Worrying comes from the wrong perspective on life. It comes from the notion that you are a victim of this world or your own inability to change your situation. You are helpless - a victim. It comes from the notion that someone other than God is in control of your life - because that's probably true because you have entered life with the wrong perspective. If God can clothe the grass, how much more will He clothe us?

In our lives we have a faith gap. We are quite happy to give mental assent to what Jesus says here. After all it *is* Jesus saying it. We have to accept these words as truth. Yet our lives live something else so often don't they? We live lives of worry, stress, anxiety. Anxiety about our health. Anxiety about money. Anxiety about relationships. Anxiety about the world.

We have a heavenly Father who cares about our anxiety! He knows everything. That's wonderful. How could have we got the wrong perspective? It happens. The world tries to push us into its mould. It's the conventional wisdom of this world to worry. They even have solutions. Increase your credit card spending limit. Take out a loan. Get private health insurance. See a therapist. Watch Trisha on daytime TV. Read your horoscope.

I've said so many times that God's way is always the opposite. We see the problems of life and what does Jesus say?

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

Seek first His kingdom, His righteousness. Seek first. Where should our main priority in life be? To seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. We seek His priorities in our lives.

In the last couple of sermons I have preached on a Sunday morning, I have focused on my desire as a pastor for this church - that you will each have a real hunger and thirst for God and delight in Him. One of the biggest barriers to thirsting for God and not delighting in Him is that we have the wrong perspective.

Have you ever been lost in fog? One of the features of living in the countryside is that when we get fog, it can be thick. If you're out walking, unless you know the land well, one bit of countryside looks like the rest. You're fogged up. You can't see where you are. You could walk round in circles and you wouldn't know.

That's what worry, stress and anxiety about life does to people. They walk in a fog and they look for solutions to get out of it, usually the solutions of the world. What about seeking in the right place? *Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.*

Not thirsty? Not delighting in God? Where's your perspective this morning? Are you in the fog of life? The seek Him. Get your priorities right.

What does it mean to seek His kingdom and His righteousness?

His kingdom

This usually means just that - the extent of where God rules. How far does God rule in my life? How far in yours? How far does God rule in Swaffham in people's lives? In our society? In our land? The truth is: not much. God's desire is to extend that rule in Christ by the power of His Spirit? What about us? Seek first His kingdom. That's God's way. Extending the kingdom is God's business. It's His passion as we have said before and He was prepared to go to a massive cost to redeem lost men and women. Seek first His kingdom.

Does He rule in our lives? Is He king? If He isn't then that may explain all the stress and anxiety in your life.

His Righteousness

Seek first His righteousness. That's an easier idea. We've got to be righteous as He is righteous. Jesus is getting right to the core here of a major issue. Do we seek the righteousness of God. Have a look at the following verses:

2 Cor 5: 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Well known verses. If we are in Christ we are a new creation and have been given a message of reconciliation because God has reconciled Himself to us. That's the work of God's grace. Now Paul talks to these Corinthian Christians in verse 20 and says Be reconciled to God. We are new creations - yes. God has reconciled Himself to us - yes. But we are called to be reconciled to God. Why? The Corinthians had done many things that did not reflect the righteousness of God. By doing these things, they had dishonoured God, yet they were new creations. We are called to be reconciled - *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* We need to become the righteousness of God. So that we can live the life of Christ.

Seek first His righteousness is the same idea. If we think like the pagans, then we are like the Corinthians: acting outside the will of God in doing the things that the world does and fitting into its mould. Jesus is calling us to put the righteousness of God first.

But let's look at this verse again:

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

What's being given as well? All I want? The best result to all my anxieties that I want? No, it's better than that. Let me read from Matthew 6 verse 31:

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. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Your Father knows what you need. Perhaps it isn't what we want, but He knows our needs. It's a different perspective. Seek first His kingdom and righteousness and what we really need to sustain us in life is what we get. It isn't what the world says we should have, but that what leads to true contentment in Him by doing His purposes: His kingdom and His righteousness.

You know, I find this one of the most difficult principles in the Christian life. It turns life on its head. It says that the true way to stop the fears, stresses and anxieties of life is to seek the things of God first. It's the last thing Christians do when life gets on top of them! In my last church, people with life problems never came to church. They took "time out". I don't think they were spending their "time out" in prayer. They were just sitting there worrying? Does that sound familiar?

It should be because it characterises just about all of us. Why seek God when we can worry. We all have worries and stresses and anxieties. What are we seeking for? What are we praying about? The problem is one of head and heart. Our head tells us as Christians that we should seek first the Father's kingdom and righteousness but every fibre of our worldly nature tells us that we should do something else. And we do the something else - we take "time out" of praying to God. We take "time out" of Church. We take "time out" of fellowship. Things that help us seek first His kingdom and His righteousness we don't do. Don't expect a prayer free life to be a stress-free one! If you don't spend time in God's presence than how can you be seeking His kingdom and righteousness. That's why we need to be thirsty for God. Because as we spend time in His presence, we find ourselves seeking first His kingdom and righteousness.

We aren't promised a trouble-free life but seeking first His kingdom and righteousness puts life into its correct perspective so that we don't face problems with fear, worry and anxiety. We have a God who deals with our needs so that we can walk with Him and see the problems of life in their true perspective and deal with them.

One minister saw worry in a different light. When asked whether or not he ever worried, the wise pastor said, "Of course not. Worry is sin. If I' m going to sin, I pick something a lot more fun than worry."

This goes right to the heart of our faith. Where is our priority? To seek first His kingdom and righteousness. As I said in recent services and in the Church meeting, as a church we do a lot. After all we know don't we that if we want to see our church grow we need to do all these events.

But these events are all a waste if we are not seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness. We need to start in the presence of God in our lives and our lives together as a church - and be satisfied in the fact that He gives us what we need.

Let me finish by giving you the last phrase.

34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

What this doesn't mean is that we shouldn't take out insurance and not plan things as a church or something like that. It simply means that the future is in the hands of the heavenly Father, who does only good things in creation so therefore if we seek His kingdom and righteousness. So we can relax and trust Him.

Dr. Peter Marshall, a former chaplain of the United States Senate, once opened the Senate with this prayer:

"Help us do our very best so that we shall not borrow the troubles of tomorrow. Save us from the sin of worrying, lest ulcers be the badge of our lack of faith."

The bottom line here is that we need to oppose every fibre of our flesh be seeking first the Father's kingdom and His righteousness.

Do you have fears, and stresses and anxieties this morning? Do you worry about your future? Have you realised that your priorities have been wrong? Then here are the words of Jesus again for you:

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.

**Said the Robin to the Sparrow:
I should really like to know,
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so.**

**Said the Sparrow to the Robin:
I think that it must be
That they have no heavenly Father
Such as cares for you and me!
Earl Nightingale**

As we come around the Lord's table this morning, let's come before Him in repentance and covenant with Him again to seek His kingdom and righteousness.

Dear Father

As we come around Your table this morning

We come in the knowledge that we have sinned.

We have sinned because we have worried and not committed our worries, fears stresses and anxieties to You

We have sinned because we have sought the world's solutions and not your kingdom and righteousness.

And we know because of the fears, stresses and anxieties those solutions have brought too.

We have sinned because we trusted our judgement instead of listening to your word to seek first your kingdom and righteousness.

We have sinned because we have tried to build your church our way and have not sought your kingdom and righteousness.

Thank you Father that you forgive all those who truly repent.

As we remember the Lord's broken body and shed blood this morning, we thank you that it was done that you could reconcile Yourself to us and that by faith we are Your people and a new creation in You.

As we have confessed our sins to you this morning, may our lives be ones of reconciliation to You as we seek first Your kingdom and righteousness.

In Jesus name

Amen.