

You know folks, I don't think there has ever been a period in my time as a minister where I have met so many people or had phone calls from people who say words like, "I don't know how I am going to make ends meet", or "I have to decide whether to put food on the table or pay for heating". It has humbled me greatly when I know that I am blessed to not have such deep worries. I can remember being in a house a year back not too far from St John's where the woman had to keep only one room in the house heated that her children stayed in. That's why our ministry of compassion is so important. What is it that scripture says, 'Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute'. Please be praying at present for Jill and Frances who are leading our CAP Lifeskills course as they help people with the basic issues of living.

And people today, whether those who are finding times tough at the minute, or whatever the other challenges they face, will naturally worry. We all worry at times.

In fact the UK Mental health stats show that in 2022 over 8 million people experienced issues of anxiety at any time, with the Workplace Health Report for 2022 stating that 58% of employees are experiencing anxiety. But worry is varied - what may lead to worry in one person can look totally different in another.

In relationships we can worry about being loved or being asked out on a date, or losing the person we have loved all our lives.

In careers, we worry about getting that job or whether we are hitting the mark.

In our finances, especially at the minute, will we have enough. What will our pension return be?

In our health, what will we do about that lump that we found, how will we deal with the long wait for treatment?

And in our families, we will just continually worry about our children (or at least I do), and once we stop worrying about our children, then we worry about our elderly parents.

So as Christians how do we equate in our heads a God who tells us not to worry, alongside a God who says he provides everything for us. In this teaching series I want to shine hope and remind all of us of the promises that God will provide so that we don't have to worry.

When I was growing up there was a song written by a guy called Bobby McFerrin which was sung A Cappella by him. It's called Don't worry, be happy. The song is a fun and relaxing one, with lots of reassurance, and yet it has absolutely no substance. Just listen to the words. 'Ain't got no place to lay your head, Somebody came and took your bed. Don't worry, be happy. The landlord say your rent is late, He may have to litigate. Don't worry, be happy'. See what I mean. It's a great philosophy, but hopelessly inadequate. There will be people today who can't pay their rent, and it certainly isn't a case of being happy. The song virtually says: "Live in denial. No matter what, just don't worry and be happy." And the reality is that you can't ignore the issues in front of you and hope they will go away – it's not that simple. So today we are **going to consider the issue of worry, but the assurance of God's provision and then finally seeking after God's Kingdom.**

### **Don't worry**

Verse 22 Jesus says, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes".

This conversation came on the back of someone in the crowd asking Jesus to get involved in a family dispute over money from an inheritance which led into Jesus telling the parable about the

rich fool. It's likely that the crowd around him were mainly farmers and fishermen. No one was super rich, and it was possible that the harvest that year was a poor yield. So therefore any chance to have a bit more money from an inheritance would be greatly welcomed in difficult times.

But it wasn't that Jesus was dismissing or diminishing legitimate need, but he's saying that in order that worry doesn't become a focus, there needed to be a different perspective on things. He's saying that yes food is important but there needs to be a recognition of who provides. Now on one hand many of us can understand this, but what about the person in our town today that literally has no money left to provide for their family. How can they really focus on anything other than that and begin thinking that God will provide? On Friday I received a phone call from the police who were wanting me to help with a situation of need within the community. Now on one hand I could say well God will provide for them, but if I am not God's hands and feet in the community, if we are all are not his hands and feet, then we become ineffective Christians where all we do is gather each week and not actually demonstrate that God promises to provide

And so Jesus goes on in verse 24 to tell his disciples that they are deeply valued by God.

Let's read again "Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!" That statement may not mean very much to us, but to a Jewish crowd who know the Torah they would have been amazed. You see in the book of Leviticus in chapter 11 it named all types of bird that were considered unclean, and one such bird was the raven. The raven was considered an unclean bird in society. Jesus is saying that if God is willing to provide food for what he considers unclean, then have a think about what he is willing to do for us that he loves, who are made in his image. Jesus is saying to his disciples that they are so greatly valued by God, and therefore so are we, to the extent that Jesus would even lay down his life for us. Today I think more than ever people in our community need to know that they are valued by God, that they truly matter, but we have got to show that in how we look after those in need.

The Church of God, that's us, need to be the eyes and ears and hands around our community to see need, and therefore we as a Church need to respond to it. I think all of us today who have reasonably comfortable finances must consider that God has blessed us with that, not for our own good, but so that those that are in need can be blessed, and know God's provision.

Jesus knew that worrying was futile, but you can see that if a person continues to sit in a place of hopelessness where the Church doesn't respond in help, then worry can become overwhelming. Jesus says in verse 25 "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?"

And he's completely right, but it is so natural for us to move to worry. I was with a person on Friday who received difficult medical news. As he sat crying, it would have been totally inappropriate for me to say, 'don't worry', because I know that if I was in his shoes I would be tearing my hair out. For some of you today your worry is very real and so I'm not saying just stop, because it's not that easy. For some of you, your anxiety is so disabling, for some of you your past leaves you with deep worry about your future, and I think God therefore wants to provide hope to all of us. I think this passage teaches us that we are valued deeply by him and he is the comfort to all our worries.

## The assurance of God's provision

So let's go to verse 27 as Jesus gives his disciples a picture of how much God provides  
27 "Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. 28 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith!"

Jesus is telling his followers to look around and see God's provision in the every day things. Have you ever considered the multiplicity of God's provision – just think of a beautiful garden on a summer's day – the flowers, the fragrance, the song of the birds – all of that comes from God. Or how about the way in which God provides to bring alongside you friends who lift you and encourage you in your life. And yet I think unfortunately we have become so used to things around us that we don't see their beauty – we're too busy that we have taken them for granted, or maybe ignore that they are a provision from God. And as Jesus points to these flowers around him, he says that Solomon's splendour can't compete. No other king had the splendour or wisdom of Solomon, and yet these flowers are more beautiful, their genetic makeup is intricate. That's how God dresses flowers that come and go with the seasons, but he promises to look after us and give us more than that.

I suspect with all the challenges that people face these days, we may need to be reminded of just how providing and trustworthy God is. We need to know how much we are valued and loved by him today. And he's being providing to his people throughout history.

What about Adam & Eve - when they were naked and ashamed, God provided them with clothes. Or Abraham, who was willing to even give up the son for whom he longed, and God provided the sacrifice. Joseph was left to die at the bottom of a well, and God provided a rescue plan that would ultimately lead to him providing for a nation so they would not starve. Moses was found floating amidst the reeds when his very life was under threat, and yet God provided a rescue so that Moses could lead his people out of Egypt. In fact Moses wasn't sure how to speak to Pharaoh and God provided help. Moses wasn't sure of how he would cross the sea, and yet God provided a path. And then ultimately when God knew that humanity had fallen short of his will, he provided Jesus to carry the weight and burden of our sin in order that we would be saved from the destruction that we deserve.

And it's not just the bible where we hear of God's provision.

Corrie Ten Boom's family provided a hiding place for almost 800 Jews who were fleeing from the evil Nazi regime. God through them provided a hiding place.

Or what about the way in which God provides people like Mordecai Ham with a gift of preaching and teaching, and in turn would bring a young Billy Graham to give his life in service to God. Or how at a meeting of learned men who would talk about literature that JRR Tolkien would help CS Lewis understand the saving nature of Jesus and bring him into a new relationship with Christ.

Folks, God has provided and continues to provide each and every day. In this very church there will be many stories of how he has provided so don't give up hope. He loves us too deeply to leave us feeling abandoned. He provides in many different ways, and through many people and situations, and his promise in these verses is for us to know that we are valued above everything.

**So consider how we can move our worries into trusting in God's provision around us, and then finally let us become more focused on seeking after his Kingdom.**

Verse 29-31, "And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.

<sup>30</sup> For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.

<sup>31</sup> But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well".

I don't about you, but whenever things are difficult, when things are worrying, when things are getting on top of me, I don't always run first to God. Panic or stress are the things that kick in first and so I often act in what Jesus describes here as the pagan world. It happens to all of us, that we pursue after other things at times, that we run in the opposite direction of God, and then eventually we realise that it's God who can provide all of what we need.

Jesus actually talked about it in another parable, where he hold the story of a young man who thought he knew best so he took his inheritance from his father and headed off on his own. His wealth was spent on anything his heart desired. But the friends he made disappeared as soon as the money did, and he was reduced to menial farm labour. Now he hated every moment of his poverty-stricken life. But he came to his senses, and returned to his father who was overjoyed. The boy re-joined the family, and everything that was good for him to have became his again. His priority was right. His relationship with his father was right. And because of a right priority and a right relationship, he had everything he needed. Jesus' point here is similar. Seek first the king and the things that belong in his kingdom, and he will ensure everything you need day by day will be given to you.

Now that doesn't mean to say that when worries come that they won't still be there. It doesn't mean either that when we ask God to give us the new car that it will be sitting outside for us the following morning. It doesn't mean that if we are full of anxiety that we stop taking medication that has been prescribed for us. But when God provides, he provides for what he knows is good for us. He knows our needs better than we know ourselves. And so when we seek after his kingdom, after the things that truly matter to God, we will receive from him those things that will build us and help us grow for his purposes. Jesus is calling each of us to a higher purpose than becoming so focused on the other things that have us so full of worry. The fact that we worry is a sign that our ambitions are too low. And therefore we end up chasing after the things that are only matter -all these things that belong just to this life, the things that we can't take with us. We think that physical matter really matters. If our view of life is only that and not actually God then we will get stuck in thinking those things really matter. But if there is a higher purpose, if there really is a kingdom to seek after that is much more important , then all those other things matter less, because we have a God who promises to provide for all our needs.

We need to be part of a kingdom that has a new King. Jesus is inviting us into a kingdom that has no anxiety, but a kingdom where the atmosphere is trust, where our future is secure in him, where we know everything is under his control, where we know he will always care for us, where we know his will for us is good and perfect, and we know that in him we are safe.

So today take your concerns, take your priorities to God today, know that he wants you to have life in all fullness with him, he wants you to experience the best life in him. Pray to him, Lord help me to fix my eyes on you, help me to learn the lessons from the birds and flowers and the everyday things around me that as you care for them you care so much more for me, that I am valued by you Lord, I don't need anything else that the world offers, I just need you.