

Text: Matthew 6:24-34

Theme: Answers for An Anxious Heart

Date: August 7, 2022 (Pentecost 9) Pastor Haugly

In the Name of Jesus who knows our anxious hearts, Dear Christian Friends,

The stress of Life

In our world stress so often seems to be a way of life. We are filled with anxiety about so many things. We may be stressed when it comes to financial matters, or when it comes to our own personal health, or when it comes to our relationships with others. We all have our own triggers for stress and anxiety in a sinful world. The people of Jesus's day also had lives plagued with stress and anxiety. The people standing on that mountainside when he delivered the Word of our text, his Sermon on the Mount, were no different than you or me. They had to deal with the problems of feeding their families, maintaining their health, and raising their children just like we do.

Today we have the privilege of listening to Jesus preach to those who were seeking answers for an anxious heart. Jesus also gives us the answers we need for our anxious hearts. Jesus teaches us to remember that 1) we are first with God, so that we remember to 2) make God first with us.

1. Remember that you're first with God

First With God

We ARE first with God. Jesus puts it this way: LOOK AT THE BIRDS OF THE AIR; THEY DO NOT SOW OR REAP OR STORE AWAY IN BARNES, AND YET YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER FEEDS THEM. ARE YOU NOT MUCH MORE VALUEABLE THAN THEY? SEE HOW THE LILLIES OF THE FIELD GROW. THEY DO NOT LABOR OR SPIN. YET I TELL YOU THAT NOT EVEN SOLOMON IN ALL HIS SPLENDOR WAS DRESSED LIKE ONE OF THESE. Jesus is lovingly telling us that if God so wonderfully takes care of those animals and plants, which do not have a soul, how much more will he take care of us, who have been created with a soul so that we can enjoy our lives with our Lord now on earth and later in heaven.

Sometimes we forget

When we let the stress and anxieties of life dominate our thinking, we may be tempted to forget that we are first with God. When the people of his day let worldly concern dominate their thinking, he told them that they were acting just like the pagans. THE PAGANS RUN AFTER ALL THESE THINGS, Jesus said. The pagans are those who don't know Jesus Christ as Savior – unbelievers. What a spiritual jolt it must have been for those listening to Jesus to hear him say that they were acting just like people who didn't believe in him. Would Jesus ever have reason to say the same thing of us when we don't trust him enough to believe that he knows exactly what we need for life in this world, and most importantly, what we need for eternal life in heaven? Sometimes we forget that we are first with God when we make our earthly matters a higher priority than our spiritual matters. How easy it is to put our busy family schedules ahead of being in church to worship our God with our brothers and sisters in the faith. How easy it is to neglect the reading of God's Word as we spend countless hours surfing social media.

Being first in his kingdom

In the words of our text, Jesus wanted his followers and he wants us to always remember that we ARE first with God. When we remember that we are first with God we will follow the encouraging words of our Savior Jesus: SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. The word "seek" means to look for something in order to find it. This word has the idea to find something by thinking about it, meditating on it, asking questions to find answers. Seeking the kingdom of God only comes through the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God. Paul said to the Romans, "Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ." God also tells us, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the power of the Holy Spirit."

There is no greater comfort in all the world than knowing that we are first with God through faith in Jesus Christ his Son. There is nothing that reduces our stress and anxiety in life more than knowing that we are first with God. The living and enduring Word of God echoes in our ears "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." The holy Scriptures allow our eyes of faith to see the bloody Son of God hanging on Calvary's cross and enduring the hell's agony for your sin and mine. The Spirit's power enables us to believe that when our Savior cried out, "It is finished," all payment for sin had been made in full and that nothing more needed to be offered to God to make you and me right in his sight. Jesus' cross, God's promises, and the Spirit's power are the answers to every anxious heart. When you know you're first with God, everything else just falls into place.

When the Lord's faithfulness continues to remind and assure us that we are first with God, great blessings fill our lives. First, God calms our anxious heart and secondly, his grace enables us to make him first in our lives.

2. Remember to make God first with you.

Serve One God

In the words of our text Jesus says: NO ONE CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS. EITHER HE WILL HATE THE ONE AND LOVE THE OTHER, OR HE WILL BE DEVOTED TO THE ONE AND DESPISE THE OTHER. YOU CANNOT SERVE BOTH GOD AND MONEY. The word “money” isn’t the best translation. The Greek word really means “money and everything that money can buy.” Some translations use the word “mammon” in this verse. “Mammon” includes our home and cars. It includes the jewelry we wear and the clothes we buy. It includes our flat screen TV, laptop, iPad, iPhone and all other electronic gadgets. It can even include things that money per se can’t buy like the quest for athletic competition and the accolades that come with victories. When the mammon of the world becomes our focus then God becomes very small.

Know the difference between mammon and God’s blessings

Is Jesus saying it’s wrong to have any of these things? Shouldn’t we put our best effort forward to succeed? Should I feel guilty if my company rewards me for hard work and dedication? Should I feel ashamed or guilty with the house or the neighborhood where I live? Should I not strive to use my God-given abilities on the field or the court or the diamond? If everything we have and all our talents are gifts from God, should I feel guilty and ashamed if God has chosen to bless me in this manner?

Certainly, Jesus isn’t saying that we should feel guilty if God has blessed us with material success. Again, Jesus says NO ONE CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS. EITHER HE WILL HATE THE ONE AND LOVE THE OTHER, OR HE WILL BE DEVOTED TO THE ONE AND DESPISE THE OTHER. YOU CANNOT SERVE BOTH GOD AND MONEY. If we LOVE our material things and we are DEVOTED to maintaining our wealth and property at all costs, and if we SERVE these things, then we have flipped the binoculars around so as to make God small and the things of the world much larger. When this describes our hearts, God has stopped being our God and instead we have made the mammon of our life our false god.

Who are we devoted to? Who do we serve?

So, the honest question before everyone of us is this, “Which end of the binoculars are we looking through?” What is it that we’ve made really big in our life and what have we let become smaller?

Before we answer that question and say to ourselves, “I would never let the ‘mammon’ in my life become more important than my God, listen to what else Jesus says. THEREFORE, I TELL YOU, DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR LIFE, WHAT YOU WILL EAT OR DRINK; OR ABOUT YOUR BODY, WHAT YOU WILL WEAR ...WHO OF YOU BY WORRYING CAN ADD A SINGLE HOUR TO YOUR LIFE ... SO DO NOT WORRY, SAYING, ‘WHAT SHALL WE EAT?’ OR ‘WHAT SHALL WE DRINK?’ OR ‘WHAT SHALL WE WEAR?’

Worry separates us from God

When we started serving the stuff in our lives instead of letting the stuff serve us and our God, then we end up worrying about the things that shouldn’t bother us. Even more tragic than our worrying about the stuff in our life is what that worrying separates us from. It distracts us from the most important thing we need – our God and his Word of promise. In our text, the Greek word for worry means to separate or divide. Sinful worry has a way of separating or dividing our attention from the things that are most important – our spiritual relationship with our heavenly Father and his holy Word. Remember when Jesus was visiting with his dear friends, Mary and Martha. Martha was so busy playing hostess to her house guests that Jesus was prompted to say, “*Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken from her.*” The earthly stuff that Martha was so concerned about became a distraction for her and separated her from the living and comforting words of her Savior.

Conclusion

I wonder how our worrying has at times separated or distracted us from truly focusing on our God and the wonderful promises his continues to offer us. In the words of our text, we hear again one of those promises of Jesus when he says: YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER KNOWS THAT YOU NEED THEM. Our anxious hearts are real. We deal with the stress of life in a sinful world everyday. We cannot escape it this side of heaven. Today, Jesus has given us answers for our anxious hearts. His love and compassion have assured us that we are first with his heavenly Father. That means that he knows what we need for body and life. But more importantly, it means he has prepared a permanent home in heaven for us. It means that the guilt of sin has been removed. And since he first loved us, we are given the grace to make him first with us now in our earthly lives and for an eternity in heaven. Amen.