LIVING FREE OF ANXIETY

1. Introduction

a. We have now come to the final section of Chapter 6. Having outlined the fasted lifestyle Jesus addresses probably one of the greatest hallmarks of a kingdom lifestyle – a life without worry, anxiety or fear.

Matt. 6:25-34 *[25] "Therefore I tell you, do not **be anxious** about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? [26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [27] And which of you by **being anxious** can add a single hour to his span of life?[a] [28] And why are **you anxious** about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [30] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31] Therefore do not **be anxious**, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. [33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

*[34] "Therefore do not **be anxious** about tomorrow, for tomorrow will **be anxious** for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

b. I think it is clear what Jesus is addressing here; **do not be anxious.** This is such a timely word as we live in a world where many are full of anxiety. The sudden change in all our lives due to the pandemic with its consequences of loss of jobs and the impact on global economy is causing much of the world to be anxious. As His Kingdom people we are called to be salt and light and what better way can we be that in this present time than by being those who are not anxious.

c. The greek word used here is *merimnaó* and is usually translated as anxious or worry. It literally means to be pulled apart, divided or distracted. In other words, anxiety distracts us from being focussed on the Lord. It begins to dominate our thoughts, it tears us apart emotionally often leading to mental illness and even physical sickness.

d. In truth, anxiety comes as a consequence of looking at our earthly life from an earthly perspective rather than from a heavenly perspective. Which is why Jesus addresses anxiety by giving us a heavenly perspective and pointing out the folly of worry.

e. Only by choosing heavenly treasure (v. 20), a lifestyle in light (v. 22), and God as our master (v. 24) are we prepared to trust our Father in the way Jesus sets forth (v. 25-34). When we determine that our primary treasure is God's glory and kingdom and not earthly wealth (6:23-24), then we approach securing our daily provision with a different attitude (6:25-34).

f. Our life is eternal and thus there is much more to it than the food which sustains us. A life dominated by worry about food misses the bigger purpose of our life in seeking first God's kingship and righteousness (v. 33). Jesus called us to escape covetousness that is fuelled by the anxiety of not having enough money. Anxiety hinders our progress in walking out the 8 Beatitudes in practical ways.

2. Four reasons to resist anxiety

a. Jesus gave us four reasons to not yield to a mindset of worry: We are more valuable to God than the rest of creation—birds and flowers (v. 26, 30); worry doesn't add any benefit to us (v. 27); God knows all our needs (v. 32); and He gives us sufficient grace to help us for today (v. 34).

b. ***Reason #1:*** We are more valuable to God than the rest of creation—birds and flowers (v. 26-30).

i Jesus reasons from the "lesser to the greater." Thus, worry results from not seeing God's goodness. God's people are more important to Him than the rest of His creation. He gave humans dominion over creation to bring it forth in much fruitfulness (Gen. 1:26-28).

ii ***Food:*** Birds are diligent and industrious in seeking for food. Despite their great efforts, birds are still dependent on God's processes in nature. Since humans have a far greater opportunity to use God's processes in creation, we should not worry.

[26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

iii God's creation provides the food which birds need. However, He does not hand feed them. The truth that our Father feeds the birds does not imply that they did not work to secure their food or that we should not work for our material needs.

iv Birds search for food so how much more should humans who have the skills to sow, reap, and store food have confidence in God's provision. This teaching was not an endorsement for lack of diligence for people or birds.

v ***Clothes:*** The flowers of the field illustrate God's care to provide us with clothing. The term "lilies of the field" included many types of beautiful wild flowers.

*[28] And why are **you anxious** about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [30] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*

vi To "consider" means to learn from. The uncultivated and short-lived wild flowers are so beautiful without being purposely fashioned for it by man's work of toiling and spinning. (To toil meant to cultivate beautiful fields and to spin meant to make beautiful clothing). Yet, our Father adorns them with beauty that surpasses the clothing of wealthy Solomon.

vii These flowers have a very short life span and were then thrown in the oven as fuel for cooking. Their survival is not at issue here since they quickly die. Jesus' point was not the survival of the flowers but their beauty.

viii If God gives extravagant care to perishable flowers, then how much more valuable are we? If God creates with such love and care flowers that die quickly and are burned, then we can be confident that He will provide much more for us.

ix The principle here is that our heavenly Father as the sustainer of a beautiful creation can be trusted to meet the basic needs of His children.

c. ***Reason #2:*** Worry doesn't add any benefit to us (v. 27).

i Worry doesn't enable us to gain more food, to live longer or to accomplish anything at all. In fact, worry is more likely to shorten a person's life than to extend it.

*[27] And which of you by **being anxious** can add a single hour to his span of life?*

ii Our life span, food, and clothing are all gifts of God and are greater than human ability.

d. ***Reason #3:*** God knows all our needs (v. 32, 8). Anxiety is confidence in the wrong things.

*[31] Therefore do not **be anxious**, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.*

i Our confidence is in our Father's knowledge of our needs.

Matt. 6:8 *….for your Father knows what you need before you ask him*

ii The bible constantly encourages us to trust God for our daily needs.

Phil. 4:6-7 *[6] do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Heb. 13:5 *[5] Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

1 Pet. 5:7 *[7] casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*

e. ***Reason #4:*** God gives us sufficient grace to help us for today (v. 34). Jesus points out the futility of having anxiety today about tomorrow's troubles.

*[34] "Therefore do not **be anxious** about tomorrow, for tomorrow will **be anxious** for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

i ***The day:*** God only promises to provide for us on a daily basis—not a yearly basis. We see this principle clearly portrayed in the wilderness as God provided daily manna.

ii ***Trouble:*** Jesus reminded His disciples of the reality of daily "trouble" or more literally of "evil." Jesus wants us to be realistic about pressures. Jesus promised believers a reward for enduring persecutions that will surely come

Matt. 5:10-11 *[10] "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

John 14:1 *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.*

iii God's provision of the necessities of life are promised, but that does not mean that the disciple's life is to be trouble free. Each day will still have its "troubles". However, God has appointed to each day its portion of pleasure and trouble and as our days so shall our strength be. So we don't misappropriate God's allotted troubles for tomorrow. We don't bring them forward into today in the form of anxiety. Believe that God will be God tomorrow.

3. Seek first the kingdom of God

a. Jesus calls us to seek first God's kingship and righteousness (v. 33). This language of wholehearted commitment links back to verses 19-21, 24. In context, He called us to make God our master and treasures in heaven our priority (v. 22, 24).

33 *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

Mt. 6:20–24 *20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also….24 "No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money.*

b. Seeking righteousness first implies obedience to Jesus' commands as seen in the main premise of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:20). Righteousness is the distinctive lifestyle of Jesus' disciples who hunger after it (Mt. 3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1). The gift of righteousness freely gives us a legal position of full acceptance before the Father with the hope we will be moved to such gratitude that we choose righteousness.

c. The influence of Western culture causes people to focus on meeting their own needs above everything else in life. For most people, the prime pursuit of their entire life is to satisfy the natural longings and cravings of their flesh.

d. In Matthew 6, Jesus calls us to a lifestyle which is completely opposite to the desire for immediate gratification. He tells us that we are to give, serve, pray, fast, and forgive without looking for any kind of immediate reward. However, as Kingdom people our focus is on the eternal rewards of the Kingdom and our trust is in our King.

e. The only way that we can live our lives fully for our Father in heaven is by experientially knowing the love that He has for us. When we believe that He is a good Father who loves us and has an inheritance for us, we will live our lives for His pleasure rather than the temporal pleasures of this life. A person who works his whole life focused on what he can get right now has no real belief in an eternal inheritance.

f. Psalm 84:6 states, "*Blessed is the man . . . whose heart is set on pilgrimage."* Setting our hearts on a pilgrimage means having a heart that is given to the lifelong pursuit of encounter with God. When we realize we are simply passing through this world, it will help us not get too attached to earthly things.

g. As our focus becomes fixed on Him and our eternal destiny in Him we will no longer be anxious about the things of this world. We will know we can trust Him with our whole life and that the things of this world are as nothing compared to the great riches of our life to come.

Eph 1:18-19 ***18*** *having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, **19** and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might*

h. I think this quote from John Piper sums it up beautifully.

To seek the kingship of God first in every affair and every moment of life is a thrilling way to live. It's full of freedom and peace and joy and adventure — and hardship, and it's worth it all. If you believe in the kingship of your heavenly Father, you do not need to be anxious about anything.