Calm and Confident in the Lord’s Provisions
"Standing true in a post-truth, post-Christian society" series – principle 7
Matthew 6:25-34

I have always been positively challenged by the stories of either calm or generosity by Christians when they faced really tough situations in history ...

• The early Christian martyrs as they were thrown to the lions. No hope of physical rescue, sure knowledge of painful death, yet they didn’t back down, in fact proclaimed Jesus’ Name to the end.
• Missionaries and evangelists as they go to a people who are totally antagonistic. We talk about a country “being closed to missionaries or the gospel”. But these really dedicated followers of Jesus understand there is NO closed country – because you can always go in – what you can’t do is insure you’ll live, have freedom to leave or be able to freely move around while there.
• Faithful believers who walk through serious illness, cancer or death. Like Job, they may wrestle with their faith in the process, but they don’t turn from their faith in the Lord. And they come out appreciating what they went through because of the positive faith & experiential knowledge of God it developed
• Christians in war torn or famine stricken areas who do not have enough for themselves, and yet they still seek to share some with another in a worse situation.

I don’t know if it was an actual happening or a fictional short story, but an enemy took over a city. They blocked the main part of this city off completely so nothing could go in or out of that area (I think the inner city had an ancient wall around it). Then the enemy withdrew all their troops and allowed the 1500 remaining people to have total freedom inside those walls. But they only allowed provisions (food, water, medicine, vitamins) for 1100 people to go into that now “free area”. They wanted to know if this defeated people would work together or turn on each other when scarcity arose.

That incident has intrigued me for decades. Naturally, we humans often turn to radical self-interest when we are threatened. But what about our Christian faith, would it change our response? If I was in that group in the city, would I be willing to put the needs of others before my personal needs? Would I be able to encourage the group to share equally, even though it wasn’t enough? Could I be strong & calm even though everything was going downhill around me?

PROPOSITION: In a world competing for limited resources, driven by fear, unrest, and scarcity, we will remain calm, confident that our Heavenly Father provides our daily bread.

I. The challenge

We have quite a challenge before us as our society turns further away from eternal truth and Christian values & perspectives. “Calm & confident in Jesus” aren’t usually the first responses that come to mind.
• After hearing statistics on the break-down of the family, the increasing suicide rate or the many areas of abuse & modern day slavery, do you ever wonder if we are witnessing the unraveling of Western civilization?
• After learning we have entered an economic “inverse interest yield curve”, do you wonder if we are headed into a major recession?
• Hearing all the reports of pollution, global warming & scarcity of certain raw materials, do you ever wonder if the environment will sustain us, then our kids and our grandkids after that?
• Seeing all the hatred & conflicts on the news, do you ever wonder if worse clashes will come to our own community?

Actually there are a lot of happenings around us that can super-charge our worry, anxiety and stress levels. How can we be calm & trust God when the future seems so uncertain? And we aren’t just talking about the big movements around us. Maybe you have some pain that won’t go away or you’ve been diagnosed with a serious disease? Maybe you are facing financial difficulties, the loss of a job or countless fights over money? Maybe you wonder if anyone will like you, if the bullying will ever stop, if anyone will want to be with you all your life? Times of discouragement, blah-ness, depression, anger, bitterness or anxiety can just consume & overwhelm us. How can we be calm & trust God when the future seems so uncertain?

A. When the “what ifs” keep us up at night?
One of the challenges we face are the “what ifs” – you know those worries and concerns that keep us up at night. “What if” this happens or what if that happens. Then our minds go through all the problems and pain that could possibly come into our life. And we go on to get overwhelmed and feel these deeply even though things look different the next morning, week or year. We go through unnecessary pain, worry and stress with this anxiety.

B. When the future will almost surely be bad?
A second challenge is when we rightly recognize that the future will almost surely be bad or harder for us? When we are diagnosed with cancer, some disaster hits or some wrong action has caught up to us, we know our future will almost assuredly be tougher with additional pain, suffering or deprivation. Yet, intense worrying for weeks, months and years before the bad actually comes more than doubles the pain, worry and stress if we just went through the problem.

C. When our best efforts fall short?
A third challenge is when we see that our best efforts fall short. We have saved up for some project, we have eaten healthy & done our exercises, we have worked hard at school, we have given up for others, but then something major goes wrong. The project costs skyrocket beyond what we can afford, the doctor’s office confirms cancer, our test or paper grades come back low or our friend won’t talk to us anymore. We gave a lot of positive effort ahead of time so this wouldn’t happen, but our efforts
simply weren’t enough. Now when we put in all that effort ahead of time because of worry or anxiety, then when we come up short, we are doubly discouraged, depressed and numb. What is the use? We become miserable to be around and incapable of taking even a small positive step forward that we don’t also undermine by faulty thinking and a bad attitude.

D. Living by faith, not by sight, focuses on the Provider rather than the provisions. Jesus calls us to live by faith, not by sight. Our focus needs to be on the PROVIDER rather than on the provisions—we know, how much we have? In time, our personal actions show where our focus really is. Are we living by faith—that is our eyes, efforts & trust are centered on our Heavenly Provider or are we simply overwhelmed by the lack of physical provisions? Believers in Jesus Christ don’t have to fear the future or whether we will have enough because we have a heavenly Father who cares for us and is already there in the future, providing what we need. God is ABOVE time, not bound by it in anyway. In uncertain times, our future, as followers of Jesus, is always certain. There is no power on earth, or in the spiritual world around us or in all the Universe that can keep God from bringing us to paradise in heaven. This isn’t because of us—but because Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose bodily from the dead to prove it is all true. We receive this free gift by faith—that is repenting of our sins without excuses, believing Jesus is God incarnate who died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins & rose bodily from the dead, and surrendering to Jesus as our boss.

II. God’s word of encouragement Matthew 6:25-32

Let’s see the challenge and encouragement Jesus gave His followers in Matthew 6:25-32. READ v 25. Whenever there is a “therefore” you should ask, “what is it there for?” In the preceding verses, Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus warned us about the problem of materialism—focusing on accumulating stuff or money OR thinking our lives will be better if we just can get more of that stuff or money. A materialistic focus leads to anxiety regardless of whether one is rich or poor. “Therefore” Jesus says three times, don’t worry—in v 25 (“do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or about your body, what you will wear”); in v 31 (“So do not worry, saying ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’”) and v 34 (“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow”). This is powerful and timely counsel about anxiety! It was needed then, and it is even more needed today because anxiety is a universal disease of our age. And it often brings far worse pain then the situation that is being ‘worried about’! Now just to be clear, Jesus is not advocating carefree irresponsibility. Instead, Jesus is giving us a clear sign so that we can know when our focus is too much on ourselves (what we can do, what we have, what we think will bring us joy or what is happening to us). This type of worry shows we are not focused on God enough—God’s work, God’s resources, God’s grace and God’s plan.

A. As enjoyable as material things are, there is much more to life Matt 6:25

READ v 25. We are NOT to worry about the everyday, material type things like food, drink or clothes. Why? Because life is more than food and our bodies more than how
the clothes hanging on them look! As enjoyable as material things are, if we are constantly trying to get more OR we are discouraged because we have less, we are going to miss out on the more important things of life – both in this life and the life to come. Jesus gives us an accurate test so we can know when things are getting out of balance. Do we treasure God (v 21)? If so, Jesus challenges us, “why then are you so worried about everything? If you treasure God you will trust him.” Again this isn’t contradicting anything the Bible says – we are made to work, we are to wisely save like the ant, we are to provide for our family and help those around us. While after hearing v 19-24, someone could say, “It is fine to release money and things when one has plenty, I don’t even have enough to buy basic food & clothing for my family.” Jesus makes it clear that this type of worry equally applies to those who do not have enough. As enjoyable as material things are, there is so much more to real life (and you know I love my bass boat – that 11 foot piece of plastic with a monster 6 hp engine on it).

B. As hard as we work for material things, God does much more Matt 6:26
READ v 26. As hard as we work for material things, God does so much more in our lives. Now, God has built into His Creation the means by which all living beings are cared for. Take birds – like the chickadees that come to my bird feeder – God is so sovereign that even their feeding is something He is involved with! Now those birds don’t lie around in their nest waiting for God to drop food into their beaks. The birds are out working to find food. But neither are they consumed with worry. God cares for us so much more because He is “our Heavenly Father”. Notice the end of v 26 doesn’t say “their” heavenly Father, but our (human believers in Jesus) heavenly Father. We can trust God!

C. As natural as worry is, it doesn’t add anything to life Matt 6:27
READ v 27. The folly of worry is tackled from another angle. As natural as worry is, it doesn’t add anything to life! Worry about clothing, food, and drink will not add to our quality of life, and it certainly will not lengthen our life span. In fact, anxiety not only hinders our ability to enjoy the things of life—it shortens our time to enjoy them! We all have read many articles on what can help a person live a longer and more active life here on earth – but I doubt any of us have ever seen an article telling us we need more anxiety and worry in our lives. “What you need every day is to wake up first thing in the morning and stress yourself out. It will really help you get through your day. It will add years, possibly decades, to your life.” Worry is unproductive.

D. God’s provisions are far greater than we can do for ourselves Matt 6:28-30
And this kind of worrying actually shows how “little faith” we have in what God can and will do. So worry is also unnecessary. READ v 28-30. What God provides for us is far greater than we can do for ourselves. Now there is a concern we are to have: we are to be concerned to obey God, be diligent in our work, take care & protect one another, stand for the truth and oppose satan, evil & wrong. To not have these desires for the things God has for us to do would be Biblically irresponsible. That is not what
we are talking about here, but even those Biblical concerns can quickly turn into this worry. I can be concerned that another is lonely, but then not contact them or invite them in because I’m worried I won’t have the words to say or they will think I am a messy housekeeper. The concern, or worry, Jesus is talking about here is focused on ourselves – what we have, don’t have, might lose, or have lost. This worry is not only counter-productive, enslaving, and short-sighted, but it also shows a lack of faith & belief in the greatness, love, provision and protection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

E. Our heavenly Father already knows our needs  Matt 6:31-32
(See sermon notes on 03-31-2019 for more on God as our Father)
This worry is based on a misunderstanding of God’s character. God IS actively involved in the lives of His spiritual children – those who follow Jesus! READ v 31-32. God is our heavenly Father who cares about us and knows we need food, drink and clothes. There is a distinctive & counter-cultural way that Christians are to approach life because Jesus is our Savior and our Lord. We want to strive (seek) after the things of God, while others strive (seek) after physical things.

III. When needs, scarcity or turmoil come – a different perspective is needed  Matt 6:33-34

A. Act by serving God now “seek first”
READ v 33-34. So when physical needs, pain, scarcity or turmoil cause worry, fear, stress & anxiety we need a different perspective – a perspective that is God-focused first and foremost. We are to “seek” – that is “run after”, “be concerned about”, become “preoccupied with”, “think about” & “focus on” God’s Kingdom and God’s righteousness. One can not simply STOP WORRYING. Instead we replace that worry drive with a different drive, ambition and desire. We change our focus from what we don’t have, to who Jesus is and what He has. Jesus points out here that all humans are “seekers”, the transforming question is who & what are we seeking? Put all your energy into seeking physical things, temporary comfort, or fleeting attention and harmful worry, stress and anxiety are coming with it. Because “seek” is an action word, God is encouraging us to take a step now that shows we are relying on Him for direction and provision in life. Letting go of worry is not trying to eliminate drive, desire, or ambition in our life – it is focusing that in a more God-focused way. Because God cares for us, God knows what is best and God has already promised us that our future is secure! No matter what we lack in this lifetime we have an eternity of bliss in heaven and a 1,000 years of life similar to now in the millennium without any evil spiritual forces tempting us or the curse frustrating us!

B. Focus on the future & bigger picture “His Kingdom”
READ v 33. To seek first after God’s Kingdom is to put God, His ways and His work as our first & primary priority rather than making our own temporary desires our first & primary priority. Simply put, we want to do God’s will – we want to help God’s kingdom to come and His will to be done. We are focusing on the bigger picture and the long term plan of God! The “Kingdom” refers to God’s rule and reign. Its final
expression will be in the new heavens and earth for eternity which will be more special than we could ever dream! When we wake up in the morning or get stuck in a traffic jam, or pain shoots through our body or we start to feel envious of what others have, “Seeking God Kingdom” is simply intentionally thinking How can I join God in His work? How can I trust Jesus more? How can I know God better? And then, taking an action in that area. Seeking God’s Kingdom is also our true motivation for sharing Jesus with others, sending out missionaries and helping national church movements around the world.

C. Seek His righteousness more than physical things

READ v 33. While seeking God’s kingdom primarily refers to seeing God’s Kingly rule expand and transform, seeking God’s righteousness is personally doing what God requires and what pleases Him. It starts with giving Jesus access to and control over ALL the interests, thoughts and activities in our life – hobbies, home, job, school, family, friends, personal thoughts, personal actions, the shows & movies we watch, honesty in tax returns since they are due in a little more than a week. Seeking God’s righteousness also involves making His righteousness attractive – we show the joy & benefits of obeying God! As Jesus said earlier in this sermon, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6). To seek God’s righteousness, in this context, is not to seek justification. It is not primarily talking about coming to faith in Jesus, having our sins forgiven & being credited with Jesus’ righteousness, but it is referring to us continually pursuing what is right in the eyes of God as clearly stated in the scriptures. Jesus has already warned us that pursuing righteousness will lead to problems, opposition and difficulties in this life. Our choice is either to be ambitious for God or ambitious for ourselves. Pick God because in Him your future is assured even in the most troubled times and He is concerned even about the small things in our lives.

D. Challenge your thoughts when worrying about the future

READ v 34. So challenge your thoughts when you start worrying about the future. Of course you will rationalize and think your worry is necessary. But it is futile to try to live a problem-free life now. You can spend all your time and energy trying to protect your life, but there is always somewhere you can’t control which will bring worse problems. **Do not worry about tomorrow**. Again, as we have mentioned before, this is not telling us we shouldn’t make plans or save up resources to accomplish bigger tasks in the future. That is part of the uniqueness God made in humans. But if there is some concern for the future that is keeping you up at night, or some concern about the now that is keeping you from serving Jesus or some concern that is causing stress & anxiety consuming your mind, Jesus’ words are clear. Don’t worry about tomorrow! All worry is about tomorrow, whether about food or clothing or anything else; but all worry is experienced today. We are upset in the present about some event which may or may not happen in the future. There is a tremendous waste in worrying about tomorrow. We should plan for the future, but not worry about the future. Worry
will not destroy tomorrow’s trials, but it will undermine our strength today. Worrying does not allow us to escape evil, but it will make us unfit to overcome it. Worry doesn’t take away tomorrow’s troubles; it takes away today’s peace.

God’s grace is sufficient for today. But like our prayers for our daily bread or like the manna God provided to the Israelites for 40 years in the desert, today’s grace is sufficient for today. If tomorrow does bring new trouble, there will be new grace then to meet it. We need to learn to live a day at a time when it comes to worry. We should plan for the future, of course, but not worry about the future.

E. Take a step today for whatever problems you have today

READ v 34. Jesus probably had one of those sly smiles when He said these final words – “each day has enough trouble of its own”. Up to this point His reasons for challenging the worry in our lives have focused on theological truth – God’s compassion, God’s provisions, God’s providence, God’s greatness. This last reason is purely pragmatic. Jesus recognizes that there will be some unavoidable worry today. But let’s limit that worry to the concerns of today. Today is when we are feeling the struggle of worry. Today is the time we can do something – take a step, sing praises to God, challenge a wrong thought, or help another! Simply take a step today for what is overwhelming you. It is why I encourage those in financial trouble, to put their effort into making a financial sacrifice today. It will never be big enough to solve the whole problem, but God can take that action and multiply it beyond what we can think or imagine. Tomorrow, we will have additional grace from God and there will be something we can keep doing that pleases God!

Keep overcoming in the power of Jesus!