

Trinity Baptist Church
Sunday 19th July 2020 – Andrew Evans
These are challenging times, but God's grace is sufficient!
Matthew 6: 19-34

The UK economy contracted by 25% between March and June;

There will be a 7.2% reduction in GDP for 2020;

There will be a 12.6% reduction in investment;

Unemployment will increase from the 3.8% recorded in 2019 to 8.6% for 2020, increasing further still to 11% by the end of 2021.

These are some of the projections of what lies ahead for the UK economy in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. To say these are worrying times would be the understatement of the century, indeed many individuals are justifiably concerned about what this may mean for them, for their lives and for the lives of their family. This whilst still dealing with the threat the virus still poses to one's health and wellbeing. Notwithstanding the advances in establishing an effective vaccine, there remains no cure and fairly limited treatment options for those who become very unwell with the virus.

But how are we as the body of Christ meant to react and respond to all of this? Some of us may have lost our job, our have been furloughed with no real certainty about what our employment status will be in the not too distant future. We could be forgiven for being more than a bit anxious and worried by it all...couldn't we?

It is easy to become overwhelmed by it all.... how will I pay the mortgage? How will we sort the kids out for school? Will we have enough money for food and to keep the lights on? Even if you are fairly secure in your job at this point, the picture may be very different for those close to you. Friends, family, adult children, the worry for them could be as great, if not greater, than it is for yourself.

Even before COVID came around there were already several things to be worried about. Persistent economic uncertainty, the threat of regional conflicts becoming global wars, the ever-growing threat of terrorism, a growing intolerance in society of each other's political and religious views, increased vulnerability of the poorest in society, natural disasters in ever increasing numbers and severity, the list goes on and on....

Again, I ask...we could be forgiven for being more than a bit anxious and worried by it all...couldn't we?

Well no! As children of God, as disciples of Jesus we are called to react in completely the opposite way. It is important to appreciate that, to not worry and to not be anxious, goes against our human tendencies, our default setting if you like, and there must be a conscious decision on our part, taken every day, moment by moment to trust God instead. **These are challenging times, but God's grace is sufficient!**

I would like to share with you this morning three principles that will aid us to make that conscious choice to trust God in whatever the situation, and regardless of our circumstances.

We will be of course consulting the Word of God as we do this focusing on Matthew chapter 6 vs 19 through to vs 34; an excerpt from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

The first principle is that we must find our wealth in the cross

The perception of Security for the future is often equated to financial provisions, to wealth. I recently said to someone, in discussing an investment opportunity, that the objective for me was to help secure my children's future. The truth is, no investment has the ability to secure my Children's future, or mine for that matter, only God can do that!

Further to that reality, it is also the case, that no matter how much money and wealth we accumulate it can all disappear. In late February it was reported the Coronavirus had wiped out \$6 trillion in value from the global markets in just six days! We have probably all seen those ads sponsored by the Financial Conduct Authority warning of the perils of investment and pension scams where many people have lost the life's savings to con artists.

Clearly money has some importance and I am not at all suggesting that God does not expect us to invest wisely, to be prudent and to make financial provisions for the future. However, our Hope for the future, which by the way extends beyond this life, **should not, and must not be built** on the wealth of this world. The wealth of this world is fleeting, it is temporal, and we can't take it with us. Beyond this life it has absolutely no value whatsoever. It is powerless to secure for us eternal life, we can't purchase God's love, no purchase can secure our salvation, we can't buy our freedom from sin...these are a gift from God a product of his grace. Our freedom has been purchased, our salvation secured by the blood of the lamb, Christ Jesus, on the cross of Calvary.

Money and wealth are there to serve us for the benefit of the Kingdom, we are but stewards...it certainly should not be the other way around, we should not be serving money, we should not be a slave to material things.

Thus Vs 19 – 21 of our reading from Matthew Chapter 6 says:

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”

An obsession with money and material things comes only to our spiritual detriment, it leads to spiritual blindness as pointed out in Vs 22-23:

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy,^[a] your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy,^[b] your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

24 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

If we lose sight of the cross and its importance to our lives, or fail to recognise it in the first place, what hope do we have? For in Christ’s death and resurrection we have life, abundant life, fullness of life...and money cannot give that to us.

So, we must give up our own lives and the appeal of the world to access the wealth of the cross....it comes at a cost.

I am reminded of the story of the rich young ruler who asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life...Jesus of course recalls the main tenants of the law You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother.’ To which he responded, “All these I have kept since I was a boy,”

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy.

Understand this, there wasn’t anything inherently wrong with the young man being wealthy, nor is Jesus commanding every wealthy person to give away all they have, but Jesus saw this young man’s heart and knew that his wealth mattered more to him than being fully obedient to God. His wealth had first place in his life.

The second principle in trusting God in challenging situations is to recognise God’s ability, willingness and commitment to provide for our needs.

We are the most precious of God’s creation, he made us in His image after all. And if we are precious to Him then surely, he will provide for us...In fact Jesus instructs us directly to not worry about our lives and highlights how God faithfully provides for the seemingly insignificant in creation. He also points out the futility of worry which will not add a single day to our lives. In fact, if you think about it, constantly worrying is far more likely to have the opposite effect.

In vs 25 through to 26 Jesus says:

25 “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 than food, and the body more 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 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life^[c]?

28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour 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—you of little faith? 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.

We see God’s provision of the most basic of needs in the most extreme of circumstances. Consider Israel in the wilderness. God had freed them from slavery and delivered them from the hand of their oppressors, with an amazing display of His supernatural power. Yet still, when faced with a lack of food in the wilderness, it didn’t occur to them that the same almighty God who set them free was able to feed them...they never considered trusting Him to provide, instead they moaned and complained to Moses and Aron, they said:

“It would have been better if the LORD had just killed us in the land of Egypt. At least there we had plenty to eat. We had all the food we needed. But now you have brought us out here into this desert to make us all die from hunger.” Exodus 16:3

Astonishingly, they were prepared to remain enslaved to have the certainty of abundant food than to simply trust God to provide for them. Are we guilty of the same thing? God through the atoning work of the cross has set us free from the slavery to Sin, His supernatural power raising us up in Christ Jesus, yet in the face of difficulty we consider Him less able or less willing to provide for our simple physiological needs.

God of course provided for the children of Israel in the wilderness supernaturally, but the experience highlighted their lack of faith.

Thus Deuteronomy 8: 2-5 says:

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors. ² Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³ He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.

Difficult circumstances provide an opportunity for us to learn how to rely on God. As gold is refined by fire, difficult circumstances provide opportunity for God to work in our lives, building character in us and bringing us into greater alignment with Christ. Through difficult circumstances we come to trust in God's grace as being sufficient for all our needs according to the riches of His glory in Jesus Christ....God's character is unwavering, his goodness, his faithfulness, his commitment to justice does not change in the face of our changing circumstances and so we must trust in Him, the unchanging God, who has made every provision for us, as afforded in Jesus Christ.

Lastly, trusting God in challenging situations means Seeking first the Kingdom of God

So, the final section of our reading gives us the clear alternative to worry, Vs 33:

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.

To put God's Kingdom first, is about valuing the things of God above the things of the World, it is about priority, it is about what takes primacy in our lives.

It was Christ coming that ushered in the Kingdom of God here on earth, his death on the cross and the salvation it secured must be our top priority. If we are neglecting our salvation by not examining the truth of the Gospel and accepting Jesus as Lord and saviour, perhaps even seeing it as important but something we can put off until we are good and ready...then we are on very shaky ground.

Equally, if we have accepted Jesus as saviour and Lord but our actions tell a different story, then we too need to consider what seeking the Kingdom of God first really means. We cannot claim to be in Christ but yet deny him in our daily lives, choosing the way of the world, failing to stand up for the Gospel, seeking out our own agenda and satisfying our own desires at the expense of God's will. If this is the case, we too are on shaky ground.

Jesus Said: *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life^[b] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."* Mark 8 vs 34-38.

In closing, trusting in God and choosing not to worry and not to be anxious is not easy but when we put God first in our lives, always holding to the truth of the Gospel, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the concerns of this world will fade away.

It requires the constant mindfulness that this life is not the end of the story, there is a realm beyond and the choices we make now and the things we give importance to now will dictate our future reality as much as it will in the here and now.

We can choose to neglect, even reject, God's great gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. We can make the trappings of this world the source of our strength, **but all will fade away**. On Christ the solid Rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand.

His grace is sufficient!

His grace is sufficient to find you another job when you have been laid off;

His grace is sufficient to ensure you don't go hungry, even though you have no clue where the next pound will come from;

His grace is sufficient to prepare you for the next grade even though you have missed four months of school;

His grace is sufficient to bring to fruition His plans for your life, even though you did not get into the University of your choice or receive the grades you were hoping for;

These are challenging times, but God's grace is sufficient!

In Christ we have everything even when we have nothing!