

Sunday 31st July 2022
Matthew 6:19-34
Rev.Scott Burton
Brightons Parish Church

Sermon keypoints:

- We've all learnt to place our security in the wrong place
- We need to learn to put our security in God
- With our security in God, we are freed to invest in eternity

Let's take a moment to pray before we dig into God's word. Let us pray:

Come Holy Spirit and soften our hearts to the word of God.

Come Holy Spirit and lead us into the ways and life of the Kingdom.

Come Holy Spirit with power and deep conviction, for we ask it in Jesus, name. Amen.

I wonder what your earliest childhood memory is. Your earliest childhood memory. If you feel like it, why don't you turn to your neighbor and for the next 20 or 30 seconds with a bit of music in the background, share what your earliest childhood memory is. Over to you.

So, okay then, sounds like you could go on for hours probably there, so feel free to pick up those conversations afterwards.

I'm saying to Margaret I have a terrible ability to remember events. My wife despairs of me. She'll be like 'Remember this?' and I'm like 'When? How did that happen?' There are some things I would love to be able to remember just because it'd be great to see what the people's faces were at the time/ Like, when I was really young and apparently, I thought that the neighbor's car needed a paint job and so I got out the creosote. Thankfully it was a company car so he wasn't too bothered actually. Or there's a time when I was really young, about three I think, and had one of those little fire engines that you could ride on. I got about half a mile away from house before dad found me and the next day a fence was built within 24 hours to keep me penned in the back garden. I would love to be able to remember these things rather than just be told by my parents 'Oh, you know, this happened when you were really young.' There are lots of things we don't remember from childhood. There's probably lots of things actually we try not to remember from childhood and these events, some of them at least, can really shape our lives in very profound ways and we'll come back to that thought in a little moment.

We're in this series on the Sermon on Mount. We're about two-thirds of the way through and we'll finish up with our all-age service in about a month's time with our children and families back amongst us, hopefully, and through all we've been seeing how Jesus has been building upon the teaching of the kingdom. He's been helping us see what the life in the kingdom looks like, the ways of the kingdom so that we can come into that good, blessed, kingdom life. I don't know about you but when I read so much of the Sermon on the Mount, I find it really challenging and there's points, especially maybe with today's passage, that it feels a bit burdensome. He says 'Don't have treasures on earth'. Well, strike number one. 'Only serve God'. Strike number two. 'Don't worry'. Strike number three. 'Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness.' Well, I'm all out Jesus so I'll just pack up my bags and especially if you're someone who worries by nature or by nurture and so that you're in that place where anxiety is something you really struggle

with and you've maybe been struggling for years and it might even be crippling your life there's every potential that you hear this passage, you read this passage, you've maybe heard it tons of times and every time you end up going 'Well, that wasn't helpful' or 'It feels like a bit of a slap in the face.' And especially when you come to some later teaching of Jesus in the same gospel, I might add, it really gets a bit perplexing because Jesus says this just a couple of chapters later not quite chapter 9 Jean, we'll move on to 11. 'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened,' - she's going to get me later on – 'and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for i am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.' and as you're reading through this passage, as you're reading through the Sermon on the Mount and you think well His yoke is His teaching, that's what Rabbis meant, that you would take the yoke of the Rabbi upon you, that's His teaching. Really? The Sermon on the Mount is easy and light, really Jesus? So how, how do we square that up? How do we square up what Jesus is saying and what we feel?

I think some of it has to do with how we read it. That we read so much of scripture, we read the Sermon on the Mount, through a particular lens and so we don't end up reading it through the lens of His heart. This heart that is gentle and humble. This heart that desires for you to know life and joy and freedom, and so, we don't read it through that lens and we read it in another way and so, we don't see His heart and it feels burdensome. So, if we were to read His word, if we were to read this passage through the lens of His heart, how does that change this passage? Indeed, how does it change the whole sermon?

Well, coming back to our passage, we heard Jesus say earlier 'Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' What is the concern of Jesus here? If His heart is for you, if He's not against you, if He's not out to condemn you and belittle you, what is His concern here?

Treasures are things that we value and it could be any number of things. It could be the material. It could be our money but, equally, it could be reputation or image; a loved one; our health; could be our comfort; it could be a job or a position that we have a role, even within the church. All these could be our treasures. Treasures are things we value but tied to that, often, treasures are things that give us security, they make us feel safe and when the thing we treasure is undermined or threatened what comes? Worry, as Jesus says, and when we elevate that earthly treasure to a position it should not hold, it becomes our master, as Jesus says, and when it becomes the focus of our lives, when it becomes our ambition and the goal and the driving thing in our life, then then our vision is often clouded, as Jesus says here, and with that, at times, can come a darkness in us, as that thing becomes the goal, as Jesus says here. And so, again and again Jesus is asking the question - Where do we find our security? Where have you placed your security? He knows our human condition, He knows by both nature and nurture, we all learn to place our security in the wrong place. There's a writer that I really enjoy reading and listening to, her name is Ruth Haley Barton, a Christian writer, and she has a helpful way of putting this across. She talks about how, across our lives but

particularly in the early years, we develop coping mechanisms. Mechanisms to help us deal with the harsh and hard realities of life in this world but, often, these coping mechanisms, particularly a young age, don't include God and so, we end up finding our safety, our security, ways to cope, in the wrong place and God isn't a part of that picture. I was listening recently to one of her podcasts and in that she related a story in which she recalled an event from her childhood. This event she had blocked from her memory for probably about 30 years but God brought it back to her and she went and spoke to her mum who confirmed it was a real event. She was about four years old when this event happened and it was her mum who dealt the blow because her mum disciplined her in a particular way, really not in a justified way, but her mum wasn't doing it for any ill reason but she was just, that's what she understood to be maybe best for her child but it clearly wasn't because it left a wound and in light of that wounding, Ruth learned a coping mechanism. She learned how to keep herself safe, how to find security in a world which had suddenly upended for her and that had effects over the years such that in her thirties she was facing a form of bullying at work, she was really in a very difficult situation but she could not stand up for herself despite the encouragement of others, she could not stand up for herself because of that earlier wound and what she did instead was she withdrew and she got small because that was how she kept herself safe, that was her coping mechanism, that was where she found security by withdrawing and getting safe.

So, what about you? What about me? Where have we learned, maybe from childhood, maybe during our adult years, where have we learned to put our safety and security? It could be in position, could be in health and comfort, could be in reputation, it could be in loved ones, or wealth and possessions, might be any number of these.

Remember, Jesus doesn't raise this to condemn you, belittle you, He does it because He loves you, He wants you to come into life, to come into greater freedom, to cut, to know a greater security than what you've known until this point. And that's our next point, because he says 'Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or stow away in barns and yet, your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? For the pagans run after all these things and your heavenly father knows that you need them.' So much of the teaching of Jesus, so much of what He says mentions the Father because the Father was His place of security, His safe place, that the foundation of His life because He is in that intimate relationship with the Father, the Father's love, the Father's care, the Father's affirmation, that was central to Jesus and He models it and He teaches it to His disciples. And so, what Jesus is saying in these verses and through this passage is that we need to find our greater security in God. He calls us to give up that limited security that we may be nurtured and built for ourselves whether through childhood or whether through our adult years, we need to give that up and find the greater security of the Father's love, the Father's affirmation, the Father's care and provision. But to learn that, to learn to find our place in that is a journey. But it does echo what Jesus says in Matthew 11 too 'Learn from me and you will find rest for your souls.' To learn from Him, to learn from Him by unlearning our coping mechanisms, to learn from Him by having our minds renewed that we

understand our Father more intimately and better, that we can have that greater trust and security. It is a process. Any learning is a process. It takes time.

I don't know about you but my mental picture almost of the disciples is that they hear this and immediately they just jump 'Right, no more worry!' So, I almost imagine that but it doesn't match up to the facts. Have you noticed how often the disciples are portrayed as a bunch of messed-up individuals. It gives me confidence actually, this is a side point, it gives me confidence that the Scriptures are true because if it weren't true you wouldn't include them as a bunch of messed-up individuals, you'd want them to be on a pedestal, but they're not. So, we find Peter at the start of his time with Jesus and Jesus goes off to pray one morning and Peter comes after Him and says 'Jesus, you know there's a bunch of people over here, they want to see you,' He's more worried about them than about what Jesus is concerned about. He has this worry in him. Or later on in life, now, admittedly, walking on water I think any of us might be a wee bit intimidated by that, but he worries and he thinks but at least he walked on the water. Or later on in life again a couple years later, he's with Jesus who's arrested and because of worry and anxiety he denies the Lord three times. Worry. Or later, as an apostle, when Jesus returned to heaven, the Holy Spirit's come, Peter saw 3 000 plus people come to faith and yet later he can then choose to ignore the Gentile Christians and only have fellowship with the Jewish Christians, because of worry, because of anxiety. And it takes Paul to come along and give him a bit of a verbal slap to get him out of that place, to help him see that it's wrong what he's doing. But he's worried. But, you know, even later in life Peter is able to write in chapter 5 of one of his letters 'Cast all your anxiety on him, the lord, because he cares for you.' It's a journey. It takes a whole of a life and more besides to learn but, if we will learn it, we will find a greater security, we will find rest for our souls. And later, in the same sermon, Jesus will say 'Those who seek will find.' Is it easy? No! Is this sermon going to answer every question and issue around worry and anxiety for you? No! Might you need to go and see a counsellor for years on end maybe, maybe, if worry and anxiety has become that pattern in your life. And that's okay, I've been to see a counsellor because of things. So that's okay. I don't expect this sermon to achieve everything but some of it might help. Hopefully. Is this ever fully achieved in our lives? Well, I've only been following Jesus for 20 years, I'm hopefully only halfway through my life so I can't really say that with any great authority but I doubt it. Ask some of the older people who have been following Jesus for a lot longer than me. But I reckon they'll probably tell you, there's always more to learn, there's always more to learn.

How do we learn that? How do we learn to find that greater security? I think core to it all has to be to listen for the voice of our Heavenly Father. I think that has to be core or at least it is from my experience so far. Because, what are the things that I worry about? Not so much the Manse, to be honest, I worry about its influence on Gill but I don't worry about it quite so much. Finances? Not so much. Image? Clearly not so much. But doing right by you, this community, doing right by God a bit more. Let's remember, this is only my first charge. I'm a young guy. I've got lots to learn. Half the time I'm guessing. That's what I worry about. But you know, whether it's through the daily reading of scripture or reading of other books, or prayer and solitude in silence, there are ways that I'm building

in. When I'm not like this little chap in the picture; he seems to be kind of almost trying to get out of his father's arms; it's not really, 'I'm not really sure about this cuddle, dad!' But if we want that greater security, we need to turn to the Father. We need to learn to hear His voice.

I shared with the Elders the very first Kirk Session meeting I had I think it was Elders it might be in the Deacon's Court it gets confusing when you have two bodies of people but I was on retreat the week prior to me being ordained and inducted here and had all these thoughts swirling around me and I've learned on retreat to utilize art. now I did do standard grade art but I'm not the greatest artist in the world so line drawings are my thing. And I drew this picture and through it was drawing it because of just what I felt the Spirit was saying to me, You won't see it well but if you want to come up and see it afterwards then please do and so, in this picture I've got me, I didn't pick black for any particular reason other than just to make it a bit less obvious but here's me and here are these things that could weigh upon me like: ministry expectation, being a pastor; week-in week-out preaching which is quite a daunting prospect; tradition; numbers; being young but also maybe lacking young people and wanting to see that grow in our body. All these weights but they're not on my shoulders because I felt God was saying 'I'm behind you, and I'll take that weight if you let me. As long as you stay connected to me and breathe in my Spirit and breathe in what I say to you, it will nurture your heart and keep you right because, what should be over your shoulders is My yoke. My yoke, that is easy, my burden that is light.' And I have that up in the study to remind me of that

So, what about you? What do you? Do to turn to the Father to hear His voice and it can't be every now and again and it can't be even just a Sunday, you need more, unless like you're a bit more like Jesus, I think you need more than once a week. So, what are you doing? What's God saying to you? Not to correct you necessarily, to affirm you, to speak His love over you. What's He saying? And, if you can't answer that question, then you need to learn, you need to learn to find that greater security in the Father and we have ways and means of doing that at church: Huddle; a Fellowship Group; many others besides. And if you don't know how to tune into the voice of the Father you need to learn because you can't do this life of faith otherwise, you can't grow in greater security otherwise so, come and talk to me, drop me an email because I won't be leading over the next two weeks and when I get back if I've got a group of people who are saying I want to learn to grow in that, we will put a group together, we will do something because there's few things more life-giving than hearing the voice of your Father.

Now being free of worry is a, more free of worry is a great thing but there's also other things that come, as Jesus says, as we find that greater security He says 'Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven when moths and vermin do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.' With our security and God, the rest of the teaching of Jesus can come into play and become a reality in our lives. And too often we try and jump from 'don't have treasures on earth' to 'have treasures in heaven' and we try and skip out the bit in the middle which I've just talked about. And, if you try and do that, you will end up with a religion, a way of

following Jesus that is lifeless and which deadens your soul because instead, what you will have is something that makes you feel guilty, which makes you feel weary, and most likely in time, will bring about bitterness. So, don't forget the bit in the middle.

But there's this other third bit of today of 'having treasures in heaven'. What is that? Well, it's anything that lasts into eternity. So, what lasts into eternity? A Christ-like character. The Scriptures teach us faith, love and hope. The Scriptures teach us knowledge of God. Those who we've helped to come to faith in Jesus that will last into eternity. 'The prayers of God's people are like an incense that come before the throne of God', they last into eternity. Our witness, our testimony of Jesus lasts into eternity. Anything that brings God glory, lasts into eternity.

So, where is the room for you to grow and how you invest in the eternal things? And that will depend upon where you are putting your security now. So, for example, if your security is in success at work and being a good employee and making sure that you tick all the boxes and such like, then you might be more inclined to say 'Well, you know, I don't have time. I don't have time to be with God and seek His voice. I don't have time to serve at church because work, that's the goal, that's where my treasure is, that's where my security is.' If it's your comfort, your lifestyle, your bank balance, then what might come as a lack of financial generosity because you don't want to invest in that, you want your bank balance, you want your lifestyle to remain safe, comfortable. It's your treasure and so you're not as generous as you might be. If image, if how you appear to others is your place of security and treasure, then what will come is an unwillingness or an inability even to step out in faith, to be different and often. I think, that can be a problem for our young people but is a problem for most of us too. A young person's journey, a big part of it, is about identity and we need to help our young people navigate that journey so that this is not their place of security, but it's there for all of us, I'm sure, as well, with each of those areas and there's many more besides. With each of those areas if we can learn to find our security in the Father's love then we are freed up to invest in eternity, to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, not simply to be more free of worry and that would be a glorious thing to see.

Now, this is the point when I suspect you begin to feel a bit more of a challenge. You begin to wonder if God is criticizing you a little bit more, but let me remind you of Jesus and His words He is 'gentle and lowly of heart; humble of heart; His yoke is easy and His burden is light.' He came that you might have life and life to all its fullness. He was sent because the Father loves you and didn't want to have eternity without you and Jesus chose to lay down His life on a cross to be the sacrificial Lamb of God for you and for me.

Let that sink in, brothers and sisters. Let that sink in, because, if we can, if we will, then we'll see the heart of Jesus, the heart of God which yearns for us to find a truer life, a fuller life, a freer life, by having our security and our treasure in God.

I pray it may be so. Amen