

Harvest Sunday, Sept 16th 2018

All Age Talk.

Main passage Matthew 6:25-33.



Harvest Sunday, a time

To renew our confidence in God as provider.

To choose to place our trust in Him our Heavenly Father to meet our needs.

To Thank God for his provision in the past year.

To renew our primary focus, to put and keep God first - to seek his kingdom and his righteousness.

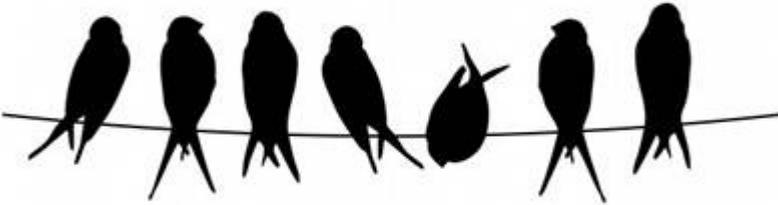
In Matthew 6, Jesus is teaching his disciples - as the crowds listen on - what it means to be a member of the kingdom, a child of God, a follower of Jesus. His teachings are known today as the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus has told them - not to store up treasure on earth, either for greed, for meeting a deep inner need, or for security, acceptance or significance - he declares that you cannot serve both possessions and God.

Then he says - THEREFORE do not worry about what you will eat, drink, or wear.

It is natural these disciples could be worried. They don't need to be concerned about money. But in fact some or all had left their work to follow Jesus full time. In Matthew 4, Andrew, Peter, James and John have left their lives and work as fishermen; Matthew / Levi has left his work as a tax collector. Where will provision come from?

In the verses Jesus points them to creation, birds, human growth, lilies. As we listen to the words, Jesus regularly talks about their heavenly father. He has clearly said a little earlier when teaching them about prayer, that they can call God "our Father." They are invited to grow in faith - for he says to them to worry, is to be "of little faith." - he invites them to grow in their understanding of who they worship and trust and what it means to be an adopted child of God in daily life.



The birds, they do not sow or reap, and yet God feeds them. The birds are not fed by God's hand coming into their nests. The birds, live, go, search, hunt, and Jesus says, God provides. Jesus encourages bird watching - when he says look at the birds the word can be translated "fix your eyes on, so as to take a good look at." As we look, we see how God the Creator provides for them, so surely he will provide for us his children, because we are of greater value.



And if we cannot make ourselves grow - can we add one cubit - to our height - Jesus asks - we only need, as sons, to ask our mums at what point we were taller than our mums - so if we leave these things to God - whether we are 1m 60 or 2m as we trust him for growth, can we not trust him for easier things like food and clothes?



And then Jesus takes us again to lilies, to flowers and vegetation. If God so chooses to clothe the world, then he will provide for our needs as well. If God as creator sustains the birds and lilies, shouldn't he even more, as our heavenly father, nourish his own children who pray to him daily? It is an invitation to trust. It is an invitation to trust in his provision for each of us. We are not to be like those who do not know our Heavenly Father - and so are unable to rely on him and his promises, so they rely on their own strength and work. We are to be different.



Harvest is that time to renew our confidence to place our trust once again in our heavenly father who knows our needs.

However to add. If God promises to provide while are many of his children under-nourished. Does the promise not work? There are Christians in parts of the world who are in very severe need. There is not a simple answer. But a key point. A main cause of human hunger is not inadequate divine provision, but an unequal human distribution. Resources are hoarded, wasted, spoiled, not shared. Harvest calls us to be good stewards of what God has made and provided. Later in the gospel of matthew, Jesus says

"I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I needed clothes and you clothed me..." (Matthew 25).

Jesus says his Father clothes and feeds his children. Later Jesus says we must feed the hungry and clothe the naked. It is important to take the breadth of Jesus teaching

"The fact that God feeds and clothes his children does not exempt us from the responsibility of being the agents through whom he does it." (John Stott, *Sermon on the Mount*, p.167).

How has God provided for you in the past year? Who can you provide for?



Jesus tackles the negative - do not worry. But then he sets out the positive attitude - 'Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness'. The word for "Seek" is said as continuous ongoing obligation. Daily, regularly, always seek his kingdom and his righteousness. Harvest is a time to renew our focus.

Seeking his righteousness - not the justification received through faith in Christ, but seeking a righteousness of life lived in full submission to the will of God. We make a commitment to find and do the will of God, our commitment comes first in our life. It is a commitment not to be crowded out by material concerns. We pursue the true goal. If we put first things first then God will take care of the rest.

"In the end, just as there are only two kinds of piety, the self centred and the God centred,, so there are only two kinds of ambition: one can be ambitious either for oneself or for God. There is no third alternative." (John Stott, *ibid.*, p172).

We are invited to be ambitious for God.

"God's kingdom is Jesus Christ ruling over his people in total blessing and total demand." (Stott, *ibid.*, p170).

To seek it, we desire the spread of the reign of Jesus Christ.

A desire starts with ourselves until every part of our life - home, marriage, family personal moral, professional life and work ethics, bank balance, tax returns, life style, citizenship - is joyfully and freely submitted to Christ. It continues in our connections, relationships, with family, friends, colleagues, desiring they too to seek first the kingdom. Our ambition, our passionate desire that his name should be hallowed that his name should receive the glory and honour due to it. And as we give priority to the Kingdom now, we also look forward to and desire the future kingdom of glory and pray for its coming.



Harvest is a time to renew our focus upon the kingdom, his rule, and seeking to live a righteous life. To move away from a preoccupation upon material things, to put the first things first, trusting his provision for our needs as we do so. For he is our loving heavenly father.

Let us pray... Eternal God,

you crown the year with your goodness
and you give us the fruits of the earth in their season:
grant that we may use them to your glory,
for the relief of those in need and for our own well-being;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.