

Matthew 6:25-34

“Antidotes to Anxiety”

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Intro:

- Howdy. Good to see ya, and what a tremendous blessing to share with the congregations who are with us on the stream today.
- If you have your bibles, won't you turn with me to Matthew 6. We are still in our in-depth study of the Gospel of Matthew and for the last few months we have found ourselves enraptured by Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.
- We pick it up this morning in verse 25.

Text:

25 *“Therefore I tell you,*

- Okay, we have to pause there, just because of the rules of language, and I promise we aren't going to stop every few words in this thing, but “therefore” is a linking word, it is an adverbial linkage to a previous concept. You can't say therefore unless there is a there before that you are building upon.
- The “there” before was...

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 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. ¹

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 6:19–21.

- So, what Jesus said next was in light of, or consequential of, His teaching about not being too connected to the treasure of this world. Because we have the possibility of investing our lives in heaven and reaping the rewards that come from the security and certainty of that investment, because of that truth...

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?

- I know... This might make you anxious, and for many of you that is an all too familiar feeling - one that you hate - and now you might be worried that you are being condemned by Jesus for it.
- Here is where we need to do a little bit of work.
 - We must acknowledge that there is a difference between fleeting and controllable moments and periods of anxiety, and more complex forms of crippling and chronic anxiety that would be classified as an anxiety disorder that requires treatment.
 - We must acknowledge that the church hasn't necessarily done a good job of understanding that or even trying to understand that, and that we have hurt some people as a result.
 - We must understand that Christianity is an embodied faith – IT IS SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL and we must wrestle both of those realities.
 - And so, we must be cautious to dismiss physical realities with just spiritual solutions. Eg, "Oh, you're anxious? You obviously aren't praying." AND... we must be cautious to give in to physical realities without considering the spiritual realities that Scripture call us to again and again. Eg. "Oh, you're anxious? You have a disorder and just need some meds."

- The word that Jesus uses here for anxiety literally means, “to have an anxious concern, based on apprehension about possible future danger or misfortune².” **It is looking into the future and seeing a bunch of bad scenarios you cannot control and allowing that to have a physiological affect upon you.**
- And so, I have a crude but concise proposed definition of the type of anxiety that Jesus was speaking about.

Anxiety is the experience of having fears of an unknown future disrupt the possibility of peace, joy and contentment in the present.

- Again, there would be a different clinical diagnosis definition, including some measurables around the duration and intensity of the experienced anxiety and a medical professional can help with that. But, even the diagnosed disorder usually begins with this base element definition.
- And I confess that I do that a lot, and while I have had seasons of it becoming crippling to an extent that I should have sought out some medical attention, most of the time for me it has just been a mind and soul battle of choosing to dwell in a bunch of bad “what if” scenarios and outcomes that I cannot possibly control. It is giving in to the thought that “God won’t have my back” and won’t provide what I need, and then **allowing that narrative and its resultant scenarios to swarm uncontrolled in my mind and heart.**
- **Eg. Kevin Peck does my 15Five weekly reviews and he noticed a trend that I said that were some things that were making me anxious. He sat me down and asked me..**
 - So, it makes you anxious to think about having to be around a lot of people?
 - And, it also makes you anxious to think that you will be left alone?
 - It makes you anxious when you think you will have too much to do?
 - And anxious when you think you won’t have enough to justify yourself?

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 312.

- You're anxious that you won't be able to provide for your family?
- You're also anxious that you will be someone who pursues mammon over the Kingdom of God?
- Yes. To all of those. His response... "Sucks to be you." It does some days. I prefer to say, "It sucks to be married to me, or to live in my home."
- Jesus was saying in this text, "don't just give in to that sort of thinking, and don't give in to thinking that should keep you from living for the Kingdom."
- You see, part of living in the Kingdom and faithfully for the Kingdom is allowing the Spiritual realities of heaven to shape the physical experiences of earth. **It is allowing the realities of heaven to shape the experiences of earth.** It is flipping the scenario of us allowing the fear of the future to ruin the joy of the present and doing what Corrie Ten Boom said, **"Trust an unknown future to a known God."**
 - So, obeying Jesus in this space is to live counter-cultural, Kingdom focused lives where we don't try to control the uncontrollable and don't try to know the unknowable.
 - Is not life more than food and clothing, Jesus asked? Is it not also about spiritual realities that we cannot see? Is it not about trusting in the treasures of heaven, and the realities of the nature of the God who is in heaven?
- Okay, so how Jesus?

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?*

Know your value in Christ, so you can work without giving in to worry

- I am not an ornithologist of any sort of acclaim, but Jesus tells us to look at the birds of the air and so I have been doing that. If you stop and watch birds, you know what they aren't? They aren't lazy. This isn't a call to passivity. Birds work. They just don't worry their little bird brains to death about whether their work will be enough.
- And yet God takes care of them, and **ARE YOU NOT OF MORE VALUE THAN THEY?** Jesus asked us a question, and it is a massive question when dealing with anxious thoughts, do you think you have value in God's eyes?
 - Do you believe that He will provide?
 - Do you believe that He will make a way?
 - Do you believe that He will stay close?
 - Do you believe that He will work all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes?
- I love the way Eugene Peterson translated this verse...

Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds.³

- "Careless in the care of God." Choosing God's care for you as the lens through which you view all the things you face. Not always easy, but very helpful in the fight against anxiety.
- Well how do you know that this God cares? Well, this Jesus gave His life for you, for us. Are you not of more value than the birds? Sometimes we just have to anchor ourselves into something solid, and the cross of Jesus is about as solid as it gets.
- This is a side note, but my mind wandered in my prep to the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10. Martha was anxious and at the root of her anxiety lay a question... "Lord, do you not care?" Then I thought about the story of Jesus calming the storm in Mark 4. The

³ Eugene H. Peterson, [*The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), Mt 6:26.

disciples were full of anxiety at the extent of the storm and at the heart of their fear lay a question... “Lord, do you not care?”

- When Peter addresses this in 1 Peter 5, he says... *“cast your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.”*
- HE CARES!

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?

Know God’s creative kindness, so you can have faith to flower where you are planted

- Again, I am no botanist, but Jesus tells us to consider the flowers of the field and so I have been.
- One of the things we have loved about living in Texas is the abundance of wild flowers. Wildflowers are remarkable, they express the creativity and ingenuity of God and put His glorious grace on display across vast fields of otherwise ordinary, albeit highly allergenic grass, as I have discovered.
- Their lives though are like ours, fleeting, and sown into a field of seemingly random ordinariness, and yet they are distinct and beautiful and all they have to do is reflect that beauty as long as their creator needs them.
- **Consider the flowers. They are created with such beauty by their Creator that they don’t have to worry about making themselves beautiful in other’s eyes.**
- So far as we can tell, they don’t seem to compete with one another. The blue ones don’t envy the orange ones. The pink ones don’t feel any less due to the magnificence of the yellow ones. They are content to reflect the glory of God and to play their part and then to be done.
- Jesus links His listeners refusal to live like this with a lack of faith. Faith is such an important base ingredient for pleasing God in the Scriptures. We mustn’t lose it. It

brings God joy right throughout the biblical narrative and brings Him distress when it is lacking. We have made doubt into the ultimate virtue, and faith is seen as fundamentalism and folly.

- **I am utterly persuaded that one of the most powerful areas of faith we could have in our context is the faith to be content with who God made us, what He has chosen to give us, and the situations in which He has placed us.** Again, this isn't passivity, or sinful refusal to change, but rather it is faith-filled contentment to have faith in God's creative genius in making us. This is something we see so little of in the world. We see lots of clambering and comparison and competition, but not a lot of Christian contentment.
- **A lot (LISTEN, not all, but A LOT) of my anxiety is rooted deeply in faithlessness.** In the thought processes that says that God doesn't care for me, and that God won't clothe me and use me for His glory.

³¹ Therefore

- Because we have more value than birds and because God clothes us with all we need to glorify Him...

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. ⁴

Okay,

- **Know your value...**
- **Know God's creative kindness towards you...**

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 6:25–34.

Know your ultimate purpose (of seeking the Kingdom first), so you can tackle today's troubles without getting crippled by tomorrow's

- Jesus gave us clear and stark warnings about anxiety.
 - It is absolutely ineffective at making you feel better or more in control.
 - The troubles that lead to anxiety will keep coming. Today is gonna be full of them. Tomorrow is full of them too. You're welcome.
- Look at this remarkable quote from a sermon preached by Alexander Maclaren. It's long, but it is marvelous and worth reflecting on.

And what does your anxiety do? It does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows; but, oh, it empties today of its strength. It does not make you escape the evil, it makes you unfit to cope with it when it comes. It does not bless tomorrow, and it robs today. For every day has its own burden. Sufficient for each day is the evil which properly belongs to it. Do not add tomorrow's to today's. Do not drag the future into the present. The present has enough to do with its own proper concerns. We have always strength to bear the evil when it comes. We have not strength to bear the foreboding of it. As thy day, so thy strength shall be. In strict proportion to the existing exigencies will be the God-given power; but if you cram and condense today's sorrows by experience, and tomorrow's sorrows by anticipation, into the narrow round of the one twenty-four hours, there is no promise that as that day thy strength shall be! God gives us power to bear all the sorrows of His making; but He does not give us power to bear the sorrows of our own making, which the anticipation of sorrow most assuredly is.⁵

- So, we are going to need to fight against it.
- How? By seeking first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness! How do you actually do this though?
- Paul, I believe, gave us a very helpful way to do just that.
- Now I know that some of you are going to roll the eyes of your heart as I speak of Scripture and prayer as the solutions to the complexity of anxiety, but I am telling you

⁵ Alexander Maclaren, Anxious Care, <http://articles.ochristian.com/article509.shtml>

that this is true and powerful. It has helped me to stem the tide of sometimes crippling anxiety, to just stop and focus on these truths.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 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. ⁶

Rejoice in the Lord

- Paul says there is always something to rejoice in. IN THE LORD.
- In His goodness, in His love, in His mercy, in His righteousness.
- This is not a call to be superficially happy with your circumstances, but a chance to choose to rejoice in God, in spite of your circumstances.

Go quickly to prayer

- Prayer reminds us of God's control, which fights anxiety.
- Prayer declares our lack of ability to control, which fights anxiety.
- Martin Luther famously said, ***"Pray, and let God worry."***

Give thanks

- It is difficult (not impossible, but difficult) to be anxious about the future and thankful for the past at the same time.

Let peace stand guard

- A Holy Spirit gifted, supernatural peace is a remarkable thing. It can guard our hearts and minds

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Php 4:4–7.

Conclusion:

- Okay, let's practice what we have learned. Let's spend a moment not allowing the anxieties of tomorrow rob us of the joys of today.
- We are going to sing, rejoicing IN THE LORD.
- We are going to go quickly to prayer, confessing our need.
- We are going to ask the Holy Spirit to guard our hearts and minds.