

Jesus' Antidote for Anxiety Part One

Matt. 6:25-34

When I was about 5 years old I started developing stomach aches and my mom took me to the doctor to see what was wrong. This was during a time when our family was in upheaval and my parents were on the verge of getting a divorce. I didn't know that, but I knew something was wrong. So the doctor examined me and asked some questions and then gave me the diagnosis and the cure: he said I was getting stomach aches because I was worrying, and I needed to stop worrying. Being 5 years old, I took the doctor's advice very seriously, said ok, and stopped worrying. And the stomach aches stopped!

Jesus gives us all the advice that my doctor gave me: *do not be anxious about your life* and lists three things, food, drink, and clothing, not to suggest that anxiety is limited to these three things, but to represent the countless things in life we can be worried about. Anxiety is an equal opportunity tormentor - it's not limited to certain demographics. The poor can struggle with anxiety, and the rich can struggle with anxiety. The sickly can struggle, and the healthy can struggle. Anxiety isn't limited to one stage of life or another. Very old people can struggle with worry, and as in my case, very young children can struggle with their own anxious thoughts. Worry is free-floating, moving through life and situations as easily as a ghost passes through walls.

- How do I deal with that bully at school?
- Why does it seem to take me longer to learn things than my classmates?
- Should I go to college?
- Will I ever get married?
- What can I do to turn our struggling marriage around?
- How am I going to pay the bills this month?
- How will my kids turn out?
- What will the biopsy say?
- What does the future hold?
- What will come of my life?
- What will happen when I die?

And on and on. Anxiety is kind of like whack-a-mole, you hit one anxiety, another one pops up. A lot of times we think, "if I can just get rid of that worry, I'll be good!" But we hit it, and maybe we are good for a little while, but then something else pops up for us to be anxious about! We can spend our whole lives playing "whack-a-worry". The simple truth is, the more we worry, the more we worry. Arthur Somers Roche described it this way: *Anxiety is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all others thoughts are drained.* Anxiousness has a way of pulling all of our thoughts into the rut of worry.

Jesus recognizes the very real struggle most of us have with anxiety. Five times in fourteen verses he talks about being anxious, encouraging us not to be anxious but more importantly giving us an antidote to the worry, stress, and anxiety that we all face. Jesus' antidote doesn't try to address every fear we could ever have. He doesn't try to fix the 50,000 different ways that anxiety can mess with our heads. Instead, what Jesus tells us is that anxiety isn't the root problem, it's a symptom of a deeper problem. Behind the question *what are you worried about?* lies a deeper question: *what are you living for?*

The key verse is verse 33: *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* Jesus says if we get our priorities right, if we put the kingdom of God and his righteousness first in our lives, everything else - all the things that we are worried about - will fall into place. Rather than anxiety cutting a channel into which all other thoughts are drained, Jesus says as we seek first the kingdom of God, it creates a kingdom mindset in us that draws everything else in life into a kingdom channel. When we're tempted to worry about food or clothing or bullies or biopsies, instead of these real concerns being swept into a deep channel of worry and fear, they are swept into a deeper channel of faith and trust in God and our hearts can experience peace even in the midst of hard times.

But what does that mean, *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*? Look with me again at verse 25, *therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about what you will eat or what you will drink...* In my Bible the heading over this section says, "Do Not Be Anxious" so we might think that this is where Jesus' instruction about anxiety begins. But verse 25 opens with the word "therefore" and that always means that what's coming is built on what's already been said. Jesus' antidote for anxiety begins in verse 19. Let's read vv. 19-24 together.

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matthew 6:19-24 ESV)

1. Seeking the kingdom first means laying up treasure in heaven

We kill anxiety by seeking first the kingdom of God and one of the important ways we do that is by laying up treasure in heaven. We are all investing our lives in one way or another. You may or may not have investments in the stock market or in real estate, but all of us invest our lives in something. You are investing your life in something. It might be your job, or your family, or trying to get a lot of money. It might be in your friendships or in recreation or staying fit or being well educated. We all have portfolios that represent what we are investing our lives in and what we invest our lives in reveals what we treasure most. What you are investing yourself in reveals what you treasure most. Jesus warns us: if all our treasures, all our investments, are earthbound, then the day is coming when we will lose everything we treasure.

One of the triggers for anxiety is fear of loss, and Jesus is saying that if we are laying up treasure in this life only we have good reason to be anxious. Because we live in a world where moth, rust, and thieves will eventually take everything from us. Everything will be taken from us either by decay or by being stolen away from us.

No matter how much we have, or how hard we try to safeguard it; no matter how much we try to protect our loved ones from harm, no matter how high or thick we build the walls around our earthly treasures, we can't keep those things out forever that will eventually pry them from our fingers. Eventually they will all decay or be destroyed or be stolen from us. That's just the world we live in - everything in this world has a temporary shelf life, including our lives. Eventually - and I don't mean to sound morbid, it's just the

reality we live with - everything we hold dear will be pried from our fingers by death, if not before. If all our treasure is invested in this world, we should be anxious, because we will eventually lose it all.

Jesus counsels us to invest our treasure in heaven, where time can't decay it, and there are no thieves to steal it from us. Now that might sound other-worldly and impractical: how can we possibly store up treasure in heaven? But Jesus isn't being super-spiritual or impractical here. Look at verse 21-24:

21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also... The end goal isn't where our treasure is, it's where our heart is. It's what we love. Continue reading...

22 The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 23 but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! The eye in the Bible represents what we set our hearts on, what we set our affections and our ambitions on. Jesus is saying, if what we set our hearts (our eyes) on is light and good, our lives will be full of light. But if what we set our hearts and ambitions on is bad (dark, worthless) then it will affect our entire lives in a bad way.

24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

These verses are really all about what we love. We can't live for material things and for God at the same time. We can't love God *and* stuff. We will serve God or we will serve stuff, but we can't serve both. Laying up treasures in heaven means to live a life, not of accumulating things out of a selfish desire to serve ourselves, but a life of giving out of a love for God and desire to serve Him. We find our lives, not by getting, but by giving! So you don't have to quit your job to do this, you don't have to leave your family or become a hermit living on a mountain in Nepal to do this. We can store up treasures in heaven right where we are, by doing everything we do out of a love for God and a love for people. Investing our lives by giving: loving people enough to pray for them and to share the gospel with those who don't know Jesus. By giving of our time and talents and money to the work of God. And it can be the smallest things that God uses to make an eternal difference in other people's lives. Jesus pointed to little things that can have huge impact: giving a cup of water to a disciple or welcoming a child in Jesus' name. Sometimes I think the people least known on this earth will have the greatest treasure in heaven because, like the poor widow, they give sacrificially out of love for God. We store up treasure in heaven when, out of love for God, we look for opportunities to be used by God to make a difference in people's lives.

Now a brief word of balance. There's nothing wrong with having money. Jesus isn't condemning wealth here - there were wealthy people who followed him. He isn't condemning saving money for the future. The Bible instructs us to learn from the ant who works hard to store for the future. Jesus is warning us not to hoard selfishly, not to make our lives about accumulating for ourselves but to make our lives about spending for the benefit of others and the kingdom. It's ok to have money, it's not ok when money has us.

One of the saddest stories - and one of the most tragically missed opportunities - in the entire Bible has got to be the story of the rich young man who came to Jesus asking what he needed to do to have eternal life. Jesus said to him, *"One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* The Bible says this young man walked away sad, because he was very wealthy. Jesus offered him an amazing, eternal opportunity and he walked

away sad! Where is that young man's wealth now? What good is it doing him now? The wealth is rotting, his earthly body is rotting, but the eternal treasure he could have had will never, ever fade or lose its value. Now maybe he had a change of heart later and maybe he didn't - we don't know. May none of us be like that young man. May none of us walk away from Jesus and the treasure he offers - both in heaven, and the treasure of a life lived following him.

This isn't about earning our way into heaven by giving. Here me carefully on this. We could never buy our way into heaven by giving or any other good work. The Bible says that we have sinned against God and owe Him far more than we could ever pay. The only way into heaven is by faith in Jesus Christ and his substitutionary death on the cross. He died to pay the price we owed to God because of our sin.

If you aren't a Christian, Jesus says something amazing in Luke 12:32 for those who will hear and believe: *Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.* What we could never earn, God the Father is happy to give to all those who believe in His Son Jesus. Because on the cross Jesus paid the entrance fee for heaven by giving his life as a substitute for our sins. Your part, my part is to believe in Jesus. If you have never trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior, I want to take a moment and pray for you. If you want to receive the gift of eternal life that Jesus offers you, pray silently with me.

Dear God, I know that I have sinned against you and have broken your Law. I believe that Jesus died on the cross in order to pay for my sins, and I receive him into my life as my Lord and Savior. Please forgive me and cleanse me of my sin, and give me the gift of eternal life. I want to live to serve Jesus, not to earn salvation, but in response to your gift of salvation. In Jesus' name, amen.

If you prayed that prayer, you need to let someone know, "I asked Jesus to be my Savior" so we can rejoice with you and help you to grow in your walk with God. If you don't have a Bible, we have a new Bible we want to give you so let someone know.

As we bring this first part of the message to a close, you might be thinking, "hey, wasn't this supposed to be about anxiety? Seems like we've gotten off that topic." Jesus gives us important insight into worry: we can't get rid of worry by focusing on worry. Anxiety is a symptom of a deeper issue - are we living life with the wrong priorities? Seeking first the kingdom of God by laying up treasures in heaven reorders our priorities where they need to be.

The second part of this message next week will deal more with our feelings of anxiety, but this deals more with the cause of our anxiety. Jesus promises us if we live for his kingdom, and store up treasures in heaven, we have no cause for anxiety. What we treasure is forever safe, it will never decay or be taken from us.

God has specific ways that He has gifted and called you to walk this out. I believe the Holy Spirit is stirring in many of our hearts a sense of conviction that we live too selfishly, and a longing to give more of ourselves to His work. If God is stirring in your heart, convicting you of being earthbound in your investments, and rising within you a desire to live for something bigger and more lasting than getting more and more. If there is a rising longing, not to accumulate more, but to give more, let's take some time to talk to God about it. The Father who is happy to give you the kingdom is eager to show you how you can grow in your love for Him and grow in your giving to His work. He is eager to show us practical

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ways that we can seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. What we will see as we go on is that we have a Father who loves us very much, and He is eager to guide us as we surrender our lives to His will.

We're going to close with a song and as we sing, let's make wherever we are an altar to God. If you want to come forward to kneel in prayer, you are welcome to do so. But as we rejoice in what Christ has done for us, let's surrender our lives to him afresh this morning. After we sing I'll close us with a word of prayer.

How Deep The Fathers Love