

Don't Be Anxious Matthew 6:24-34

Introduction: Take your Bible and turn with me to Matthew 6. The last few weeks, and particularly the last few days have seen unprecedented upset of normalcy in all of our lives. There have been some among us who have faced incredible challenges which put you in very difficult situations. College students who now have to move back home and miss out on all that the Spring semester offered, while trying to figure out how they are going to manage online education. Seniors who will now not have graduation ceremonies. People in the high-risk categories who are now sequestered to their homes or their care facility rooms. Dads and moms concerned for their families and how they will provide for them, or even how they will find basic necessities for them, like toilet paper of all things. We all have some aspect of this virus and of the regulations and restrictions which is particularly difficult for us. And so, we need more than anything this morning to hear from our Lord. We need the Head of the Church to speak to us words of comfort, words of clarity, words of exhortation, words to re-focus our hearts on Him. Matthew 6 is just such a passage. *Read 6:24-34.*

Anxiety has gripped our world over the Coronavirus pandemic. And for those who are not in Christ and do not have the hope of eternal life, you can understand their panic. The reality is, we as the human race value life, at least our own lives, and we try as hard as possible to avoid death. And this comes out in all kinds of panicked anxiety about all kinds of things like the spread of the virus, the overwhelming of our hospitals, the closing of our schools, and having enough hand sanitizer! We are an anxious people. But the church must be different. God's people have an incredible opportunity in the midst of all of the panic to shine as bright lights of peace and trust and rest in a Sovereign God. But, let's be honest – we probably haven't done as well as we ought to over the last few weeks with our response to the crisis. The earthquake of upset schedules and canceled events and complete overhauling of how we do life has probably exposed some fault lines under the surface where worry and anxiety we already growing. And so, where the cancer of worry has been exposed we need to lop it off with the surgical precision of the scalpel of God's Word. I don't know of a better text in the Scriptures for such a surgical strike.

I want to set the context here, and then give a brief overview before I give you four truths about anxiety. This text is in the center of the greatest sermon ever heard by human ears. It was preached by the preeminent preacher, the Lord Jesus himself. And it was a counter-cultural proclamation to Christ's followers of what it really means to be one of his followers. I know that some look at the Sermon on the Mount as being only for the 12 apostles and then for the Millennial Kingdom saints. I don't take that view for many reasons, which I don't have the time to explain this morning. This sermon from Jesus starts with the beatitudes which set the scene for the level of instruction. In a culture that was all about religious externalism, Christ took truth to heart depth and addressed what it really meant to be his follower – to be a Christian. If

the Sermon on the Mount were a gold-mining cave, there would literally be golden nuggets just sitting on the floor of the cave, you hardly have to dig to find the precious truths. This is one of the most cherished and richest sections of Scripture. And in the midst of it we come to our text for this morning. In the broader context he has started chapter 6 by teaching his disciples how to pray. And this instruction will have carry-over to our verses for this morning. He then calls them to lay up treasures in heaven and not on earth, which addresses the grave danger of materialism and the vanity of here and now living that is absent of the eternal perspective. And this leads him in verse 24 to make the unforgettable statement that we cannot serve two masters. We cannot be slaves of both God and money, or possessions. We will either love the one and hate the other or hate the one and love the other. That is just the nature of the case. And this sets the context for our main text in verses 25-34 in which Jesus gives two main commands – one that is negative and one that is positive. The negative command is so serious and yet so easily missed that our Lord repeats it three times. He starts with it in verse 25, repeats it in the middle in verse 31, and then closes it out with the same negative command in verse 34. And the negative command is “do not be anxious.”

To be anxious is to be double-minded. It is to think that you can set your heart’s focus and intent upon two things at the same time. It is the double minded Christian who tries to focus one eye of faith upon God and one eye of faith upon his stuff and his circumstances, and the only thing he ends up with is blurry vision. It is like Martha compared to Mary in Luke 10. Martha is fluttering about trying to be hospitable and Mary is singularly focused on listening to the Lord’s teaching. Martha complained to Jesus and what did he say? “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary.” This is the heart of worry and anxiety – it is a divided focus – a split loyalty – a double worship. And Jesus is saying here in no uncertain terms – don’t do that – don’t be anxious!

The positive command is given just once, and it is found in verse 33. And the positive command is to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. That is the great antidote to worry. This is the ladder out of the pit of anxiety – to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. So, that is the lay of the land. Let’s study it by considering four truths about anxiety from this text. The first is that anxiety reveals misplaced loyalty.

I. Anxiety Reveals Misplaced Loyalty – vs. 24

- a. I have found it to be axiomatic in my life that you can usually work your way backward from a sinful expression in your life to discover the root cause as you seek to grow in Christ. I think this is the hard work of sanctification in which we are putting to death the deeds of the flesh which remain in us. Well, anxiety is definitely one of the deeds of the flesh which remains in us. So, as we seek to lop it off and let it die, we need to work backwards from the anxiety we can see to the heart that it reveals. And what Jesus teaches us here, among so many other truths, is that anxiety reveals misplaced loyalty. That truth is found in context before the main section. At the beginning of verse 25 you have that word “therefore” which links you to the previous section and lets you know that what Jesus is about to say is inextricably linked to what he just said.

- b. In light of verse 24's truth, Jesus commands us, do not be anxious. Meaning that this command to not be anxious is built upon the foundation of verse 24. And that verse is all about singular loyalty to one God. The great demise of the materialist is that he is deceived to think he can have his cake and eat it too – that he can have his stuff and his God. But what he misses is that his stuff is his god and therefore the one true God is not his God. And when he enters eternity he will find out the naked truth that he was laying up treasures on earth and it was all vanity and worthlessness.
- c. The clear and unchanging truth is that we cannot serve two masters. Christ had to say that because we think we can do this. We think we can be loyal subjects to God as Lord and King while also seeking to loyally worship some other god. This is what Adam and Eve were tempted to believe in the Garden. They thought they could love and serve God while also serving the god of their desires that craved what had been forbidden. What turned out to be true was that in lovingly and loyally serving the false god they turned from the one True God and essentially hated him by their lack of trust and obedience and worship. This is what split loyalty does. It lies to us that we can mostly love and serve God and have a little idolatry gig on the side – like a part-time job or something.
- d. But how you know that doesn't and can't work is the anxiety it brings. When you are trying to maintain this split loyalty you grow more and more worried in your confused worship. So, this crisis situation we find ourselves in has pulled back the curtains on our heart. And that may be mostly encouraging and reaffirming – I trust that it is. But it may also have displayed a worry and anxiety over things and stuff and health and future and unknowns and unpredictability that actually reveals a misplaced loyalty. What you are anxious about shows who your true Master is. Anxiety reveals misplaced loyalty. You can't serve God as the Sovereign One while also wanting to maintain your own sovereign control of your life which has been frustrated by this pandemic.

II. Anxiety Reveals Misplaced Faith – vs. 25-31

- a. Anxiety also reveals misplaced faith. This is another fault line – another crack in the soul that is revealed by the shaking earthquake of challenging circumstances. This is the bulk of Jesus' focus here, from verses 25-31. The section is bracketed by the command to not be anxious about your life. This anxiety about life is then explained as a worry about what you will eat or what you will drink or about what you will wear. It is also a worry that encompasses the span of your life – how long you will live and when you will die. And that has been one of the main points of great worry and fear in the world around us most recently. They are afraid to die, and they think that by worrying they can add an hour or a day or a month or a year or 10 years to their life span.
- b. And by the way, if you are not right with God through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, then you do have great reason to be worried. Your greatest problem is not the illness or the old age that will eventually bring you to the end of your life. Your greatest problem is that you are not at peace with God because you have rebelled against Him and His authority as your Maker and as the God of the

Universe. The anxiety you are feeling in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic is simply the warning tremor of the coming anxiety you will feel on the day of your physical death, when after death you will face the judgment of the Just and Holy Judge of Heaven. If you have not looked to Christ Jesus as your only hope for salvation, then you truly have no lasting hope in the face of a worldwide pandemic. Your life in this world is the best you will ever have, so your worry about keeping it is natural.

- c. But it doesn't have to be this way. You must come to Jesus as your only hope for salvation. He took the curse of sin upon himself on the Cross, and he made a way for sinners to be made right with His Heavenly Father by grace through faith alone. You must look to Jesus today and find in him eternal life. He is the only guarantee of life to come which means that this is the worst you will have it here in this life. The life to come will be filled with much greater joy and absence of all sorrow, loss, curse, and sin.
- d. So, Jesus is saying to us, if you are a true follower of mine – if you have been born again to a living hope – if you are adopted in God's family and are sons and daughters of God – then do not be anxious about your life in this world. He uses basic logic to argue the point by pointing to lesser truths which guarantee greater truths. So, he asks in verse 25, is not life more than food and clothing? You are worried about the lesser things of food and clothing, but there are much greater realities to this life than food and clothing. And the reality Jesus is pointing to here is the giving, sustaining, and taking of life that is not in our hand. God made you. God sustains your every cell, gives you every breath, knows the number of hairs on your head, determines your days, has innumerable thoughts about you, and will be the One who decides when life on this earth is done for you. Life is surely more than your body and what you put on it and what food you put in it!
- e. Then he argues from the lesser to the greater by pointing to other aspects of God's creation, namely the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. The birds of the air do not sow nor reap and yet the Lord makes sure they are well supplied. The point here is not to call us to quit working hard to provide for ourselves and our families. Many in the history of the church have tried to use this section to make that point, but they are missing the clear and plain logic of the text here. The birds of the air don't just sit around and wait for God to drop a worm from the sky into their nest, do they? No, they hunt and gather. The point is not to call you to a lazy faith that does nothing to provide. The point is to call you to not be anxious as though the provision of your needs is dependent upon you. You must work hard in all that the Lord gives you to do. That's why Paul tells the church in Thessalonica that the one who refuses to work should be one who does not eat. Jesus' point is to show you the care God gives to the birds of the air and to the lilies of the field. These are surely some of the least parts of God's creation, and he daily cares for them. So, how much more then does God care about you and provide for you, O Christian?
- f. So, when we are anxious and worrisome about our lives, what is revealed is a misplaced faith. That is the core issue that Jesus exposes at the end of verse 30.

He asks the question, 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? Anxiety is an expression of little faith, or said differently, anxiety reveals that we have put our faith in the wrong thing. We have little faith in the God of Heaven and we have more faith in our ability to add one hour to our life by worrying. You see how illogical, and how silly this is right? And yet, it is one of the most common struggles for us as believers. We are prone to this small faith.

- g. And notice how Jesus defines this small faith. It is a faith that is not applied to the current situation through logical and critical thought. The great danger for the Christian is to have their faith bludgeoned by the onslaught of worrisome realities in everyday life. And then, when a major crisis hits, like what we are currently experiencing, this worry multiplies greatly in us because we are beat down by all the concerns that smack us in the face as humans living in a sin-cursed world. The remedy is not the removal of the worrisome realities – those will always be there until Christ returns. The remedy is to give some serious and Biblically rooted thought to the problem. Assess it and examine it in light of what the Scripture says about God and His care for you. Instead of asking, what am I going to do to provide – ask – how has God proved himself trustworthy in all things to provide for me? Worry is the fruit of a thoughtless and therefore a small faith.
- h. A great example of this is the disciples in the boat on the Sea of Galilee in the midst of the storm. This is found in Matthew 8, Mark 4, and Luke 8. The storm was great and they were in peril. But Jesus was asleep after a long and hard day of serving others. They woke him with the worrisome pleas for his intervention because they were sure they were going to die. And his answer to them is – why are you afraid, O you of little faith? In Luke’s Gospel the question is – Where is your faith? In other words, they had lost sight of who Jesus was because they put their eyes on the storm and on their immediate peril. They had lost sight of the promises of God being revealed and kept through the life and ministry of Jesus. They were not going to die in that storm, but they were convinced they were and they were panicked and full of anxiety because they did not thoughtfully apply their faith to their current situation.
- i. And that is the great challenge for us isn’t it? We are prone to trust God with our greatest eternal need – the need of the salvation of our souls. But then we are prone to fret over the smallest and most insignificant of things – like whether or not I’ll have any toilet paper left next month. A true and strong faith is a faith that is thoughtfully applied to every situation. A faith which takes God at His Word. A faith which is filled with a high and holy understanding of the greatness and majesty of God. A faith which looks at the waves crashing over the sides of the ship and sees the hand of a good and Sovereign God behind each droplet of water. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says it this way – “It is a poor type of Christianity that has this wonderful faith with respect to salvation and then whimpers and cries

when confronted by the daily trials of life. We must apply our faith. ‘Little faith’ does not do this.”¹

III. Anxiety Reveals Misplaced Desires – vs. 32-33

- a. Anxiety reveals a misplaced faith. It also reveals misplaced desires. That is the truth found in verses 32-33. The Gentiles is a reference to those who are outside of Christ. Jesus used that same designation in verse 7 when he was teaching them about how his true followers are to pray. They are not to be like the Gentiles who heap up empty and repetitious phrases thinking they will be heard by their god because of their many words. So, these are those who are outside of Christ – and they are anxious about all of these everyday necessities of life. Verse 32 says they seek after them. This is an intentional pursuit of something that is of great value and importance to the person doing the seeking. It is a seeking that has its priority of obtaining the thing sought. They are deceived to think that if they get these possessions for daily life then they will be secure in daily life.
- b. And what we seek after is the evidence of what we are most concerned about. Our anxiety displays what we desire to have the most. So, naturally, the ones who do not have a Biblical worldview and who do not have hope outside of this here and now life, are anxious about the needs of today.
- c. But Christ says, you must not be like that. Rather, we must seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And if we do that, then all of these things – all the stuff of life that so many others are worried about – will be added to us. This is obviously not a seeking entrance into the Kingdom of God – like a pursuit of salvation. That is not how we are saved. There is one door to the kingdom of God, and that door is Christ Jesus our Lord. The seeking here is the priority of the diligent pursuit of God and all that is His. This is the constant pursuit of the Christian to live as a citizen of a Heavenly Kingdom while being a citizen of an earthly kingdom. This is like Paul telling us in Philippians 2 to work out our salvation with fear and trembling because it is God who works in us both to will and to do according to His pleasure. This is Paul saying that he labors with the energy that God provides to present all men mature in Christ. This is Peter telling us to make our calling and election sure. This is how Christ taught us to pray earlier in chapter 6. We are prone to be most concerned about here and now stuff, and are prone in prayer to rush into God’s presence with here and now oriented requests – the daily bread of life kind of stuff. But Jesus tells us that we are to pray this way – Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. And then we can pray – Give us this day our daily bread.
- d. Our tendency is to have small faith which expresses itself in errant desires. We seek after small stuff because we have a thoughtless and small faith. Jesus says – the Gentiles do that – but my people must be different. There are so many things to be concerned about in any normal day, let alone in a day in which we must face the onslaught of news about a growing pandemic. But Jesus tells us that we

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, pg. 403.

ought not be anxious about and seeking after what everyone else is. So, as everyone else is seeking after a return to normalcy and after a protection from sickness and for a cure to disease and for adding one more hour to their life – the Christian must be seeking after the kingdom of God and His righteousness. We must exercise a thoughtful faith which seeks for God's greater works in the midst of a global crisis. We must be a people who are more concerned to be ambassadors of peace and hope through faith in Christ than we are with the latest death toll numbers. We must be a people who are zealously pursuing growth in our love for God and for one another during this challenging time, seeing in the difficulty an opportunity for God's Spirit to transform and change us with God's Word. We might paraphrase Christ's words here – if you want to be anxious about anything during this worldwide pandemic, then be anxious about your spiritual relationship with the Lord and how He wants to work in you and use you to work in others. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

IV. Anxiety Reveals Misplaced Focus – vs. 34

- a. So, anxiety reveals our misplaced desires and Christ calls us to re-focus those desires on what is eternally important. And the last truth from this text about anxiety is that it reveals misplaced focus. That is how Christ ends in verse 34. At first glance it seems like a let down from the peak truth of verse 33. Why didn't the teaching on anxiety just end on that super high note of seeking first after God's kingdom and God's righteousness?
- b. Instead of ending there Christ says once again – don't be anxious. Specifically he tells us to not be anxious about tomorrow because tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Anxiety and worry are evidence of a focus on tomorrow. It is a bearing of the burdens of a coming day on top of the burdens of this day, and this is overwhelming and leads to anxiety and worry. Christ says to us here, as a closing salvo – don't do that. Don't borrow trouble. I have asked you to carry the responsibilities and the pressures and the challenges and the opportunities of one day – that is today. Tomorrow will be tomorrow. I have given you present and daily mercies for this day. You do not need to store up those mercies, like people hoarding essential goods. You do not need to hole yourself up spiritually because you see a coming challenge. You have no idea what tomorrow is going to look like. So, be faithful today. Be fervent today. Be zealous for Christ today. Trust Him today to provide all that you need. Seek His kingdom first today. Seek His ongoing and gracious provision today. And let tomorrow come when tomorrow comes.
- c. Christ does not mean that we should have no thought for tomorrow and that we should not plan ahead for tomorrow. He is not telling you that you should have no retirement account and no insurance policies. Rather, he is telling you that you should not trust in and depend upon any of those things. You honestly have no idea what tomorrow might bring. But you have today – so work hard today to walk by faith with a priority on seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Don't lose out on today because you are fretting over tomorrow. You can't be focused on today and tomorrow at the same time. And if you are

anxious, it is a solid indicator light that your focus is wrong. You are thinking more about tomorrow and vesting more hope in tomorrow than you are in God who has given you today. So, as Jonathan Edwards resolved, may we live today as though at the end of the day we will stand in eternity before our great God.

Conclusion: Beloved, now is a time for anxiety and worry and panic and fear for all of those who are outside of Christ. For us, it is a time for thoughtful and intentional faith in God who calls us to the priority of seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness.