

Some Causes of Anxiety

Matthew 6:19-34

Call: Jer 17:7-8; Ps 5:1-7 (adapted by Brian – responsive reading)

Scripture: Matt 6:19-34

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.

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!

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.

25 “Therefore I tell you, 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? 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? 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? 31 Therefore 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.

I. Introduction

After our journey through the Lord’s Prayer, we now enter into the last half of the Sermon on the Mount. And, these next two weeks will be focused on one theme – anxiety. For our scripture reading today, Brian read the entire text, the text we will explore over these next two weeks.

Now, this text is actually an answer to a prayer written a many hundreds of years before Jesus spoke these well-known words. The prayer says this:

1 *You have searched me, LORD,
 and you know me.*

2 *You know when I sit and when I rise;
 you perceive my thoughts from afar.*

...

23 *Search me, God, and know my heart;
 test me and know my anxious thoughts.*

24 *See if there is any offensive way in me,
 and lead me in the way everlasting. (Ps 139)*

Are there any anxious thoughts in me? Are there any anxious thoughts in you? And, what would be some causes for these anxious thoughts?

II. Text Introduction

Now, as we consider our text for these next two weeks, let me explain how we will explore it. As Brian read the text, it may have sounded like many different topics which have no connection to each other. Jesus mentions treasures, visions, masters, anxiety, birds, flowers, kingdom of God, etc; seemingly many random topics. However, I think everything in this passage falls under the theme of anxiety. Here's why:

In the very center of our text is verse 25. This verse is the key verse of the text and holds the clue for the text. It says this, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life..." This is typically where the Hallmark cards begin. This is where the Christian posters begin. Notice it begins with a "therefore." As I have said before, when we see a "therefore" in the text, we always ask the question, "What is it 'there for'?" Which sends us back to find out what came before the "therefore." And, what came before verse 25? Specific teachings on treasures (19-21), visions (22-23) and masters (24). Somehow treasures, visions and masters are related to anxiety. Somehow our anxiety is rooted in the decisions we make about treasures, visions and masters.

III. Anxiety Introduction

Are there any anxious thoughts in you? We live in an anxious time. We live in a restless time. Now, just to be clear, Jesus is not talking here about clinical anxiety, the kind of anxiety resulting from traumatic events in our past or a chemical imbalance. I think what Jesus teaches here can help with those things, but what Jesus is getting at here is the low-level anxiety, the restlessness, the constant worry, that comes about in all of our everyday lives. Elsewhere in Matthew, Jesus specifically calls this anxiety "the anxiety of the age" (Matt 13:22). Indeed, this anxiety may be *the* great epidemic of our age here in the West, for reasons that will become evident this morning.

And, here's my plug for next Sunday night's forum. Janie Sacks will be here to discuss the different kinds of anxiety and how anxiety affects our daily lives.

So, with that as an introduction, let's dig into our text, beginning with treasures, verses 19-20.

IV. Treasures (19-21)

A. The Text

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.*

B. Earthly vs. Heavenly Treasures (19-20)

We all treasure treasures. We are all investors. To be human is to invest in treasures. And, Jesus does not fault us for investing our time, energy and resources in treasures. The question is *what kind* of treasures will we invest our time, energy and resources in? Because there is a great difference between the two treasures here: heaven and earth. So, we need to understand these two very different kinds of treasures.

Treasures on earth

First, what about treasures on earth? What does Jesus mean that we are not to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth? Well, he is not banning owning personal possessions. Jesus is not banning saving for a rainy day or having a life insurance policy. Scripture praises all of that stuff (Prov 6:6; 1 Tim 5:8). Neither is he banning the enjoyment of God’s blessings (1 Tim 4:3-4). Scripture affirms that as well. But, those things cannot become ultimate in our lives either.

So, what is he banning? He is banning, what we would call today “materialism.” It’s the pervasive love of money and possessions that takes no account of the world’s poor. It’s the love of money and possessions that tethers our hearts to the earth, that causes a person’s worth and identity to be wrapped up in their wealth, and that causes people to seek satisfaction and security from things that belong to this world only. This is a great danger for the church in the West, to be formed into the materialistic mindset of our surrounding culture. This is why Paul says that *“the love of money is the root of all evil”* (1 Tim 6:10). Craig Blomberg says this, “Materialism is [a false religion and] the single biggest competitor with authentic Christianity for the hearts and souls of millions in our world today” (Osborne, 245).

Now, it’s also important to note that many earthly treasures aren’t even material: ambitions, desires, ideas, values, goals, hopes, reputations. For in many of these to, we can get drawn in and seek our worth, satisfaction and security.

And the reason why we are not to lay up earthly treasures is because they are profoundly insecure. The Titanic was a boat that was supposedly impossible to sink. Our retirement accounts were supposedly free from recessions. Forest fires would never reach into suburbia. Earthly treasures are susceptible to corrosion and decay. Earthly treasures are unwise investments because they will eventually disappear.

Did you ever notice that here in the west, we get all this stuff, we accumulate all this stuff, then we tie ourselves down protecting all of it. We buy expensive security systems to protect all of it. Why do we do that? Because we know that all of our stuff is insecure in the first place.

Treasures in heaven

On the other hand, treasures in heaven are incorruptible and secure. They are eternal. They are the only safe investment in life, safe from moth or rust or thieves, or earthquakes, floods, fires, recession, terrorism or even death. Nothing will destroy them. They are untouchable.

So what does Jesus mean when he says treasures in heaven? Well, he's talking about participating with God in his purposes for the world. In Luke 12, Jesus says this, "Take care, and be on your guard against every form of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." He then tells the parable of the rich fool. He says this, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' 18 And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 17:15-21).

Instead of participating with God in his purposes for the world, the rich man laid up earthly treasures only for himself without any thought of the world's poor. Jesus is saying one of the most concrete, practical ways to lay up treasure in heaven is to invest in others, especially the poor. That is to be rich toward God. Be rich toward God by aiming your investments Godward, not earthward.

This is so critical because our very hearts are at stake, verse 21.

C. The Heart (21)

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (6:21).

Our hearts follow our treasures. It's not the other way around. Our treasures do not follow our heart. Our heart follows our treasures. Throughout the sermon, we have noted that Jesus is the great cardiologist. He's always taking our hearts into his hands and healing them. He's doing that again here. Remember, in scripture, the heart is the control center of our lives. The heart takes in all the input of life, assesses it all, then makes decisions based on those assessments.

And, here, we see in verse 21, that our treasures draw our heart toward them. They are a magnet for the control center of our lives. So, if we invest in earthly treasures our heart makes decisions for them and continues to be drawn to them. But, if we invest in heavenly treasures, our heart will cause us to be rich toward God.

Let's now move to Vision, verses 22-23.

V. Visions (22-23)

A. The Text

[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!

B. Healthy vs. Bad Eyes (22-23a)

I know many of you get up before the sun comes up especially during the fall and winter months. And, if you have other people in your house, you try not to disturb them by turning on lights. So, you probably walk around in the dark trying not to wake them up. I’ve been in my house for 10 years and I still walk into chairs and walls in the dark. We feel profoundly insecure in the dark.

Here, Jesus is making the observation that the eye is the window of the body which lets in the light. And, essentially, the amount and quality of light that comes in depends on the condition of the eyes. If your eyes are healthy, light comes in. If your eyes are unhealthy or cloudy, light cannot get in. Now, even though this is all true physically, I think Jesus is speaking metaphorically here, because as John Stott observed, in scripture, the eye is many times synonymous with the heart (Stott, 157).

The word “healthy” here has many meanings. It can mean single, whole and sincere. But, it also has a deeper meaning of generosity. In James 1:5, James says that God is the one [“who gives wisdom generously.”](#) It’s the same root word. In Romans 12, Paul urges his friends to give generously. It’s the same root word. So, here, I think Jesus is saying if the eyes of your heart are sincere and generous, your whole body is full of light.

However, if the eyes of your heart are ‘bad’ or cloudy, then no light comes in and your whole body will be in the dark. The word there for bad, is actually evil, but in the ancient world, an evil eye meant greediness or stinginess. Deut 15 exhorts the people of God to not be stingy toward one another by saying “do not let your eye be evil toward your poor brother” (Deut 15:7-10). Proverbs 28:22 says, *“A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth”* (NASB).

C. Impacts “Whole” Life (23b)

The point of what Jesus is saying is that what we focus our eyes on determines everything about us. What we focus our eyes on gets us. And, by getting us, I mean it impacts our whole body. If we focus on the things of the light of the world, we will be *full* of light. But, if we focus on this present darkness, our whole life will be *full* of darkness. In the context of money and possessions then, living in the light will result in generosity and looking out for others. Whereas, living in the darkness will result in a life of self-centered greediness.

And, this self-centered greediness clouds and darkens our entire view of reality. How great is this darkness? Well, it clouds our view and understanding of happiness and satisfaction. It clouds our view of what success really is. It clouds our view of our worth and other people’s worth. It clouds our view of God’s purposes for our life. For parents, it clouds our view of God’s purposes for our children. It clouds our view of God’s Word. And, it clouds our view of

the use of money and where to put our money. Corrie Tan Boom puts it so well, *“God is not impressed w/ our money, fame or talents. He’s impressed w/ our sharing.”*

So the question becomes, what are we allowing to occupy our vision?’ What is the focus of our life? Because that will determine whether our entire life is lived in darkness or light.

Let’s move to masters, verse 24.

VI. Masters (24)

A. Read Text

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.”*

B. God vs. Money

Jesus captures it all with this statement. He lands the proverbial plane in this verse. The first thing to notice is that Jesus is really emphatic here. He does not say you *should not* serve two masters. He does not say, you *must not* serve two masters. He says, you cannot serve both God and money.” This is the reality of the situation, you cannot do this. You can only serve one master. It is very emphatic.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it this way, “Our hearts have room only for one all-embracing devotion” (Bonhoeffer, loc 2258).

Bob Dylan sang a song that resonated well with this saying - I think he actually won a Grammie for it. It’s called, “You Gotta Serve Somebody.”

*You may be an ambassador to England or France
You may like to gamble, you might like to dance
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls*

*But you’re gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You’re gonna have to serve somebody
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you’re gonna have to serve somebody*

Someone or something is the master of your life, and you serve or worship that thing or that person. Birds chirp, lions roar, sheep bah, fish swim, dogs bark, and humans worship, humans serve or worship somebody or something. And, it’s only one who or what. There aren’t multiple somebodies or somethings. As with the other two examples, earth and heaven, darkness and light, the division here is great: love or hate, devote or despise. Why is it so great? Because both masters will make huge demands of us. Both masters will want total devotion.

And, so, Jesus says, you cannot serve both. Yet, how prone we are to wander. How prone we are to compromise? How prone we are to walk the fence? How prone we are to think we can serve more than one master? The Old Testament provides rich examples of this “being prone to wander.” For example, the Israelites are always orienting their lives around the idols of the land. They try to fit God into the idols of the land and **it does not work because it cannot work**. God tells them he wants total devotion. He says it like this, *“I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me”* (Deut 5:6-7).

Those old idols are still with us, they have simply changed clothes. They look a little different now, but they are still with us. How? Well, typically they manifest themselves like this: we serve and worship God on Sundays, then serve and worship something else throughout the week. Throughout the week, we follow our culture in serving and worshipping the gods of materialism or consumerism or status or grades or individualism (self), etc.

Jesus says we cannot serve two masters. Notice, he doesn’t say employers. You can serve two or three or four employers at a time. But, you cannot be the slave of two masters. You can only be the slave of one master. ‘Single ownership and full time service are the essence of slavery’ (Stott, 158).

So, who or what will you orient your life around - God or money? Let’s talk about this word for money, which is the Greek word “mammon.”

C. Money (Mammon)

Some translations leave this word untranslated as “mammon.” And, it’s translated ‘money’ probably because most of our translations are made here in the west where money is our biggest mammon. But, mammon can mean more than just money. Mammon means anything in which we put our trust other than the living God. Mammons are idols. Mammons are rival gods.

Most mammons are, in and of themselves, perfectly fine. They are usually good: family, career, talents, reputation, bank accounts, pensions, grades. In fact, mammons have to be good or at least appear to be good or we would never give them our trust and our hearts. So, Jesus is not judging the mammons here. He is simply telling us a fact of life. It is impossible to serve any form of mammon and the living God at the same time. Our heart only has room for one all-encompassing devotion.

A way to think about this is with a circle. Imagine your heart is a circle. Many things can be in a circle, but it can have only one center. Only one thing can be at the center. No other point can be at the center of a circle. Jesus main point in this entire text is that we were designed to have God at the center. The life of discipleship demands total allegiance, an undivided commitment to God. Nothing else is to be at the center, otherwise we are living in idolatry.

D. Naming Our Idolatry

But, it can be hard to figure out where our idols are because, as we have already said, idols are not always visible; ambitions, desires, ideas, values, goals, hopes, reputations. So, how do we spot these idols in our lives? Reflect over these four potential idol spotter questions.

1. What do I fear? Fear may lead me toward an idol. Do we fear rejection - so much so that we will play down our allegiance to Christ in order to be liked? Are we consumed by a fear of failing, so much so we will never step out into participating with God in his purposes for the world? Are we consumed by a fear of losing everything, so much so we never give our things away?
2. Where do I resist God's word? What themes of scripture do I avoid? His word may be threatening an idol in my life.
3. What is it that gives me hope for the future? Any answer other than the living God is a potential idol in my life.
4. What is it that which gives me greatest delight? Any answer other than the living God is a potential idol in my life.

VII. Anxiety

Hopefully that was a valuable time of sitting with the Lord and trying to identify what might be at the center of your heart, if God is not there. But, you may ask, how can we tell if we are deceiving ourselves? I mean, we are really good at justifying our actions, justifying our idols. So, how can we really tell if we are living in idolatry? Well, the choices we make regarding treasures, visions and masters will lead to a particular disposition of the heart and mind. If we choose to lay up treasures on earth, focus on darkness and serve mammon, we will be filled with anxiety. Our disposition, our state of being, our constitution will be anxious. Why? Because they are idols, and our heart and mind know that idols are always in danger of toppling. They are profoundly insecure and always in danger of falling over. The result will be anxiety. We will be anxious, restless, worried and unable to sleep at night.

But, here's the good news - if we choose to lay up treasures in heaven, focus on the things of the light of the world and serve God, our state of being will be peace-filled and restful. We will be preoccupied with only the things of God, his purposes and his work in the world, and we'll be at rest, able to sleep at night.

As Augustine said so long ago, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you" (Augustine, book 1).

VIII. Conclusion

That's exactly what Jesus tells us in Matthew 11:29. He says, "Come to me all you who are weary, who are heavy-laden with anxiety. Come to me all of you who are making yourself anxious because you're investing in the wrong treasures or focusing on the things of darkness or serving the wrong master. Come to me, follow me, focus on me, serve and worship me – and here's his promise - I will rest you. Jesus will rest you. It's a promise.

Amen.

IX. Benediction

Now, receive this benediction adapted from Jeremiah -

Go now -

- 7 "Blessed as one who trusts in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.
- 8 For you are like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream,
have no fear when the heat comes,
but continue to bear fruit.
- Be not anxious,
for he is with you and will never leave you
And, he will rest you.

Go in peace.

Amen.

Resources

Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook: Matthew 1-12*

Darrell Johnson, *Living in Sync: Studies in the Sermon on the Mount (Regent College Course)*

Grant Osborne, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT*

John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*