

Some Hope for Anxiety Matt 6:19-34

Call: Ps 121

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. Intro

I discovered this article this week. Back in 1961, Time magazine said this about anxiety: Not merely the statistics of murder, suicide, alcoholism and divorce betray anxiety... but almost any innocent everyday act: the limp or over-hearty handshake, the second pack of cigarettes, the forgotten appointment, the stammer in mid-sentence, the wasted hour in front of the TV set, the discipline of our children, the new car unpaid for. It all betrays anxiety (Hughes, 219).

How much more so today, some 57 years later in the middle of Silicon Valley where most, if not all, of us feel busy, frazzled, distracted and fragmented? As I said last week, we live in an anxious age. I think anxiety is the great epidemic of our age. We’re anxious about our jobs, about our future, about our past, about the upcoming election, about our mortgages, etc.

Parents are anxious about getting our children to all of their activities, let alone over their future. Meanwhile our children are anxious over their exams and grades. And the rise of technology simply adds a layer on top: we are anxious about keeping up our reputations on social media, protecting our on-line identity and responding to all of our email and texts in a timely manner. For me, I realized this week how anxious I get when this little thing is dying! When that battery indicator turns red, I get anxious! How foolish. Is there any hope?

Well Jesus word's in Matthew 6 are sorely needed in our day. As I said last week, although this text seems to present many random topics, a bit like the book of Proverbs, everything in this text falls under this one theme of anxiety.

II. Review

Now, as I also said last week, this anxiety that Jesus speaks of in this passage is not the clinical anxiety that comes from traumatic events in our past or from a chemical imbalance, although what he says here can help with those things. The anxiety Jesus is talking about is the underlying humming of worry and restlessness in all of our daily lives.

Verse 25 is the key verse which splits our text into two sections. Above verse 25, which we talked about last week, Jesus shows us that the choices we make relative to treasures, visions and masters lead us in a particular way, either toward restlessness and anxiety or toward restfulness and peace. If we choose to invest in earthly treasures, focus our vision on the things of darkness or serve idols, we will be anxious. Why? Because all of those things: earthly treasures, darkness and idols are all profoundly insecure. They are always in danger of toppling and falling over. It is foolish to invest in them because they will never last. But, if we choose to invest in heavenly treasures, focus our vision on the things of the light and serve and worship God, we will lead restful lives. Why? Because those things are eternal. They are safe from moth or rust or thieves, or earthquakes, floods, or fires, or recession, or terrorism or even death.

Today, we move to the verses 25-34 which gives us some hope for our anxiety. If we are struggling with our choices regarding treasures, vision and masters, if we are trying to make good choices regarding idols in our lives, but we are still struggling with anxiety, Jesus in these verses gives us some hope. He gives us three practical baby steps that can provide some hope for our anxiety. And, in reality, when we do these three practical baby steps, it will also help us make better choices regarding treasures, visions and masters.

These three baby steps emerge from the commands in the text. Besides Jesus telling us three times to not be anxious, in verses 25, 31 and 34, he gives us three commands in our text. These commands will provide the outline for this morning.

- In verse 26, we get the command, "Look at the birds of the air."
- In verse 28, we get the command, "Consider the lilies of the field."
- And, in verse 33, we get the climactic command of this section, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

So, let's dig in and we'll look at the first two commands together under the heading, Study Creation.

III. Study Creation (25-30)

*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?"*

A. Look at the Birds (25-27)

Look at the birds of the air. Along with the consider lilies command, Jesus is essentially saying, "Study creation."

As we said in the petition give us today our daily bread, Jesus affirms creation. We are physical creatures living in a physical world, and the physical world is good, even very good. Even though sin has marred it in many ways, it is still very good and something to care for and cherish. But, here, Jesus even goes further. We're not only to care for it and cherish it, we are to study it in order to learn from it.

Jesus says here, "Stop being anxious Shawn. Go outside and look up at the birds of the air."

And, I hear myself say, "What? I mean, Jesus, have you not read the newspaper/ internet today? There are massive problems in this world Jesus, and you want me to go outside and look at birds? You can't be serious, Jesus. How are the birds of the air going to help me with my anxiety?"

And, Jesus says, "Do it Shawn! *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?*"

Now, what Jesus is getting at here is that birds live a life of daily sustenance. They don't do what we humans do, growing and storing crops, and yet the heavenly father provides for them daily. And, aren't you much more valuable than they are, being made in the father's image? Aren't you his children, adopted into his family.

Now, this does flow directly from the petition, "Give us today our daily bread." When we pray that petition, we are going for our daily necessities, not weekly or monthly. It's a "one-day-at-a-time sweet Jesus" petition.

Here, once again, as we saw in our studies of the Lord's Prayer, we get a glimpse of the Exodus from Egypt. When the Israelites are wandering around in the wilderness, God provides manna every day for 40 years. And, he instructs them to only gather for the current day because God will provide the next day. If an Israelite gathered for more than one day, he was said to have an imperfect faith (Pennington, 248). He wasn't trusting that God would provide. He was anxious

that God would not provide.

So, here, don't be anxious Shawn. Look at the birds. If the birds can trust God for their daily provision, so can you.

Jesus finishes his argument by saying, *“And which of you by being **anxious** can add a single hour to his span of life.”* I love this passage because Jesus is such a realist. He's the ultimate realist. We cannot add any days to our lives by being anxious. In fact, as we all know, studies have shown that anxiety can shorten one's life.

B. Not Laziness

Now, note here, that Jesus is not advocating a lazy, thriftless, meaningless, careless life, doing nothing. There are many things we should be caring about in life, such as the state of our hearts, the spiritual well-being of others, how we fight the temptations in our life, etc. Jesus is simply calling us to recognize that our heavenly Father is a good God, is big enough to care for us and is worthy of our trust. Go outside and look at the birds who already recognize this truth! Notice that they seem pretty healthy and happy. They don't seem to be suffering from hypertension or stress-related diseases. They certainly don't look like they are struggling with anxiety. Why? Because they're counting on their heavenly father to take care of them, even though they do not sow or reap like we do. Can't we count on him as well? Can't we trust him for our needs as well?

Jesus now moves onto clothing, from sustenance to clothing, continuing with the study of creation. He now directs our gaze downward after looking upward at the birds, verses 28-32.

C. Consider the Flowers (28-30)

*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?*

Jesus says here that the flowers of the field preach to us as well.

Now, here, the ESV translates the command “consider.” The Greek word is a bit stronger than that. I would translate it more as “carefully notice” or “examine.” Examine the flowers of the field; carefully look at them and see how beautiful they are. God is into beauty. The church has forgotten that at certain times in history. And, that's unfortunate. God's really into beautiful things, so carefully examine the beauty of the flowers that he has made.

I don't think Jesus is referencing a particular flower here. He is most likely referencing the spectacular wildflowers that light up the fields in Israel in the springtime. As we all know, they light up our fields here every spring as well. But, the bloom is even more spectacular than Solomon's clothes. Solomon's clothes had become legendary in Jewish writings leading up to the time of Jesus. But, even his legendary clothes were drab compared to the beauty of what

God creates.

However, these wildflowers do only last a few weeks, then they die. And because they are out in a field, surrounded by grass, they would be mowed down along with the grass, and then used as fuel in fires.

Jesus' point is if God cares enough to make wildflowers spectacular for only a few weeks, how much more will he clothe you, his image-bearer.

D. Not Laziness

Now, once again, Jesus is not advocating for us to not toil and spin! Work is a gift to us and for us. It's a good thing for us, however, in working, we are to continue to trust God, not trust ourselves or trust the profits of our toiling. That's what you learn by examining a flower and by looking at the birds of the air.

Don't be anxious Shawn, O you of little faith. Go out and study creation. Get out there and take a walk in creation. Listen to the sermons the birds and the flowers are preaching. They are preaching to you out there Shawn. They are asking, "Hey human, where is your faith? Don't you know our good God? Isn't he your good Father? Isn't he a Father who cares deeply about you and cares deeply about us? You do not need to be anxious, because you can trust him. He is on the throne of the universe and holds it all together. The one who is very near to you right now holds it all together, and he is the supreme giver. You can trust him."

Jesus finishes this section by comparing the anxious person to the unbelievers, verses 31-32.

E. Seek To Not Be Like The Unbelievers (31-32)

*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.*

F. Unlike the Unbelievers

If we continue to be anxious about our daily needs, our sustenance and clothing, we are acting just like unbelievers who have no knowledge of a loving heavenly father. We look just like them. Unbelievers have no knowledge of anything beyond the physical world. So, to continue to ask what shall we eat, what shall we drink, what shall we wear? Is to appear as an unbeliever, anxious about, what's called, the world's trinity. Dale Bruner says this, "It is characteristic of the secular world to be obsessed with economic questions, to be almost entirely engrossed by consumer concerns, to be preoccupied with finding and getting better and bigger things" (Bruner, 269). This is the world's religion, which if we are not careful, will form us. The commercials and advertisements preach to us too, like the birds and flowers, but it is not about a good Father. It is about this religion of materialism and consumerism. They all cater to our anxiety about eating, drinking and wearing. And, so, we need to continue to walk outside and study creation and trust that our Father is good and trustworthy.

Helmut Thielicke said it this way, “Every worry is a vote of no confidence in God” (Thielicke, 128). When I’m anxious, when I worry, I am saying that what I’m worried about is too big for God to handle. God, I know you are busy and all, and you probably don’t have time to take care of this particular thing. And, I’m not really sure how much you really care for me. So, I’ll worry about it for you. And, when that happens, our hearts become preoccupied with the worlds’ trinity: What will I eat? What will I drink? What will I wear? And, Peter will tell us, *“Cast all your anxiety on God because he cares for you”* (1 Pet 5:7).

And, those are the first baby steps we can take to help us move from anxiety to rest. But, there is one more baby step, verses 33-34.

IV. Seek First His Kingdom

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.

A. Seek His Kingdom and Righteousness

We are not to be anxious, but instead seek his kingdom and righteousness. But, note he is not saying a simplistic command of “Just stop being anxious” and that’s it. We are to actively replace our concern for earthly matters with an overriding concern for the things of God. In other words, redirect your entire heart toward his kingdom and righteousness.

His Kingdom, his rule, his reign. Where his will is done on earth as it is in heaven. It is the only kingdom that will last. It is the only kingdom that is eternal. No other institution, no other corporation, no other business will last. So, seek it with all your heart.

Righteousness, as we have said all along in our studies of this sermon, is the main theme of the sermon, and it means right-relatedness. So, seek right-relationships with all your heart. Don’t seek influence with all your heart or you will be anxious. Don’t seek affluence with all your heart or you will be anxious. Don’t seek to make a name for yourself with all your heart, or you will be extremely anxious. Don’t seek to secure your future with all your heart, or you will be anxious. Don’t seek straight A’s with all your heart or you will be anxious. Now, all of those things are not unimportant. They are not of ultimate importance.

Seek with all your heart, of ultimate importance, his kingdom and righteousness. Here are the marching orders for followers of Christ in the world. Being a Christian is not being passive. It is go out and seek his kingdom and righteousness with our whole heart, participating with God in his work in the world. And, everything else falls into place.

Practically speaking, what might this look like? Well, it’s gathering here on Sunday mornings. It’s attending small groups through the week. It’s participating in the Lord’s Supper, which we will do in a minute. It’s practicing the disciplines which Jesus just taught on before this passage. It’s being discipled and discipling others in the kingdom life. It’s caring for our neighbors, and loving our enemies. But, it’s also going to our jobs. It’s loving our spouses and raising our

children. It's using our gifts and talents that God has given us. It's ordinary life stuff. It's not extraordinary super spiritual stuff. It doesn't take a great deal of training or talent to do any of it. Children can do most of it. It's the everyday, ordinary stuff done with a focus on his kingdom and his righteousness. Because once your singular focus is on his kingdom and his righteousness, all the other stuff that we worry about, isn't that important anymore. It all falls into place where it should be, for the things of earth grow strangely dim, when his kingdom and righteousness are our dominant focus.

John Stott sums this up best when he says, *"When this [seeking first his kingdom] is genuinely our dominant ambition, then not only will all these things... be yours as well, but there will be no harm in having secondary ambitions, since these will be subservient to our primary ambition and not in competition with it. Indeed, it is then that secondary ambitions become healthy. Christians should be eager to develop their gifts, widen their opportunities, extend their influence and be given promotion in their work - not to boost their own ego or build their own empire, but rather through everything they do to bring glory to God. Lesser ambitions are safe and right provided that they are not an end in [and of] themselves, but the means to a greater end (the spread of his kingdom and righteousness) and therefore to the greatest of all ends, namely God's glory"* (Stott, 173).

And, *all these things will be given to you as well*. For many of us, this is a hard saying because it raises many questions about the experience of Christians around the world who face deprivation and starvation. We do not have time to address many of those questions this morning, except to say that the Christian community is invited to be God's instrument for sharing with those in need, to be his hands and feet in the world (Lk 12:33, Mk 10:30a, Matt 10:42). God will take care of his people, but he often does so through others in the family.

Jesus concludes this section with one more call to not be anxious. *Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*. I never understood that last part. The ESV here translates it woodenly which does not help me. Jesus is essentially saying, "Don't pile tomorrow's troubles onto today." Why? Because it's a sign of not trusting our Father for our daily provision.

Andy Crouch reminds us that the lilies of the field close up their blooms at night and rest patiently for the next day. But, what do humans do? We cloak ourselves in ghastly light, making tomorrow's troubles today's and tonight's instead. (Crouch, 17-18)

Once again, Jesus is not arguing against the wisdom of preparing and planning for times of need. He is not saying we should not own more than one shirt or have a pantry of food. These issues of food, drink and clothing are ultimately about the heart, as we have said over and over again. Jesus drives at our hearts, as he has done throughout the entire sermon. Anxiety simply reveals the condition of our heart. Is God at the center of our heart or is something else there? Are we trusting him, leaning on him, throwing our entire life on him, our good, good father, for our daily needs?

V. Conclusion

Are there anxious thoughts in you? Are there anxious thoughts in me? Our text today is a text of hope. Jesus' instructions here provide us with some hope. First of all, take the baby step of getting out into creation. Take a walk in nature, and study God's good creation. Study creation, but look through creation, through the birds and flowers and everything else, and see the good Father caring for all of it. You are much more valuable than they, for you are made in his image. And, he loves to care for you. You can trust him.

Next, after taking a walk through creation, be active in the kingdom life, seeking right-relationships with your whole heart.

And, when you do these baby steps, take note of how you can sleep at night. Take note of how your self-absorption disappears. Take note of the lack of anxiety in your life and give thanks to the Father for being a good, good Father.

Amen.

VI. Communion

Well, today, we have the privilege of celebrating communion. If you are a follower of Christ, you are invited to the table today.

Jesus invites us to the table this morning where he is the host. We pray the petition, "Give us today our daily bread." And, today, we proclaim with material things, bread and juice, bounty of his good creation, that Jesus is the bread of life, and that his blood confirms the new covenant with us. In participating in communion, we are proclaiming our trust in him that we do need him every hour. We are proclaiming our satisfaction in him and not in money or possessions or treasures or anything else, in Christ alone we trust. We are proclaiming that he is enough, that he is all I need especially in the face of anxious thoughts and nagging worries. It is through him we have hope. And, it is through him that we can be at peace. He is our peace. We proclaim all of these things this morning through our participation in communion. So, may we take the cup and bread this morning with thanksgiving.

The words of institution

On the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Cor 11:24-26)

VII. Benediction

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. You can trust him and he wants to care for you. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:6). Go in peace. Amen.

Resources

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

Andy Crouch, *Tech-Wise Family*

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

Grant Osborne, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT*

Jonathan Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*

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

Helmut Thielicke, *Life Can Begin Again*