

“Overcoming Anxiety: Part 1”

Matthew 6:19-24

Delivered during the COVID-19 crisis via Livestream at Central Baptist Church on August 2, 2020

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** The CBC put out a documentary entitled **“Age of Anxiety.”** The documentary makes a clear distinction between clinical anxiety disorders and everyday anxiety. Here is how it begins.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** ***“Anxiety. It’s being called the disease of the 21st century. Everybody is either afflicted - or knows someone who is. According to the World Health Organization, disorders related to dread are the most prevalent mental illness on the globe at the moment. Some of us shriek at spiders, others have panic attacks that flare up out of nowhere and mimic the symptoms of heart failure, still others worry excessively about everything and nothing – violent crime, cancer, black bears, tornadoes: fear is a condition in search of a cause.”***
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 3)** Every one of us has experienced the sickness of everyday anxieties. Even right now there is a general anxiety throughout our entire culture about Covid. Add to this that many times we have lain awake at night feeling stressed about what the future holds. Have you not felt anxiety turn your stomach when you see how tight your finances are and how many bills need to be paid? Hasn’t the fever of anxiety over a relationship gone bad burned you up for days on end? At times have you not felt ill from worry that you might lose your spouse, your kids, your job, your investments, or your position?
 - Every one of us has experienced the sickness of anxiety. And, like all sick people, we long for health. That is why this passage is such good news.
 - In Jesus, the kingdom of God has invaded this world. This kingdom is making all that is sick healthy again.
- Now, it is obvious that Jesus is seeking to heal us from the sickness of anxiety in verses 25-34. **READ 25a - *Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life.*** But what is not so obvious is how verses 19-24 about treasures, vision, and masters, are also talking about anxiety.
 - In verse 25 Jesus is saying to us that the anxiety he will talk about in 25-34 is rooted in the decisions we make about the three things of verses 19-24: treasures, vision, and masters. Jesus is telling us that anxiety is a merely a symptom. You feel anxious because you are making unwise decisions about treasures, vision, and masters. So, verses 19-24 get to the root cause behind anxiety.
 - The anxiety Jesus is speaking about is not that clinical anxiety that is often the result of deep trauma. He is dealing here with the everyday anxiety that we face.
- So in verses 19-24 Jesus is going to teach us about our hearts that we might be healed of our anxiety. My seminary Professor Darrell Johnson, whom I am borrowing from today,

puts it like this: Jesus is going to teach us about three basic laws of the human heart. Each of these laws has a consequence which then presses us to make a decision.

- The main point of verses 19-24 then is this: **(SHOW SLIDE 4) Since anxiety comes from making unwise choices about three basic laws of human nature we must make wise kingdom informed decisions.**
 - So three laws, three consequences, and three decisions.

LAW #1: EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN INVESTOR

- Let's begin with law #1. **(SHOW SLIDE 5) Every human being is an investor seeking security for the future.**
 - Look at verses 19-20. Jesus makes a negative statement and then a positive statement. **READ 19-20 - (SHOW SLIDE 6) 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.**
 - Notice that Jesus assumes that we all seek to store up treasure for ourselves. Note also that Jesus is not against you doing this. To the contrary. In verse 20 he commands you to store up treasures for yourself. **READ 20 - but lay up for yourselves treasures.**
 - The treasure Jesus is talking about is first of all money, possessions, and material wealth. But it is more than that. Treasure is can be just about anything that you pursue with all your might.
- So, Jesus' concern is not to rebuke us for our selfish desire to store up treasures. No, he calls us to store up treasures. His concern is not that we are *too selfish* but that we are *too foolish*. We foolishly invest so much into treasures on earth that we think will make us secure but in reality will all be taken from us.
 - This is foolish because we could be investing in heavenly treasures that are eternally secure.
 - So that is the first law: every human being is an investor seeking security for the future.

CONSEQUENCE #1: OUR HEARTS FOLLOW OUR TREASURES

- Jesus then tells us that a critical consequence follows from this law. The consequence of this law is that **(SHOW SLIDE 7) our hearts will always follow our treasures.**
 - Look at verse 21. **READ 21 - (SHOW SLIDE 8) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** Oh how gracious Jesus is to reveal our hearts to us. He wants his people to walk in the freedom and health of the kingdom.
 - So he says don't seek to store up treasures on earth because if you do then your heart will become attached to things that are profoundly insecure. This will make you feel anxious because you will always fret and worry about losing your treasures.
- This is so true is it not? Think about wealth. The Bible calls us to work hard, to save for the future, to provide for our families, and to enjoy God's creation. But if the main thing that drives your life is financial security, you will live in a perpetual state of anxiety. You

will worry about people scratching your expensive car. You will fret about how your investments are doing. If the economy collapses, you will collapse.

- Do you see how good Jesus is? Jesus wants you to know freedom. If you invest in heavenly treasures – in people, in your church, in the poor, in missions, in gospel causes, then your heart is free from anxiety because you never have to worry about these things being taken away from you.

DECISION #1: WHERE WILL WE INVEST?

- So the law is that we are all investors. The consequence is that our hearts will always follow our treasures. So now the decision that we must make this morning is simple. **(SHOW SLIDE 9) will we invest in treasures on earth or treasures in heaven?**
 - The things of this world are insecure. Jesus states three things that destroy our treasures: rust, moths, and thieves. **READ 19-20 - (SHOW SLIDE 10) 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.**
 - Rust is time's slow decay – time will eventually take everything from us including our lives.
 - Moth is nature's decay – the house that you put so much money into needs remodeling only a decade later.
 - Thieves are how humanity destroys your treasures – the market crashes, your RRSP's falter, you lose your job.
 - In order to free us and keep us from getting sick with anxiety, Jesus says, "Invest in things that last."
- So look at your life. Could it be that you are anxious because you are investing in things that are profoundly insecure. What practical ways can you start investing in things that will last into eternity?

LAW #2: EVERY HUMAN BEING OPERATES WITH A VISION OF REALITY

- **(SHOW SLIDE 11) Law #2: every human being operates with a vision of reality.**
 - **READ 22-23 - (SHOW SLIDE 12) 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 is what we see reality with. And we all have a vision of reality. You see the world through a set of glasses that are tinted by how you were raised, by your experiences, and by what you have learned. This is a law that is true of all people.

CONSEQUENCE #2: OUR VISION AFFECTS OUR WHOLE LIVES

- And once again there is a consequence that follows from this law. **(SHOW SLIDE 13) Consequence #2 is this: our vision of reality affects our whole lives.**

- It is literally true that what we let into our eyes affect us but that is not what Jesus is getting at. He is speaking metaphorically. He is saying that what you focus your attention on will allow either light or darkness into your heart. Good eyes focus on light and a person is filled with light. Bad eyes focus on darkness and the person is filled with darkness.
 - So Jesus is saying that what you focus on will determine everything else about you. You will become like that which you focus on. This forces us to make a decision.

DECISION #2: WHERE WILL WE FOCUS OUR ATTENTION?

- **(SHOW SLIDE 14) Decision #2: where will we focus our attention?**
 - What will you focus your life on? Whatever treasures you focus your eyes on will always pull you toward themselves. Jesus is saying that what you focus on will either fill you with light or darkness.
 - That is why Col 3 says, **(SHOW SLIDE 15)** *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”*
 - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 16)** Again Jesus is only seeking our good here. We all know this because darkness makes us feel insecure and when we feel insecure we are filled with fear, anxiety, and worry. Since we have been given new life in the kingdom we are to seek first the kingdom of God. This will bring the freedom and peace of walking in the light.
- So what is your life focused on? Do you fill your heart with God’s word? Do you seek him in prayer? Is your whole life bent on living in line with the kingdom?
 - The choices you make about church, the Bible, money, time, language, will affect your children’s vision of reality.

LAW #3: EVERY HUMAN BEING SERVES SOME SORT OF GOD

- **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** That bring us to law #3: every human being serves some sort of god. **READ 24 - (SHOW SLIDE 18)** *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.*
 - Every human being serves some sort of god. Aside from Jesus I have another favourite preacher who talks about this. This preacher’s name is Bob Dylan and his best sermon on this is called, *Gotta Serve Somebody*
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 19)** *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,
It may be the devil or it may be the Lord*

But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

- Bob Dylan is simply echoing what Jesus is saying, namely that everyone serves some sort of god. Whatever you serve, cherish, and live for - that is your god.

CONSEQUENCE #3: WE CAN ONLY SERVE ONE GOD AT A TIME

- This law also has a consequence. **(SHOW SLIDE 20) Consequence #3: we can serve only one god at a time.**
 - Notice that Jesus isn't saying that it is not *wise* to serve two masters. He isn't even saying you *should not* serve two masters. He says you *cannot* serve two masters. It is possible to serve two employers but a slave cannot serve two masters. It is impossible.
 - And the two masters Jesus mentions are at the end of the verse. **READ 24 - (SHOW SLIDE 21) You cannot serve God and money.** Now the word for money here is "mammon."
- Mammon simply refers to anything, other than God, that we put our confidence in. Since human beings most often put their confidence in wealth, the word came to be synonymous with money. But mammon is more than just money or wealth. If you put your confidence in your looks, your popularity, your achievements, or your family then that is your mammon.
 - Notice that Jesus is not saying that mammon is evil. In fact, mammon is often something that is good. Jesus is simply pointing out the fact that you cannot give ultimate allegiance to mammon and to God.
 - There can only be one God on the throne of the human heart. But our hearts are forever putting idols in the place of God. This, Jesus says, is why we get so anxious. We are trying to serve gods that are impermanent, that are insecure, and that will always fail us. Our hearts know this and so they are anxious.
- So how can you know what mammon may be vying for the throne of your heart? Darrell Johnson offers five questions that help you to see the idols of your heart. Let the Spirit search your heart as we walk through these.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 22) Discerning the Idols of Your Heart. Question #1: What gives me a sense of security?**
 - In this turbulent world of Covid-19 what do you look to protect you and make you feel stable? Anything other than Jesus is a potential idol.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 23) Question #2: what is my greatest delight?**
 - What brings me greatest joy? What do I get really excited about? What do I talk about all the time? Where does my mind roam when it is free? What do I spend my money on? Anything other than Jesus is a potential idol.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 24) Question #3: what do I fear?**
 - Fear is always a good clue to an idol. Primitive people would project their fears and make them into gods. Trace your fear and you will find your true god. Fear is something that you have given too much authority to.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 25) Question #4: where do I resist the word of God?**

- What themes of the Bible will I avoid? What I resist is probably a potential god because I will not give it up.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 26) Question #5: what is it that if God took it away I would walk away?** I would say, “forget you God.”
 - I believe in you but if you do not keep my financial state comfortable then our relationship is negotiable. If this rings true your true god is your money.
 - I believe in you but if you don’t let me get married then our relationship is negotiable. If this rings true, marriage is your idol.
 - I believe in you but if you do not keep my family safe and healthy then our relationship is negotiable. In this case you have elevated family and health to be your functional god.
 - I would encourage you to take those five questions and to ask the Spirit to really search your heart through them.

DECISION #3: WHAT GOD WILL WE SERVE?

- So this leaves us with our last decision. Decision #3 is this: **(SHOW SLIDE 27) what God will we serve?** You can only serve one master – who or what will it be?
 - Once again I emphasize to you that the Jesus is saying all of this for your good. He wants you to be cured from your anxiety. In order to be cured of your anxiety you need to look beneath the symptoms. You need to understand how your heart works.
 - Jesus has taught us that what you invest in will give birth to what you focus on and what you focus on will give birth to the god that you will worship. And any God other than Jesus Christ, is an insecure god that will ultimately fail.
 - So the reason why you are anxious is because you have made unwise decisions about treasures, vision, and masters. So think through two examples that show how good Jesus is in revealing this to us.
 - **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 28)** Think about how this affect parenting. Children are a good gift from God to be loved and cherished. But if your children are the number one thing you live for then you will live in a perpetual state of anxiety. You will worry constantly about your kids. This will lead you to be way too overprotective with your kids. You will place a burden on your kids to fill that place in your heart that God alone can fill. This will crush you kids.
 - That is why Jesus said, ***“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.”*** Jesus does not mean hate as in you attack your kids. He means that your heart can only have one ultimate allegiance and love.
 - This is so good because when God is our supreme love then we are free with our children. When we know the Father’s love for us we don’t place the burden of feeling loved on our kids. When we know the Father’s care we protect our kids but we don’t live in perpetual anxiety about their

safety because we know that they are ultimately in God's hands. Jesus is a good master.

- Or think about how this frees you from anxiety in regards to career achievement. As Christians we are called to work with all our hearts. Achievement is a good thing. But if the chief thing that you live for is to achieve you will live in perpetual anxiety.
 - You will fear what your boss thinks of you. You will fall into despair when things go bad. When you succeed you will live in constant fear of someone else overtaking you. You will worry constantly about maintaining your achievements. Not only that the god of career success, like all false gods, will demand you sacrifice all to it – your time, energy, health, wife, and children.
 - Jesus wants to free you from all that anxiety. When Jesus is your master you know that he achieved everything that you need to have God's eternal favour. This frees you to work hard, to help others achieve, to not feel threatened by others, and if things fall apart you don't collapse.

CONCLUSION

- For our good Jesus calls his people to make wise kingdom informed decisions. Store up treasures in heaven. Focus on God and the things of him. Serve God and him alone ensuring that He is the supreme God in your heart. He alone will hold.