

## **“Overcoming Anxiety – Part 3”**

Matthew 6:31-33

Delivered during the COVID-19 crisis via Livestream at Central Baptist Church on August 16, 2020

### **INTRODUCTION**

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Two weeks ago I referenced a documentary on the CBC entitled, *Age of Anxiety*. The documentary demonstrated how anxiety disorders are becoming the most commonly diagnosed mental disorder in our society. Part of the reason for this is the controversial and ever-broadening definition of what actually qualifies as an anxiety disorder. The other reason is the simple fact that we all face anxiety, particularly in a fast-paced urban lifestyle.
  - Everyone experiences anxiety. Social anxiety. Financial anxiety. Unemployment anxiety. Relational anxiety. Apparently 28% of students have an anxiety disorder. I’m guessing that number rises to 100% at exam time. The documentary stated that by age 32, 50% of the population might qualify for an anxiety disorder.
    - Drug companies understand this better than anyone. They spend a fortune marketing to doctors and people. To cite the documentary, **“The country is bathing itself in prescribed drugs.”**
- The prevalence of anxiety in our lives is what makes Jesus’ words so relevant to us today. Although Jesus’ words certainly do have something to say to those who actually suffer from an clinical anxiety disorder, Jesus is dealing here with the anxiety that we all face over our material needs - getting a job, paying the bills, finding a place to live, paying for school, and surviving financially when the baby arrives.
  - In this passage Jesus identifies the causes and cures for anxiety. In verses 19-24 Jesus identifies the causes of anxiety. Then in verses 25-34 he gives the cure.
    - In essence, Jesus says two things about how to be cured – redirect your attention and redirect your ambition. Last week we focused on redirecting our attention. Today we conclude by looking at Jesus’ call to redirect our ambition.
- So we are going to do three things today.
  - First, we will look at Jesus’ thesis. Second, we will look at three reasons for why Jesus says you should trust His thesis. Third, we will get really practical and look at three ambitions that we need to redirect.
    - Thesis, three reasons, three ambitions.

### **JESUS’ THESIS**

- So let’s begin by looking at **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** Jesus’ thesis.
  - His thesis is simply this: **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** **Your anxiety about material needs will be cured when you redirect your ambitions from obsessing about them to obsessing about living for Christ.**
- In order to understand Jesus’ thesis I want you to notice first of all that Jesus is not against ambition. In fact, **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** **Jesus assumes that all human beings are wired for ambition.**

- Look at verse 32. **READ 32 - (SHOW SLIDE 5)** <sup>32</sup> **For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.** Pagans simply refers to someone who is not Jewish, who do not follow the God of the Bible. Notice that Jesus says all non-Christians spend their lives doing something. What is it? Seeking after things. This verb “to seek” means to be on an unceasing quest for something, to be devoted to it, obsessed about it, to set your heart on it, and to pursue it with all your might. In short, it is means to be ambitious.
  - Note very carefully that Jesus does not go on to say, **“Now that you are a Christian stop being ambitious because that is the way of the world.”** To the contrary, in verse 33 Jesus calls Christians to be hugely ambitious. **READ 33 - <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.** This word for “seek” comes from the same root word as the one in verse 32.
- So Jesus is not trying to destroy your ambition. He assumes that we are all wired for ambition. Human beings are not like plankton that just floats wherever the tide goes. No one aspires to sit in a chair and just breathe for their whole life.
  - Kids want to grow up to be astronauts, pilots, and doctors. When Emily was 3 she said, **“Daddy, when I grow up I want to be a fire truck.”** I said, **“Don’t you mean a firefighter?”** **“No, I want to be a fire truck.”**
    - So I followed the advice of our self-affirming culture and said, **“Emily, you can be anything you set your mind to.”**
- We are all ambitious but Jesus’ point is that **(SHOW SLIDE 6) anxiety is caused by misplaced ambition.**
  - Remember that the main subject of this entire section is not worrying about material needs. And Jesus is saying that people worry and are so stressed out because their ambitions are focused solely on material needs.
- But then Jesus says his people are not to worry about material needs. Now here is the big question: how do you stop obsessing and fretting about your material needs? Redirect your ambitions. Jesus says that **(SHOW SLIDE 7) Anxiety is cured when we redirect our ambitions to God’s kingdom and righteousness. READ 33 - <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.**
  - Christians are to seek and obsess after something. Jesus intensifies this with the word “first.” So, there is something that is to become the supreme quest of your life, the chief thing you strive for, your one sacred obsession, the primary thing you bend your ambitions toward.
    - What is it? **READ 33 - the kingdom of God and his righteousness.**
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 8)** The kingdom of God is God’s reign. It is Jesus ruling over us and over the world. To seek first the kingdom means to desire above all else that Jesus’s good rule be extended into your life, the lives of others, and the whole world.
  - It is not that a Christian does not have other ambitions like career or family. Not at all. Those are good and right ambitions. It is just that the kingdom must be “first.” All other ambitions are to be subordinate to the seeking the Lordship of Jesus in all things.

- Jesus also says we are to seek first after God’s “righteousness.”
  - Righteousness means right living. To seek first after God’s righteousness means that above all you obsess about living in a way that conforms to Christ’s rule.
    - One sign of a true Christian is that they “***hunger and thirst after righteousness***” – a righteousness Jesus described in chapter 5 as a life that controls anger, is quick to resolve conflict, is sexually pure, maritally faithful, truthful, eager to forgive, and shows love to one’s enemies.
- So let’s put it all together. Jesus says the way that you deal with worry is to be overtaken by something more important than the object of your worries. Your anxiety will fall away when it is replaced by something superior to what you worry about.
  - If you want to be cured of anxiety learn again order of the Lord’s Prayer. We are commanded to pray about our material needs but they are not first. We are to seek first the glory of God’s name, the extension of his kingdom, and His will being done on the Earth.
    - As you seek first God’s kingdom and live as he requires you find that your anxieties about material things just fall away. That is Jesus’ thesis: your anxiety about material needs will be cured when you redirect your ambitions *from* obsessing about them *to* obsessing about Jesus’ living for Christ.

#### CHRISTIANS DON'T LIVE LIKE PAGANS

- Even though Jesus says this we still aren’t fully convinced it is true. If we throw ourselves into seeking his kingdom, how can we be sure our material needs will be met? This sounds great but does it work?
  - Jesus now backs up his thesis with **(SHOW SLIDE 9) three reasons why we should follow what Jesus says.**
- **(SHOW SLIDE 10) First, redirect your ambitions because a Christian does not live like a pagan. READ 31-32 - <sup>31</sup>Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup>For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.**
  - The average person in Victoria is ignorant about God. This word “pagan” refers to any non-Jewish person. The Gentile nations around Israel did not really care about the God of the Jewish people.
    - Likewise today, the average person in our city knows a bit about what Christianity teaches but, by and large, it does not matter to them very much.
- Most people today view life in one of two ways. Some people believe that there is no God - that everything that has happened, and will happen, is the result of random uncontrollable chance.
  - Others believe in what we might call “fatalism.” Fatalism says that there are forces above you that control everything. The alignment of the stars, the energy of the universe, spirits, crystals, your horoscope, your birth sign - all of these control your life.

- Both of these views share a common denominator. At the end of day, you are left to walk life alone. It all depends on you.
  - This creates anxiety. You see, if all of life is random chance and you have no God to turn to then you should worry about your life because you are the only one who can help yourself. Likewise, if your life is controlled by impersonal forces like the stars then you will also be filled with anxiety because you cannot control what will happen next.
    - If there is no Almighty and benevolent God you must, at the end of the day, face everything alone. It is only natural then that you would feel a certain measure of anxiety.
- So Jesus is exposing the world's shallow ambition. Since the average secular person does not know God he or she is entirely preoccupied with material things. This creates a level of anxiety because it is tough to walk alone.
  - Jesus says to his people, ***“Don’t spend your life being ambitious and anxious about your material needs because you know that you don’t walk alone. Don’t live like a pagan.”***

#### THE FATHER KNOWS WHAT YOU NEED

- Then Jesus gives a second reason why you should follow his teaching. Secondly, **(SHOW SLIDE 11) redirect your ambitions because the Father knows what you need. READ 32 - <sup>32</sup>For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.**
  - This is how Christians are different. The Christian knows that we do not walk alone. God walks with us. But He is not just God. Because of what Jesus did for us at the cross, God is our Father. Like any good Father, God pays very careful attention to every detail of our lives. He knows our material needs.
- This sentence alone should cure you of all your worry. The Father knows what you need. The reason we worry is because we do not know how we will meet our material needs. We don't know where we will get a job, where the money will come from, or how we will make it on one income. But the Father knows.
  - Armed with this great truth, you are free to invest time, effort, and money into kingdom causes because you can trust that the Father knows what you need.
    - Jesus could have stopped here. The fact that the Father knows what we need should lead us to trust him with our material needs and throw ourselves into seeking the kingdom. But in typical gracious fashion Jesus goes even further to cure our anxiety.

#### THE FATHER WILL GIVE YOU ALL THAT YOU NEED

- In the third place Jesus says, **(SHOW SLIDE 12) redirect your ambitions because the Father will provide for your needs as you seek his kingdom above all things.**
  - **READ 33 - <sup>33</sup>But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.** What a promise! What freedom from anxiety. It is not just that the Father knows but also that the Father *will* provide for our material needs. This is what frees you to redirect your ambitions to

kingdom matters. This is what enables you to give freely of your money and time.

- I should note here that Jesus does not promise to give you everything you desire or wish for. He promises to meet your needs.
- So let me bring all of this together now. As a Christian, you may have many ambitions in life but your supreme ambition that overrides all others is to be the kingdom. Christians do not have to fret and worry about material needs like the non-Christian does.
  - We are free to be ambitious for God because we don't have to waste all our energy on worrying about material things. We can fully devote ourselves to the kingdom because the Father knows our needs and promises that as we pursue his kingdom he will provide for our daily needs.

### CHRISTIAN OR PAGAN?

- So ask yourself some practical questions now: **(SHOW SLIDE 13) What is the supreme ambition of my life?** What drives me? What makes me tick? If someone were to look at your life what would they say you are most ambitious about?
  - We have to ask ourselves, does the way I use my money look different from the world around me? Does the way I use my time look different from those who do not know Christ. Do my ethics and morals look different from the non-Christian?
    - So what is the supreme ambition of your life?
- Or ask yourself **(SHOW SLIDE 14) When I am faced with difficulties do I react like a secular person or like a Christian?**
  - When money is short do you look to the Father in childlike trust or does anxiety consume you?
- Let's go further. **(SHOW SLIDE 15) Do I strive to see my Christian faith worked out in every area of life?** Is it affecting all of my choices? Does it determine how you view sexuality, money, anger, career, and finding a spouse? Is it obvious to everyone that your life is totally different than those around you?

### BE AMBITIOUS IN LIFE

- Having looked at Jesus thesis and his three reasons for following what he says, let's wrap all of this up by talking about three areas where Christians can be ambitious for the sake of Christ – in life, in family, in the church. **(SHOW SLIDE 16) First, be ambitious in life.** I kept this broad simply because I want to let the Spirit lead you in your particular situation.
  - Be ambitious for Christ. Dream, think, and pray. How can you use your life for the cause of Christ? How can your unique gifts be used in his service? How you seek first the kingdom as a student, as a medical professional, as an engineer, or a teacher?
- In 1790 William Carey, was very frustrated by the church's lack of concern for global evangelization. He proposed the formation of a society for world missions and launched the modern missions movement. Carey said, **(SHOW SLIDE 17) "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God."**

- That is the rallying cry of all those who seek first the kingdom. Dave Harvey writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 18)** *“We need an ambition that won’t rest until more people are reached, more churches planted, more marriages helped, more art created, more enterprises started, more disciples made . . . so desire great things. Dream big dreams. Get out there and get to work.”*<sup>1</sup>
  - How can you use your life for Christ?

### BE AMBITIOUS FOR YOUR FAMILY

- **(SHOW SLIDE 19)** **Second, be ambitious for your family.**
  - If you are not married I have a huge dating tip for you. Make Mt 6:33 the primary criteria for choosing anyone you date and eventually marry. Don’t choose a spouse like everyone in the world does. If your #1 ambition is seeking to live for Christ in all things then make sure that the person you date and marry shares this ambition.
    - Look at couples who do this. Look at their mutual joy in Christ. Look at all they do for Christ. The next time a guy asks you out say, **“What do you think about Mt 6:33?”**
- To those of you with kids I especially have a heart for you today. I want to call you to be ambitious for your family to know Christ. Don’t just seek to have good kids. Seek to have godly kids. Be ambitious for your family. Work and strive to ensure the Bible is read, prayer is always a part of family life, service to others is demonstrated, and Sunday worship is a top priority.
  - Parents, your children will seek first whatever you show them they should seek first. So for instance, if Sunday worship comes after soccer, sleeping in, weekends away, family days, and doing homework, then don’t be surprised when your kids grow up having little or no love for Christ’s church. You taught them to seek other things first – above worship of God.
    - Your kids will learn what they should seek first in life by your example. Parents, you set the priorities. Be ambitious for your family.

### AMBITIOUS FOR THE CHURCH

- **(SHOW SLIDE 20)** **Finally, be ambitious for Christ’s church at Central.**
  - Because of our individualistic culture many Christians have failed to see that ambition is not just about you. Our ambition is also to be corporate. In the NT every Christian was an active member of a local church.
    - Jesus loves his church so much that he gave his life for her. Jesus is so ambitious for his church that he said, **“I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”** If Jesus loves his church and has so much ambition for her should we not have the heart of Christ?
- It is such a joy to be part of a church with so many members that share this. Right now in this pandemic, I want to call you to be ambitious in the small thing of reaching out to others. Join a house church. Care for one another.

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<sup>1</sup> Dave Harvey, *Rescuing Ambition*, 209-210.

## CONCLUSION

- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 21)** My brothers and sisters, Christians should be the most ambitious people of all. The question is what you will seek first. What will be your supreme ambition? Once again, Jesus simplifies things for us – there are only two choices.
  - Do not be preoccupied with your own security and material needs for that is the obsession of the Gentiles who do not know God. Be obsessed with God's rule and righteousness.