

“Overcoming Anxiety: Part 2”

Matthew 6:25-30

Delivered during the COVID-19 crisis via Livestream at Central Baptist Church on August 9, 2020

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** It is one of the catchiest songs of all time. You can't help but whistle along when you hear it. Bobby McFerrin wrote it in 1988 and it is called, *Don't Worry, Be Happy*.
 - *Ain't got no place to lay your head
Somebody came and took your bed
Don't worry, be happy
The land lord says your rent is late
He may have to litigate
Don't worry, be happy
Ain't got no cash, ain't got no style
Ain't got no girl to make you smile
But don't worry be happy*
- Now on the one hand, it's a fun song that makes you smile. But on the other hand, the message of the song is very naïve. It trivializes our pain. It's pretty hard to be happy when you're getting evicted.
 - At first glance this is how people think of Jesus' words in our passage today. They imagine Jesus like a hippie sitting on a hillside talking about flowers and birds as the wind blows through his long silky hair.
 - Don't worry? Jesus, do you know the pressures that we face? Some of us are not sure how we will make tuition *and* afford to eat this fall? Others have lost their jobs due to Covid and worry about losing their house. Still others have young children at home and more on the way. How will they make it on single income? How is it possible not to worry?
 - But Jesus is not a naïve hippie singing reggae songs about not worrying. Jesus takes us deep into our hearts. He reveals why we worry and then gives realistic teaching on how to be free of it.
 - I'm praying that if you are worried about food, clothing, and a roof over your head that this message would really help you today. And if you have these things, that you would grow deeper in thanksgiving to God and in trusting him when future challenges come your way.
- So we are doing a three part series entitled, **“Overcoming Anxiety.”** Last week Jesus showed us the causes of our worry. This week and next he describes the cure for our anxiety.
 - The cure is twofold. First, *we must redirect our attention*. Second, *we must redirect our ambitions*. Today we are going look at redirecting our attention and next week we will look at redirecting our ambitions.
 - So in order that we might know freedom from the anxieties of daily life, Jesus calls us to redirect our attention in five different ways.

FROM YOUR PHYSICAL NEEDS TO THE GREATER PURPOSES OF LIFE

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** First, **your anxiety will be cured when you redirect your attention from your physical needs to the greater purposes of life. (SHOW SLIDE 3) READ 25 - 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?”**
 - Now do not misunderstand this and think that Jesus is unconcerned with your physical needs. Right before our passage he taught the Lord’s Prayer. There he told us to pray for our daily bread. He cares about your needs.
 - Moreover, in verse 32 Jesus says the Father knows we need food, clothing, housing, and jobs. And in verse 33 he says he will give them as we seek the kingdom.
- Jesus is confronting the upside-down way the world thinks – a way of thinking that is absolutely preoccupied with the body. People are obsessed with their bodies: we feed them, cloth them, exercise them, put jewelry on them, keep them warm, keep them cool, put expensive scents on them, and a million other things.
 - Now, if we are only bodies that need to be watered, fed, and clothed then it makes sense to obsess and feel anxious about these things. In verse 32 Jesus says the non-Christian world obsesses about these things. Fine! Let them! But as Christians we know that life is so much more than just physical happiness.
- The Lord’s Prayer has already taught us this. The request for daily bread was not the first, second, or even third request. It was the fourth. Even more important that clothing and jobs is our relationship with God. You were made to know your Maker, to enjoy Him, to live for his purposes.
 - So if you are filled with anxiety about the essentials of life it is partly because you have lost sight of the greater purposes of life. Redirect your attention. Focus on God, on knowing Him and enjoying Him.

FROM YOUR NEED FOR FOOD TO THE FATHER’S FAITHFUL PROVISION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** Second, **your anxiety will be cured when you redirect your attention from your need for food to the Father’s faithful provision.**
 - Verse 26 begins with the word, **“Look.”** So again, Jesus is saying that you are anxious because your focus has been on the wrong thing. You need to redirect your attention to...well, are you ready for this...to the birds.
 - **READ 26 - (SHOW SLIDE 5)** 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?**
- Really? The economy is shaky, gas prices are rising, Covid will probably continue for another year or so, and you want me to go bird watching? Does Jesus know what he is talking about?
 - This reminds of the time when Peter had fished all night and caught nothing and Jesus said, **“Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”** Peter cannot see why this is a smart move and says, **“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything.”** Look at the birds? But then Peter said,

“But because you say so, I will let down the nets.” When they did they caught so many fish the boat started to sink.

- Jesus, because *you* say so, we will look at the birds.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 6)** So let’s walk along Dallas Drive and watch the birds. What do you notice about them and the way they eat? Birds don’t plant fields. Birds don’t build Costco’s to store food for winter. Eagles don’t start trucking companies to ship fish across the country. **READ 26a - Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.**
 - Before I say why this is so important I need to make an aside. There are some people who are naturally carefree but who are also irresponsible. You know, the guy who’s 35, still backpacking the world, and asking to sleep at your house for a few weeks because he has no money. Is Jesus saying that we should all just relax, quit our jobs, and trust God to provide food for us? No. Look at the birds. Birds work hard for their food. It is the same for us. God is the one who provides food but he provides it through working hard.
 - So as one commentator says, Jesus is not using the birds as an example of idleness. He is using them as an example of freedom from anxiety. End of aside.
- So you see every bird is a preacher. They are the best preachers. Their message is same day after day after day. They sing, squawk, whistle, caw, and chirp the same message: ***“God always provides. God always provides.”***
 - But Jesus goes even further to cure your anxiety. He does not call God, “God.” He calls God, ***“your heavenly Father.”*** When a person receives Jesus Christ they are adopted into God’s family. He is not just God. He is Father. Every good Father provides for His kids. And then Jesus adds the big statement at the end of 26. **READ 26 - Are you not of more value than they?**
- So you see, the real problem with our anxiety is that we fail to draw some obvious conclusions from the birds. If God faithfully provides for them will not He, who is your loving Father, faithfully provide for you?
 - The reason we worry is that we have either never grasped the loving Fatherhood of God or we are currently forgetting it.
 - Has Jesus not already told you to pray for your daily bread? Will the Father reject the very prayer that he has told you to pray?
- So the cure for anxiety all comes down to knowing the Father – what He is like and what He is not like.
 - You can trust that He will provide easy things like food for you because He has done the incredibly difficult thing of saving us from His wrath through Jesus’ death on the cross.
 - You can trust that He cares for your temporal needs because He cared for the eternal needs of your soul in sending Jesus to be punished in your place.
 - You can trust that He will care for you because He has already proved his love for you in giving up His most precious Son for you.

- Do you know the personal love of the Father for you? Can you say with Paul, ***“The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me”***? Then how can you doubt that he will provide small gifts like food?
 - Are struggling with anxiety? Then redirect your attention to the birds. Go for a walk in Beacon Hill Park or along Dallas Drive today. Let the birds redirect your attention to the Father.

FROM YOUR FEAR OF THE FUTURE TO GOD’S PROVIDENCE

- **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** Third, your anxiety will be cured when you redirect your attention from your fear of the future to God’s providential plan for your life.
 - Look at verse 27. **READ 27 - (SHOW SLIDE 8)** ²⁷ **And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?** You will notice that there is a footnote in your Bible at the end of the verse. The footnote says, ***“Or single cubit to his height.”*** So Jesus is either talking about trying to add more time to your life or trying to add more inches to your height.
 - It does not really matter because both make the same point, namely that you cannot change what God gives through his providence. Providence is a word that refers to the fact that God ordains whatever comes to pass. All your worrying will not make you one inch taller. All your fretting will not add one more day to your life.
 - You see God has ordained how many days you will live. Psalm 139 says, ***“All the days ordained for me are written in your book.”*** That means God planned the very day of your death before you were born.
- This will help cure your worry. Redirect your attention away from your worries to the providence of God. So much of your worry is because you are trying to run the universe. But as one person has said, ***“For peace of mind, resign as general manager of the universe.”***
 - Darrell Johnson has humorously and rightly pointed out that a miracle happened after the horrific events of 911. The miracle was that Wall Street closed, and was closed for seven days, and the world kept turning. As Johnson says, ***“That is because Wall Street does not make the world go around. New York does not make the world go around. The Father makes the world go around.”***¹
 - It is the same in your life. When you worry you are acting as if the Father is not capable of making the world go around. But Jesus says, ***“redirect your attention away from your fear about the future. Look at the Providence of God. He is the one who sets the pathway for your life. He runs all things.”***

FROM WORRY OVER BARE NECESSITIES TO GOD’S EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY

- **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** Fourth, your anxiety will be cured when you redirect your attention from your worry over bare necessities to God’s extravagant generosity.

¹ From a sermon Darrell Johnson preached on this text.

- **READ 28-30 – (SHOW SLIDE 10)** 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?**
 - Again, I point out to you that our gracious Master cures us by calling us to redirect our attention away from our worries. And what are we to look at? Flowers. Flowers? Really? Jesus, because you say so we will do it.
- When we look at the flowers we learn so much about the Father. We notice that they don't follow fashion accounts on Instagram or go to the runways of Paris and Milan. They don't sew and yet they are clothed in extravagant beauty. Look at their shapes and sizes. Look at their colours. They are pink, orange, purple, blue, yellow, white, and red.
 - That is why Jesus says in verse 29. **READ 29 - yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.** Notice that Jesus did not compare the clothing of flowers to John the Baptist's clothing, which was made out of camel hair. He compared them to King Solomon – the wealthiest king in Israelite history.
 - Listen, God doesn't dress his people in standard issue uniforms that are drab and grey like George Orwell's Big Brother does in *1984*. God is not just the Creator of basic things. He is the Creator of beautiful things. His love of beauty is everywhere. As human beings we want clothing that will enhance beauty. Is this trivial? Not according to Jesus. Jesus is saying that his kingdom announces beauty. The Father is extravagant in his generosity. Look at the flowers! **READ 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?**
- The main issue here is will you trust the Father? Note that Jesus does not say we have no faith. A non-Christian has no faith in the Father. This passage is spoken only to Christians who have faith even if it is only a little. The problem with worry is that we are not exercising our faith. Helmut Thielecke said, **(SHOW SLIDE 11) "Every worry is a vote of no-confidence in God."** At its root, worry is a great sin.
 - To paraphrase Darrell Johnson again, when we worry we are saying, ***"Sorry Father this crisis I'm facing is just a little beyond you. Sorry Father I don't think you are up for this one."*** When we worry we are saying, ***"God you cannot be trusted."***
 - May Jesus have mercy on us and forgive us.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 12)** How can you trust that the Father will provide? Look to the flowers. They call you to use your faith because they shout of God's extravagant generosity. But the greatest reason you can trust the Father to provide is because of what He sent Jesus to do on your behalf.
 - Jesus had his clothes taken from his body. Jesus was stripped naked and crucified. Jesus voluntarily underwent the beatings, floggings, and crucifixion. He sacrificed his beauty. ***"His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any***

man and his form marred beyond human likeness.” He did this so that you, a naked, starving, and lost orphan might be adopted by the Father.

- And if God did not spare His own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not then graciously give you all things like jobs, clothing, housing, and the like? Will you trust the Father?

FROM FUTURE WORRY THAT PARALYZE THE PRESENT TO TRUSTING GOD’S GRACE FOR TODAY

- **(SHOW SLIDE 13)** Finally, your anxiety will be cured when you redirect your attention from future worries that paralyze the present to trusting God’s grace for today.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 14) READ 34** - Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.
 - Again, I just love how realistic Jesus is. He is no reggae hippie singing about how everything will just work out. That’s ridiculous. Notice very carefully with me that Jesus is realistic – he says you will face trouble.
 - He wants His kingdom citizens to be worry free but He never promises that becoming a Christian will make you trouble free. Not one sparrow will fall apart from the will of the Father but they will fall.
- So how can we not worry when life falls apart? Helmut Theilecke is helpful here. He preached the Sermon on the Mount in Germany just after WWII from 1946-1948. He often alluded to the scream of the air raid sirens, alerting people to yet more devastation and death from allied bombs.
 - What could freedom from anxiety mean in such circumstances? He said, **(SHOW SLIDE 15)** *“We know the sight and sound of homes collapsing in flames...Our own eyes have seen the red blaze and our own ears have heard the sound of crashing, falling, and shrieking. Nevertheless I think we must stop and listen when this man, whose life on earth was anything but birdlike and lilylike, points us to the carefreeness of the birds and lilies. Were not the somber shadows of the Cross already looming over this hour of the Sermon on the Mount?”*
 - As Jesus preached this He knew His hour was near. Jesus is not naïve. He is realistic.
- **(SHOW TITLE SLIDE 16)** And here he again helps us to live realistically by saying that we need to redirect our attention away from tomorrow’s troubles to face today’s. Worry is so often about the future; the future that we cannot do anything about and the future that will often not even happen. And so we get paralyzed today because we are focusing on tomorrow. Jesus says that today has enough trouble. Look to God’s grace for your worries today and let tomorrow take care of itself.
 - Oliver de Vinck, severely disabled from birth, lay helplessly on his bed for all of his 32 years, unable to care for himself. Day after day and year after year his parents put every spoonful of food into his mouth, changed his diapers, and still maintained a happy home.
 - One day Oliver’s brother Christopher asked his father how they managed. He explained that they didn’t worry about the long succession of

tomorrows that might lie before them. They lived a day at a time, asking, ***“Can I feed Oliver today?”*** And the answer always was, ***“Yes, today I can do it.”***

- Redirect your attention away from tomorrow’s troubles to today’s. Trust that the Father will give you the grace to face today.

CONCLUSION

- What a good King Jesus is. In his kingdom the upside-down way of worry is being put right side up. In the Father’s house worry is cured not by trying to whistle a happy tune but by a gritty trust in the Father’s care for his children.
 - Redirect your attention.