

Overcoming Anxiousness Matthew 6:19-34

This morning I want to talk about anxiousness – that sinking feeling you feel in the pit of your stomach that can come and go like waves. It's a feeling that I've always hated since I was a kid. I remember feeling anxious on the bus while driving to a baseball game or track meet and looking out the window at the cows in the pasture and thinking, "I wish I was a cow so I wouldn't have to feel like this. I bet cows never feel this way." Of course I also realized cows get butchered, so that deterred me from wanting to be a cow too much.

I've felt anxious this week as I've tried to deal with all these changes and a new way of ministry that quite frankly, I'm not a big fan of. I never wanted to do a Virtual Worship Service. I don't like being on camera and I'd much rather be with people. I wish we could be together this morning. I've felt anxious about preparing this sermon because it didn't come together well at all. My writing and thinking really never flowed smoothly all week and I was literally up all night trying to write this sermon and it just wouldn't come out until early this morning.

Anxiousness. A lot of us are feeling anxious right now because of all the shutdowns in our society and because the threat of the virus seems to be spreading. When will it stop? Will it come to our community? Will I lose my job? Will I be able to pay the bills? Will my kids be OK? There's a lot of things to be anxious about and it's a feeling that's really unpleasant.

So today I want to look at a passage of Scripture from the Sermon on the Mount that deals with anxiousness because I think it might help. It's a passage I'm a little afraid to preach on because I don't want it to be taken the wrong way. I know that everybody is different and anxiousness comes for many different reasons, but I see some things in this passage that I think most of us have in common that probably leads to some of the anxiousness we're feeling right now and I think it will help.

Most of us know the passage that starts out with, "*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.*" We're going to look at that, but before we do I think we need to look at the passage that comes right before it, because I think that one also deals with

anxiousness and helps us to see why we might be feeling it. So I want to start reading at Matthew 6:19 and look at what Jesus had to say.

Read Matthew 6:19-21.

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.

This is actually a warning from Jesus to be careful about how we live our lives, because how we live our lives will end up becoming the passion of our heart. One way we can live our lives is for accumulating the things in this world. It could be many things, money, material possessions, fancy cars, fancy houses, lots of clothes, lots of stuff. We can get caught up in pursuing these things, but Jesus points out there's a major problem with that. All these things are going to one day disappear. Whether it's moths, or rust, or thieves, or fire, or disease, or death, one day they're all going to be gone. And if you focus your life on pursuing these things, you're focusing your life on things that are going to fail, and when they do, it's really going to shake you up. That's where anxiousness comes in in this passage. If you make the pursuit of earthly treasures your aim in life, you're going to have a major problem, because at some point all of these things are going to go away and as you're losing them you're going to be shaken up. You are going to be troubled. You're going to worry. You're going to be anxious.

So Jesus says, don't live that kind of life. Don't store up treasures on earth – Store up treasures in heaven. Those treasures last forever. They won't be taken away. They give you a foundation that cannot be shaken, so seek after those things, seek after God and his righteousness and his Kingdom. because if you do your feet will be on solid ground. And I think that's what he points out in the next few verses.

Read Matthew 6:22-24.

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.*”

Jesus gives an illustration here and to understand it you have to picture someone with good eyesight and someone with bad. The person with good eyesight has confidence, they can see their way around and have stability and direction. The person with bad eyesight is just the opposite. They have no confidence. They stumble around in the darkness and don't know where to go or what to do – it's a real sad case.

The person with the good eyes is the one who lives for the treasures of heaven. The one with bad eyes is the one who lives for the treasures of earth. As Jesus pointed out before, you don't want to live that way because your foundation will be deeply shaken and when that happens, you'll be filled with anxiousness. So he calls us to live for the Kingdom of God. We have to choose which direction to go and Jesus calls us to serve the Lord for all these reasons.

I think this passage reveals the problem some of us are having and why we feel anxiousness with everything that's happening. Without knowing it we can focus too much on the things of earth, the security, the comforts, the possessions, the money, and there's probably more things we could add. We can become conformed to the world, and as we have started to see the loss of some of these things, we feel anxious. For us it's a good reminder that we need to switch gears and refocus our lives. We need to start living for what's more important and will never be taken away. We need to start living for treasures in heaven and devote ourselves more fully to God. I truly believe that as we do that, we will be able to handle the loss of things on earth much better because our foundation is secure.

Now I want us to look at the following passage. This passage relates to the one we just looked at, but it's also a little different. I think it describes the person who's just trying to make ends meet in life. They aren't trying to accumulate more and more, they're just trying to put a shirt on their back and a meal in their stomach. But their underlying problem is the same, they are captivated by living for the things in this life, focused on working and doing what they need to do to survive and the result of that focus is also the same – anxiousness. So Jesus has some things to say to that kind of person as well.

Read Matthew 6:25-34.

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.*

Jesus says don't be captivated by what you're going to eat and drink and wear. And notice the reasons he gives. He points out that they are extremely valuable to God – far more valuable than the birds in the air or lilies in the field, and if God feeds and clothes and takes care of them won't he also take care of you? So you don't need to live your life worrying about trying to make it on your own. God is with you. He knows exactly what you need. Seek first his Kingdom and righteousness (which is the same as, “lay up treasures in heaven”) and all these things will be added unto you.

For some of you this passage might hit closer to home because that's the situation you're in. You're just trying to make it through from one week to the next. You're working hard, but now all this stuff has happened outside your control. Now you're worried about your job and your income and paying the bills. And your tendency is going to be to worry about that and focus on that and forget about God's Kingdom and righteousness. Jesus says don't be anxious. God is watching over you. Don't be captivated by trying to get by in this world. Seek first his Kingdom and righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

I hope one or both of these passages has been helpful for you this morning I hope you've been able to see if you've been thinking too much about the things of this world and maybe feeling anxiousness because of that. And I hope that now you can see how to break free from that. Let your focus be on seeking the treasures of heaven, seeking first God's Kingdom and his righteousness and trusting God to give you peace and everything you need.