



Sermon Transcript February 3, 2019

Seeking God in the Secret Place An Onward Heart: Speaking God's Truth Matthew 6:24-34

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on February 3, 2019 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text:
Matthew 6:24-35

²⁴No 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.

Introduction

Three times in our passage this morning we can hear Jesus say, “*Do not be anxious.*” We first hear him say it in verse 25, “*Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life.*” He says it again in verse 31, “*Therefore do not be anxious saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’*” And then a third and final time he concludes by saying in verse 34, “*Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow.*” The fact that Jesus says it three times tells me that this is something we are prone to struggle with on a regular basis. We worry. We get anxious.

In 1948 W. H. Auden wrote a poem that won the Pulitzer Prize. The title of the poem was “The Age of Anxiety.” In an article in the *New York Times*, Daniel Smith said, “from the moment that title appeared, that phrase has been used to characterize the consciousness of our era.”¹ He said that this phrase “The Age of Anxiety” has been like sticker on the bumper of the Western world for the past six decades. Would you agree? Do you think we live in the “Age of Anxiety?”

I am not sure how to gauge whether or not we are more anxious than the generations that came before us. Clearly, in reading the words of Jesus in Matthew 6, people have been anxious for a long time. When you go back into the Old Testament, one of the often repeated commands from God is “*fear not.*” Perhaps we can be guilty of having a romanticized view of the past and therefore we unwittingly minimize their issues of anxiety and consequently we lose out on learning from them what it looks like to walk by faith. So this issue of worry has long been part of the human experience.

And yet, I can’t argue against the fact that our contemporary Western culture is consumed with worry. There is no doubt, we are an anxious people. There are many things that feed our anxiety. We can get anxious about finances and making ends meet. We know our own personal struggles with relationships and we fret over our health. We worry about our kids and whatever issues they are facing. Things that are happening in our world like terrorism, or politics, or the seemingly ever changing moral fabric of our culture cause us to be anxious about the future. Perhaps one of the things that may cause us to think that this is truly “The Age of Anxiety” is our constant connectivity to information. The saying “ignorance is bliss” has a measure of truth to it. But the way we are bombarded with instant information it is hard to not be aware of all that is happening in the world. We hear about things that are happening almost in real time. Then we hear the chatter through social media and much of it is negative and mean-spirited and never ending. All this feeds our anxiety.

Here is the problem with being anxious and being consumed with worry. It leads to a spirit of pessimism. I think many Christians in our Western world have fallen prey to a pessimistic spirit. Trevin Wax was giving a sermon on the issue of anxiety and he recounted a conversation that he had with an older Christian in his church. This person said to him, “Trevin, I guess I just feel hopeless for our country these days.” And he confessed, “I’m becoming a pessimistic old man.”² I think you can go into almost any church in our country and hear these same feelings being expressed. I have heard these very thoughts expressed here. Pessimism is the byproduct of worry.

Trevin Wax went on to say that pessimism should never be the default setting for a Christian. Sure we can mourn over the troubles of our day. Quoting John Stott, he said, “There are such things as Christian tears, and too few of us ever weep them.”³ But these tears are not to be confused with worry or even more importantly, with pessimism. Trevin Wax went on to say that an overly pessimistic view of the world leads to a defensive posture and a defensive posture leads to a maintenance mentality. We circle the wagons and try to hold onto whatever we think we need to hold onto from the past. The problem with that is that we lose sight of the mission. We lose sight of the fact that we have a hope in the Gospel. We lose sight of the fact that we are not a people governed by fear. Rather, we are a people of faith and this faith calls us to stand with courage in whatever age we happen to be. And so we can rise above this “Age of Anxiety.” In fact, we must rise above it! It is the mission of the church to be a beacon of hope in a world filled with fear and anxiety and worry.

But how? Clearly, we hear the command from Jesus, “*Do not be anxious about your life . . . about what you eat or drink or wear . . . nor about tomorrow.*” But how? The solution Jesus offers to our worry is not the solution Bobby McFerrin made popular in his song *Don’t Worry, Be Happy.* He sings, “Ain’t got no cash, ain’t got no style, Ain’t got no gal to make you smile, don’t worry, be happy. ‘Cause when you worry your face will frown, and that will bring everybody down. So, don’t worry, be happy. . . . Now listen to what I said, in your life expect some trouble. When you worry, you make it double. But don’t worry, be happy, be happy now.”⁴ This is not what Jesus is saying here. It is not like you can flip a switch from being anxious to being hopeful. It is not like you can flip a switch from fear to faith. You can’t flip a switch from worry to happy. So what is the answer? How do I keep from being consumed by worry?

Do you notice each time Jesus says “*do not be anxious*” he begins with the word “*therefore?*” “*Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life.*” That word “*therefore*” links you to something he had just said. And so the command to not worry

is anchored in some truth Jesus just spoke. Something he had just said is essential to helping us overcome our anxiety. And so the way we deal with worry and anxiety is that we need to speak the truth of the Gospel to our hearts. When we do that, that is when we genuinely move from worry to hope. That is when we are able to move from fear to faith. That is when we are able to replace anxiety with peace. In other words, hope and faith and peace are the fruit of the Gospel. These aren't things you can manufacture. You can't just say to yourself, "don't worry, be happy." And so, I would like to isolate three truths from this passage we need to constantly speak into our hearts when worry and when anxiety and fear and pessimism starts to well up within us.

Truth #1 - God is My Security

When I stop to examine my own worry and my own anxiety, I realize that much of it stems from my own uncertainty. Maybe I am uncertain about how I will make ends meet. Perhaps I am uncertain about a challenge I am facing or a hardship I am having to deal with in my life. It could be an illness where my own mortality is staring me in the face and I am unsure of how long I have. I came across an article this week and the title caught my attention. It was titled *The Anxiety Beneath All Your Anxieties.* What is that one anxiety that fuels all other anxieties? It is the fear of death. These uncertainties cause me to look around at life and to ask whether or not there is anything in life that is truly certain. Is there any rock that I can find that will not be moved under the storms of life? Of course we hear Jesus say at the end of the Sermon on the Mount that indeed there is such a rock. That rock is Jesus. It is the life that is built on Jesus that is able to stand the storms of life. That rock is anchored in knowing God.

The first truth I need to speak to my heart is that my security in life is found in knowing God. The first time we hear Jesus say, "*Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious . . .*" it comes after he tells us that we can't serve two masters. In the previous verse he tells us, "*You cannot serve God and money.*" It is one or the other. By putting God and money side by side, Jesus is calling us to evaluate where we find our security in life. Is your security found in temporal things or is it found in God?

The qualitative difference between earthly things and the things of God were highlighted in the passage that precedes our passage this morning. We saw last week that the things of this world perish, they don't last forever. "Moth and rust can destroy them and thieves can steal them." And so if that is your security in life, of course you will be anxious. If your security rises and falls with the stock market, then your emotions are in for a roller coaster of a ride. Instead, our security is to be found in God. He is eternal.

He is in control of the future. The treasure of knowing him cannot be destroyed by moth and rust and no one can steal that from you. *“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?”* It reminds me of what Jesus said when he was tempted to turn the rock into bread., *“Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*

That really does get to the heart of it, doesn't it? Wealth can cause you to lose sight of God. But it cannot deliver the security you might think it does. There are a lot of very anxious wealthy people in our world. In fact, I wonder if in the end, wealth brings more worry with it. Richard Foster put it this way, “We have no independent existence, no self-sustainability. All we are and all we possess is derived . . . We are not captains of our souls nor are we the masters of our fates. We are part of the created order and hence we are totally dependent. Our posture is not one of arrogant acquisition, but of simple trust. What we have or ever will have comes from God's gracious hand.”⁵ When I feel worry or anxiety bubbling up within me, I need to speak the truth of God to my heart and remind myself that in the end—no matter what happens—God is my security. *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea.”* I have a rock in God that cannot be moved. In God we can truly trust.

Michael Kelly is a Christian writer and his oldest son battled leukemia. So he knows what it is like to deal with the uncertainties of life. He knows what it is like to have more questions than answers. He knows what it is like to flood his pillow at night with tears. So when he talks about the issue of worry, you know that he has been tested in this area. Listen to what he wrote about a Christian who doesn't succumb to a life of worry. He wrote, “When we live with a lack of anxiety about the future, even in those tightrope kind of times, we communicate the truth that our God is indeed worthy of our trust. We don't fret over the future because he holds it in his hands. We don't wring our hands in worry because we know he is charting the course. That sort of confidence invites others into it.”⁶ In an “Age of Anxiety” that kind of peace stands out and it speaks to the reality of Christ in your life. It is one way we manifest an evangelistic presence in a world that is anxious. It is the result of knowing that my security is found in God.

Do you need to speak this truth to yourself this morning? What is it that is making you anxious this morning? What are you worried about this morning? Would you hear once again the promise of God from Isaiah 41:10. *“Fear not, for I am with you; be not*

dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Be at peace. God is your security.

Truth #2 - Christ is My Identity

The second truth you need to speak to yourself in the midst of your own anxiety and worry, is a truth that points to God’s love for you. In Zephaniah 3:17 there is that little phrase about God’s love that I absolutely run to as often as I can. Here the prophet says of God, *“he will quiet you with his love.”* When you are feeling anxious, it is the reassurance that God loves you that quiets your heart.

And so Jesus says in verse 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? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 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 implication is rather obvious here. If God is going to take care of the birds and the lilies of the field, don’t you think he will take care of you—”O ‘ME’ of little faith?” He loves you! *“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’”*

Do you remember the scene where Jesus is at the back of the boat fast asleep in the middle of the storm? The disciples frantically wake him up and they ask him perhaps the most insulting question they could ever ask Jesus. *“Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”* Maybe in your situation it feels like Jesus is asleep and he has abandoned you. Maybe you might even wonder if he cares, let alone loves you. Be assured, Jesus is not asleep. He is actually in your boat. And furthermore he left heaven’s glory and entered into this suffering world. He took on the limitations of humanity and he voluntarily laid down his life for us on the cross so that we could be made right with God. You never have to question whether or not God loves you. If you have come to him through faith you can know that God will never leave you and he will always deeply love you.

This gets to the heart of the second truth you need to speak to yourself when you struggle with anxiety. Christ is your identity. Therefore, you never have to worry if he will love you and take care of you. I think we often lose sight of the fact that as Christians we slip and fall. The struggle we have with sin is our common struggle. But

this struggle with sin does not define us. We are saints who sometimes sin. But in Christ, don't forget, we are saints. It is our salvation in Jesus that defines us as we keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus.

Warren Wiersbe observed that “we are continually being crucified between two thieves—the regrets of yesterday and the worries about tomorrow.”⁷ The “regrets of yesterday” are often the result of our own slipping and falling in life. Knowing that this is what many in the pew are feeling, Trevin Wax pleaded with the pastors who were listening to him preach on the topic of anxiety: “Don't let people think that their struggle is an anomaly.”⁸ It is the norm! I saw a title to a book that caught my eye this week. I didn't get it or read it yet, but I am tempted to get it. I saw my name all over it. That is the power of a good title. Here it is, *Imperfect Disciple: Grace for people who can't get their act together*. When I am anxious because of past regrets or failings in my life, I need to preach the truth of the Gospel to my heart. I need to fix my gaze on Jesus and I need to get back up and keep struggling. I do so without worry about what Jesus thinks of me. “*Are you not of more value?*” Did he not die for you? My identity is in Christ.

There is a song by “Tenth Avenue North” that goes like this:

Hallelujah! We are free to struggle
We're not struggling to be free
Your blood bought and makes us children
So children drop your chains and sing!

That is a cure for worry if I ever heard one! Drop your chains of worry and rest in his perfect love for you.

I need to say something about this common struggle and our identity in Christ on a broader level. I already mentioned that one of the causes for worry and anxiety in many Christians is this feeling like our culture is in decline. It implies that there was this golden age in history and this view of history can create within us a pessimistic and anxious spirit. But that is a myth. It is a lie. Do you know why? We act as if there was a golden age in Christian history or American history. When we do that, we are denying that every stage of history is riddled with brokenness. Prior to the two world wars there was this thought that with the gains that were made in science and in technology our world was progressing—not just in technology, but also in the basic goodness of man. But the wars taught us that the heart of man didn't change. Furthermore, the advances made just gave man greater capacity to destroy each other. Looking at this, the great Christian thinker C. K. Chesterton debunked the idea that the world is progressing and

he also debunked the idea that it is getting worse. He said, “The world is what the saints and prophets saw it was, it is not merely getting better or merely getting worse. There is one thing the world does, it wobbles.”⁹

This world wobbles . . . We wobble . . . But we don’t fall down! Why? When this world does wobble—and it has—and it does—and it will—we have hope because of our identity in Christ. We are not given to despair or pessimism. Do you know why? It is because of what we are? We are an “unbroken line of broken sinners transformed by the grace of God empowered to transfer the gospel to the next generation.”¹⁰ So no matter how much the world “wobbles” in our day, we will be confident and hopeful because we live with the conviction that God is at work. Christ is our identity.

Truth #3 - I Belong to the Kingdom of God

Finally, in Colossians 1:13-14, Paul tells us that Christ “*has delivered us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*” We belong to the kingdom of God. And so when Jesus says in our passage this morning “*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness . . .*” he is not suggesting that we have to go looking for it. That is not what he means by the word “*seek.*” Instead, Wilkins says that Jesus is saying here, “the disciples are to make the kingdom of heaven the center of their continual daily priorities. They have already entered the kingdom of heaven and are to live with that reality, drawing on God’s ordering of their daily lives.”¹¹

So as I center my daily priorities around the kingdom of God I have all I need to help me not give into worry and anxiety. “*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*” There is trouble today and there will be trouble tomorrow. The world wobbles today and the world will wobble tomorrow. But I belong to the kingdom of God and God has given me all I need to overcome worry. What has he given me? What daily priorities do we have in the kingdom of God? We have the angles of the triangle from the beginning of Matthew 6.

We have the “upward heart of prayer.” As we take the Lord’s Prayer and submit our lives to God’s agenda and rely on God for his provision he fills us with peace. That is what Paul said in Philippians 4:6. “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God*

and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your heart and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

We also have the “inward heart of repentance.” How does that help us with our worry? When we apply the gospel to worry, we are not just repenting of the act of worry. Rather, we need to repent of the false beliefs that lead us to worry. Do you need to repent of putting your security in money instead of God? Do you need to repent of your self-sufficiency instead of depending upon God? Do you feel like you are not good enough and that your sin defines you and so you think God has turned his back on you? You need to repent of that kind of thinking and turn and embrace the truth that your identity is in Christ. That is what produces peace and defeats anxiety.

This happened to me the other week. I woke up in the middle of the night and I felt the accusations of not measuring up to what God wants me to be. I was anxious. I could have said, “don’t worry, be happy.” But I couldn’t stop it. And then I started rehearsing what I know to be true about the gospel. I repented about making it all about me and I reminded myself of who I am in Christ and what Jesus has done for me. As I did that, a peace came over me. But I didn’t experience it until I rehearsed what I know is true and repented of what I was believing at that moment. That “inward heart of repentance” is an ongoing way of life in the kingdom of God. We need to learn to proclaim the gospel to ourselves if we want to defeat worry.

Finally, the “outward heart of generosity” helps us defeat worry because it gets our eyes off of ourselves as we make other peoples problems our problems. That is how we counter pessimism. Remember, pessimism causes us to take a defensive posture and to circle the wagons because of all the things that are happening in our world. But that is not what we are called to do. We have a mission and every generation of followers of Christ needs to engage that mission with the conviction that the unbroken chain of God’s grace will flow from their generation to the next. I love the affirmation in our Way of Life that affirms, “I will live with the conviction that God is at work through me whether I can see it or not.” We are confident. We are committed. We are hopeful. We are not consumed with worry, or anxiety, or pessimism. So step into the mission! Embrace the wonderful truth that you belong to the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

No doubt, we do live in a world filled with anxiety. Admittedly, it is easy to succumb to it. But we must heed the words of Jesus and not become anxious. This is the “ongoing

heart of speaking the truth to our hearts.” I need to do that today. I’ll need to do it tomorrow. Our world wobbles in every corner. It will wobble tomorrow too. So I constantly need to speak these truths to my heart.

Don’t be anxious about your life! How can you say that when there is so much uncertainty in this world. I can say it because God is our security.

Don’t be anxious about what you will eat or drink or wear. How can you say that? I can say it because Christ is our identity and therefore in Christ nothing will separate us from God’s love. He’ll take care of you.

Don’t be anxious about tomorrow! How can you say that? Because we belong to the kingdom of God and God has given us all we need to make him our priority. So we seek first God’s kingdom through prayer and repentance and a life of generosity. We become agents of peace.

You learn a lot about a driver by reading their bumper stickers. If the “Age of Anxiety” is the sticker on the bumper of our culture, then may peace be the sticker on the bumper of our lives. May they see it at work tomorrow. May they see it in our homes. May they see it here. It is the byproduct of the truth of the Gospel spoken daily into our hearts. God is your security. Christ is your identity. You belong to the Kingdom of God. Therefore, do not be anxious!

¹Daniel Smith, “It’s Still the ‘Age of Anxiety.’ Or is it?” www.opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com January 14, 2010

²Trevin Wax “Pursuing Faithfulness in an Age of Anxiety” sermon preached The Gospel Coalition 2017 National Conference in Indianapolis, April 4, 2017

³John R. W. Stott, Dale Larsen, Sandy Larsen “The Beatitudes: Developing Spiritual Character” (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998)

⁴Bobby McFerrin, Song: Don’t Worry, Be Happy (1988)

⁵Richard Foster *Freedom of Simplicity* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981) 63

⁶Micahel Kelly quoted in Trevin Wax sermon “Pursuing Faithfulness in an Age of Anxiety”

⁷Chapel message for the Doctor of Ministry students and faculty at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, November 9, 1998

⁸Wax

⁹C. K. Chesterton, quoted in Trevin Wax, “Pursuing Faithfulness in an Age of Anxiety”

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹Michael Wilkins *Matthew: NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004) 299

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What are some things that make you anxious or cause you to worry? Are you currently anxious about anything?
2. Do you think we live in "The Age of Anxiety"? Why or why not? How does anxiety manifest itself in our culture?
3. What is one thing that stuck out to you from the sermon this past week?

Diving Into The Word

4. Read Matthew 6:24-25. What do you hear when Jesus says, "do not be anxious about your life?" How have you found God to be your security in life? How do you remind yourself of this truth?
5. Read Matthew 6:26- 31. Can you share any stories of how you have seen God provide for you?
6. "Hallelujah! We are free to struggle. We're not struggling to be free. Your blood bought and makes us children. So children drop your chains and sing!" How do these words help you rest your identity in Christ?
7. Read Matthew 6:32-34. What do you think it looks like to "seek first the kingdom of God?" What "beliefs" fuel your worry? What gospel truth counters those beliefs? Practice "repenting" of your unbelief and confessing out loud the truth.

Taking It Home

8. What are some practical ways you can bring a presence of peace into an anxious environment? What truths do you want to speak to yourself on a daily basis?
9. Share one thing with the group that you are taking with you from your discussion.