



WORRY AND ANXIETY: FUNCTIONAL ATHEISM
MATTHEW 6:25-34

Open to Matthew 6. Talking about worry and anxiety. Matthew uses the Greek verb to be anxious 7 times in his Gospel and 6 of them are right here in Matt. 6:25-34 which represents Jesus longest teaching on worry and anxiety. And it's hard to think of something that's more relevant for us. Worry marks our culture. Anxiety effects roughly 20% of the population—1 in 5. Birds aren't real. WHAT DO YOU MEAN 'BIRDS AREN'T REAL'? The term "Birds Aren't Real" refers to biological "Birds" no longer existing on United States soil. After the government forcibly made the entire species extinct in the 20th century, all of these real birds were replaced with surveillance drones designed to look just like Birds. To simplify- Birds no longer exist in the U.S. as a biological lifeform, thus, Birds Aren't Real! I HAVE A PET BIRD, WHAT DO I DO? Not to startle you, but you have a highly advanced governmental surveillance drone in your house, watching your every movement, picking up every word of your conversations, and sending that data into to the pentagon. "Pet Birds" were actually unheard of before 2001, when all Birds became surveillance drones. At this time, the government started a propaganda campaign normalizing "Pet Birds" (if you think about it, a Pet Bird in a cage doesn't even make sense- the animals are supposed to have endless sky to explore, not to be held within a cage in a house). You would be best advised to not bring up any matters you'd prefer to remain confidential around your "Pet Bird". (birdsarentreal.com, FAQ page). What about something a little closer to home: COVID. According to Statista, 36% of people report anxiety after COVID, anxiety that comes with a variety of detrimental health effects—headaches, muscle tension, insomnia, depression and a variety of other side effects that make life more difficult and exhausting.

And yet when it comes to anxiety, contrary to what we might feel, the reason it's so serious is not because psychological side effects but the spiritual danger it represents. Luke 8:14, "And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares—noun form of the verb to be anxious used 6 times in our passage today— and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature." Anxiety is spiritually lethal. Anxiety is not primarily a problem because it's a threat to your mental health wellness. Anxiety is a problem because it's a threat to your soul. This is why the Bible talks so much about casting your cares on the Lord, and don't fear, don't worry, do not be anxious—because it will choke out your spiritual life. And for that reason when it comes to anxiety we don't just need therapeutic relief we need spiritual deliverance and freedom. And my goal is to take some steps toward that end as we spend some time with Jesus here in Mt. 6. **Pray.**

You may know that Matt. 6 falls in the middle of arguably the most famous sermon ever preached called the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matt. 5-7. A crowd of people has assembled, Jesus has gone up to a hillside North of the Sea of Galilee and sits down. And he calls his disciples to himself—they are the primary audience while the crowd is the secondary audience—and he begins to teach them. And he gets to his teaching on anxiety about half way through, which is where we're picking it up today and you'll see that it starts with the word, "Therefore". And in Bible reading, whenever you see a "therefore" you need to look back and see what it's there for. And in this case, preceding verses set the context and lay the foundation for Jesus' teaching on anxiety. And when you look back, you'll see that since vs. 19 Jesus has been talking about competing loyalties. Conflicting devotions. Treasure in heaven or on earth. What your eyes seek after can lead to darkness or light. You can serve either God or money—but not both.

And it is in this context of conflicting allegiances that Jesus locates and discusses our anxiety. And I really want us to look at three things this morning when it comes to Jesus teaching on anxiety (1) The Errors of Anxiety (2) The Essence of Anxiety (3) The Remedy for Anxiety.

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 the KJV translates this first phrase, “take no thought for your life” which is a bad translation and can lead people to think that we just should care about anything. Shouldn’t plan ahead. Shouldn’t really be concerned about anything. And that’s not at all what Jesus is saying. He’s saying we shouldn’t be *anxious*—here he means concerns that are elevated to the point that they control us and cause us to misplace our hope. And Jesus describes three errors that we make in anxiety. Error #1 Fear that God would give me life and then fail to give me what I need to live it. He says “Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” If I am responsible for giving you life itself, if God spoke you into existence, you think I’m going to neglect to feed you? That body I created, that is fearfully and wonderfully made, you think I’m going to not wrap it in something?

Honus Wagner. Played for Pirates. One of the best shortstops Had production of his T206 card stopped. \$3.12 million in 2016. Do you think he put a cover on it? If that card could talk, “I wonder if he’ll put a cover on me.” “If you knew how much I invested in you that wouldn’t even be a question.” If we would do that for a card, how much more would the Lord do that for his children—ininitely more valuable than a trading card. Jesus “If God ordained your days before one of them came to be, and then knit you together in your mother’s womb as someone bearing his image, you don’t think he’ll put a cover on it? He will. Don’t be anxious.

Error #2, is Failing to believe that we’re more valuable to God than animals and nature. 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? . . . 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?

So the second error we make is thinking that God cares for wildflowers and birds in a way that he doesn’t care for us. But it’s not true. What this doesn’t mean is that we can be lazy. And it’s important that you know this—humans are more valuable to God than plants and animals. Humans are made in God’s image. They are not. This of course should not lead us to mistreat animals—Prov. 12 says a righteous man has regard for the life of his animal. But we are far more important than animals and Jesus specifically tells us to look at them, a command—or consider flowers—as a constant visible reminder that you matter more. And if you matter more, God will provide for you more. This changes how you go to the Zoo. I’m not saying you say it out loud, but you could go to the bird exhibit and say, “God loves me more than those birds. Those plants.” That might be socially accurate but it is theologically accurate—“See, thus he makes the birds masters and teachers, so that a weak little sparrow must stand in the gospel, to our great, lasting disgrace, as teacher and preacher of the very wisest man, and hold this daily before our eyes and ears” **Luther** Don’t live like that’s not because if you do, you’ll constantly be anxious and worried about what around the next corner and whether or not you’ll have everything you need when you get there. When we worry we fail to believe that God sustains what he creates, we fail to believe that God loves us more than the rest of his Creation, and last—and perhaps the clearly practical critique Jesus makes is that worry doesn’t work. Anxiety doesn’t do anything.

27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? It's not an effective strategy. It's a waste of emotional bandwidth. Now again I want to quickly correct what could easily be a misconception here, this is not somehow saying that we should feel free to live recklessly or shouldn't take precautions. Some might even conclude from the birds that we're not supposed to work—God will just take care of us? But how does he take care of the birds—allows them to feed themselves. Same with us. Jesus isn't saying we should work or walk wisely, he's saying that adding anxiety only hurts you and those around you. For example when it comes to COVID—we should walk wisely and take the necessary precautions for ourselves and others—but anxiety does absolutely nothing to help you or anyone else. There have been zero studies demonstrating that having anxiety about COVID decreases your chances of getting it. “For if our fear does not materialize, we have worried once for nothing; if it does materialize, we have worried twice instead of once. In both cases it is foolish: worry doubles trouble.” Stott Anxiety just doesn't work.

All of this leading to the essence of anxiety—which really could be a fourth error, but I think it is really the core problem that fuels everything we've just talked about and its given to us at the end of vs. 30 and in vs 31, “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? And it's core, anxiety is a lack of faith. Anxiety is not primarily caused by our circumstances, but by a lack of faith. And this is important because if we don't get this, we won't take responsibility for our anxiety and blame it on our circumstances. Now to be sure, we inhabit broken bodies, and there can be biological elements to our anxiety, for which we can and should receive help—technology and medicine—but that should never be the first step or the only step. The vast majority of our anxieties concern our uncertainty about what might or could happen and they reflect a lack of faith that God is who is claims to be and will do what he promised. “Faith,” in Matthew, means the confidence that God can and will act on his people's behalf; without that, however much a person may “believe” intellectually, they are for practical purposes “faithless.” France We're living like functional atheists, and unbelievers.

That may sound harsh but Jesus continues 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. Gentiles are unbelievers in this context. To be consumed with anxiety about resources, and reputation, and material things, and future circumstances—Jesus says that's what unbelievers do. Jesus has come to rescue you and give you a hope and future, and exceedingly great and precious promises that free you from being consumed by the cares of this world and when you fret and worry you're living like that's not true. You're not believing I'll be everything for you that I promised to be. In a poem imagining what the birds must think of us, Spurgeon wrote “Said the robin to the sparrow: ‘I should really like to know Why these anxious human beings Rush about and worry so.’ Said the sparrow to the robin: ‘Friend, I think that it must be That they have no heavenly Father, Such as cares for you and me.’” The birds don't have God as Father, but Spurgeon imaginatively suggests that when they look at us, they might very well conclude the same thing about us. But it's not true—we do and when our concerns control us and cause to misplace our hope, our faith has failed. Which means that when it comes to anxiety, in most cases it's not just an illness we need to be healed of it's sin we need to repent of. And fortunately Jesus doesn't leave us without help, he gives us a remedy, and I want us to conclude today by looking at three crucial components of fighting anxiety to the glory of God.

(1) Trust God to graciously provide abundant life

Now here's where things really get interesting for us this morning. You heard that God will clothe you and knows what you need and you hear Jesus saying you shouldn't worry about whether you're going to have food or clothes—and most of go, “I don't.” And there's danger that when we come to a text like this, it might be comforting for someone in a third world country but doesn't really address our worries. Our

anxieties aren't about our needs—they're about our preferences, comforts. In many ways, our anxieties are very first world and if we're being honest, maybe hearing God say he'll give us what we need, kind of leaves us disappointed. Isn't need low bar for a sovereign God?

We want a verse that says, don't be anxious, I'll preserve your reputation, financially secure, health is optimized, I'll keep you from suffering. And there not there. Anxiety happens when we place our hope in things we're not promised. **Possible Tumor**. Sometimes I think God uses things like that as a checkup. He knocks and says. "You ready to lose it all?" Does God promise me that? No? What does he promise me? Himself. Jesus says I've come to give you abundant life in me. Ps 73 God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Ps. 16:11 in your presence is fullness of joy at your righthand are pleasures forever more—all of that is yours in Christ. This is the opposite of anxiety—anxiety locates your joy in your circumstances. Christ says I'll give you a kind of joy and abundant life that doesn't depend your circumstances because I promise you myself—in all of them. The question is—is that enough? And when we're anxious we tell God, "No." What lie am I believing? Repent and place it in Christ—we won't be free from worry any other way. If the peace in your heart constantly depends on what happens next in life, you don't have a shot. Trust God to Graciously Provide Abundant Life...number two.

(2) Orient your entire life around pursuing God's glory and purposes.

If the first remedy for anxiety is trusting, the second remedy concerns our trying—actions. So in anxiety there things we need to believe and things we need to do, in a fairly well known verse **33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.** Now it might seem like Jesus is going off on a rabbit trail, but he's not. Seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness is directly related to the issue of anxiety. Now seeking righteousness is fairly straightforward. We're actively seeking to cultivate the godliness and holiness that mark kingdom citizens—a character that reflects God's glory. But what's the kingdom of God? Well we get some help if we look at how Jesus uses it in other places. For starters, Jesus says in Jn. 18:36 to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." So immediately we know that it's something spiritual not physical. In Mk 11:20 Jesus says, "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

It's the reign of Christ in and through people's lives. And it's present in people who he has captured by grace and given the Holy Spirit and it's extended as that grace captures more and more people and brings them in as kingdom citizens. And Jesus is saying that one of the reasons we struggle with anxiety is because we're not consumed with that. And we certainly don't do it first. Christ reign in our lives and in the lives of those around us—extending his global worship—gets our leftover energy after we've worried about all the things. Seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness is not just our call as believers it is one of Christ's anti-anxiety strategies. If you would make this your pressing concern, if you would make appropriating my reign and character in your heart and in the lives of those around you—you wouldn't be so anxious about your money. You wouldn't be nearly as worried about hypertension. If you were driven at your core by glory for the king you wouldn't worry so much about other people think. Your constant anxiety is a sure sign that you're seeking something else first. Don't be consumed by seeking a life that's comfortable but a life that counts. Where your biggest fear isn't that your life wouldn't be easy but that it would be wasted—I'll add these things to you. Make God's biggest concerns your biggest concerns and your other concerns will fade.

(3) Refuse to live in the future.

Jesus ends with a final exhortation to us about. 34 “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” Jesus knows what you and I both know and that’s that worries live in the future. The daily bread and the grace God gives today don’t do much for worries because they don’t live in today—they live in tomorrow—they live in the future and what may or may not happen. Their joy is constantly pending how the next thing turns out. And it’s important that we realize that God gives us daily bread—the grace we need—on a daily basis. Most of the time, God doesn’t give you grace for tomorrow’s thing today. Mt. 10:19, “When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.” Worriers forecast tomorrow’s circumstances apart from tomorrow’s grace. Ed Welch says that when we worry we are false prophets. We’re declaring tomorrow’s trouble without the power God promises to provide when we get there. Welch has a huge fear of drowning, and he gives an illustration of how this just in time grace works. “It doesn’t say that I will be spared suffocation. What it says is that, if I am called to death by asphyxiation, I will have grace when that time comes. What does that mean? I don’t know. I can’t image such grace. I can’t imagine anything that would make drowning tolerable. And that is exactly what we should expect: At this moment I don’t have grace to down because I am not drowning! Of course I will worry if I try to envision a drowning scenario. I will project the grace I received for today onto tomorrow, not comprehending that I will receive the grace as needed tomorrow.” Ed Welch

God will provide you with grace for tomorrow when you get there, your job is to rest in the grace you have today. And this is going to have to be your constant practice. The clear implication here is that troubles will constantly mark our lives. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Not worrying doesn’t mean not having trouble. Not worrying means knowing you will have trouble and trusting that God will be more than enough when it comes—because he’s promised to give his children daily bread. This is only for his children—if you’re not a believer you have every reason to worry—the bread’s not coming.