

The Sermon on the Mount | A New Kind of Obedience

Part 6 | Matthew 6:19-24

Sermon Title: **Freed from fear**

Mercy Church has been going through Jesus' sermon on the mount. what we've been calling the most famous sermon in history. If you have your bibles get them out and turn them to Matthew chapter 6. He's hitting the big rocks of life and Today he's talking about Fear, Stress & anxiety.

And that just made some of ya'll anxious. Nothing builds anxiety in anxious people like a sermon on anxiety.

Today is very personal to me because perhaps the greatest spiritual victory in my life as an adult has been in a long war against anxiety. In my family I'm the anxious one and Courtney is the chill one. My Story. -2010. 2 young kids, growing ministry. Kids had been sick. Like go to the ER sick. I'd stay up at night waiting on one of them to cough. And if you've experienced paralyzing anxiety you'll understand that I would lay in bed literally unable to move. Paralyzed by fear. Of a tiny cough. That came to a head August 27, my birthday. I woke up from a birthday nap...that's how new parents celebrate...and I woke up suddenly with my heart pounding rapidly and my left arm was completely numb. Now, I didn't know if I was having a heart attack so being the anxious person I am I started worrying I was dying. Well, Courtney being the chill person she is was like "you are fine, but if you want peace of mind, you can drive yourself to the doctor. I've got two babies to worry about."

The doctor checks me out & my heart is fine & he says...you aren't having a heart attack, you are having a panic attack. You are so wound up about something that your muscles have pinched a nerve in your neck and sent your left arm numb. You need to calm down. Thanks Doc. That day woke me up to the spiritual reality of anxiety and fear. And the more I share this teaching from Jesus and my own personal story the more people I find who need the freedom from fear & stress that God offers us in Christ.

whether or not you identify as an anxious person or a chill person, you will at some point be confronted with fear in your life. Maybe it will come out in a big decision, maybe a medical diagnosis you didn't expect, maybe a job change or a relationship crisis. I don't know, I just know it will happen. And listen...Chill people, when you encounter anxiety it messes you up bigtime. Anxious people are used to worrying. Ya'll go off the deep end. We all need this teaching!

And hey I kept trying to figure out the main idea and then it just hit me like a ton of bricks. The belief that Jesus is trying to press into your heart today is one of the most basic in scripture. One I know you've heard before but today Jesus Goes in on it. Three Simple Words.

God. Loves. You

Inside of those three words is the victory over anxiety and fear. If you believe that statement in its fullness you will be set free today I promise you. Now Jesus is going to take 9 verses to press this simple truth into our hearts. In fact, threaded in here are God's promises for anxious people.

[25] "Therefore I tell you, "Therefore" is a bridge connecting us back to what he said previously. Bible reading tip: when you see a 'therefore' go figure out what it is 'there for.' The last verse ended saying you cannot serve God and money. If you remember last week we said you can serve Master Money or Master Jesus but you can't serve both. And when you give away your \$ to the mission of God, you free yourself from Master Money and allow Master Jesus to rule in your heart. Now what he's about to say is a direct product of one who has chosen to surrender their lives to God. In fact in Luke's gospel account this teaching comes right before the money teaching. Because money and worry are so closely knit together.

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.

Ok if you are prone to anxiety again I understand that the WORST thing you can hear is 'do not be anxious.' Because now you are going to be anxious about not being anxious Chill people listen: When you tell us anxious people "Will you stop worrying?" I need you to know we start thinking "GREAT NOW I GOTTA WORRY ABOUT NOT WORRYING."

There is only one command from Jesus in our whole passage. This is the negative side of the command today. In LIGHT of who your master is from previous verses, and in light of one deep truth Jesus is going to lay out: The truth that **GOD LOVES YOU**, Jesus is going to say this will give you the power to STOP fearing and START living. At the end of the passage Jesus is going to give you the positive side. What you are to start doing. Because you can't just stop all the mental energy you spend on anxiety. You have to redirect it. That's coming. But first Jesus is going to spend a few minutes helping us see the underlying problem with it. **Because we will never ask God to deliver us from a problem we don't believe we have.**

- Anxiety is a form of fear. And the command "Do not fear" occurs more than any other command in scripture. 366 times. One per day plus leap year. Why would God have to say this so much?
- Because we are unavoidably and irreducibly hope-based creatures. How we live in the present is controlled by what we think will happen later. For example if I'm confident I will make an A on the exam tomorrow, I don't study today. If I hope to win a starting spot on a team, I practice as much as I can today.
- Anxiety is our response to an awareness that we cannot actually guarantee the events of tomorrow. No matter how hard we try. So Jesus goes straight to our most fundamental physical needs. To the bare necessities. food & clothing.

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

Right here we find God's first promise to anxious people. True Life is more than food and clothing. There is so much more to you than what you have or don't have. Remember the rich young ruler we talked about last week? Jesus said he needed to give away his wealth to find true life. If true life can't be found in having money, then you won't miss out on true life by not having money. But even more basic than this...consider that physical life can't be sustained without food. And you will freeze or be in complete shame without clothing. Without these bare necessities your body will die. And I think Jesus is saying even those who would take those things away cannot cause you true death. Because they cannot take your true life or rob you of your eternal life in Christ. Listen: In Christ YOU ARE IMMORTAL. And Paul says to die is gain.

[4] "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. Luke 12:4

Listen there is something far worse than death out there and Jesus is saying that thing...that thing so much worse than death...can never happen to you who are in Christ.

[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?

Second promise right here looking at the birds. What does he say? He says **GOD**...your heavenly father...he controls the entire ecosystem so that the birds are fed. That's the first premise here. Jesus wants you to re-awaken to how big your heavenly father is. **HEAVENLY**. He rules over the heavens. He was before the foundations of the world. And that **GOD** has put the world in motion and set it up so that even birds can get food. That **God**...he put the birds there to be a comparison. So that you could look at them and then hear him say **I LOVE YOU SO MUCH MORE THAN I LOVE BIRDS!** Birds are dumb & dirty. They aren't in my image. You are in my image. I call you sons and daughters. Listen to me: **God. Loves. You.** Do you believe that? He treasures and values you. Here's the second promise: **God Loves You** more than he loves birds. Birds eat berries and worms and God has taken all the time to make sure they can eat.

That's gonna be the one some of you latch onto. Because you get in an anxiety spiral and you think God has abandoned you. And God says ok if I can't get through to you right now just go outside and **LISTEN TO THE BIRDS CHIRP. I AM ACTIVELY PROVIDING FOR THEM SO THEY CAN CHIRP AT 6AM AND WAKE YOU UP 15 minutes** before your alarm was set to go off. And every time you see a bird from now on you need to look at it and say **God loves me more than you.**

IT'S TRUE! He hasn't forgotten you. He Loves You. Serious now. He cares for you. So listen when he says 1 Peter 5.7 to cast all your anxieties on him...because he **CARES** for you. Ok then Jesus gives us a twist for promise 3

[27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

Ok now that he's comforted us with God's love Jesus drops a little logic bomb on us. I've told you that even if you are a skeptic and you don't believe Jesus is God, you can appreciate that a lot of our wisdom today came from him and it should at least make you listen in. And we just gotta own this one right. So here is your third promise: Anxiety Accomplishes Nothing. It is 100% useless. It is a useless emotion that didn't show up until after sin entered the world. So you need to go ahead and preach to yourself that you are not about to be undone by a useless emotion. Aint nobody got time for that.

Worriers act as if they might be able to control the uncontrollable. Central to worry is the illusion that we can control things. "If only I could get my retirement right, I could control the future." "If I could figure out the right childrearing technique, I could guarantee how my kids turn out." Worry assumes the possibility of control over the uncontrollable. The illusion of control lurks inside your anxiety. Anxiety and control are two sides of one coin. When we can't control something, we worry about it.

Old german monk Martin Luther had a friend named Phillip. Also a great theologian. Phillip was a worrier though. So Luther used to try and help Phillip through his bouts with anxiety. Luther didn't tell Philipp "stop worrying." Instead, Luther said "let Philipp cease to rule the world." See anxiety dethrones God and exalts self. But you make a terrible god because you can't control things. Thus the worry. See You can't worry and at the same time let God be King. You have to stop trying to rule the world.

[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?

This promise is like the one with the birds. But that one was about your value, this one seems to point to you being eternal. Don't miss the set-up: Bringing up Solomon is Jesus' way of saying the richest man who ever lived. If anyone had fine clothing, splendorous clothing, it was him. Yet Jesus says the lilies...that just exist...they are just there...Jesus says they are intentionally crafted by God. There is no even small speck of nature God didn't design on purpose. And he's saying the lilies out shine Solomon...and he's going to clothe you much better than them. So listen Jesus can't be talking about your literal clothing right now. What's he saying? Here's the promise: In Christ you will live forever in extravagant glory.

This promise is far more than "God will take care of you." This is "God will clothe you in nothing less than his radiant glory!" "So why do you worry about the clothes you wear? I'll dress you in my own glory! Why do you worry about your health? I'll raise you from the dead to eternal life. Why do you worry about a few dollars? I'll give you the whole earth as your inheritance. Why do you worry when someone doesn't like you? I'll make you live in the kingdom of my love!"

God is giving you a future life that is radiant, indestructible, and full of glory. That God...the God of the vast expanse of the glorious kingdom of heaven...he LOVES YOU. And one day when you are done on this earth you will BE GLORIOUS in the next.

This promise goes to war against anxiety by appealing to the end of days. Listen anxious guy...you are anxious because you can't control the future and the great news is that for those who follow Christ the future is GLORIOUS! It's more glorious than you could possibly imagine. And sometimes in the middle of hard financial crisis or a dark period of despair you need to remember the end of all things. This world is not the end. It's a fleeting moment. Eternity is beautiful and good for those in Christ.

Leads us right to the next and very important promise:

[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.

Verse 31 he's summarizing the past few verses right. Food & clothing as the basic examples of worrying over things of this earth. And then he says, the gentiles seek... important word meaning they put their focus there. Seek is basically the same as the word serve from his teaching on money. You will become anxious over the things you seek after. And in a really bold way Jesus is saying that anxiety is the behavior of gentiles, or more specifically non-Christians, who don't have a sure hope like Christians do. So here's the bottom line promise: Anxiety forgets the gospel. Again this is not warm and fuzzy but you need to hear it.

When you are anxious what you need to begin recognizing is that you are acting out of some form of unbelief in God's goodness and in God's control. That's how unbelievers act. But that is not you if you are a Christian. So you need to start rehearsing the gospel that says: GOD LOVES YOU. God loves you so much he gave his only son to you. That whoever believes in him WILL NOT PERISH.

So listen, every single promise I'm saying today is for people who've received the salvation Jesus offers from our sin. If you are constantly worrying, perhaps you've never really believed the gospel. If there is a fear that feels like Jesus cannot overcome, you are believing like a non-Christian. REMEMBER THE GOSPEL! In fact we are taking communion in a minute and we will remember the gospel together. Ya'll anxiety is a monster. And it will eat you alive. And you cannot self-help your way out of it. You need to be rescued from its bondage and the rescuer you need is Jesus. God says he knows what you need in this world. But if you are ABOUT those things. If you seek them, if they are your source of security, you either have never believed the gospel or you are forgetting it now.

And let me be clear: Romans 6.23 says the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Turn from your sin. Repent of your anxiety where you've forgotten that God is your heavenly father. That GOD LOVES

YOU. Somewhere in anxiety you've forgotten that promise. Either you've forgotten what it means to say he's God. That he is all sovereign & powerful, or you've forgotten his love, or you've chosen to believe that love is not for you.

Ok let's keep going... 2nd to last promise

[33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

To me this is the best and hardest verse in this whole thing. Finally we get the action step. Seek First the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And "all these things" will be added. The "seek" is in contrast to what the gentiles seek. It's a big thing from the sermon on the mount. The Lord's prayer begins with GOD IN HEAVEN...YOUR KINGDOM COME...YOUR WILL BE DONE. Not mine, but yours. It's surrender and yielding to God and his desires. And only one kingdom can reign. Either his or ours.

How do we seek first the kingdom? Start with the Lord's prayer. Then we set our hearts to love what he loves. And he loves people!! Ya'll this is so big. When we seek first the kingdom of God, we become bold in advancing the mission of God. Listen Anxiety paralyzes the Church from carrying out its mission. We are afraid of what people will think. We want approval of others. Thinking like gentiles again. We must be so consumed with God's love that who cares if anyone else doesn't love us. We are heralds of a message not divas trying to win a popularity contest.

One more thing here: The argument is specifically that God will supply everything you need to do his will for the kingdom and for his righteousness. Because listen and this is very important: Jesus also promises we will suffer. He promises that some of us will be imprisoned, beaten, tortured, & killed for following him. And he calls us blessed for that. We don't miss out when that happens. The promise isn't: God will keep you well fed and well clothed. How shallow would that be. It's that God will provide everything you need as you seek first the kingdom of God. So sometimes our prayers won't be answered but that doesn't mean our needs aren't met. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane for God to let him NOT go up on the cross but then yielded saying "not my will but yours be done." And Paul says in Romans 8 what shall separate us from the love of Christ? And it says shall famine or nakedness? NOPE! Even when we starve to death for Christ or die stripped naked by persecutors...Christ's love is still there.

Because we don't measure God's love for us by our circumstances, we measure it by the Cross. And that will be something you need to rehearse time and again. Sometimes circumstances are terrible. But the love of God for us is unchanging.

[34] "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (ESV)

Tomorrow has trouble of its own, and the same God of grace will be there then that is there today! The promise is the unspoken otherside of the coin right. Don't fret tomorrow because you got enough today. Which means God's mercies will meet you here today. Last promise for anxious people God gives new mercies each day for

everything that awaits you. That's laments 3.22-23. The Steadfast love of the Lord NEVER ceases. EVER! Because GOD LOVES YOU. His mercies NEVER come to an end. They are new EVERY morning. GREAT is your faithfulness.

God. Loves. You. Do you believe it? Do you believe these promises? They are all different implications of the gospel which begins with those three words I can't say enough today. God. Loves. You.

I want to take the last couple of minutes to give you some handles for this. How do you fight anxiety with these promises of Christ?¹ Proverbs 25.8 says like a city broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit. In other words, how can you get a grip when the barbarians of anxiety are rioting the streets of your mind?

Anxiety confronts everyone at some point. So everyone needs to a plan for how to respond. Now a plan is not a formula. A baseball coach has no idea what is going to happen once the first pitch is thrown. But that doesn't stop him from being prepared. He's got a game plan. That's what I want to give you. A game plan.

1. Give your anxiety a name. What are the specific things that you are most likely to be anxious about? You'd be amazed just writing it down or verbalizing it to someone, you'd be amazed how much smaller that makes it. Because our mind starts swirling and it feels like a million overwhelming things. But its actually just 2 or 3 specific things.
2. Identify how you express anxiety. What does it look like for you? Maybe you are like me and you lock up. Kevin Love, forward for Cavs, wrote an article the other day about a anxiety attack he had where he got winded and short of breath. Maybe its physical like that for you. Maybe its repetitive, obsessive thoughts. Like you go worse case scenario & put that thing on repeat with X200 speed. Maybe its anger. Short temper. Maybe you escape to food or to drink. If you can identify the signs you can get an early jump on them.
3. Get a Sparring Partner. I mentioned this a couple weeks back. Everybody needs somebody to encourage them in the gospel. But you REALLY need somebody you can say "hey I'm losing it right now." And they can remind you of these promises you have in Christ and can help you defeat the anxiety monster.
4. Reflect: why am I anxious? This gets down into the heart of it. Worry always has inner logic. Its flawed, but its there. The way Powlison says it is, If you've forgotten God is in charge, identify the hijacker who is ruling in his place. When anxiety is raging it is because we have stopped seeking after God and his kingdom and have started seeking after his gifts in some form or another. Identify the object of your affections. This is hard work but its also where real

¹ These steps largely come from the end of David Powlison's chapter 'Don't Worry' in his book *Seeing with New Eyes*. A fantastic help

breakthrough can happen.

5. Rehearse the Gospel. Listen, I can't say this enough: God. Loves. You. I want it in your head. Maybe you need to memorize this story today and when a specific bout of anxiety hits you need to I.D. it and then just fight it with "God loves me more than birds." And it may be humorous even but you need to then remember that God's love for you was shown on the cross and his power to give you victory over the sin of anxiety was shown in the resurrection. REMEMBER JESUS. For me...Philippians 4.4-7. While sitting paralyzed in bed I recited it. Claimed that promise. And then...
6. Go to your father. Talk to him. He knows what you need. Cast your cares on him. Listen you most likely have good, important things that you worry about. Go to God with them. The thing is, you'll have to leave your worry with him. He calls you to pray. Take the Lord's prayer and use it. Start with God's will and kingdom and even in that you'll find worry begin to fade. Just as he promised.