

WHY DID JESUS SAY THAT?

Part 1 - *Don't be anxious about your life* - Matthew 6:25-34

Delivered By Pastor Kevin Thiessen on Sunday, July 8, 2018

(Slide 1) I'm 23. I've accepted a position with a mission that I truly believe in. God has been opening doors and leading me into this position. This was a huge decision in my young life, and a big commitment now having to raise my full salary. Yet, I've got people who believe in me, and I'm thrilled at the opportunity to live out my passion combining sport and ministry. Yet only a few weeks in I get called into my director's office. Three people are waiting for me, all friends, all people I respect. Very soon into the conversation, a knot starts forming in my stomach, what I'm receiving is not positive, and in fact my loyalty to the organization is being questioned. In the weeks following this devastating encounter, I dipped into a state that was at least depression like – characterised by isolation, pity, doubt, frustration and even anger at those who hurt me. Questions arose like “How could they believe this?”, “Why is this happening?”, and I even experienced a season of crisis where I questioned if Christianity truly was “the Way” – not because I had any question of why I believed, but because I couldn't understand how other Christ followers could act this way. All sorts of stories were swirling in my head – what was truth – what was lies? See, in this moment my whole world revolved around that position – my identity, my livelihood, my passion. Was it misplaced? Had I made the wrong decision? Am I going to be out of a job so quickly? *We'll come back to this later.*

Many people experience more worry than they care to admit, living in an ongoing state of anxiety and rarely having a sense of peace. It affects our sleep, our work, our family life, and our relationships. For some it even escalates to panic attacks or nervous breakdowns.

In recent years, social media has added a new dimension to causes for anxiety. As an anonymous blogger put it, “One reason that we're constantly glued to our phones is that it's actually addictive. Whenever we get a hit of information (a new Tweet, Instagram heart or Facebook like) we get a release of dopamine which gives us a sense of 'reward'. It's the same pathway that is involved with heroin users and smokers. **The struggle is REAL people.**”

Another big reason that people get social media anxiety is comparison and FOMO (fear of missing out). We are repeatedly exposed to everyone's fabulous lives – from what they eat for breakfast to who they party with on Saturday night. Meanwhile there we are, in our pajamas, feeling bloated and eating ice-cream and nachos on the couch.

We see their highlight reel and our everyday and the comparison can feel unbearable. There's a recipe for feeling awful about yourself if ever I heard one!

In my research for this message – I learned from the Anxiety and Depression Association of America that anxiety disorders are the most common mental health disorders in the United States. Interestingly, as Pastor Steve was sharing about the impact of devices a couple of weeks ago - the more technology we acquire, the more stressed out we become.¹

According to those studying this development, almost 20% of people with social media accounts **cannot go more than three hours** without checking them. (Just a second, let me check the World Cup scores...☺)

Most people who have social media accounts do not get nervous or stressed out when they are not able to check their notifications every five minutes. However, for those spending too much time on social media – it can greatly reduce your ability to enjoy real life. If you are spending several hours a day on these platforms, you are not going to have enough time to work, study, or spend time with loved ones. It can affect your health, both physically and mentally.

¹ Fader, Sarah. *Social Media Obsession and Anxiety*. <https://adaa.org/social-media-obsession>

On top of anxiety that we can bring upon ourselves, throughout history, there have been many people in power who actually work to keep their subjects / followers in constant anxiety. If the people are anxious about their life and worry about where their next meal is coming from, then perhaps they will be more willing to do the bidding of those in authority in order to secure the essentials they need. Fear and Anxiety kept people in their place.

How do we understand anxiety and fear – and how do we combat them?

In our passage today Jesus lays out a clear template – but why should we listen to him? This morning we're going to review first who Jesus is – then second, the evidence of his authority by reviewing eye witness accounts of what Jesus did? Finally, we'll dig into our passage to clarify what Jesus says about anxiety – and consider how we can combat anxiety and respond to the challenge Jesus gives us.

Who's telling us not to be anxious?

Why does Jesus' identity matter?

In the Christianity Explored course, speaker Rico Tice gives a great illustration about being invited out to lunch. As he arrived early he was waiting on the stairs outside the main dining room. With him stood another man whom Rico vaguely recognized but thought nothing of it. As good Englishmen they gave each other a sheepish nod and stood there awkwardly for 5 minutes in total silence from 12:55-1:00. Then, another person comes in and exclaimed to the other man, "Oh, there you are William, come with me we're in the private dining room." It turns out, this other man was Prince William! Rico been with him for 5 whole minutes with nothing better to do than talk with him and he hadn't said a single word ... now, he'd lost the opportunity. It could have been so different – Rico isn't saying 5 minutes would've changed his life and he's not saying they would have been life-long friends – but he knows the conversation would have been memorable – sadly all he saw was a handsome, well dressed 25 year old with thinning blonde hair – what he didn't see was his future king. In William's case getting his identity wrong didn't make much of a difference – Rico only missed out on a memorable conversation – and possibly so did William! Sometimes though getting someone's identity right really does matter.²

(Slide 2) It's critical to get the identity of Jesus right – otherwise we'll relate to him in the wrong way.

The Bible tells us that Jesus is the Son of God. Through multiple eye-witness accounts we learn that Jesus lived, died and was resurrected according to the will of His Father. The Bible tells us that he is now seated at the right hand of his Father. Christians believe that Jesus *is* the promised Messiah Israel was waiting for – that he is our Saviour and our King. By his life, death and resurrection Jesus made the way to be reconciled to God because he paid the ransom for our sin and removed the separation between God and man. His way offers to break the many chains that daily bind us – which for many of us includes anxiety.

(Slide 3) Thankfully, Jesus's kingly rule is not like worldly rulers. He secured his kingship through right living and obedience to the will of His Father all the way to giving up his life for ours. Beautifully, Jesus doesn't need to keep us frail and weak to establish his power and authority – rather he utilizes his power and authority by working even today first to redeem us – and then to be our ongoing strength, confidence and assurance.

Foundational in today's message is that if we trust and believe who Jesus is – that he is the Saviour of the world, and that he is our sovereign King who is in control of all things – then we do not need to be anxious about anything.

Why should we listen?

We should listen if Jesus is trustworthy? To figure that out we need to look at Jesus's life – consider his integrity (the congruence of his words, actions and behaviours), his motivation, his capacity, and the tangible impact of his life.

² Christianity Explored, The Good Book Company, 2011.

Though this topic alone could be a series of sermons, today we're going to laser in and take a crash course through the book of Mark as we view just one of the first hand, eye-witness accounts which reveal 5 blocks of evidence that Jesus had God's power and authority:

- **(Slide 4)** In Mark 1:21-22 we see Jesus' power and authority to **teach** ... the teachers of the law didn't come up with their own material, they relied on great teachers of the past and just gave their opinions on what others said ... but what set Jesus apart was that he didn't stand on anyone else's authority but spoke from his own authority. It was a "new teaching with authority". Even more importantly, Jesus lived out what he taught ... "love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you". Jesus did that exact thing, even as he was being killed on the cross...when he prayed, "Forgive them Father – they do not know what they are doing."
- **(Slide 5)** In Mark 5:25-34 we see his power and authority over **illness**. Where others would not even touch or go near the sick – Jesus both touched and healed them. Josephus, a historian of Jesus' time who was not a Christian, called Jesus was a doer of wonderful deeds. Jesus' enemies didn't understand where his power came from, and they would have looked for every opportunity to discredit him – so why didn't they? Because they couldn't. The evidence was there for all to see.
- **(Slide 6)** In Mark 4:35-41 we see his power and authority over **nature** as he calms a storm ... and not just stops the bad weather but the sea is described as "a great calm" --- like a glass lake on a calm morning. (Imagine a bowl of water ... you can stop shaking and the water keeps splashing.) Jesus was in the boat (sleeping!) with hardened fisherman who understood the seas – they were afraid for their very lives by this storm – just imagine how traumatizing and then amazing this would have been!
- **(Slide 7)** In Mark 5:35-43 we see his power and authority over **death** as he raised a young girl to life. The girl was the daughter of Jairus who was the ruler of the synagogue, a notable religious leader. When his daughter died, all hope seemed to be lost. Yet Jesus asked this grieving father to not be afraid and to have faith. This may not seem like a reasonable thing to ask as everyone else had already given up. Jesus' words reveal that either he is spectacularly misguided or supremely confident of his own power ... you've got to be very sure of yourself to say something like that to a grieving father. The astonishing insight we are given was that it was as easy for Jesus to raise someone from the dead as it is for us to rouse someone from sleep.
- **(Slide 8)** In Mark 2:1-12 we see Jesus's power and authority to **forgive** sin. Why did Jesus see that sin was a more pressing issue than healing paralysis? Because sin is ignoring our creator in the world he has made ... living without reference to the one who made us and gives us each breath ... it's rebellion against God and living independent of him – failing to think, say and do what we should. The world is not the way it is supposed to be because we're not the way we're supposed to be. Sin comes from within our hearts – and sadly each one of us have a heart problem. We often treat each other and our world in a shameful way – and we treat God that way too. Yet Jesus came to cure our heart problem and not just our physical ailments – he came for those who recognize they have a problem, not for those who think they've got it all together.

These 5 blocks of evidence reveal to us that as God's Son and God's chosen King, Jesus behaved with God's authority and consistently displayed God's power.

As you might expect, people around him observing these events responded to Jesus in a variety of ways – from fear to astonishment and for many faith and belief in who Jesus was.

How should we respond?

Knowing who Jesus is and what he is done is critical for informing us about who we are and how we should live.

In our passage of Scripture today, it starts with "Therefore" – and as Barton always says, what is the there for? The context for these verses is found earlier in Matthew 6 – which begins with Jesus teaching his followers how to pray.

(Slide 9) As Warren Wiersbe points out, “It is worth noting that there are *no singular pronouns* in the Lord’s prayer; they are all plural. It begins with “OUR Father.” When we pray, we must remember that **we are part of God’s worldwide family of believers.**” Those who’ve put their faith and trust in Jesus are now children of God – he is our Father – but we are also a part of a family with brothers and sisters all over the world.

How do we live out this identity? When Jesus says in our passage, “Don’t be anxious about your life”, he is stating it as if it should be our normal way of living. Yet so much of the world around us gives us daily cause for anxiety!

So why did Jesus say this? One obvious reason is because it impacts so many of us on a daily basis. **This message is critical for us because living daily life under his rule and authority, with our identity as his beloved children secure, sustains our ability to press on joyfully even when we can’t see how all our needs will be met.**

Pastor Steve shared a John Piper book that identifies at least eight reasons Jesus gives for his followers not to be anxious ... so let’s now dig into our passage for today.

Why should we not be anxious?

1. **(Slide 10)** Don’t be anxious about your life, what you eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Why? Because life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. (v.25)
 - a. Why do we get anxious about these things?
 - i. It could be as small as losing some pleasure ... because food tastes good!
 - ii. Or we may not receive compliments and admiring glances if we didn’t have nice clothes.
 - iii. At worst, if we can’t acquire food or clothes we may indeed be worried about literally losing our lives due to starvation or the cold.
 - b. So, in summary, we don’t want to lose physical pleasure or human praise or our lives.
 - i. Jesus’s response is that we have lost sight of the greatness of life. Life was given for something far greater – the enjoyment of God (Luke 12:21, 34). Where our treasure is, our hearts will be also ... Jesus is saying that life is not for the approval of man – but the approval of God (John 5:44). Not the extension of the earth – eternal life with God in the age to come (John 3:16)
 - c. Food and Clothes simply can’t provide the greatest things God intended for our lives.
2. **(Slide 11)** Look at the birds of the air. (v.26) Anxiety is unnecessary. Charles Spurgeon used an illustration to the effect of: If you saw a farmer feeding his cows and chickens, you would not believe a false accuser who claimed that same farmer starved his own children. As long as you see God providing for the wild creatures he has formed, rest assured that he will take care of his own children.
 - a. This isn’t a poster for laziness – even birds dig for worms and build their nests ... but Jesus says it is God who feeds them. Birds don’t anxiously hoard as though God will not take care of them the next day – they go about their work as should we – as though God will still be God tomorrow just as he is today.
 - b. ***This goes after our own insecurity – that we can’t take care of ourselves.***
3. **(Slide 12)** You cannot add one hour to your span of life. (v.27) Anxiety is fruitless. This argument is very pragmatic – Anxiety simply does not get you anywhere good. No matter what the problem is, feeling anxious is not going to minimize the problem. It’s only going to make you feel more miserable.
 - a. Jesus said that worry is sinful. We may dignify worry by calling it by some other name—concern, burden, a cross to bear—but the results are still the same. Instead of helping us live longer, anxiety only makes life shorter (Matt. 6:27).
 - b. Furthermore, worry is useless. Even if you feel yourself bound to fret, of what possible benefit does worry provide you with? Would birds be better fed if they moped about on the branches in winter time, or if they chirped and cried out against the God who created them? And if you begin complaining, what will you gain by it? Can you by complaining add anything to your life? If there is no rain, will the worry of the farmer compel the clouds to come, and empty themselves on his crops? If the farmer is worried that it is raining too much, will his grumbling seal up the heavens? If your work is dull, will it

be made any better by your sulking? If your business yields you no profit, will you become any richer out of your protests?

- c. Worrying is a poor business; it just does not bring about any good results. It is useless, it is fruitless, it is unnecessary.
4. **(Slide 13)** Consider the lilies of the field. (v.28-29) Similar to the birds, and yet the lily has no will or instinct of its own to labor or spin – yet it is clothed in beautiful form and colour. Jesus says you can draw a conclusion from this: that God delights to adorn things. If his delight finds expression in adorning grass and flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow – then surely his delight in adornment will express itself in how he clothes his children!
 - a. Some of you may protest – God certainly hasn’t adorned me. Or what about those in destitute situations all over the world, even on our own streets? Very few of us will be adorned like the mighty King Solomon! But what about John the Baptist, who wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and honey (Luke 7:25; Matt 3:4) ... In Matthew 11:11 Jesus says, “Among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.” **John Piper comments on this section, “The adornment that Jesus promised does not mean that we will have exorbitant clothes, but that we will have the clothes we need.”**
 - b. Let’s be careful – we must not measure the perfection of God’s provision by some standard below his calling. *He does not call us to live in palaces – but to take up our crosses and love people no matter the cost.*
 - c. The promise of provision in this context is that God will give us all what we need to do his will.
5. **(Slide 14)** Don’t be like the Gentiles. (v.32) Anxiety puts us on the same level as those who don’t follow God’s ways. It reveals that we are exactly like the rest of the world in regards to what makes us happy. Jesus assumes that we do not want to be like that.
 - a. To worry about material things is to live like an unbeliever! When we put God’s will and God’s ways first in our lives, He will take care of everything else. What a testimony it is to the world when Christians dare to seek His kingdom first and foremost.
6. **(Slide 15)** Your Heavenly Father knows what you need. (v.32) Do we believe that God has the heart of a loving father? Anxiety reveals that we are too close to the world and too far from God. Yet the world has nothing eternal to offer, and your loving heavenly Father knows your needs both now and forever – and is committed to providing them for you.
7. **(Slide 16)** All these things will be added to you. Your Father will ensure that you have what you need. (v.33) When you seek the kingdom of God first, he works for you and provides everything you need. “All these things” does not mean everything we *think* we need, but everything we *really* need. Real needs are determined by what God calls us to do, not what we feel like doing. God will give us everything that we need **to do his will**.
8. **(Slide 17)** Tomorrow will be anxious for itself. God has appointed to each day its portion of pleasure and pain. Worrying about tomorrow does not help either today or tomorrow. If anything, it robs us of our effectiveness today—which often means we will be even less effective tomorrow. Therefore, we shouldn’t unfairly take the troubles meant for tomorrow and place them in today. Believe that God will be the same yesterday, today and forever. **Why? Because of who he is and what he has already done!**

(Slide 18) The main point of today’s passage, as Jesus tells his followers not to be anxious is that **the more primary and central His Kingdom becomes in our lives, the less anxiety we will have.**

Let me bookend a couple things that we started with today:

First of all, it’s important to realize that many people who post all that great stuff on Facebook have a normal life just like you and me but most only post the good stuff. If your life is not as awesome as some of the people you see on Facebook, **it is not going to get any better by sitting there obsessing over it.** You have to get out and enjoy your real life, not your social media “life” because social media alone is not a real life. If you are having trouble doing this or you just need to talk to someone, there are people here who can help you with this. Request to meet with a pastor or check in with others in your community groups.

Second, let prayer be like breathing air for you.

Warren Wiersbe said, “Prayer prepares us for the proper use of the answer.” If we recognize our need, and if we voice it to God, trusting Him for His provision, then we will make better use of the answer than if God forced it on us without our asking.³

Three words in our passage today point the way to combating fear and anxiety:

- **faith** (Matt. 6:30), trusting Jesus that he is who the Bible says he is, based on the evidence of his power and authority, and of his life, death and resurrection ... and that God will meet our needs;
- **Father** (Matt. 6:32), knowing God is a loving father who cares for His children;
- **first** (Matt. 6:33), putting God’s will first in our lives so that He might be glorified.

(Slide 19) If we have faith in our Father and put Him first, He will meet our needs.

Some of you may be thinking – I get that’s what the Bible says, but I’m still anxious – and now I’m even more ashamed because I can’t trust God with my anxiety. Friends, there is a huge difference between guilt/shame and conviction. The enemy Satan, is prowling around seeking to prey on our insecurities and he uses guilt and shame to compel us to isolate, retreat, and pull away from God. Yet, it has been my prayer that you would instead be convicted by the Spirit of God – because the conviction that the Spirit produces in us compels us to repentance, to turn back and draw towards God and his family of believers – the church, to seek restoration, support and renewal.

May your desire, first of all, *be to enter into the kingdom of God*. His is the kingdom of **new life**, of **perfect freedom**, of **faith in Christ** and **union to Christ**, it is the kingdom of **the power of the Spirit of God**.

Do you belong to his kingdom? If you don’t, I encourage you to seek His kingdom immediately. The way in is found in Acts 16:31, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

Once a part of God’s kingdom, *you get to enjoy its privileges*. We get to ask daily for the peace that relates to his kingdom, the rest, the joy, and we are secure because of the sacred identity of being a part of God’s family which is given to everyone under the Lordship of Jesus. As his children, these privileges are now our right, purchased for us by Jesus.

On top of belonging to and enjoying its’ privileges – it is our duty to *seek to extend that kingdom*. We are all called to be ambassadors – to represent Jesus all over the world. So, begin each new day in prayer, and then step out with the tools of love, grace, mercy and kindness in hand, seeking to help point others to Jesus. Instead of giving into anxiety, let all your concern go in this direction – to serve God, to live for Him, to bring glory to His name.

(Slide 20) A helpful resource is this little booklet by Stuart Scott called *Anger, Anxiety and Fear: A Biblical Perspective*. As Scott states, “Godly concern is caring about important things for the right reasons. It is accompanied by a trust in God’s ultimate control and faithfulness.”⁴

I told you I’d come back to my initial story. The first part is that in the midst of my “crisis of faith” it ended with me moping on my couch. It was like Jesus was sitting next to me staring at me with questioning eyes saying something like, “Are you done yet?” Instead of pitying me, he refocused me on the fact that he had not let me down. He was still Lord and Savior ... he was still in control. He had not changed, and he was the same as yesterday – and he would be the same tomorrow. It was his followers who had let me down, but they are human – and flawed just like I am. Interestingly, many years later I received an apology from my former director. Many

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 26). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ Scott, Stuart (2009). *Anger, Anxiety and Fear*. Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, Inc.

facts came to light that there was a previous conflict that I had been caught up into. It turned out I had done nothing wrong but had become a cog in someone else's conflict.

Yet in reality the apology was basically unnecessary at that point. The reality is, the encounter itself was necessary and formative. It was a blessing in that God used this encounter to form and shape me as a person, and as a future leader of others. In that early season of life, that ministry was my whole life and identity, but God used it to grow me and to create a bridge to an even clearer long-term calling – which began first by combining my love for sport and discipling youth through being invited to create a youth ministry for a church in Dublin, Ireland. Immediately after joining that church, I was in relationship with three men who were or had recently gone through similar circumstances to me. Now, instead of being ill-equipped, I actually had a platform and real-life experience to speak truth into their lives and stand with them in their own season of crisis. A second critical point of learning, was that it shaped how I meet with people – realizing that sometimes my 11 o'clock is someone else's whole world. That mindset helps me to be present and attentive to not just the immediate issue, but hopefully to provide a gracious and understanding environment for these issues to be heard, prayed over and addressed.

So friends, why did Jesus tell us not to be anxious? Because, even when life seems out of control and even completely against us - Jesus is still King – he is sovereign and he's in control - and wonderfully, he's got us. Ultimately, he has secured our eternal future – yet he is also looking out for and providing for our daily needs. So let us continually be mindful of who he is – what he has already done – and who we are because of this. Then, with all that in mind, let's build our life on the unshakeable rock that is sovereign rule of Jesus – so that foundation undergirds us with his strength, provision and joy. If you've drifted away – turn back. If you've been struggling, go to the only One who actually has the capacity to free you and provide for you. It's time for us to respond by living with his Kingdom as our priority. And we *can* do this – because He is with us!

As we now transition to the Lord's table – let's end with Philippians 4:6-9 in mind:

⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.