

Anxiety Some Causes and Cures - Part 2

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 April 2012

Preacher: Darrell Johnson

[0 : 00] Spirit of the living God, we believe that you enabled Matthew, the tax collector, to remember these words of the Lord Jesus. And I pray now in your mercy and grace that you would lift these pages, these words off the pages and work them deep into our hearts as never before.

For we pray in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Two weeks ago, the Globe and Mail published a very interesting article on the human heart.

Right on the front page of the section called Health and Fitness was a colorful drawing of the heart with all kinds of words describing its different parts.

Right ventricle, left ventricle, pulmonary artery, left subclavian artery, aorta and on it went. And the title of the article under the drawing was The Mysteries of the Human Heart.

And when I saw that, I thought, what a perfect title for the second part of Jesus' sermon on the mount. For in the second half of his sermon, Jesus is uncovering, he is opening up the mysteries of the human heart.

[1 : 20] Not of the organ that pumps blood through the body. Although he could do that, Jesus could write the finest textbook on the anatomy of the heart. But in this text, he's using the word heart differently.

For Jesus and for most of the authors of the Bible, the word heart stands for the control center of our lives. The heart is not only the seat of the emotion, which is what we tend to think, but the heart is the seat of the will.

The heart is the place where we sort out all the data that comes to us through our senses and through our imaginations. And then the heart is the place where we make the really tough decisions in our lives that affect the whole of our lives.

And in his sermon, Jesus is helping us understand this control center of our lives. He's telling us things about our hearts that we would have never figured out on our own.

And in the process, he's healing our hearts. Especially in Matthew 6, 19 to 34. As I said last Sunday, this is one of my most favorite texts to preach for the simple reason that it is the text I most need to hear.

[2 : 38] In the text, the chief cardiologist, if you will, takes our hearts into his hand. And then tells us things about our hearts we would have never deduced on our own.

As we have been following Jesus into his sermon on the mount these past weeks and months, I keep hearing in my head what the apostle Paul said about Jesus in his letter to the Colossians. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And I especially hear this when I soak in Matthew 6, 19 to 34.

As I said last Sunday, on first reading, this section of Jesus' sermon appears to be a series of loosely connected, or loosely strung together wisdom sayings, much in the vein of the book of Proverbs.

On first reading, it appears that Jesus speaks about treasures. Then he goes on to speak about vision. Then he goes on to speak about masters and mammon. And then he goes on to speak about the birds and the flowers.

[3 : 57] And then he talks about seeking first the kingdom and righteousness of God. On first reading, it appears that there is no inherent connection between treasures, vision, masters, worry, birds, flowers, kingdom, and righteousness of God.

But on further reading, we discover that everything in Matthew 6, 19 to 34 is carefully crafted around one main point.

On further reading, we discover that the whole text pivots around verse 25. Therefore, I say to you, do not worry.

Matthew 6, 25. Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life. Literally, it is stop worrying. Stop being anxious. The whole of Matthew 6, 19 to 34 pivots around verse 25. Therefore, I say to you, stop worrying.

[5 : 10] It is a command. Not just a friendly suggestion. It's a command like all the other commands in his sermon. Let your light shine before others.

Make friends quickly with your opponent on the way to the court. Let your yes be yes, your no be no. Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, but say, Father in heaven.

And do not worry. Stop worrying. How? That's the million dollar question, isn't it?

Especially in our time, in our age, in this place of the world. How? How do I stop being anxious? In what precedes the pivotal verse, Jesus opens up for us some of the cures for anxiety.

Before the causes. After the cures. Before, therefore, do not worry. Jesus is showing us what gives rise to anxiety in the human heart.

[6 : 28] And then after, therefore, do not worry. Jesus is showing us how to move beyond this anxiety into authentic living of the new life into which he is calling us.

Again, a word about the kind of anxiety or worry that Jesus is addressing. As I said last Sunday, he is not addressing the clinical condition we call anxiety disorder.

Anxiety disorder emerges from those traumatic experiences we have in life. And what Jesus says here does help. It does help. But he's not addressing such distress.

He does that in another way and in other places. Here, Jesus is speaking of the kind of anxiety, the kind of worry every human being experiences sometime in life. He's speaking about the kind of anxiety that especially marks the present moment in history.

The preacher on the mount knows us. And he loves us. He takes our hearts into his hand. And he tells us why we worry.

[7 : 38] And then he shows us how to move through the worry, beyond the worry, into authentic living of the life he brings into the world. Okay.

Before the pivotal verse. Before, therefore, do not worry. The chief cardiologist is telling us that excessive worry is due to making unwise decisions relative to deeply ingrained movements of the human heart.

Movement one. We are all investors. We all treasure treasures. Movement two. We all have a vision of reality. We all have these presuppositions about the way the world works.

And movement three. We all serve a master. We all serve some sort of God. We all serve some sort of mamma. Review. Matthew.

Movement one. It's in verses 19 and 20. Movement one. We worry so much, he says. We are so anxious because we have tried to secure our future with earthly treasures.

[8 : 47] Not that earthly treasures are bad. Not at all. As he says in verse 32, your father knows that you need these things. And verse 33, all these things will be added to you as well.

It's just that we try to secure our lives by these treasures, by earthly treasures. We tie the future to earthly treasures.

And we worry because all earthly treasures, no matter how good, are profoundly insecure. Moth and rust destroy.

Thieves break in and steal. Hearts that are tied to earthly treasure cannot but be anxious.

Movement two.

It's in verses 22 and 23. We worry so much, says Jesus. We are so anxious because we have let our vision be clouded, if not blinded, by the values and goals and ambitions of people around us who do not know his father.

[9 : 58] Our vision is so full of what our cultures say is important that we do not see the living God right there in the middle of all that we are facing.

Because all we see and hear is doom and gloom. Someone recently observed that the evening, the nightly news begins good evening and then goes on to tell us every reason why it's not a good evening.

Because all we hear and see is doom and gloom. And because all we hear from our culture is the message that we can repair the world on our own.

We do not see and hear the rock of ages actively involved in everything we face. And we cannot but be anxious. Movement three, verse 24.

We worry so much, says Jesus. We are so anxious because knowingly or unknowingly, we serve some sort of mammon and not the living God.

[11:04] Mammon comes from the word aman. Aman means that in which one trusts. Mammon can be money. But for many people, mammon is people.

Spouses, children, grandchildren, employers. For many people, mammon is career, ideas, ideology, systems. Most mammons in and of themselves are perfectly good.

That's why we're tempted to put our trust in them. That's why we're tempted to serve them. Most mammons, in fact, are a gift from God. Spouses, homes, jobs.

It's just that. All form of mammon, however good. All form of mammon, however good, are profoundly unstable.

No mammon is eternal. No mammon is all-powerful. No mammon is ever-present. And because all forms of mammon are unstable, a life that is built on any form of mammon will wobble.

[12:13] It will shake. We cannot but be anxious. For our hearts know, but usually will not admit, that the mammon can collapse or crumble overnight.

So, before the pivotal verse, therefore do not worry, Jesus is showing us some of the causes of anxiety. Freedom from anxiety is going to come by making wise decisions relative to those three movements of the heart.

So, I say to Jesus, Okay. Okay. I am getting it. I see what you see in my heart.

I'm trying to bank my hope for the future on heavenly treasure where moth and rust cannot destroy, where thieves do not break in and steal. I'm trying to keep my vision clear.

I want to see you at the very center of everything. I'm trying my best to serve you and not any form of mammon. But Lord, I am not making enough progress.

[13:24] And so, I'm going to need some help. So, Jesus continues. After the pivotal verse, after verse 25, Jesus speaks of some of the cures for the anxiety in the human heart.

He calls you, He calls me, He calls all of humanity to two new movements of the heart. I hear the chief cardiologist saying, Let these two movements move your heart and you will start making wise decisions relative to the other movements of your heart.

New movement one. New movement one. Shift the focus. New movement two. Channel the energy.

New movement one. It's in verses 26 and 28. Shift the focus. Shift the focus away from that which causes you to worry.

Indeed, shift the focus away from your heart altogether. Shift the focus and look at... Ready? Shift the focus and look at...

[14:42] Ready? Shift the focus and look at... Birds and flowers. What?

Verse 26. Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store in barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Verse 28. See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was dressed like one of these. Shift the focus and look at the birds. Shift the focus and look at the flowers. You know how I respond to Jesus at this point? Forgive me, Lord.

Like I know you're the master. And I know that you are Emmanuel God with us. I know that you are the most fully human who ever lived.

[15:50] I know that you're the smartest person who ever lived. I freely endorse what the Apostle Paul says about you. In you are hidden all the treasures of wisdom. But you want me to do what?

Like Jesus. You can see what's going on in the world today. You can see that the world economic order is on the verge of collapse.

You can see that nations are saddle rattling, sword rattling. You can see that people are losing their jobs. And you want me and everybody else to shift the focus and take up bird watching and horticulture?

I hear Jesus reply to me, yes, that's what I want you to do. Spend time looking at the birds, Lord, I ask.

Yes, he says. Spend time studying flowers, I ask. Yes, he says. Really, I ask. Yes. Really, really, I ask.

[16:54] And then I hear him say, Daryl, will you just do what I tell you to do? Get out of yourself. And go outside and look at the birds and the flowers.

Just do it. Trust me by doing what I tell you to do. Perfect exercise on Earth Day. One of my favorite stories is the story of Jesus turning water into wine at Cana at Galilee at a wedding feast.

The wine runs out. It's a major social embarrassment for the couple that is uniting themselves in marriage. And so Jesus tells the servants to fill jars with water. With water?

I can imagine the waiters saying to Jesus, Water? You want us to fill the jars with water? Like Jesus, we've got plenty of water. We need wine.

What does filling the jars with water got to do with wine? And I imagine Jesus saying to the waiters, Will you just do what I tell you to do?

[18:10] And when they do, 120 gallons of stagnant water is turned to the finest of wines. Go outside, Daryl, and look at the birds.

Go and consider the lilies of the field. Literally, he says, Start looking. It's a call to shift the focus. Stop focusing on what is making you worry and start focusing on the birds and the flowers. New movement one. Shift the focus.

Stop looking and fretting about what you will eat or what you will drink or what you will wear. All important. All good. All necessary. And start looking at birds and flowers.

Why? Because when we look at the birds and the flowers, when we finally see the birds and the flowers, we see his father.

[19:14] Yet your heavenly father feeds them. Yet your heavenly father clothes them. And while looking at the birds and the flowers, Jesus then asks us, Do you not matter more to the father than these?

Well, do we? Do we not matter more to the father than birds and flowers?

If the father, says Jesus, the father I know and love and trust so cares for these flowers and birds, will he not care for you?

Jesus is not calling us to stop working or stop planning or stop strategizing. He is not, as William Barclay notes, calling us to a shiftless, thriftless, reckless, thoughtless, improvident way of life.

Jesus is calling us to be realistic. Jesus knows us. He knows that we do not live realistically. He calls us to be realistic, to be fully realistic.

[20:29] Birds are very industrious. Watch them. Energetically, creatively, building their nests and bringing food for their little ones. It's just that. The birds know what human beings forget.

The birds know there is a father. The birds know there is a heavenly father who cares for us more than the birds. The birds are very industrious. It's just that birds know what we forget.

Birds know that they do not make the world go round. The flowers which keep emerging after winter. The flowers which keep emerging in the cracks in our cement cities.

The flowers know that their laboring and spinning do not make the world go round. I think I may have pointed it out to you in another context.

It's worth doing again. Do you know that after the horrific events of 9-11, we witnessed a miracle? You remember what the miracle was?

[21:35] I'm going to remember the miracle the rest of my life. The miracle after 9-11 is this. Wall Street closed and was closed for seven days.

Wall Street was closed for seven days and the world kept turning. That's because Wall Street does not make the world go round.

New York does not make the world go round. Washington, D.C. and Ottawa and Vancouver and Hong Kong and Shanghai and New Delhi do not make the world go round.

Google, Facebook, GM, Walmart do not make the world go round. The Father of the Lord Jesus Christ makes the world go round.

Start looking, Jesus says, until you see through the birds of the air and the flowers of the field to the Father. That's what Jesus is after.

[22:50] Start looking. Look until you see the one who made us. Look until you see the one who loves us. Look until you see the one who holds it all together. As the great theologian John Calvin once noticed, the birds and the flowers are the great creatures of creation.

A bird and a flower is preaching to you. Do you not know the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ? Don't you know the Heavenly Father? Look at the birds and the flowers until we see through the birds and the flowers to Abba Papa Father.

You see, the great German theologian Helmut Thilica was right. He said, every worry is a vote of no confidence in God. Every worry is a vote of no confidence in God.

Sorry, Father, but this crisis we're facing is just a little bit beyond you. you don't say it out loud, but it's what my heart's saying. Sorry, Father, I'm really sorry to say this, but I just don't think you're up to this.

Sorry, Father, I mean, I love you and all, I sing hymns and all, I love you, and Jesus says some nice things about you, but you are not able to handle what I am facing, and so I have to worry.

[24 : 18] shift the focus, says Jesus, until we become realistic, fully realistic, and see the Father at the center of everything.

I want to take a moment and speak to the leadership of our church right now. Members of the church leadership team, members of each of the mass, members of the development committee, hear me out, hear me out.

We need to be realistic about our ministries. That's what many of you say to me, be realistic, Daryl. But we are not realistic until we see the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ in the center of us.

We're not realistic at all until we see the mighty God at the center of things, who has provisions way beyond we imagine. The development committee. Who's going to get us through City Hall?

Not the developer. The Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that when you do your work. Church leadership team. Who's going to provide for us when the Lord wins people in this city and this place is too full of people?

[25 : 36] The Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's being realistic. Anything less than that is unrealistic. I will preach that until I die because I need to hear it most. Sorry about the energy.

Am I right? You see, there's a tendency in the Christian faith. I'm working on an article on this. I call it horizontalizing the burden pole.

The tendency in the church, Jesus Christ, is to take this mighty presence of God and then make it horizontal and just look to each other. Birds and flowers, get it.

So movement one, shift the focus. And then you'll like movement two, channel the energy. Verse 33, but you seek first the kingdom and righteousness of God and all these other things will be added to you.

Take all the energy, take all the fearful, nervous, anxious energy and channel it toward entering and experiencing the kingdom of God. Literally, it's keep seeking.

[26 : 56] Keep seeking the kingdom and righteousness of God. Keep channeling all the energy until you find and actually live in the kingdom. It's a very intense verb that Jesus uses here.

it's the word zoteo and in other places it's translated persecute. A very intense action. Jesus is saying go hard after press in all the way keep seeking the father's new world order.

Kingdom and father they are what Jesus ministry is all about. His first sermon, one line, the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come here.

His parables, the kingdom of God is life. His sermon on the mount, the kingdom of heaven has come. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom. Seek first the kingdom.

It's a kingdom of light, a kingdom of mercy, a kingdom of justice, a kingdom of peace. It's a kingdom of reconciliation where relationships really work.

[28 : 02] It's a kingdom where addictions are broken. It's a kingdom of cleansing. It's a kingdom of joy. Seek first this kingdom. kingdom because it's the only kingdom that is going to last.

No other kingdom is going to last. All other kingdoms fade away. And some of us have lived long enough. I was tempted to diswrite all the great kings and governments I've seen collapse in my 64 years.

It would be a huge list. no kingdom, no institution, no corporation finally lasts. Only the kingdom of God does. And the new movement too is channel all that energy until you get into the Father's kingdom.

Nothing else is going to matter. seek first, says Jesus. Not just first as one in a line of things, but seek first as all-encompassing, as all-embracing.

Not seek first security. That's why our hearts are anxious. Not seek first affluence. That's why our hearts are anxious.

[29 : 17] There's never enough of it. not seek first influence. Not seek first, make a name for yourself. Oh my goodness, boy, you will really be anxious. Not seek first to meet my needs and the needs of my kids and grandkids.

That will make you very anxious. But seek first the rule and right relationship of God. Throw yourself into the only world order that is going to last.

And then surprise. All these other things fall into their proper place. And one morning, you wake up, and it dawns on you.

Huh, I'm no longer tying the future to things that can fall apart. I am beginning to see clearly.

Oh my goodness, I haven't put my weight on a mammon for days. And then you realize I'm not worrying like I used to.

[30 : 41] the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. And the love of the Father who so loved you, he gave you his son, be with you.

And the fellowship of the Spirit who will never leave you and who will never let you down, be with you. So that we can breathe.

Amen.