

ANXIETY IS THE EMOTION OF 2020

SERIES: JESUS IS KING | WEEK 8 | 12.6.2020

I think I'd be right to say that anxiety is the official emotion of 2020. In fact, I would say the narrative of 2020 has been fear and anxiety. Our passage this morning talks about that, and so it caused me to begin to ask some questions of a whole bunch of people about anxiety this week, and it's been sort of fun. It sort of grew. I wasn't really expecting that, I didn't set out to have an interview with a bunch of people on the subject of anxiety, but I kept on asking people, like, "Are you an anxious person?" And I would tell you the predominance of the amount of people I spoke said, "Oh, yeah. I'm an anxious person."



And they'd tell me that they're predisposed to anxiety; have had anxiety from the youngest of age; oftentimes I'll wake up in the middle of the night heart rate racing, palms sweating, wide awake with something that they're worried about, that they're anxious about. They tell me that sometimes it's a legitimate thing. They said sometimes in the middle of the night it's absolutely crazy when they think about it the next day that that's what they were worried about, but nonetheless it is totally what they were worried about. They told me they were a worrier by nature. Many mentioned physical symptoms that they're dealing with as a result of that, and some mentioned that some nights it scares them because it becomes so dark that their thoughts are extremely scary, thoughts about what they might do.

I also talked to people that maybe you'd say you're jealous of, who'd say, "Nope, not me. I don't struggle with that. It's never been my problem." And this is why you might be jealous of them, they said they had nerves of steel, everything rolls off their skin, their skin's 2 or 3 inches deep. I heard words like, "Aw, I just look at life like God's got this." And they'd tell me things like, "Aw, I'm gonna die eventually anyhow, so when those worries come to mind I just brush them off and figure who cares." Like I said, those of you who are anxious, you're like, "You're so lucky. You're so lucky that you feel that way."

It's funny though when I talked to those folks, I probed a little bit deeper. I'm like, "Like, you don't have any anxiety?" "Nope. Well..." and then they'd get a little bit honest, "well, there's this one thing that bothers me all the time." "OH! Okay. So you do have a little bit. Okay, good, good." And quite truthfully, everyone I talked to that has no anxiety, there is something that makes them anxious and, um, probably relieves all of us when we think about that. And it seems to be one of those things that bubbles up. In fact, what appeared to me at a given point for them, they've created some really good coping mechanisms. That thick skin, they just build up a wall, they build up a protective device, and they know how to keep that worry and that anxiety at bay and they just fight it off anyway possible. And they would tell you it's probably not their predisposition to be anxious, but even when they feel that coming they put it up, they hide it to the best of their ability. And yet, they told me that when it bubbles up in them it's uglier probably than the average person who's just anxious all the time.

Here's where I'd like to take us this morning. For most of us in this room, I think anxiety is something that we've just assumed will be our lot for the rest of our lives. But before we're done here today I'd like to give you two simple—let me pause and say not simple—items that we can do for the rest of our lives to combat anxiety. And so you don't have to wait around to hear what those two items are I'm just going to just quickly give you what they are. They're found in Matthew Chapter 6, and I'm also going to take you to Philippians Chapter 4 where they're found, the only place I know how to know the answers to these questions. Two things, two simple things—(1) seek first the Kingdom of God, and (2) pray. You see what I mean? Like, they're big things, they seem simple, and probably a bunch of you are like, "I don't know how that will fix it," or "I've done it and I don't know how to go there."

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Before I drill down on that a little bit more, I want to read this text in Matthew Chapter 6, so if you have your Bibles you might want to get there. Before I drill down on that, I want to give you a little – should I say a little context? I just want to put a little context around this before I go any further. Jesus in John 10:10 makes a fascinating statement. He says this:

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

— and when He's talking about the thief He's talking about Satan, the prince of the power of the air.¹ You've probably heard this statement from Scripture, "We don't wrestle against flesh and blood,"² so it's not your mate, it's not your boss, it's not some political entity. We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, we wrestle against principalities, against [cosmic] powers, against rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places. I say this because I don't think we say it enough to realize so that it's drilled into our head as a foundational principle. There is a battle, it is against Satan, and Satan is our enemy.

The THIEF comes ONLY to steal kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.
JOHN 10:10

And I want you to look at this verse again, John 10:10, you've got to get this into your head. The enemy has a desire and I capitalized the word "ONLY" on

purpose—circle it, capitalize it—the only reason, the only thing the enemy is trying to do is steal from you, to kill you, and to destroy you. So anything that is stealing from you, killing you, destroying you is from the enemy. That's exactly what anxiety is doing to so many of us—it's stealing from us, it's killing us, it's destroying us. It's why when I bring it up you're just like, "Ugh. I wish I could fix it." But there's almost this, "No, thank you" because I know you can't and it's only going to make it hurt worse. I like the second half of that verse where it says, this is Jesus speaking:

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

– JOHN 10:10 (ESV)

And you know when that life is being sucked out of you about the cares and the worries and the anxieties of this life. It's being sucked out of you, there's nothing left, and the joy that you once had and the happiness and the bubblyness that you once had is gone. And people are saying to you, "You're flat. You're not who you once were. You don't have that joy. You used to smile so much. You used to be, I don't know, there was just something about you and that's gone now." And Jesus says if you'll come to Me, in Me you'll have that. The enemy is trying to steal that from you—don't let it happen.

I found myself poking around a passage in Luke Chapter 8 this week, and I'm just going to turn there, you can if you wish. Luke Chapter 8 Jesus again is speaking and He's talking about these different soils that, you know, using farming terms that could cause a seed to grow, and He's using that to try and explain to us our spiritual life. I mean, if you're gonna grow spiritually and you're gonna flourish as a Christ follower, what would be the kind of soil you'd be planted in? Or, if you're not going to flourish as a Christ follower, what kinds of conditions would be the case that would really mess up your flourishing

¹ Ephesians 2:1-3 (ESV) By Grace Through Faith: ¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

² See Ephesians 6:10-20 for complete passage, The Whole Armor of God: ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

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as a Christ follower? And He explains it here, and really, He lists three things that will really keep you from flourishing as a Christ follower and I want to just read what those three things are. He says the cares, the riches, and the pleasures of life – [COUNTS THEM OFF ON HIS FINGERS] the cares, the riches, and the pleasures of life.

And I would say in this room here today probably each one of us would connect with one of those more than another. Some of you will say, "I don't care about riches, the pleasures of life is not a big deal. Man, I'm sitting here just tied up with anxiety, the cares of life. I'm worried about everyone. I'm worried about everything. I mean, it's just coming at me. It's so hard." Others of you are like, "Nah, it's just like, man, I'm all about my riches. I want that." Jesus says those three things are going to be a problem. And by the way, when He talks about riches as being one of the things that keeps us from growing in Jesus, that's what He talked about in the earlier part of this chapter, Chapter 6, that we talked about last week. Do you remember how we began last week? It says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth,"³ and then He talked about, you know, those treasures are going to rot and they're going to, you know, get eaten up by bugs and this kind of thing. Don't be spending your time laying up treasures here because it's just going to totally, totally mess you up.



And we walk into today's passage in verse 25, the very first word is "Therefore" – it's sort of, I mean, Jesus keeps on coming after these same themes. We see in Luke 8 when He says hey, listen, there's going to be some soils that are going to mess you up – cares, riches, and pleasures. When you get to Chapter 6, He says, "Therefore" – that money is going to be a problem, therefore, I tell you don't be anxious. Your anxiety is really going to keep you from growing spiritually.

Those pictures that you paint in your head, those things that you're just constantly seeing—those pictures are the things that are keeping you from God. Remember, Satan is an ancient enemy, studied mankind carefully and over all the time that Satan has prowled around on this earth as a lion waiting to devour as 1st Peter⁴ says, he's learned what it takes to mess us up and trip us up. It's not real complicated so he keeps on running the same play.

And evidently by the amount of times that the Scriptures mention anxiety and the amount of times Jesus mentions anxiety, this is one of the devil's key plays. He just keeps coming back and running the same play again and keeps on getting the same results; even to a point that he's made anxiety look like just a normalized thing by labeling it and creating something called an "anxiety disorder." And yet, you can take all the medicine you want for it, and I've talked to people even today who said they are taking medicines for it but they still feel a new level of anxiety and a different level of anxiety, and so it hasn't totally taken it away or fixed it.

When I go back to that verse in John 10:10 where the thief comes to kill and destroy, I'm reminded when he's coming to kill, steal, and destroy, even this virus that we're dealing with at this moment, everyone

³ Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV): [Jesus speaking] ¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."

⁴ 1 Peter 5:8 (ESV): Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

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I told you the first answer was found in this text, Jesus says hey, listen, I've got everything covered, here's what I want you to do—I want you to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven.

We've been through the last bunch of weeks as we've been going through the book of Matthew, the book of Matthew has this key theme with Jesus is King. Matthew is speaking to a Jewish audience who has been waiting for the King to come and he's trying to establish the fact that Jesus *is* the King, that He's come to set up His Kingdom, and he begins to move our mindset from the kingdom of this world—which the prince and the power of that kingdom is Satan, who is the thief that comes to steal and to kill and to destroy—he wants to change our allegiance from that kingdom, the kingdom of this earth, to the Kingdom of Heaven; that he has begun to set into motion that he invites us in by inviting the King into our lives. And what he wants us to know is that when we are part of the Kingdom, we are participants in the Kingdom, and we are in relationship with the King, it changes our mindset, it changes our behaviors, it changes the way we think. The hard part you and I have is we have this tendency to flip between the two kingdoms.

Who or what owns you?

And so when we come in here we sort of get focused back on the Kingdom of God, we walk out of here, the phone rings, an email pops up, and we gotta get into it for tomorrow and we move back over here to this kingdom. And we think that's very normal and natural, and Jesus is inviting us into His Kingdom. And that's why even here the anxiety about tomorrow is going to build because everyone's going to be calling with incredible pressure on you, and Jesus says n-n-no, I want you to recognize what kingdom you're seeking, and I want you to be in communication with this King.

Here's what we realize when we enter the Kingdom, when we are invited into the Kingdom, we've put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ and so now we're part of that Kingdom, is that we have access to the King. And something I've learned in my life that when it came to me it was so powerful—access is gold. Access is one of the greatest gifts you can give to someone. You say to someone, "My house is your house. Come on in whenever you want, the door's unlocked, you know the code." Access is amazing. I mean, you tell one of our young adults here that not only do they have access to your house but they have access to your fridge, is that gold? I see smiles and shaking of the head. There's something awesome about access. And for some of you, um, it's called networking, it's called contacts, it's—imagine if you had access to the right people the things you could get accomplished tomorrow. And that's why oftentimes we'll be chatting with each other and someone will say, "Wait a minute, I know that person."

I had someone say this to me the other week, we were talking about the CEO of their company, and they were like, "No one's ever met the CEO of our company and I've been in his office five times." I'm like, "Whoa!" Access. When you have access all of a sudden that's a game changer. Imagine if the CEO of that huge company that no one knows said to you, "Here's my cell number. If that happens to you again, call me. In fact, anything you need, call me. In fact, I'll be upset with you if you don't call me." You're like, "Serious? Oh, I won't abuse it." "No, seriously, call me. I don't care if it's once a day. I don't care if it's five times a day." And you're going, "Really?" Now that's access. That's a gift. That's a powerful thing.

The King of the universe has said to anyone who puts their faith and trust in Him—YOU HAVE ACCESS. The One who created us, the One who made us says you have access to Me.



Why wouldn't you use it? Have access once a week? Can we do it every day? Wait a minute—not just once a week, there's something powerful about this moment. But He says you had access when you woke up this morning, you had access when you got dressed this morning, you had access when you went to breakfast this morning. In fact, you have constant access. And He says utilize it, take advantage of it, seek Me first, ask Me before you do anything.

Can you imagine the CEO of your company, "Before you do anything, just call me and ask me." "Serious?" "Oh, yeah, you'll never get it wrong." Pick up the phone, "Okay, here's what they told me, blah-blah-blah." "Hey, do this." Boom! "Thanks, I'll call you later." Boom! Hey, a few minutes later, "They said this. Okay." Boom! Make the phone call, you've got access. It's a huge gift. The God of the universe has offered you access.

Anxiety, I can't figure this out on my own. I'm worried about the unknown. I'm worried I'll get it wrong. I'm worried someone else will mess it up. You've got access [HE POINTS UP], go to the One who knows the future, go to the One who knows the past, go to the One who knows what's happening behind closed doors, behind the walls around you. Go to the One who knows who's trying to subvert what's going to happen. You've got access. Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Wow. What a powerful thought process.

SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Philippians, the Apostle Paul adds just a little flavor to this in Philippians Chapter 4, it just adds something to it. Philippians 4, verse 6, says this:

⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

— just come to God, give Him your requests, thank Him, and just bring it to Him. And he says:

⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

– PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 (ESV)

And so for a moment the answer seems extremely simple. I have access and I can go before the God of creation, I seek first the Kingdom of God on every subject, on everything, and I do that by praying, by bringing Him my requests, asking the questions, by thanking Him, and this incredible peace will come across me. There's your answer, but I'm going to pause for a moment. I'm going to say there are three different responses, at least that came into my mind, that you might be having in this room today.

The first one is, "Yeah, that's not my experience." And I might say to you, is it possible that you're not really truly seeking the Kingdom of God? "Well, no, I think I am." Let's just drill down on that a little bit more. Are you really seeking the Kingdom of God, or are you really locked into the kingdom of this world? I mean, it's just tricky. He talked about there in Luke 8 where He says the cares of this life and

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the riches and the pleasures—and they own you, they're owners—and you have access to all of that stuff, but because of that, that access is a substitute for even needing to go to the King. You solve everything with money or with a break in pleasures, or just by worrying about it because you can figure it out, you're a pretty smart person so that's the cares of this world. You're gonna figure it out, you'll think it through, you've got this. Dig a little deeper.

Some of us in here, like I said, we need to step back and go, "Wait a minute, you're right. I'm, yeah, I'm not even in the most basic way seeking first the Kingdom of God." And I really encourage you to just really rethink that because your focus is on a substitute for God. The substitute is pleasure, the substitute is money, the substitute is worry.

The second group of people that I thought of in here and I would say this is a little more difficult answer, you say, "Oh, I don't know, I think I do seek first the Kingdom of God. I *do* pray. I'm, yeah, I think I'm there and yet I'm still struggling with anxiety." I thought about this this week in sort of terms of like someone who gets told that they have diabetes, blood sugar is off and this kind of stuff, and the doctor says, "Hey, you need to take insulin." You're like, "For how long?" "The rest of your life." So you take it for a day or two and you go, "I think I've taken it, I think I'm good to go." And you go to the doctor and the blood sugar is off the charts and the doctor says, "Um, this isn't working. Are you taking your insulin?" "Aw, well, I tried it, it didn't do anything." And the doctor, "Well, I can't fix this if you don't take the insulin. I mean, you've gotta do it, you've gotta do it every day. You can't just stop."

And I think there's some of us – and the mindset is simple because we're used to you can go to the doctor and you can take a pill for many things, you can, you know, go to court and get a ruling. You can go get a new job and get the money. There's a lot of things we do where, yeah, it might take a little bit but pretty quickly it's solved. And for you, you tried seeking first the Kingdom of God and it seemed like it worked, it felt a little bit better but before you knew it, it wasn't working so you sort of – you aren't doing it anymore. And the doctor says, "Well, I need you to do that." And so it's sort of a reminder. That's a little harder answer, but it's one that we have to really go, "Okay, I've gotta go there."

Now there's some of you in this room who, man, you would say, "I **DO** feel like I am seeking first the Kingdom of God. I mean, I'm praying all the time. Every time this stuff comes to mind I'm bringing it before God and I truly feel like I am. So what do you make of that, Pastor? What do I do with that? Like, it should be gone. I mean, I am doing it, I've been doing it for a very long time. No, I didn't stop. I am still doing it. What's up with that?" I would tell you that that's the hardest answer. And I've really wrestled with that a bunch this week and thought through that, and as I thought about it, you know, we want an end game. We want a complete solution. We want, like, if you do this, it's gone, and you get freedom from that.

And I keep on going back to Luke Chapter 8 and what Jesus said when He talked there about these different soils and about the things that are going to hold you back from growing. Luke Chapter 8, I love what Jesus said when He came back on this subject as He wrapped it up. Luke 8:15 He says:

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¹⁵ As for that in the good soil,

— ah, okay, so you actually have good soil, like, you are growing, but in the midst of that good soil you're going, "Man, this is hard. This isn't going well." —

they are those who, hearing the word,

— that's, you're saying, like, "I'm hearing God's Word, I am responding," because that's a key piece to growing in Him, that you're willing to go to this Book, that's why we read it again this morning, that's why I keep on taking you to His answers. My answers [SHAKES HIS HEAD] – whatever. He says this:

hold it fast in an honest and good heart,

— in other words, keep it inside of you; and listen to this last phrase, this is Jesus' words:

and bear fruit with patience.

– LUKE 8:15 (ESV)

Yeah, if we think we're going to get there, we think it's all going to be done, if we think it's all going to be finished in this life, Jesus says hey, listen, you are growing, you are doing it right, you are coming to Me all the time with this. You do have that access and you're taking advantage of it and you are praying just like I said. And I think Jesus says to you – just do that with patience. You're bearing good fruit. Yeah, it's going to be a heavy load for you to carry for a bunch of years, but be patient with it.

This week I was reading an article about Tim Keller. He was for many years the pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City. He was very popular, he's written a lot of books, a lot of people have gotten a lot of great stuff out of him. He's 70 years old, just a reminder that it doesn't matter how old you are, powerful things can happen, and 70 years old, still ministering but he got a cancer diagnosis I want to say about a year ago. A lot of people have been praying for him and I saw an interview with him this week written out and he said when he got the cancer diagnosis that it's been since that time that his relationship with Jesus and that tangible experience of that relationship has been so much more meaningful than it ever was before. And I liked this phrase that he said; he said, "It's not until you realize you can't get through the day without Him that you really have the closest of relationship with Him that You should have." I liked that. Like, I cannot get through this day without You.

Can you imagine if you could have that access to the CEO and then all of a sudden he said, "No, nope, you've gotten everything. I've answered a thousand questions a day for three months, you should know it all now." You'd be like, "Uh, [FLUSTERED/PANICKING] I was doing so well." We have that experiential day-to-day and you realize I can't do without God. He said that was huge. He said it just made me realize He is there, he has realized communion with Him, He's really available, and he said He's not just there every single day when I come to Him for my devotional time, but he said He's just there so much more than I just ever realized because I need Him so much more. And then his comment was interesting at the end, he said I just have one fear and it's not the fear of death, he said my fear is that I'm going to get word from the doctor that maybe this has gone into remission, the results are looking like I'm doing well, and that somehow in the midst of that I'll back off and I won't have this same relationship that I've had where I just realize I need Him so much and I go to Him so much.

I'm going to leave you with a challenge today. In some ways it's like how do you make a challenge on this when it's such a big subject and such a difficult subject? So let me try this and see if this will help, because we just have to start somewhere. So whether you're like a chronic worrier and anxiety is just like hard-wired into you, or you're the one with the wall up and that one thing pops into your mind, may

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I ask you right now is there one thing that when I talk about worry you're like, "That's the thing." Would you tell me what that one thing is? Don't tell me – just pop that in your mind right now. Got it? Here's what I'd like you to do is make a commitment right now over this, just this next week, to every time that worry comes to your mind, that anxious thought comes to your mind, just give it to God. Go to the God of the universe with that access, that gift that you've been given, and just give it to Him.

Now I know there's some of you, that's new and that's going to take some real training. Some of you have done it once and it's done, and I'm just going to say every time. And some of you, you're already doing that, I'm just gonna say just do it, take that one especially this next week and just give it to God.

Lord God,

I bring before You my brothers and sisters and this one item that they are holding up before You right now. As their pastor I want to in care and compassion bring that one item before You because it is weighing them down today and it is being allowed to steal joy from them. And I would pray that You would give them back their joy, that leap in their step, that smile, that laugh, knowing that the God of the universe has it and is watching over them and caring for them. So Lord, I pray that You would just allow us to bring that to you every time this week and I pray that You would give that joy back and the enemy will have no way to steal it. It's in Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.



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