

Intro

We all have fears. Chapman University in Orange, California has been tracking fears in America for several years. In 2019, here were the top fears (a random sample of 1,219 adults from across the US asked about their level of fear with 88 phenomena):

- 1) Corrupt government officials: 77.2% afraid or very afraid
- 2) Pollution of oceans, rivers, and lakes: 68%
- 3) People I love becoming seriously ill: 66.7%
- 4) Pollution of drinking water: 64.6%
- 5) People I love dying: 62.9%
- 6) Air pollution: 59.5%
- 7) Cyber-terrorism: 59.2%
- 8) Extinction of plant and animal species: 59.1%
- 9) Global warming and climate change: 57.1%
- 10) Not having enough money for the future: 55.7%

Things that I thought would be near the top were just outside the top ten: economic/financial collapse: 55.3%, high medical bills: 53%, terrorist attack: 51.4%, identity theft: 50%. Pandemic or a major epidemic came in at #31 with 42.8%. If these can be considered accurate, 55.7% percent of our nation is afraid of not having enough money in the future, 55.3% are afraid of an economic collapse, and 53% are afraid of medical bills.

Like our fellow citizens, we're prone to fear about money. We probably fear declining health too. What does Jesus say about it?

BIG IDEA: Kill anxiety by trusting God's care and rule

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

- problem is "little faith" (6:31)
- pursuit of material possessions is driven by a lack of trust in God's provision ("therefore" = making command based on what was just said)
- three reasons we shouldn't be anxious about our needs: **Worry kills our faith...Worry is fruitless...Worry diverts our focus...Faith, Fruitless, Focus.**

Reason 1: Worry kills our faith (6:25-26, 28-32)

Explanation

The argument is: if the Father cares for the lesser (nature), he'll care for the greater (us). Jesus begins by attacking our fears: "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." Then he tells us why.

Jesus says look at the birds. Unlike humans, "they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns." In other words, birds don't have to work to grow their food, "yet your heavenly Father feeds them." So if the birds, who have no control over food production, are taken care of, why are we afraid?

"Are you not of more value than they?"

Since God's children are more valuable than birds, we'll have food. After all, Jesus died for us, not for birds. Yes, human life is more valuable in God's eyes than animal life. Humans, not animals, were created in God's image.

God also takes care of the lilies of the field. These were wild flowers in the fields, and from the description given, they were beautiful ("even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these"). The lilies grow and develop beautifully, even though they don't labor. So if God ensures that the lily develops and is clothed with beauty, even though its end is to be burned in an oven, he'll ensure we have clothing.

Failure to trust in God's provision of food, drink, and clothing is "little faith" (6:30). Little faith in the problem.

FCF

It's when we don't trust that God will actually provide what we need. We believe what the Bible says intellectually, but not practically. Maybe, without giving thought to it, you don't actually believe God cares? Or you don't think he is able to provide for you? The problem is living like God's promises don't exist. We say God is good, but we don't really believe God cares. After all, if God cared, why do bad things happen to me? Why am I facing hardships others don't have? Why is my health failing? Why did I lose my job?

Failure to trust God's care leads to a wrong aim in life. The Gentiles (= the unbelieving world) seeks after food, drink, and clothing, but this shouldn't be the case for us. This how Paul described the Gentile believers in Ephesus prior to their conversion: "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (**Eph 2:12**)." The Gentiles seek after these things because they don't have the comfort of God the Father's care, rule, and knowledge. They don't have Christ. They don't have God's promises. They don't have hope. But we possess all these through faith.

Application

What's going on here? Jesus is aiming to kill our anxiety by pointing us to the doctrine of God. Doctrine isn't something we store away in a statement of faith and forget about. No, doctrine informs how we should live. Knowing who the Father is should kill our anxiety. Jesus highlights three doctrines:

The Father's care

God's care for his children reflects God's goodness. Greg Allison describes God's goodness like this:

“an attribute of God, the benevolent kindness that characterizes him and his way... The response to God’s goodness is praise, trust rather than anxiety, receiving his gifts with thanksgiving, and imitation of his goodness.”

The Father’s care, his goodness, assures us that he is concerned for our well-being. Because he cares, we don’t have to worry about having our needs met.

The Father’s rule

The Father’s rule reflects the doctrines of sovereignty and providence.

Sovereignty is “the divine attribute of being all-powerful as the King and Lord who exercises supreme rule over all creation.” – Greg Allison

Providence is actually an element of God’s sovereignty.

Providence is “the continuing work of God to sustain this created universe in existence and to direct it towards its end.” – Greg Allison

One aspect of providence is preservation: “God’s work to maintain the creation in existence and functioning as he designed it.” – Greg Allison

Put together, sovereignty and providence express the fact that God rules over his creation and is actively directing what’s happening in his creation. Because God is in control of what’s happening in his world, we can be sure that he has the ability to ensure we have employment, money for our mortgage, money for food, etc.

The Father’s knowledge

God’s knowledge of our needs reflects God’s omniscience:

“the divine attribute of being all-knowing.”

There is nothing God is unaware of or ignorant about. Because God is aware of everything that goes on in his creation, he knows what we need this moment.

Jesus believes that knowledge of God’s care, rule, and knowledge provides comfort when anxiety strikes. Learn who God is and trust him with your life. Choose faith, not fear.

Point 2: Worry is fruitless (6:27, 34)

Explanation

Jesus makes two statements about the fruitless nature of worry.

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

In other words, worry does nothing for you, it doesn’t increase your lifespan, so why worry?

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

In other words, leave tomorrow’s troubles for tomorrow. It’s better to focus our energy on the problems we’re dealing with today.

Application

In reality, worry doesn't change anything except us. Worries are generally about some potential future negative outcome. How will my kids turn out? Will a rapidly changing economy affect my job or my business? Will I get Alzheimer's? What if my spouse dies too soon? Worrying about what might be doesn't change the future, but it disturbs us today. We're distracted, discouraged, and leave today's problems unattended. Or we fail to enjoy life today because we're concerned about what might be.

Illustration

- April 29, 2019: exceeded occupancy and lease up at end of November
- great opportunity for fretting: what happens if I can't get a church job by November?
- back to PNS = wasted my family's money for nothing & admit failure (given up secure great-paying job, house on track to be paid off at 57, etc.
- stay afloat in Kentucky = moving all our stuff again (costs), more money wasted, and stuck in a lease so can't be looking for jobs
- but God provides: had provided funds for Kentucky through PNS
- secured work in Kentucky and was able to pay bills even if it was for half the pay I expected and planned on (God provides even if it isn't in the way we expect or desire)
- what went on in my head? → greatest fear was having to move and staying in Kentucky (inconvenience not the finance); trust God and do everything in my power; don't think about November until it was close enough
- what did I do? → prayed, brought prayer concerns to my small group & pastor...and did what was in my power to secure pastoral employment

Worrying about future uncertainties can be crushing. Do what you can. Be diligent. Trust in God to provide. He is able! But submit to his will and timing.

The other problem is that today can be hard. Today can be enough to push us to our limits. So why make ourselves more anxious when today is enough to bear.

A word of caution: there is nothing wrong with planning. It's okay to consider your future and plan. Like thinking about retirement and how you'll pay the bills. Or how you'll handle declining health. It's wise to make plans, but it's not wise to worry. The problem isn't being concerned about real challenges. The problem is doubting God. Ground your faith in God's care and God's rule.

Point 3: Worry diverts our focus (6:25, 33)

Explanation

Jesus tells us to focus on spiritual needs instead of physical needs.

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

Life is more than just having your needs met, acquiring material goods, and serving money. But what is life for?

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness

This is a great life verse, but what does it actually mean?

God's kingdom = simply God's rule and reign. The sense intended here is seeking God's rule in our own lives right now. We wait for Jesus to return and establish his eternal kingdom, but in the present we seek to place our lives under God's rule.

God's righteousness = righteous conduct (reconciling with people we've wronged, sexual purity, honoring marriage vows, keeping our word, enduring opposition without retaliating, loving our enemies, etc.)

So to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness means to seek to bring our lives under God's rule and live according to kingdom ethics. We seek after what we pray for in the Lord's prayer: that God's rule will be present in our lives as we obey his revealed will (Matt 6:10).

and all these things will be added to you

When we seek to submit our lives to God, things fall into place. Put another way, our worries should be spiritual, not physical. We should be worried about failing to please the Father. We should be worried about losing rewards. We should be worried about failing to be a light to the world. We should be worried about giving in to temptation. We should be worried about having the wrong **focus** in life.

Another word of caution. This doesn't mean no trials. James says, "when you meet trials of various kinds" (Jas 1:2). In Mark 10:29-30, Jesus said earthly blessing came "with persecutions." This doesn't mean no poverty in the church. See James 2. This doesn't mean we're promised wealth or perfect health. It simply means the Father will take care of our needs, not our greeds. We will have what we need to survive. Assured we'll be cared for, we're free to set our **focus** where it belongs: "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." And this doesn't mean we don't have to work. Serving God through our labor is one way we seek his righteousness (Col 3:23-24). Trusting God to provide = trusting God for employment, or if retired, trusting God to stretch our funds or provide in other ways.

Application

So you're thinking. I get it. God cares. God rules. I can trust his promises. Worrying about the future does nothing for me. Instead of seeking security in material things, I should seek to live pleasing to God. But what do I do when real challenges come into my life?

Let me share how I deal with a couple of concerns, and then we'll consider some you might have. As your pastor, I'm concerned about the condition of Palermo Christian Church. There's nothing unbiblical about this. Besides all the persecutions and hardships he had endured, Paul had this concern:

2 Corinthians 11:28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

The word for anxiety here is the noun form of the verb found in Matthew 6:25 ("do not be anxious"). So there is faithless anxiety and proper anxiety. The problem isn't being concerned about real problems that need to be addressed. The problem is lacking faith in God's care and his ability. The Corinthian church had real problems and this made Paul anxious. It wasn't because Paul didn't trust God's love and providential care. It's because Paul loved these people and desired their good. He feared their immaturity. He feared they'd be duped by false teachers. He wasn't fearful about God's dependability.

So as your pastor, I'm concerned about the spiritual health of Palermo Christian Church. Well, how do I deal with these anxieties without doubting God? I pray. 1 Peter tells us to cast our anxieties on God because he cares (1 Pet 5:7). Paul says that bringing our anxieties to God brings us peace (Phil 4:6-7). I cast my cares on God, I ask for his help, I ask for wisdom, I ask for endurance, and I ask him to help me be faithful. Then I search out Scripture for promises I can cling to, I seek out wisdom (Scriptures, godly counsel, or reading), I do my part to bring about positive results, I have a long view (can't fix everything all at once but small steps can have an impact years from now), and I submit to God's hidden will.

I also have anxiety about my children. So I bring concerns to God, I get perspective from Scripture and good Christian books/articles, I put into practice what I've learned, I have a long view, and I submit myself to God's hidden will.

Well, what anxieties might you have? Maybe it's the Coronavirus. If so, the issue may be: is God going to protect me? Or the issue could be: how should I exercise wisdom? What's the best decision for me given my health situation? Whatever the case, COVID-19 should be approached with prayer, informed understanding, wise practice, long-term vision, and submission to God's hidden will. We can't live secluded forever. We can't eliminate all risk. But we can be wise and make good decisions. I'm not trying to pressure anyone. Just trying to help you see how you could process it.

Maybe it's our nation. Increasing partisan divide. Public safety has become a political issue to be manipulated for a party's end. Rapid moral change. Laws that would have been unthinkable ten years ago passed in quick succession. Increasing unrest and uncertainty. One article I read said the Coronavirus and George Floyd sent us to 2030. What will our nation be in 5 years? In 10 years? What can we do as an alternative to anxiety? Cast your cares upon God. Pray for our nation and its leaders. Pray for believers you know of who are in office. Study what Scripture has to say about nations, their purpose, and how our citizenship is in heaven = get a biblical perspective. Make a difference in your sphere of influence. Contend for the gospel, articulate biblical solutions, and be a good citizen. Submit yourself to whatever God's hidden will for our nation is knowing this world isn't the heavenly country we're seeking (Heb 11:13-16).

Maybe it's something on the survey. Given our congregation, I would think declining health of ourselves or a loved one could be an issue. Pray for trust rather than fear. If you're going through a health problem, pray for healing. Pray for God's help in enduring well. Pray for God to use your illness for his glory. Seek Scripture for perspective. Maybe you'll find promises about God's help in trial a comfort. Maybe you'll find promises about the new heavens and new earth helpful. Do what you can do to improve your health. Follow doctor recommendations. And submit yourself to whatever God's hidden will is.

Conclusion

I've said a lot. The simple truth is believe God cares and God rules. And then act on God's will as revealed in Scripture. Make your aim in life God's glory. **Kill anxiety by trusting God's care and rule.** Jesus says that knowing who the Father is kills anxiety and fuels faith. Jesus gives us three reasons not to worry. **First, worry kills our faith. Second, worry is fruitless. Third, worry diverts our focus.** Bring your anxieties to God. Don't despair. If you're his child, trust God to be who he says he is for you.