

Sanctification: Dealing With Fear and Anxiety

REVIEW: Last week we looked at the idea of sanctification, and applied it specifically to two areas of life that all of us deal with: guilt and shame. We said that guilt is falling short of a legal standard, like God's law. It is a moral code that is clear and we did not meet the standard. Shame has more to do with how we feel when we perceive a shortfall.

We looked at how God deals with both of those things. For the guilt that we have, the falling short of God's standard, God gives us Christ's righteousness in justification. We were declared legally guilt free because of our trust that it is Christ's blood that paid our penalty, and that it is enough - we don't have to add to it - in fact we can't add to it.

We also looked at shame, and how God covers our shame in adopting us into the family. When we are fully known, and still delighted in, our shame ebbs away. We looked at the younger son in the story of the Prodigal God to see how this worked.

We also noted that being delighted in can be hard. I mentioned how we have times of encouragement on mission trips and how most people can't look at the one that is delighting in them. It's some part in us that, while we love being delighted in, we struggle with it. There can be rare exceptions of people that think, "Amen man! You can tell me how awesome I am all day long and I'll just stare you in the face, because I know how awesome I am, and was hoping you would pick up what I was laying down!" Let me make a brief comment on that and we will get started on today's message: I have yet to find a person that reacts that way, filled with that kind of swagger, that isn't fronting. That kind of response is a mask, hiding most often self-hate, and your bravado really reveals your own insecurities.

INTRO: This week I want to turn our attention to real things that happen even to Christians. Allow me to say at this point just how much I hate the fact that Christianity thinks it can't be real over some issues. Today we are going to delve into fear and anxiety, and there has always seemed to be this unwritten rule some place that Christians have it all together. May I get harsh with you for a minute - "Hogwash!"

Quick reality check, raise your hand if you have ever dealt with fear or anxiety at some level. Look around the room! Before we even get rolling that should help you right there. You're not the only one!

Genesis 1:28-31

- I. Man was first given the garden in innocence and honor, but also peace and prosperity

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- A. We went over innocence and honor last week, so what I want us to understand from this passage is the peace and prosperity that Adam and Eve enjoyed in the garden
1. Before I get rolling here, let me clarify what I mean by “prosperity”
 - a) Prosperity is not having lots of cash, or being successful
 - b) I can point to numerous successful and wealthy people that are miserable
 - c) Prosperity is simply the state of prospering - doing well, flourishing, blossoming, to make progress
 2. So Adam and Eve and naked and unashamed, in innocence and honor in the garden
 3. God gives the mandate to fill the earth and subdue it
 4. So here they are, before sin entered the world in peace, and prosperity
 - a) There is no such thing as death
 - b) Can you imagine that?
 - (1) No worrying about falling out of a tree trying to pick the orange way at the top
 - (2) No worries about cancer, or disease, or the death that steals our loved ones away
 - (3) How amazing would that be!
 - c) But in the absence of sin, there is peace, even in relationships
 - (1) Sin has not entered the world - Adam never said, “That woman you gave me...” yet
 - (2) There is no fighting between husband and wife, because life is sinless, and perfect
- B. Then sin entered the world in Genesis 3
1. As a result death entered the world
 - a) Now you and I have lived in a world with death all our lives
 - (1) From the minute we were born (even conceived) we were closer to death
 - b) Imagine for a minute how Adam and Eve felt when God pronounced judgment on them and said that they were going to die
 - (1) No more jumping out of trees for Adam - now he might die
 - (2) God said, “from dust you came and to dust you will return” - peace and prosperity turn to death and decay
 - (3) And welcome - fear and anxiety
 2. I need you to understand that this innocence and honor and peace and prosperity were never the end
 - a) They were not meant to be the end of what we receive, as if this was the goal - the goal was always God

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- (1) It was never to be the benefits that God bestows on us when we are in right relationship with Him - it's HIM
 - b) All of those things, peace, innocence, etc were an overflow of Adam and Eve's perfect relationship with God
 - (1) It was not the action (sin) in and of itself that broke the peace and innocence
 - (2) It was that they had been cut off from a right relationship with God, and that destroyed the other benefits they were enjoying from God
 - 3. So the very first thing to deal with fear and anxiety is making sure we are in right standing with God
 - a) But because we live in a fallen and broken world, fear and anxiety can still creep in on us
 - b) We are not immune from it completely, even when we have the best of relationships with God
 - c) So what's a Christian to do? Glad you asked!
- II. Jesus' teaching on fear and anxiety - Matthew 6:25-34
- A. Jesus starts in verse 25 saying not to be worried about food or clothes
 - 1. Most of us are fine about food and clothing - not a big worry for us
 - 2. I dare say that few if any of us woke up this morning thinking, "How am I going to eat today! There's no food or money!"
 - a) Many of us may have said "Where are we going for dinner today? Maria's, Raider's, Lucky's"
 - 3. What Jesus is really focusing in on is what we really value in life, and how much we value them
 - a) The more value you give something, the more fear and anxiety will run those parts of life
 - b) When we hold so tightly to those things, the fear and anxiety come flooding in
 - 4. But what things? That could be answered in a million different ways, but allow me to suggest a few
 - a) Money
 - (1) With money we pay the mortgage, and bills, and get food - money is important
 - (2) But if we make money too important fear sets in, anxiety sets in
 - (3) Because fear and anxiety are really about who is reigning over your life - if money is too important than we have fear
 - b) Stuff
 - (1) If stuff is too important we have fear

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- (2) Ever notice that when you have old stuff or little money, stuff is not as important as it is when you have nice stuff
 - (3) If you have a cell phone, you ever notice that when you first get it you treat it better than you treat your child that you brought home from the hospital?
 - (a) But after many months pass by you chuck it across the room - if it drops you don't seem to mind as much
 - c) How about this one that brings fear and anxiety like no other - your children
 - (1) We have mentioned this in the past that faith is called for with children
 - (2) Children are a gift from God - Amen?
 - (a) Because they are a gift from God, they are just on loan to you
 - (b) You are charged with protecting them, caring, providing, and shaping their lives for God
 - (c) But can you protect them from everything in the world? Should you even protect them from everything bad?
 - i) If you try, all you will be is one of those ever-present parents that builds resentment in your children
 - ii) No one likes feeling like they are under surveillance
 - iii) Your job is to lead them toward being a capable, godly adult and adulthood does not start at 30
 - (d) It is a scary, anxiety producing thing to have kids, but that is why we have faith that God can protect them far better than we can
 - (3) If you raise your kids up to an ultimate level, without acknowledging them as God's gift to you, it will produce levels of anxiety in you that you were never meant to face
 - d) One more quick one - status
 - (1) Whether we get that status through
 - (a) Relationships
 - (b) Sports
 - (c) Academics
 - (d) Job position, you name it
 - (2) Status becomes a fear producer
- B. On to verse 26 - What Jesus is giving us here is an argument from the lesser to the greater
- 1. If God cares for the birds - now birds are of lesser value than humans
 - a) If a bird dies, there is no bird funeral home where people come to pay their respects

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- b) In fact, often times, a bird is eaten by other animals after death - they are not of the same value
- 2. So if God cares for them, how much more will He care for you!
- C. Verse 27 - Can you add, by worrying, a single hour to your life?
 - 1. Basically, “Stop driving yourself crazy!”
 - 2. It will do you no good, so knock it off
- D. Verse 28-30 - Another example that Jesus uses that is less about anxiety and more about fear (admittedly the two are close to the same thing)
 - 1. Jesus says that the grass of the field is clothed with flowers - to the point that not even Solomon looked this good
 - 2. Then Jesus reminds us of the shortness of life, that the grass and flowers are here today and thrown into the...not “fire” but “oven”
 - a) I had to look it up because all my life I grew up with the word “fire”
 - b) Here’s why - They did not have lawn mowers in the first century, they did not cut down the trees for fuel - they would pull up the grass and flowers
 - c) This was the fuel for the oven to make “daily bread” (where have we heard that term before - the Lord’s Prayer)
 - 3. So here is what is happening, Jesus is reminding them of their mortality
 - a) He does not shy away from the fact that everyone will die eventually - a fact that few ever ponder
 - b) You are now about 45 minutes closer to death than when you walked in
 - (1) I know you may bristle at the thought
 - (2) But it is good to understand that you will not live forever (here)
 - (3) We may not know the day or the hour, but the fact is there may be some of us that do not see next year
 - (4) But if God takes such great care of the grass of the field, how much more will He care for you?
 - (a) So who is ruling in your heart?
 - (b) Who are you putting your trust in?
- E. Verses 30-32 - The prime way that we run fear and anxiety off into the night is by a faith that realizes God is good, and that He cares for us
 - 1. While I cannot say that I have had many experiences to where I have had to trust God like this (by His grace), I have had a few
 - 2. Most have had to do with how things happened in churches I served
 - a) Most of you know the church I served before coming to Almont split, and it was an ugly split
 - (1) There were many tears shed
 - (2) Many prayers prayed - and it was rough

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- (3) I personally wound up out of a job, searching for both a temporary means of income and a permanent ministry position
 - (4) I got down to my last \$1000 by the time I said yes to moving up here and becoming the Y.P. at FCC
 - b) If you have been in this church as long or longer than I, I don't need to tell you some of the difficult times we faced together
 - (1) I do not speak much of my experiences in leadership, behind closed doors because those days are past, and there is no point
 - (2) But there were times personally, I was in fear for my job, fear for my reputation because of what people might try to say about me, because some did not hold to as strong of an ethic as others
 - (3) God was faithful and things in this church have changed course in a good direction
 3. I have little doubt that there are some of you that could get up here and tell stories of times when your faith was greatly tested, and fear and anxiety threatened your walk - yet your faith was in God, and God proved this very passage to be true - He cared for you
 4. Make sure you get this, and get this well
 - a) Understanding that you have no control is a very freeing thing
 - (1) Except for you control freaks
 - (a) You know the most terrifying thing about a mission trip for me - it's not if all the food will be smothered in cheese, its not keeping watch over the kids - its the plane flight!
 - (b) I can control (by God's grace and the wisdom He has bestowed me with) a great many things - but the second I step on that plane, I am completely at the mercy of physics I only partially understand, the pilots, and the maintenance guys I have never met
 - (2) For control freaks that is a scary thing, but it should be freeing when you realize that Someone infinitely more powerful than you is in control
 - (a) Life will play out exactly as He plans
 - (b) And yes, His plan may involve sickness, or death, or pain, but He promised that HE would take care of us, and ultimately, His plan is for our good
 - (c) When we trust Him like that, the illusion that we are in control evaporates and we can rest in His sovereign power
- F. Verse 33 - This is a cliché text - "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

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1. Many people throw that out as a cliché and we really need to understand this
 2. So Jesus, using food and clothing as examples of fear and anxiety, “seek His kingdom and righteousness first, and all the rest will be added to you.”
 - a) The problem with that is the history that we know - have there been Christians that have starved? Frozen? Burned up? Of course.
 - b) So what about them?
 - (1) The best answer I can surmise from the evidence at hand is this statement was never meant to be taken as absolute
 - (2) Let me give you an example: John 14:13-14; John 15:16
 - (a) Is this meant to be a formula in which we are able to say, “God please give me a million dollars, in Jesus name.” and God is obligated to give us what we asked for?
 - (b) If that is true folks I would have been married a LONG time ago!
 - (c) It is not an absolute statement, because it rests on understanding what “in my name” means
 - (3) So too, in Matthew 6:33, the point of the passage is not, “you will never go hungry, you will never be in want.” The point is do not focus on the material needs, focus on Me - I will take care of you
 - (a) Even in want, I will take care of you - Remember Paul, “I have learned to be content in all things - in want and in plenty”
 3. Jesus’ point is to be trusting in God, and not worrying about the needs of life
 - a) Does that mean you can be lazy and God will bring it all to you?
 - b) Of course not, and that is why Jesus uses the illustration about birds, because they are always working away - and God provides for them
- G. Verse 34 - “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.”
1. That is awesome because it reminds us that when we worry about tomorrow, you can’t enjoy God’s goodness today!
 2. I could worry about the future, what will happen when the fall gets here for the church, how the YM will run, how our seniors will do in their first year of college, did I help prepare them well, Michael will be leaving us again soon and we will miss him, and on and on it can go
 3. But then I rob myself of the joys that God has put in my path today!
 - a) I rob myself of enjoying Michael while he is here when I dread the day he leaves

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- b) I rob myself of enjoying the seniors in their last few days and weeks with us rather than worrying about the future
- c) I rob myself of seeing the growth in the people of our church today, when I worry about the fall programs and how they will all go
- 4. I know there are some of you out there that are the type of people that are like, “Yeah, today may be good, life is well, but I know something is coming along to screw it all up!”
 - a) Do you understand how Eeyore you sound?
 - b) Be grateful for today
 - (1) Walk out of here today and think of ten things that God has blessed you with TODAY!
 - (2) Walk out of here praising God for who He is and what He has done for you TODAY
 - c) Let tomorrow worry about itself
- 5. The final line of the verse, “Today has enough trouble of its own.”
 - a) This is Jesus being compassionate to us
 - b) This is Jesus saying, “I give you permission to deal with fear and anxiety today.”
 - (1) How? Give it over to God
 - (2) Don’t let tomorrow’s worries creep in, just hand over the day’s concerns to Him
 - (a) When I drive in to work from Capac it gives me enough time to ask God to help me with the tasks of the day - the sermon, phone calls, bible studies, administration, whatever is coming at me that day
 - (b) Do I still struggle sometimes, worried about something I know is coming? Of course - but I try to remember that God already has next Thursday - He’s got it covered, so no need for me to worry about it
 - c) This may hurt a bit, but I have to go here
 - (1) The root of fear and anxiety is that we don’t trust God with whatever that is - money, our kids, that business meeting, whatever
 - (2) We have to be honest before God about that if we are ever going to find healing
 - (a) We have to be able to tell Him that you don’t think God can handle it, that He is does not have your best interest at heart
 - (b) When we are able to do that, we can then press into Him, deal with today and tell Him, “Help me, I do believe, help my unbelief.”

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III. Closing

A. Lamentations 3

1. It's not a book that most people that are fearful or anxious spend a lot of time in
2. In fact of you go to read it, make sure its a bright sunny day, you are outside basking in the warmth of God's goodness - do not read it on a cloudy depressing day
3. Just for clarity, the NIV that we have in the pews says, "Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed..."
4. I admit that I am not a Hebrew scholar - with that in mind, I looked for a reason for one translation over the other and what I found is that it can be translated either way - both fit the context
5. I chose the ESV this time because of its emphasis on the character of God

B. Lamentations 3:22-23 "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness"

1. Did you hear the phrase..."his mercies never come to an end."
 - a) All you control freaks, those who are anxious and fearful, God's mercies never come to an end
 - b) More than that, they are "new EVERY MORNING"
 - (1) Does that sound like a man that is worried about tomorrow?
 - (2) He looks forward to God's mercies for the day
2. The verse ends with a great reminder as we close talking about fear and anxiety: "great is your faithfulness"