

The God Who Calms our Fears

1. Introduction

- Welcome if you are visiting > really pleased you have come along
 - Pray you will find your visit to C@P encouraging and challenging

- One of the things we do each week is have the Bible read and explained
 - Christians we believe God is a God who is relational and he speaks to us
 - Way he speaks is through his word – the Bible
 - We read and unpack the Bible each week because that allows God to set the agenda and tells us the things he's got to say rather than the things we want to hear

- Subject for today is fear and anxiety
 - Melissa Honor – Interrelate last two Tuesday nights running workshops here helping parents and grandparents parent their kids well when it comes to managing their emotions and overcoming their fears
 - And she had some really helpful advice on those topics
 - But of course it is not just kids who get anxious and worry ... as adults we do too
 - In fact, Melissa made the comment that often we project our worry and anxiety onto our children and they pick up on it themselves

- The session with Melissa on Tuesday gave us some useful strategies for helping our kids (and ourselves!) manage anxiety
 - However those strategies were mostly managing anxiety as / after it happens

- But what if we could get to the heart of anxiety?
 - What if we could get to the root of it and start to address anxiety at its foundation?
 - Surely that would be better for us and our kids?

- It's no surprise, given that God created us and this world we live in, that he has some wisdom for us on this issue
 - What you find as you read the Bible is that not only does God's word identify the root cause of our anxiety ... it also offers us a remedy for it as well

- This morning, I want to look at this topic of fear and anxiety under three headings

- The reality of anxiety
- The root of anxiety
- The remedy for anxiety

2. Reality of fear and anxiety

- In this passage Jesus says to his followers – “do not worry”
 - He does it three times
 - v25 – Therefore I tell you, do not worry
 - v31 – Do not worry
 - v34 – Do not worry about tomorrow
 - Jesus recognises people around him are prone to worry and anxiety
 - And in this passage Jesus tells us how to deal with it
- You don't have to look far to see that while we live in world that's very different to the world of Jesus time, it is still very similar in the fact that it is a world full of worry and anxiety
- In fact ... worry and anxiety have become so endemic in our world today that its become a major health issue
 - There's so much that we get anxious and worry about
- We worry about
 - Economy and the effect it may have on my super or my job
- We worry about
 - Health
 - Children
 - Are the developing at the right pace?
 - What school should I send them to?
 - What are their friends like?
 - Are they getting led astray?
 - Will they find a marriage partner?
 - When we stop worrying about our children, we then begin to worry about our parents
- We worry out about our finances
 - Savings
 - Salary
 - Mortgage payments
 - Retirement fund
- We worry about

- Our jobs
 - Will I get the job I want?
 - Will I get made redundant?
 - Am doing a good job?
- We worry about
 - Relationships
 - Is anyone ever going to marry me?
 - Is he being faithful?
 - Does she still love me?
 - Are we going to make it?
 - We worry about old age and dying
 - How we're going to die?
 - Whether we'll lose our faculties before we die?
 - Die before we have grandkids?
 - What happens to us after we die?
- Melissa was saying on Tuesday night that some anxiety and fear is good
 - Sometimes when we experience anxiety and fear it is because we're being confronted with something dangerous that we need to be careful with
 - Rock ledge with no barrier
 - Surf with a strong rip
 - Jordan and I doing Six Foot Track > brown snake > slithered away next to us on the path
 - We jumped and yelled and hot tailed it out of there
 - That's appropriate > don't want to get bitten by a brown snake
 - So there are fears and anxieties we experience that are okay because they are designed to keep us safe
 - They are protective fears
 - But then there are fears and anxieties that are inhibitive
 - That is, fears and anxieties that undermine the joy the life
 - And its these fears and anxieties we need to deal with
 - Because these are the ones that destroy us
- When we experience this type of anxiety it can be crippling
 - It not only causes health problems
 - Ulcers > headaches > panic attacks > heart palpitations

- It damages relationships
 - Neurotic
 - Obsessive
 - Overprotective of kids
 - And it robs us of joy in life
 - Anxious person won't be willing
 - to try new things
 - step out of their comfort zone
 - Anxiety can really undermine our wellbeing as a person and the life God created us to enjoy
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- And so when Jesus says "Do not worry", he is acknowledging the reality of worry, anxiety and fear that's so prevalent in our society and in our lives
 - But he does more than just acknowledge the reality of it
 - He identifies the root of it
 - He gives us a remedy for it

3. Root of fear and anxiety

- Before we get to the solution, we really need to look at the root cause of anxiety
 - What's the underlying reason for much of the anxiety we experience
 - Let's look at what Jesus has to say in this passage

- In v25 Jesus says
 - *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"*

- To understand the context at why Jesus is saying not to worry about food, drink and clothing ... we need to look at v19-20
 - ¹⁹ *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal"*

- There's a lot there that Jesus has to say about what type of riches we should chase after
 - But the concerned listener would probably start to think ...
 - "If I don't store up earthly treasures > if I focus on gaining treasure in heaven ... then how am I going to pay for my food, drink and clothing?"

- And it's in response to this concern that Jesus says in v25 "Do not worry about your life"
- The point of what Jesus is saying
 - You can't control your life
 - You don't determine the number of days you will live
 - You're not the master of everything that happens to you
 - So it's pointless worrying about these things
- He goes on to say in v27 "*for who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?*"
 - Answer of course is no one!
- Underneath anxiety is the desire for control
 - Desire to do only what God can do
 - To be able to determine and control or in fact add to the length of our lives
 - Somehow by worrying we think we can add to our life
- And here is where we get to the root of fear and anxiety
 - And it's a desire for control
- Anxiety happens when we have this desire to know / control something about the future that is unknowable or out of our control
 - We want to control things only God can control
 - See things only God can see
 - Know things only God can know
- When we realise we can't control, see and know everything ... we worry > we get anxious
 - When things are under control, we're fine
 - When things are outside of our control, we worry
- In the context of what Jesus is teaching ... it's the desire to control you life with wealth
 - I want to be in control of my life so I'm safe, healthy, comfortable
 - So I'm going to build a hedge of protection around my life and my family
 - And I'm going to do that by
 - Living in a nice suburb
 - Sending my kids to nice schools

- Making sure I've got health insurance
 - I need a certain amount of money to do that ...
- So when Jesus tells me to store up treasure in heaven and not treasure on earth ... that threatens my ability to control my little world

- If you're someone who likes to have control over your life and you do that through buying fences to protect you and your family ... then if you don't have the money or there's a threat to not having the money you need for that, that will make you anxious

- Fundamentally, behind our anxiety and worry is a desire to have control or mastery over something
 - When that control is threatened
 - When your ability to control is undermined, or taken away ...
 - you stress
 - you worry
 - you get anxious
 - you might be so stressed and anxious that you get angry

- The issue at stake in Matt 6 is having the finances to control your life
 - But there could be **any number** of things we seek to control that causes us to be anxious when our control over it is threatened

- As parents, because we love our kids, we want what's best for them
 - And because of that we often try to control them and their lives so they don't get hurt, or disappointed or let down
 - Anxious about whether they have friends to play with at school
 - Anxious about whether they have the right friends to play with at school
 - Anxious about whether they will hurt themselves climbing trees

- Next month, our eldest son Liam will get his driver's license
 - My greatest fear for my kids, is not drugs or alcohol ... but being killed in car accident > freaks me out!
 - There's no way I can control that
 - Even if I was neurotic and
 - Installed engine stall switch if he goes over 60kph
 - Tracking device put in the car so know exactly where he is and how fast he is going
 - Hidden camera so I know who's in the car with him

- Electric zapper installed in the driver's seat that senses when you are tired that sends 240 volt through him to stop him falling asleep at the wheel
 - Even if I do all that ... I still can't control what other drivers do
 - I can't really even control all that he does
 - If I wanted to control that situation, it would soon become obvious that it's impossible and I would continue to be anxious, stressed and fearful
- Behind our anxiety is this desire to control something or someone
 - Work
 - Spouse
 - Health
 - Finances
 - And when we sense that we're losing control
 - Or realise we don't have control ... that makes us anxious
- But do you see the problem
 - Our desire to have control / to have mastery is an illusion
 - We can't do it / we can't obtain it / never had it
- And it can be debilitating
 - Wanting to have mastery or control over something that you just can't control will ruin your life
 - It will make life a misery for you and those around you
 - You will be constantly threatened and anxious by any uncertainty in a particular situation
 - You will be obsessed with planning and putting controls in place
 - You won't be happy unless all plans are up to your standards
 - Your life will lack spontaneity ...
 - It will take away your joy in life
- What do you do?
 - You can suffer through the chaos
 - Or you can see counselors and psychologists to help put strategies in place to minimise the effects of anxiety
 - But neither of those really gets to the heart of our anxiety and our desire to control things
- And this is what Jesus is doing in Matt 6

4. Remedy for fear and anxiety

- Three times in this passage Jesus says – "Do not worry"

- But you can't just command someone not to worry
- It's like commanding someone to "be happy"
- You can't just say - "buck up, be happy"
- It's ineffective to make someone happy by sheer force of will

- Same is true for our worry and anxiety
 - Can't just say to someone "It's okay, don't worry about it, you'll be right"
 - There's got to be way forward
 - There's got to be something that can give us peace so that we don't have any need to be anxious

- In this passage Jesus gives us three things that will calm our fears and overcome our anxieties
 - Reframe your perspective: know God in control
 - Reorientate your priorities: seek first the kingdom
 - Relinquish your throne: let go of your need to control

- **Reframe your perspective: know God in control**
- ***Birds of the air***
- In v26, Jesus says ... look birds of the air > there's millions of them
 - They're not worried about their superannuation plan
 - They don't seem to be suffering from hypertension
 - They're not chirping to each other ... "I'm so busy, I'm time poor, life's so stressful"
 - They live from day to day and God provides for them

- And Jesus says ... aren't you much more valuable than they?
- In other words ...
 - You're much more valuable to God than the birds
 - If God provides for the birds ... will he not also provide for you

- **Lilies of the field**
- In v28-30 ... gives second illustration > lilies in the field
- Year after year the flowers appear for us to delight in
 - Like a field of tulips or daffodils
 - Every spring the bulbs sprout up ... and they look beautiful!
 - Yet they don't work > God does the work
- So why should you doubt that he is able to provide for you

- He who takes care of the lilies of the field would surely not neglect his children
- If he does this with the lilies of the field ... how much more will he take care of you
- Anxiety comes when we want to control
 - Jesus says you need to recognise you're not the one in control
 - But there is one who is in control and that's God
 - Even though you don't have control ... there's a Heavenly Father who **is** in control ...
 - And he cares for birds and the lilies ... so how much more will he take care of you?
- **Aside – God really in control?**
- Some of you may be sitting there thinking – 'really, it doesn't look like God is in control'
 - What about earthquakes, tsunami's, refugee crisis
 - How's God in control of that?
- I'd say two things
- First thing is ...
 - How can we say for certain that God isn't in control?
 - Bible tells us that God is absolutely in control of those things ...
 - It's just that you and I are so insignificant in the scope of the universe that we can't see what he's doing through those things
- Second thing is ...
 - Assume for a moment that God is not in control
 - Then the obvious question is ... who or what is?
 - Very quickly we come to the conclusion, if it's not God, then it's no-one
 - That is a very scary prospect
 - Because we know we're not in control > that's why we get anxious
 - And if our world has no control mechanism then the reality is our world is merely a place chaos, uncertainty, and pain
 - And that's going to leave us perpetually anxious
- **Reorientate your priorities: seek first the kingdom**
- Second thing to calm our fears and overcome our worries is to re-orientate our priorities
 - In Matthew 6:33 Jesus says – "*seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*"

- That doesn't mean seek the kingdom and forget about everything else you need
- What it means is to make Jesus and his kingdom far more central to your life than things we try to control and that make us anxious

- If food, drink and clothing is the entirety of your life ... those are things that are here today and gone tomorrow and will only cause you more anxiety
- But if you seek after
 - something that is unending,
 - something that is unending
 - Something that is utterly reliable – Jesus and his kingdom
 - it strikes at the heart of anxiety ... because that will never go away

- If your heart is filled with what is temporary and shakable then you will be filled with anxiety and worry and fear
 - But if your heart is filled with what is eternal and unshakable then you will be unshakable as well

- So when you have an eternal perspective to life ...
 - It means you can hold those other things a bit looser
 - It will help you realise that life is **not** made up of food, drink, clothing, health, homes or jobs
 - These things come and go
- But real life comes in seeking first Jesus and his kingdom
- So re-orientate your priorities

- ***Relinquish your throne***
- The third thing to calm our fears and overcome our worries is to relinquish your throne
- The more we try to grab control of our lives, the more we realise we don't have control > the more anxious we become
- We cannot do it > we're under qualified for the job of controlling the world and our lives

- Rather than try and control our lives and fail ... the best thing to do is to give up the control of our lives and allow God to be in control
 - Because when you know the one who is in control
 - When you are loved by the Father in Heaven who holds all things in his hands

- that's brings you true peace
 - That's what truly calms your fears and overcomes your worries
- Do you know ...
 - Jesus Christ gave up his control and died,
 - So that you could give up you your need to control and live
- Do you know that
 - Jesus Christ lost his Heavenly Father who cares for him,
 - So you could have a Heavenly Father who cares for you
- Even though Jesus is God himself ... he allowed himself to be led to the cross
 - At the end of Matthew's gospel, on the night before he is crucified ... Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane¹
 - *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death..."* ... clearly he is very stressed
 - *"Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*
- Here is Jesus ... extremely worried and anxious about dying
 - But gave up desire to have control
 - Submitted to his Heavenly Father > arrested > tried > beaten > flogged > hung on a cross until he died
- In that moment, Jesus Christ gave up his control and was led to the cross
 - So that you can let go of your need for control and
 - come to your heavenly father who is in control
 - who cares for birds of the air and lilies of the field
 - and who will also care for you
- To the extent we try and gain control ... we will constantly find it slipping away > that just leaves us constantly worried and anxious
- To the extent we're willing to let go of our need for control ... only then will we find a Heavenly Father who is in control

5. Conclusion

- Stop trying to rule the world
- There's a Heavenly Father who is far more qualified

¹ Matthew 26:38-39

- And he is a Heavenly Father who cares
 - Knowing him, giving over control to him
 - Is the best way to calm your fears and overcome your worries

PRAY