

## **Introduction**

Sometimes we need to look our sins straight in the face. Identify them for what they are and resolve afresh to put them off. In that spirit we are using a little break from our study in the gospel of Matthew to teach on common sins Christians struggle with in everyday life. It is my goal in these studies to be eminently practical to equip believers with knowledge and strategies to pursue holiness. Last week our focus was on sinful anger. This morning we turn the spotlight to anxiety. This subject is big and there is so much I want to say that I am doing two sermons on it. Today's message is going to focus more on the foundational basis for handling anxiety. Next week we are going to look at an inspirational example of handling anxiety and fear and specific steps to take to handle it well. This morning we are studying 1 Peter 5:6-7. So let's turn there and stand for the reading of the word of God.

[Read Text; Pray]

I never met anyone who enjoys having the flu. But the flu usually drives you to bed. It is accompanied by a fever, body aches, fatigue, and a lot of drainage, coughing and spitting. I am thankful I have not had the flu for a few years now. But when a person gets the flu, it is not like we have a lot of control over it. We can take all the precautions in the world that make it less likely that we will get it and yet still come down with it. Even taking the flu vaccine is no guarantee. Those who get the flu are rightly called victims.

I never met anyone who enjoys having anxiety. It is the absence of peace. It can grip your entire body and bring discomfort. It robs you of the ability to enjoy every day life. If you give in to it sufficiently, you can even experience panic attacks in which adrenaline is pumped into your system and your heart rate increases. A sense of doom engulfs you. It debilitates your mind and robs you of sleep, leading you to feel fatigued and sleepy when the daytime finally comes. Now I am aware that there are instances in which the symptoms of anxiety manifest themselves when a patient has no awareness of a specific cause. It is just another evidence of our living

under the curse due to sin. However, much of our anxiety is clearly explainable in terms of fear and worry. We worry about medical diagnoses. We might be anxious for our family when we know they are on the road. Financial pressures bring stress and we often respond with apprehension. We realize that one day, if Jesus does not return before then, we will die, and dread consumes us. We face a challenging event in a relationship and we are concerned about how it will go, so we yield ourselves to nervousness over it. The expectations at work push us to our limit and we worry; we might not be able to measure up; the boss might not be pleased; I might lose my job. Inside, and sometimes on the outside, we tremble. We wring our hands in unease as we think about the unknown future. These are not like microbes that cause an unwanted illness. They are temptations to sin against God through fear. But that is good news. The word of God gives Christ-followers the imperative not to fear, not to be anxious, not to worry. And it tells us HOW to overcome the sin. This is good news. We are not victims; we are sinners, but sinners for whom God cares. And the root issue is that we must put off anxiety and in its place put on trusting God. This principle is what Peter is teaching us in this text this morning.

## **I. A Cord of Three Strands**

Peter is at the conclusion of this letter which he has written to Christ-followers spread about in what is modern-day Turkey. In the letter he has been stressing a cord of three strands. Three themes are woven together.

A. First, there is the magnificence of the salvation God has provided. This is precisely where Peter begins his letter. Look at chapter 1 beginning with verse 3.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In verses 18-19, Peter declares that in this salvation "you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers . . . with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

Chapter 2:9 indicates that the saved have been brought "out of darkness into his marvelous light."

This salvation is through the glorious work of Jesus. In chapter 3:18, Peter explains, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God."

B. The second strand of Peter's message is that this magnificent salvation calls for a holy life. 1:14-15 say, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you be holy also in all your conduct."

In 2:5 Peter says we are to offer up to God spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. Verses 11-12 say we are to "abstain from the passions of the flesh" and "keep our conduct honorable." He lays out then how this looks in the home and in the church. We should live in the flesh not for the passions of the flesh but for the will of God. In 3:8 Peter says, "All of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind." This is the theme of holy living that should proceed from the lives of those who have been so gloriously saved through the grace of God by Jesus Christ.

C. Now there is a third strand woven into the fabric of Peter's letter. It is the strand of suffering. These believers who have so gloriously been redeemed from their sins and freed to pursue holiness in their lives are being persecuted unjustly.

1:6 – now for a little while you have been grieved by various trials

2:19 – indicates that servants were suffering unjustly from their masters, but they were called to suffer like Christ.

4:12 – "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you."

4:19 – mentions those who suffer according to God's will.

5:9 – resist the devil, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

D. Salvation, holiness, of life, and suffering, even unjustly—these are three realities of life for the child of God. And it is with these realities in mind that Peter brings this letter to a close and issues a final couple of exhortations including the one we are focusing on. “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”

Men and women who have come to Christ are God’s chosen ones. They are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession. Having come to Christ, they are called to holiness of life and they rejoice in the hope of such a great salvation and the inheritance promised them by the Lord. But there is a fly in the ointment so to speak. They are going through horrendous trials. And if there is anything that might occasion the temptation to worry, fear, and anxiety, that would be it. And so Peter addresses the temptation head-on. In essence he tells his dear brothers and sisters to not be anxious. He tells them to put off anxiety and to put on in its place trust in the Lord.

## **II. A Cluster of Four Principles**

What Peter exhorts us here highlights several points in relation to fear and anxiety.

A. First, anxiety tends to emerge in our lives when there is a threat to our peace. Why were the recipients of Peter’s letter faced with anxieties? They were suffering. They were under persecution. They were suffering unjustly. Life was tough on them. But holy conduct which glorifies and magnifies God—the way in which they, and we, are called to live—excludes anxiety.

Now the threat can be real or it can be imaginary. Our minds are deceitful. And many times what we fear or what we dread is not what is but what might be. It is imaginary. We fear what might happen. This is sinful anxiety for sure. We condition ourselves to think bad things will happen.

But obviously the threat does not have to be imaginary. The anxieties facing the dispersed believers was as real as it gets. But Peter, calling these people away from their former manner of life and unto holiness calls them away from anxiety. "Casting all your anxiety on him."

B. Second, anxiety is the opposite of humility. Look. Notice Peter's central command in these two verses. "Humble yourselves." Humble yourselves . . . casting your anxiety on him. Humility is the opposite of pride. Humble people are poor in spirit. Humility submits to authority. And the particular target to which Peter says we are to submit is to God. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God. The way that these folks would humble themselves under God's mighty hand is by casting not keeping their anxieties. The word casting means throwing it on another. It means to give something up to someone else. Casting your anxieties on God means giving them up to him. It means letting God have them. This is how you humble yourself under the mighty hand of God with respect to your anxieties. You give them up to him. You let God worry about them.

Here we see why worry and anxiety are so out of place in the life of the Christian. It is because worry is prideful. When you worry, you are speaking loud and clear and pridefully. You are not humbling yourself under God's mighty hand. You rather are resisting God's mighty hand. Just think how this is true. Rick Gamache, a pastor up in the Minneapolis area, points out what worry says to God.

Worry says to God:

**I** can handle this situation better than you. When you worry, it is exhibit A of a person who thinks he knows best what ought to happen in a given situation. So your worry reflects doubt as to whether God is going to handle it the way you think it should be, according your understanding of things.

**I** care more about my circumstances than you do. I demonstrate my care by my worry. Worry disputes the care of God.

**This is beyond you.** I need to handle it. Worry latches on to a threat and refuses to let go and thereby communicates I am the one who matters in

dealing with the threat. If I won't let go for God to handle the situation as he wills, then I insinuate that I am more important in handling it than God is.

When we worry, we have ceased to trust God and we have resorted to trusting ourselves. We trust our heart. We trust our supposed wisdom. And we trust our own strength as though worry can affect an outcome. That is why worry is a blatant expression of pride. My hope is in my heart for the situation. My hope is in my wisdom. And my hope is in my plans. And my hope is my own strength. That is blatant pride and arrogance. I may say I know God and I trust God, but worry does not honor God as God.

C. Anxiety sets God in opposition to us. Because hanging on to anxiety is in essence pride, when we hold on to our fears and anxieties, we are not only acting in opposition to God, we are putting him in a position of opposition against us. Peter is unequivocal here. God is opposed to the proud. Look back up in the chapter to verse 5. It tells us why Peter urges the believers to humble themselves by casting their anxieties upon God. It is because God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. If you want grace to endure the trials of life and to be upheld in the midst of the threats, you must humble yourself. If you do not, you will find that God himself will oppose you. And that is the worst possible state in which to be. Let anything be against me, but never let it be that I find myself against God and him against me. The devil is not my biggest problem, and my circumstances are not my biggest problem. Me and my pride are my biggest problem. Because God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. The thing of which I most need to rid myself is my self-love, my self-focus, my self-righteousness, and my self-assurance.

D. Now the fourth point Peter makes about fear and anxiety is that abstaining from anxiety requires that we get our eyes on God. Peter stresses four aspects of God in this text and its context which underscore the basis for which we should gladly cast our anxieties on him. When we focus on the greatness and majesty of the Lord, we are emboldened to humble ourselves before him and trust him. What we most need in order to handle anxiety is an accurate view of God. And Peter reminds us of several

of the most crucial aspects of his being and character that encourage us to cast our anxieties on him.

1. He is almighty. Peter does not say humble yourselves under the hand of God but “under the mighty hand of God.” He reminds us of the greatness of the power of God. We need to come before him as the God who is self-existent, who has created all things that exist, who holds it all together. This assurance filled the heart of Jeremiah as he prayed to the Lord in 32:17 saying, “Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.” When you humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, you are acknowledging that the entire universe is at his disposal to do whatever he wants. He is omnipotent. What God does or does not do in the midst of life’s circumstances is never a question of ability. Why even when the lot is cast, its every decision is from the Lord.

He orchestrated the details of the life of Joseph. Think of the miseries of the life of Joseph. He was wickedly sold into slavery by his own brothers. He was falsely accused of attempted rape by his master’s wife and sent to prison. In prison he interpreted a dream and pleaded his case to the king’s cupbearer who was promptly released. Yet when he was released, he forgot Joseph for two years. It was two full years before Pharaoh had a dream and the cup bearer remembered the man who could interpret it. Major misery followed major misery. Threats to peace were constantly bombarding Joseph. But his confidence was in the Lord. His perspective was that he was living under the mighty hand of God. When Joseph eventually rose to prominence as the prime minister, he was used to preserve his wicked brothers and their father through a terrible famine. The brothers came to regret what they had done and begged Joseph not to take vengeance on them. Joseph replied, “you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.” The Lord God is the same today. His hand is mighty. He rules the wind and waves. He exercises dominion over every one of your enemies. You have every reason to humble yourself under his mighty hand.

2. He cares for his people. If you belong to God through Christ, then you are part of the people who are God’s own possession. He cares for his people. He loves his people. He exercises his almighty power for the well-

being of his people. God cares for his people. Peter says, "cast all your cares on him because he cares for you." Listen. God cares about you more than you could care about yourself. How do I know? Because before you were even born he did not spare his own son but freely gave him up for your rescue. Listen to what Deuteronomy 32:9-10 says about God's love for Israel. "The Lord's portion is his people and Jacob his allotted heritage." That is what God is acting for here—his people. His people are his prized possession. He hears our cries. He knows our hearts. He acts for our good. In Deuteronomy 32, it says of his people, "he found him in a desert land and in the howling waste of the wilderness he encircled him; he cared for him; he kept him as the apple of his eye." The assurance that we have in Romans 8:28 is this that for all who love God and are called according to his purpose, all things work together for good. And it is not that this just somehow happens. It happens because this is the purpose of God. God is bringing it about. He cares for his people.

3. He has a plan and a purpose. Look down in 1 Peter 5 to verse 10. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." See, God is at work through your suffering, through the threats to your peace to work in you in such a way that you will be restored, confirmed, strengthened and established. There is a purpose that he has for working the way he does. He emphasizes this very thing to the Israelites in Jeremiah 29:11. "For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." The plans God has for his people are mind-boggling. God's plans for his people are better than our plans for ourselves. Paul says in Ephesians that God raised up his people with Christ Jesus and seated us with him in order that he might show us the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness. But God gets there his way. His way is sometimes hard and many times experiences threats to our peace. But peace is not the absence of threats it is the presence and power and assurance of God in the midst of those threats, and it is in God's assurance that he will use things to perfect and complete his people. His way is the best.

A key component of triumphing over fear and anxiety in our lives is having an accurate view of God and meditating much on him. Isaiah 26:3 tells us

that the Lord will keep the steadfast of mind in perfect peace whose mind is fixed on him. And at the center we need to bear in mind the sovereign power of God, the amazing love and care Gd has for his people, and the wise plan and purpose God has as he works.

## **Conclusion**

So the essence of today's message on anxiety is two-fold. As believers pursuing holiness, we will face threats to our peace. But we dare not handle these threats with anxiety and fear. To do so is to refuse to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. It is in essence to put ourselves in a place only God belongs. But when we cast our anxieties on him, we can rest. We rest not because he will spare us all our fears, but he will lead us to triumph over them by trusting in him. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God because he cares for you. He will never forsake his people.

One day a tired man was asleep. He had been giving his all to minister to multitudes of people who were sick and suffering. He had climbed into a boat to make his way across to where there were other people also in need. The man I am talking about is Jesus. His disciples were rowing him across the Sea of Galilee to the other side. I figure you know the instance I am talking about. A sudden and violent storm blew up. It threatened the peace. Waves were breaking into the boat and it was filling up with water. It did not disturb Jesus. He was asleep on a cushion! The disciples woke him up. They in great anxiety asked, "Do you not care that we are perishing?" Jesus rebuked the storm. He said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was a great calm. And Jesus said to the disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" Jesus does not always remove us from the storms of life and he does not always suddenly calm them. But the same Jesus that did calm the storm that day is worthy of our faith and trust in every trial and every concern that comes our way.

You can trust him. You must trust him. Above all you need to trust him for the truest peace there is. The biggest trial confronting us is not of this world. It is the just wrath of God deserved for our sins. That is the greatest storm Jesus has stilled. Do you realize that when Jesus went to the cross in essence his cry, "it is finished," was no different from, "Peace! Be still"? His death brought peace between God and sinners. It cost him

his death to bring this peace. Paul says, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Before you trust him with your everyday anxieties, you need first to trust him to take care of life's greatest anxiety. We will stand before the judgment of God and nothing will justify any of us but the work of Jesus. You need to repent of your sin and trust in him today. And if you have trusted in him for salvation, how could you not trust him to take care of the little things in your life that threaten your peace?