

The Fear of the Future

Matthew 6:25-34



Ever since 9/11 we have instituted in this country the Homeland Security Advisory System. Though you haven't memorized it, I am sure you are familiar with it. It looks like this. [Put on Screen]. These levels are assigned based on information gathered by our intelligence agencies to help us be prepared for potential terror attacks in the future.

We are currently being attacked by an unseen enemy, **COVID-19** (Coronavirus) that has increased our anxiety levels.

Follow this scenario and chart your "**ANXIETY ALERT LEVEL.**"

You begin to have a scratchy throat or a dry cough but there is no fever or other symptoms. **Anxiety Alert Level Green - LOW**

The next day your throat and cough isn't better and you begin to question every ache or pain but still no fever. **Anxiety Alert Level Blue - GUARDED**

The third day things have not changed and you call your doctor's office and begin to investigate where you can get a COVID-19 test. **Anxiety Alert Level Yellow - ELEVATED**

The doctor's office calls back and tells you where you can get a test and urges you to self-isolate even in your home. You are beginning to run a fever and having difficulty breathing. **Anxiety Alert Level Orange - HIGH**

The next day you are worse and you go to the emergency room and are admitted and placed in isolation. A covid-19 test is administered and it is confirmed that you have the dreaded virus. **Anxiety Alert Level Red - SEVERE**

We have been looking at the Sermon on the Mount and today I want to skip ahead to **Matt. 6:25-34**.

Matthew 6:34 says,

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

Some people call it tension. Other people call it anxiety. Jesus as you will see in a moment called it worry. I am calling it the fear of the future.

In many ways, we are indeed a fearful nation. We are a nation of worriers. All of our worries are always about the future. For example, we worry that:

We will be left alone in the future

We will not know what to do when we get to the future

We worry that we won't have what we need in the future

We worry that we will be hurt by someone or something in the future

We worry that we may not make it to the future

Why do you think that the number one concern in every presidential election without fail is almost always the economy? Besides Covid-19, many are concerned if they will have jobs to go back to when this crisis is over.

Because, people do worry about their financial, social, and vocational future.

Jesus took this fear head on when He said, ***"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*** (Matthew 6:34, NIV)

Someone has defined "worry" as, "The interest we pay in advance today for trouble that may never come tomorrow."

The problem with worrying and fearing the future is simply this - when you are worrying you are acting like a spiritual orphan. You are acting like, either there is no God, or if there is, He is powerless. What you are really saying is, "I don't really believe that God can do what He says He will do and I don't really believe that God will be with me and take care of me in any trouble."

Being a worrier myself, it is a lot easier to talk about overcoming worry, than it is to overcome it. We can take what Jesus said in **Matthew 6** and we can take some practical steps that will help us to overcome the fear of the future and keep our anxiety alerts at a minimum.

I. Remember How God Has Performed In The Past

I am going to make a simple statement right now that I hope will speak volumes to you about how you can use the past to help you face the future. Are you ready? Here it is. "You are here now, aren't you?" Whatever has happened to you in the past, to this point, you have survived. A little beaten up? Maybe. A little bruised? Perhaps, but you are still here and you are still standing.

One of the greatest leaders who ever lived was Moses. Moses had a great habit of sitting the Children of Israel down from time to time and just reminding them of what God had done for them in the past. As he was trying to prepare them to go into the Promised Land, he made this statement in Deuteronomy chapter one, ***"The Lord your God is going before you. He will fight for you, just as you saw Him do in Egypt. And you saw how the Lord, your God cared for you again and again here in the wilderness, just as a father cares for his child."*** (Deuteronomy 1:30-31, NLT)

Now Moses is asking them to go up and down memory lane and just remember what God had already done for them.

Did they remember the parting of the Red Sea? Did they remember the pillar of fire? Did they remember how God destroyed the Egyptian army?

Even now in the wilderness, here were millions of people who needed to have food. How was God feeding them? Every morning He gave them manna, which was bread. Then at night, He gave them quail and they didn't even have to bake the bread or hunt the quail. God just delivered it to them. When they needed water, Moses would just walk up to a rock and speak to it and God would have water gush out of the rock to take care of their needs. The whole point Moses was making was this - do you see how God has performed in the past? Don't you think the God that has taken care of your past, can take care of your present and take care of your future?

God said something amazing to the Nation of Israel through the Prophet Isaiah. Listen to these words, ***"Listen to Me...all you who remain of the House of Israel, whom I have upheld since you were conceived...and have cared for you since before you were born."*** (Isaiah 46:3, NIV/NLT)

Get that in your mind. From the moment you were conceived in your mother's womb, when that cell was first formed, from that moment on, God was upholding you. You wouldn't be here today if God hadn't nurtured you in the past, before you even knew what was going on. Even when you didn't know there was a God, He was watching out for you. In fact, you don't even know all the trials and tragedies you've missed, because God was taking care of you.

Listen to what else He says, ***"I will still be the same when you are old and gray and I will take care of you. I created you. I will carry you and will always keep you safe."*** (Isaiah 43:4, CEV) You see your life is like two bookends. From the moment you were conceived, to the moment you die, God was there, God is there, God will always be there and He will take care of you.

Have you noticed how everything these days is going "retro"? Shoes, clothes, food, cars? When I was growing up my mother used to patch my blue jeans when they got a hole in them. Now, teenagers are tearing holes out of them. Going retro is not all bad, especially when it comes to fearing the future. Every one of you can think of a time in your past when you know God intervened on your behalf, when God provided for a need, or God protected you from a harm. If you will remember how God has performed in the past, it will encourage you as you face your future.

If you feel like an Egyptian army is behind you and the Red Sea is before you, go retro and remember how God has delivered you in the past and how God has been faithful in the past and realize He will be that same God in the present and in the future.

II. Realize What God Has Promised In The Present

Beginning in **verse 25 of Matthew 6**, Jesus repeats something three times. Three times He says three words. Here they are - ***"Do not worry."***

When Jesus talks about worry, He is talking about tomorrow. If you think about it, worry is always about tomorrow. You act in the present. You worry about the future. If I could guarantee you, that you would never, ever, ever, ever again have a problem in the future then you wouldn't worry about anything else, so worry is always about the future. Once again, we can use the present to teach us how to face the future.

He goes on to add in **verse 34**, ***"Each day has enough trouble of its own."*** In other words, you've got to take today, which is the only day you have, and ask yourself this question - How can I depend upon God just for today?

The way you do it is to realize what God has promised you, just for today. Here is one. The Lord says, ***"I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you."*** (Psalm 32:8, NLT)

Here is another one. ***"The Lord himself will go before you. He will not leave you or forget you, so don't be afraid and don't worry." (Deuteronomy 31:8, NCV)***

Now these are two promises. Put together, here is what God has promised. Today, I will guide you. Today, I will guard you. Today, I will go with you. Today, I will give you what you need to face any trouble.

There is something you and I can do that God can't do. I know that may sound somewhat shocking to you at first, but let me tell you one thing you and I can do that God can't do. You and I can break a promise, but God cannot. God never has and God never will break one promise. I need to realize what God has promised in the present.

Jesus even used an illustration that we all experience every day. He gave a simple piece of advice on how to cure future fright. What was it? Believe it or not, become a bird watcher. Listen to verses 25 and 26, ***"So I tell you, don't worry about everyday life - whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Doesn't life consist of more than food and clothing? Look at the birds. They don't need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than they are." (Matthew 6:25-26, NLT)***

Have you ever seen a worried bird? Did you know there has never been a bird in medical history that was ever treated for hypertension, high blood pressure, or stress? Think about it. Fear of the future isn't even for the birds! There is a great lesson perching on trees every day. If God takes care of little birds, don't you think He will take care of you? Everyone listening to me today has a roof over your head, clothes in your closet and food on your table and every one of those things is a neon flashing sign telling you, just look at today and realize, if I am taking care of you today, that I can surely take care of you tomorrow.

III. Rely On What God Has Planned For The Future

Listen to verse 34 one more time and you will find in one simple sentence what Jesus had to say about the fear of the future. ***"Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes." (Matthew 6:34, MSG)***

If you are a child of God, if you are a follower of Christ, I can tell you something about your future, in fact I can guarantee it. Here it is. Everything will always work out for your good. That is not speculation, that is not just positive thinking, that is God's word, ***"We know that God causes everything [in the future] to work together for the good of those who love God." (Romans 8:28, NLT)*** When you obey God today and trust God for tomorrow, you have found the antidote for your fear of the future.

May I be very honest and transparent? I have these same fears. Through every stage of my life, I have been afraid of what is next. Would I be a good husband, a good father, a good grandfather? Will I get Covid-19? Will a member of my family, my friends or a member of my church get Covid-19?

Now as I look at the end of my ministry and my life just over the horizon I pray that I will finish strong spiritually and that I will have enough financially to take care of the wonderful wife He has blessed me with.

I want you to remember something as we talk about the past, the present and the future. Yesterday is gone, you can't change it. Tomorrow is not here, you can't touch it. All you can do is live in the present. The best thing about the future is it only comes one day at a time. The only day you need to be concerned about is today.

I want to close by sharing a couple of thoughts with you. First of all, **worry is an optional misery**. You don't have to worry, nobody forces it on you. Every time you worried, you chose to worry. Every time you fear the future, you choose to fear the future. This is one area where those of us who are true followers of Jesus Christ have an advantage over those who are not, because when you know this book and you know God, then you also know you don't need to worry.

Has it ever occurred to you that nothing has ever just occurred to God? Nothing has ever surprised God including this deadly virus. Nothing has ever caught Him off-guard. He already knows the final score of the game of your life and if you are one of His children, you win.

Here is the second piece of advice. **Leave tomorrow alone**. When tomorrow comes, God will give you the grace and strength you need for it. For today, you already have the grace and the strength that you need. Your calendar gives each day its own number. Live them in that order, just as God arranged them. Stay in one square at a time. Live one day at a time.

Don't get the impression that I have told all of you not to worry, because if you do not know Jesus Christ, there are two things you had better be worried about and there is a future you had better fear. You had better be worried about death and you had better be worried about judgment and you had better fear a future without God. Once again, that is the beauty of the Cross of Jesus Christ. He died. He was buried and He was raised from the dead to take away the only fear that we should have which is the fear of dying without God.

I don't know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future and if you are in His hands, you never need fear the future any more.