

- I. Introduction: Today, we start our new series: "So What?"
 - A. Previously book of Acts discovering the "FIRST THINGS" in our relationship with God
 1. Jesus first, prayer and surrender to the Holy Spirit
 2. Today, the lab portion. How "Jesus first" plays out with our fear and anxiety.
 - B. Story - Mae: ran to me, screaming, jumped in my lap. "Spider!" "It's moving!"
 - C. Now, we tend to look at that and say, "Aw, how cute. Kids are so funny!"
 1. But I think often times, kids deal with fear much more logically than adults do.
 2. Mae screamed and ran to me, why?
 - a. Because she knows where the safety is.
 - b. Because she hasn't learned shame yet. "I'm afraid and I need you!"
 3. There is NO SHAME in fear. This is an area we tend to devolve in as adults. Instead of responding to fear, we tolerate it. **Why do we just tolerate and live with fear? Pride and shame. Pride in being convinced that I should be able to handle it, shame when I realize I can't.**
 - a. My 5-year-old deals with her fear. She runs shamelessly to safety and admits what is true.
 - b. Do you know that about a month ago, for the first time in my life that I can remember, I actually said to God "I'm afraid."
 - D. We are NOT alone. We have a Father and we have a family.
- II. We're in this together.
 - A. No matter what the reason is for your fear, the Father knows your fear and He deeply cares about your fear. And He put you in THIS family so that you wouldn't have to walk through it alone.
 - B. Chronic clinical anxiety disorders ... you're in a situation where something that visits us all naturally, for you, fear has packed up all its stuff and tried to move in with you.
 1. Those of you who suffer this and keep going on to fight another day: I genuinely admire you. It wasn't until this last year that I experienced any kind of abiding fear. It is paralyzing, confusing, and very painful.
 2. It is not spiritual to deny the many ways God is providing to deal with fear. Counseling, diet + exercise, medication-these are gifts of God's grace.

- C. Whether your fear is chronic or not, I think most of us have learned to deal with on the ends of the spectrum: either heard, "Suck it up!" or "Here are the 10 reasons why your fear won't actually happen."
1. Jesus isn't telling you to suck it up. And Jesus isn't pacifying your fears by telling you, "Nothing bad will ever happen."
 2. Instead, He invites us into a relationship with Him that can weather the storms and even THRIVE in and through fear.
 3. There is no CURE to experiencing fear. That is not the goal today. The goal is to follow Jesus to a place where fear cannot RULE us.
- D. Here's how I want to do that:
1. Discover the anatomy of fear.
 2. Listen to Jesus' words for our fear.
 3. Get practical: So what? What do I actually do when I am afraid?
 4. Disclaimer: with responding to fear, I am in a season of discovery, both biblically and experientially. So those who have more expertise, please be patient with this novice!

III. **The Anatomy of Fear:** Need to understand fear ... genius behind Jesus' words

A. Psalm 27:1 *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

1. David writes this amazing courageous statement that fear has no place.
2. But then he lists all the reasons he has for fear:
 - a. Psalm 27:2 *When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh* - Fear of his body being attack and harmed
 - b. Psalm 27:3 *Thou an army encamp against me...* - Fear of death at the hand of an invading army
 - c. Psalm 27:6 *... my enemies [are] all around me...* - Fear of being surrounded and losing mobility and autonomy
 - d. Psalm 27:10 *For my father and my mother have forsaken me...* - Fear of losing relationship
 - e. Psalm 27:12 *... for false witnesses have risen against me...* - Fear of losing reputation; shame

B. **Five Basic Human Fears** ("Psychology Today," Karl Albrecht) All anxieties and phobias boil down to one of these:

1. **Extinction (Psalm 27:3):** Loss of life; loss of existence
2. **Mutilation (Psalm 27:2):** Loss of a body part or its function; includes physical pain
3. **Loss of Autonomy (Psalm 27:6):** fearing of being immobilized, restricted, enveloped, hemmed in either physically or relationally

4. **Separation (Psalm 27:10):** Loss of relationship, connectedness; loss of being wanted, respected, or valued by someone else.
 5. **Ego-death (Psalm 27:12):** loss of reputation; humiliation, shame, loss of worthiness.
 6. What is the common thread that runs through all fear? LOSS
- C. If we boil it down both biblically and psychologically: **Fear is the anticipation of losing something we treasure.** (life, limb, comfort, finances, freedom, people, reputation). It's all about losing something we hold dear.
1. Fear has its purposes. If you're in the woods and a bear is running at you, fear is a great tool at your disposal *in that moment*.
 2. The problem is when fear steps out of the moment and into the permanent; when a temporary fear turns into an abiding fear.
 - a. What's happening with anxiety is that your mind and body are reacting to the *perception* of a threat. Your brain is running the situation/threat over and over trying to solve the problem, while your body is preparing itself for fight or flight.
 - b. I've realized that I much prefer doom over impending doom. Why? Control
 - c. In my fear and brokenness, I seek control over the loss of what I treasure.
- D. And here's what I think we'll find based on our Scripture today: **Abiding fear is only possible when my greatest treasure is losable.**
1. The big question is this: **What is my bare-minimum for well-being/peace/joy in life?**
 2. The answer to this question reveals your greatest treasure.
 - a. As long as I have (fill in the blank) life is worth it.
 - b. Family, money in the bank, health, a certain reputation=greatest treasure.
 3. Here's the problem: if anything in your "bare-minimum" for well-being is losable, abiding fear is not only possible but probable.
 4. So I just shouldn't be attached to anything or anyone?
 - a. No. Non-attachment is tenet of Buddhist philosophy. IMO, it's not possible and not biblical.
 - b. So what does Jesus say? We need to hear His words to us.

IV. Jesus' Words for Our Fear

- A. Matthew 6:25 *Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life ...* (When you see, "Therefore ..." read it as, "Because of what you just read **before** ..."

1. The **before**

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in

Heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ... No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matthew 6:19-21, 24)

2. So Jesus has just talked to us about our treasure, what we value most, what our heart bows to and serves; says not to invest it in things that can be lost. And then He says, "THEREFORE, do not be anxious ..."
3. This tells me that everything He's going to say about fear and anxiety is rooted in what we treasure.

Therefore I tell you, 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. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (Matthew 6:25)

- B. Anxiety is fed by treasuring things that can be lost.
1. Again, treasuring things that can be lost is NOT a bad thing. The question that Jesus poses, though, is WHAT PLACE IS IT IN?
 2. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?
 - a. Which is harder? To create life from nothing or sustain it?
 - b. To create it! "If I can give you life, which is a miracle, why would you doubt that I can sustain it?"

Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? (Matthew 6:26-27)

- C. Compared to you, birds are of such lesser value, but they don't have to fret and worry to provide for themselves.
1. YOUR Heavenly Father feeds them, but He's YOUR Father. How much more will He provide for you?!
 2. Quick poll: for how many of you—sitting there fretting—has worry magically turned into more food in the fridge, money in the bank, 20 more airbags in your kid's car?
 - a. Anxiety has no power to actually accomplish anything.
 - b. When we worry, we feel like we're doing something, but we aren't. It's just an internal game of trying to exert control over things we have no control of and it can't add even a footstep (cubit) to your journey.

And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (Matthew 6:28-30)

- D. Lilies of the field are even LESS valuable than birds. They get cut down and burned in ovens to make the bread that you're so worried about not having! And yet our Father has poured out His great creativity and care to clothe them more amazingly than the richest king who ever lived clothed himself!

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the Gentiles seek after all these things [pagan religions were all about appeasing and pleasing the gods so that they would provide for your needs and not smite you], and your heavenly Father [not a pagan god to be bribed, but your daddy] knows that you need them all. (Matthew 6:31-32)

- E. Frantic Seeking after these things we worry about is wasted energy because God is already on it. "Where's the salami? Who ate the salami?!"
 1. This is not a command not to work, provide a living, etc.
 2. But our intense, focused serious endeavor of seeking in life should be for that which cannot be taken away, that which moth and rust cannot destroy.
 3. Here's where you really need to lean in and absorb: Jesus has just said "Therefore, do not be anxious ..." and now He says "but ..."
 4. This is the great exchange we're all waiting for. "Don't be anxious ... INSTEAD ..." What? What replaces anxiety?

But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

- F. "Seek FIRST." Not "Seek only" but "Seed FIRST." Fear loses much of its power when our treasures are in their proper place.
 1. Jesus isn't teaching non-attachment, He's teaching treasure-priority.
 2. His Kingdom, His righteousness: Jesus is our highest treasure and we become like Him.
 3. When our life's goal and highest treasure is Jesus Himself and becoming like Him, then fear and anxiety lose their longevity.
 4. **If fear's power comes from losing what we treasure most, then fear loses its power when what we treasure most cannot be lost.**

- a. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." - Jim Elliot
 - b. Jesus is the only treasure that cannot be lost.
 - c. If having Him and becoming like Him is the greatest treasure, our bare minimum, fear will still come—and pain and disappointment and sorrow—but they cannot control us if Jesus is our definition of peace and joy.
5. **That which you treasure MOST will rule what you treasure less.** (Matthew 6:21, 24)
6. He's telling us that there is something we must seek first—something to be of infinitely greater VALUE to us, to be our "bare minimum," to be our "one thing."
- a. What do I treasure MOST?
 - b. Anxiety and fear capture us and torture us when our ONE THING (Jesus!) shares His place or loses His place.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:34)

- 7. Today's grace and provision is sufficient for today. Don't waste it on tomorrow or you will be in want today.

V. **So what do I actually do?**

- A. I want to tell you **a** way, not necessarily **the** way. This is what has worked for me, but what is most important is not the steps or order, but the heart of surrender behind it.
 - 1. **RUN to Jesus first.** Tell Him exactly how you feel WITHOUT SHAME.
 - 2. **PRAY that He would show you what you treasure more than Him.** It's very important to realize and confess that a false god might be at work in our lives.
 - 3. **ASK Jesus to be a greater treasure to you.**
 - 4. **SURRENDER to the transformation of your heart through this fearful situation.** Consider this: instead of asking Him to change the situation, ask Him to use it to make you more like Jesus. And share this journey with a bro/sis
 - 5. **SHARE & REPEAT: This is not an event of isolation toleration, it's a together-journey of transformation.**

*Transition to Communion: right now, name your fear to God. Is there possibly a greater treasure? As we remember Jesus, ask Him to become your ONE THING.