

The Seeking Church

Kenneth Korby

Matthew 6:24–34

Invocation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. My dear and beloved brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Anxiety: The Greatest Insult Against God

Jesus tells us about anxiety today, and he says in place of anxiety you are to seek first the kingdom of God. To seek His righteousness and all of the things that you worry about will be added to you.

The problem with the preacher preaching to a Christian congregation on this text is that when, if you pay attention and your eyes are open and your mind is enlightened, you understand that the very common activity of worry and anxiety is so natural, and we say, with bland excuse, well, it's natural to be human. I'm only human.

And with that, we do not realize we have exalted the greatest insult against God that could possibly be imagined. It's far worse than getting drunk, far worse than killing. To assume that God is not to be trusted, and that is what our anxiety is. It is a little badge that we wear. You can't trust God the Father. It is the liturgy of our unfaith that we do.

Now the problem for the Christian preacher is to start scolding the people. You shouldn't worry, should you? Yes, although that we shouldn't worry.

And if the preacher really gets serious, then you begin to worry about the fact that you worry. So the anxiety is doubled, and it may happen this morning, that our anxieties will be doubled and tripled, because we discover we not only worry about food, drink, and other things. Now the pastor has told us to worry as a monumental sin, and now we have to add that worry to our worries.

But that's not what the text is about, that's not what this preacher is aiming at, and that's not what Jesus is about.

Jesus Addresses Disciples Where They Live

When Jesus tells us first to seek the kingdom of God first, and His righteousness, he doesn't act as if you don't need food, clothes, house, work, check. He doesn't act as if he's not a make-believe sky god. He is the grubby god who became man, who ate and drank and gives his body and blood with bread and wine, and who chooses through human beings to speak this word to us about seeking the kingdom of God first.

He is addressing you. He's addressing his disciples. This is from the great chapter on prayer. In this chapter beforehand, he [unclear] Our Father. And prayer is one of the ways that you keep polishing the mirror of his words.

And he is addressing you as disciples. I'll speak about that later when we talk about your Father knows you need these things. What kind of a Father do you think you have? Like earthly fathers? No, he's a heavenly Father.

So he is addressing you as a disciple, but he's addressing you not where you have your big worries like is the doctrine of the Trinity true? Is the new age really the way to go? Are the Jehovah's Witnesses right and we're all wrong? You don't worry too much about that most of you, not much of the time.

What you worry about is your health. [unclear]. Are you going to have enough money to pay the bills? What are you going to eat? Is the food going to kill you? What are you going to wear? Kids gotta go to school. Did you ever try to buy kids clothes? They're expensive as everything. How are we going to pay for them?

What we're worried about is our life. And that's what Jesus is talking about. He's not talking about some religious sky. He's talking about where we eat and drink and live. That's where the worry goes on.

And he is calling us to wage a war. He's not calling us to sit around in some sort of stupor, ignorant about what's going on, he's saying to wage a war against anxiety. That is done first by seeking the kingdom of God. And it is done by [unclear], the promises, the righteousness that God gives you. And the promise: "All these things will be added to you." You will understand that more in a few moments.

What Is the Kingdom of God?

The Kingdom of God is what you are to seek. What is it?

You listen to some people, it means a march, and that we get all [unclear] done away. You listen to other people, it means that everybody becomes a Sunday school kind of person. Jimmy Carter almost took us to the edge of that when he was president. And we are only a hair's breadth away from some kind of do—good fascism now. Just let things collapse a little bit more, and some dictator will take over. [unclear] that the Kingdom of God gets some believers, some true believers, a Christian man, to take over the government and make everybody run by the commandment.

Is that the Kingdom of God? Is the Kingdom of God that you don't pay any attention to that you're just so spiritual, that you have no care about that? You don't care what goes on, whether somebody starves or kids are ignorant or schools can't run, no worry about it.

The Kingdom of God, rather, is not so. It does not consist in power, money, clout, legislation. We need all of those and we have them. Would to God we had some honest and good men and women running them.

But the kingdom of God is the word of God. Talked to you so that it takes control of you, governs you. That it is taught to you truly. You don't mix it up with half-lies about what you can do and what somebody else might do. And to say if we bring this together with what God can do, then we ought to have a winning case.

For that word of God must be pure, clean. The way he cleanses you and forgives your sins is one way, washing you in holy baptism, absolving you in holy absolution, feeding you in the holy supper, teaching you with his holy gospel. You confess that in the [unclear].

And when that word comes to you, so that in your heart you can say and confess that God is your Father. That as the children of God, you live a life of His children while you eat, drink, and worship, and suffer, and die, play, and do your things. To live that life now, because it starts now, He's no spook God, He's now, here. And to live that life forever.

The Kingdom of God, then, is righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Ghost. It is not food, money, clothes, religion, power, politics, law. The Kingdom of God is where Jesus as King dominates you by forgiving you, caring for you, loving you. Seek that Kingdom.

You Cannot Serve God and Money

The alternative is what pagans [unclear]. Jesus said it very clear. God the Creator does not give three options. You will either worship Him or you will worship money. There is no third option.

All you do need to worship money is be natural. Don't worship Him. If you worship Him, the God of money must be crucified. For God, the King, is the crucified and risen King.

No one can serve two masters. Serve one you will. Living is to be a living King. You are worshipping as you live. He is a pagan, worships money. You worship the Father.

No one can serve two masters. He will love the one and hate the other. Get out of my life. How about this one? If it's money, God, get out of my life. You'll own money, money, money. [unclear]. Or he will cling to the one, and you will despise him. You cannot serve God and money. There is no third option.

So Jesus is addressing people that he understands very well, and he's telling them a most severe truth. God the Creator is holy. There is no God like him. He doesn't share his realm with other gods. He's God, and that's it.

And he is [unclear]. He wants to be your father. He wants you to have his pleasure, his life. He wants you to pray. He wants to take care of you. He's [unclear]. Doesn't want you falling in love with all these other gods.

Why Anxiety Is Real

The anxiety, therefore, is real. The psychologists have a great difficulty. In fact, it's impossible, psychiatric, to diagnose anxiety and aggression. Those two things defy analysis.

That is because you need the word of God to know what anxiety is about. Worry is not just a simple, natural thing that people do, or some people just get drunk and drink and have used drugs, and they don't have a worry in the world, except how they're going to get more drugs and booze, but anxiety is real because God is going to kill sinners. We all go to the cemetery, and that's what anxiety is. It is the deep dread that we're going to die. Anxiety is the response to that threat, and we do well to be anxious.

We do well, and yet Jesus says, do not be anxious about your life. It is in the face of the threat to our life that we seek to fend God or hold him away. If we can get enough money, we can go

to Mayo Clinic, I think. If we can get enough power, we can at least control some of life. If we get enough wealth and security, we at least can retire and have fun. And we sort of forget that at the end, [unclear].

So we use money. God also uses food. He gives it to you every day. He made food and plants and bellies and feasts and olfactory nerves and taste buds. It is a delight to him. He loves to give it. Look how much he made of it.

But when we want to take it, to use it against him, to hold him off, maybe our clothes will make us look pretty, even though we may be corrupt inside. Maybe our house will make us look secure, although there may be only quarreling and greed inside. Maybe our health will make us safe, although we never know, somebody may cough next to us and we'll get a flu bug and die. To send God off and to avoid judgment is what the worship of mammon is. It does not want God to be God.

So all these things will be taken away from you and from me. I will come to the point where I will no longer be able to think my brain will be dead. My mouth won't talk, I will not be able to eat, and I'll have nothing to eat. Until somebody puts clothes on me, I'll be as naked as I was when I was born, before somebody puts clothes on me. All these things will be taken from you.

Look at the Sparrows and the Flowers

Now, I want to tell you something, then, about anxiety. He says, look at the sparrows. They fly around [unclear]. And most of us at least, for my part, I don't get that excited about a sparrow, unless I remember what Jesus said. He tells this intelligent old young man, go to the sparrows and learn something about God. They don't worry and sweat, and God keeps them.

Go to the flowers. You think this was pretty and shaped so well and so handsome, and you are. But if you want to look at the flowers, not even Solomon could [unclear] himself in such beauty. But you're not worth more than sparrows and flowers?

It is foolish for you to sit up early, rise up early, sit up late, eat the bread of sorrow, because he gives to his beloved sleep. You have your home, you have your work, you have your family, and that's how he gives it to you.

So that the alternative that Jesus is telling us about is one we are to fight against. You are to seek your heavenly Father's kingdom because your Father knows what you need. And he adds these things, he adds them. They're not the life, they're the addition.

Your Father Knows What You Need

Your father, he has begotten you. You did not make yourself a human being by your will; that came by the will of the Creator through your father and mother. And all they did was enjoy what they were doing. Didn't have anything else to do with you. But he has begotten you in the same way through his blessed [unclear].

You're born again in holy baptism. You didn't do it, he did. So he says, "Call me Father." It means he's bigger than you are, he wants you to live. He gives you his name and he knows how to take care of you.

And when he spans you, he spans you as your father, not as some policeman who says, get out of my way, kid, you're bothering me. Even there, he loves us. He causes your life and he cares for you.

He's not like many fathers that we know, angry, gone all the time, earning so much he has no time for us, always grumbling, always working on something that's not ours. He's not that kind of a father. He doesn't run off, make babies and [unclear] run. He causes our lives to care for us.

And your money that you have, your food, is a consequence of your being alive. It's not the cause of your life. You don't work to make a living. If you do, you've got things twisted again. You work because you are alive. And he is giving you work and money and food and life and family, place, weather, etc.

So do not be anxious, Jesus says, about your food and clothes, about your health and life. Is not life something more than food and clothing?

"O You of Little Faith"

And then Jesus puts his finger on our face. O you of little faith. And we say, doesn't he understand? Doesn't he know?

When he tells us about not worrying, not dishonoring God, that makes us worry more. We are anxious, not only about food and drinks, but we're anxious because we're anxious. We worry about our worrying. Is Jesus now aggravating the problem? In a way, yes.

Is Jesus giving us mental health advice? He says to us, I know children how hard it is to trust God, and I know how natural it is to worry. But you should not worry, you know. It isn't good

for your health [unclear]. And besides that, you may be stressed out, and besides that, you never really get what you worry about, unless you keep worrying about death, that you get.

No, Jesus is no mental health counselor. No, Jesus is no supreme [unclear]. Jesus is your savior.

The things that the Gentiles seek, they seek because they do not know God their Father. Jesus is the way God is your Father. And that's what he's telling me.

Seek First the Kingdom: Where He Is Found

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. For the work of making you right, worry worse than we are, or at least than I am, the way he makes worry work right. He is first. He trusts God perfectly for us. He [unclear] him. All that he is for you. Secondly, he teaches you by his forgiveness of your sins to cling to him even against the worry.

Seek him then where he comes to you. You do not go mucking around in yourself trying to find him or have an idea or a picture on the wall and say, ah, if I could only be like that, ah, if he would be like this. You seek him where he is to be found.

He is to be found in the baptismal water where he named him. When you've got that, you've got the whole lot. That's where he becomes your father. You become his children. You are brothers and sisters to our brother, Jesus, and brothers and sisters to each other. [unclear]. [unclear].

When you get up, you do well to make the sign of the cross and say, "[unclear] in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost." And remember, you are that kind. Suddenly you have that, but you are. There is where he promises to wash away your sins.

That is why, and here I remind you, brethren, you are wealthy beyond most congregations. You have a pastor who teaches you and practices with you holy absolution. Your worrying is a greater sin than your cursing, although they are both monumental. When you worry, when you are fretful and anxious and hostile and angry about it, and sometimes simply brokenhearted, when you come, you make confession of that [unclear]. You say it out loud. Thus you honor God. You say to God, you are my father and I have acted as if I were a bastard, as if I had no father.

And in confessing that sin to Jesus, he's not floating around on the 52nd floor of the penthouse, he's where that word is. The word of forgiveness put into your ear. Use this while you can. God may again take it away from you. Most churches, even the Lutheran churches in our country, do not even know about this. It's already been taken from them.

So you are to go to seek him where he is, not where you imagine him to be or where you feel he ought to be, but where he is. And so you seek him then. Look for him.

Bread, Body, and Blood

He comes to you with bread today. This is not only bread. It is bread because you worry about bread. So do I. How are we going to pay for it?

But he takes bread and gives you his body. Look for him there. And that's where he makes everything right—all your sins and your insulting of God by worrying, all of that. But he makes right. He is the one who carried it, wounded and bruised and dead, and now alive. He comes to feed you with that body, and he says, "Drink it." This is why—this is joy, because here is blood, the blood of forgiveness. He sweat and suffered; when he fills the cup, [unclear] sweet wine when you drink it. For here he wants to nurture [unclear] on his love.

To remember that in the bitterness, in the worry, in the anxiety, you have a mighty weapon. And your weapon is his righteousness. And that is what he feeds you on, to nurture you.

Yes, come on, you can trust him. Yes, you may trust the Father. You may even delight in the Father.

Seek Him in Prayer: Elijah and the Widow

Seek him in listening to him, and seek him in praying. Learn how to pray. How? How far?

Aren't you astonished by that widow? Here it is, a long, bearded, probably smelly, old man wandering out of Jewish land. He comes up beside me, this poor widow, getting ready to die, just that far from death. And this old man says, "[unclear] water for me." And everybody's short on water. [unclear]. [unclear]. He said, "Oh, by the way, bring me some cake to break."

And then she turns around and says, "What we've got is a little handful of flour and a little bit of olive oil left. In fact, I'm gathering sticks now to bake it for myself, and I would eat it and [unclear] die." And he says, "Bring it to me first." First! Blows me away.

I can't imagine my going into your house and saying, feed me first. I'll take it back. That's honor for the word of God that he had. That's trust.

And that woman, alright, so she does this. And then what God said happened. He just kept giving her flour, oil. They ate all through the famine. They just kept on eating.

Faith Is Not Made by Prayer

Now this listening to him and praying is not the cause of your faith. You don't make faith by praying. The Pope will tell you that and any of his priests and the Protestants believe that and they'll tell you that. [unclear].

That kind of faith that can be made by prayer is not the faith Jesus is talking about. The faith Jesus is talking about is the one that he makes. And it is the exercise of itself that we call prayer.

You don't have to tell God. Now we're going to pray for Dorothy this morning. Dorothy's in intensive care right now and she's not in very good condition as if we have to inform God what our prayer is.

It's that terrible meekness that Peter talked about. You trust God's hand to give you what he has promised. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God. The meek who trust God are dread and terrible. People don't know what to do with them. They work, they play, they pay. Sometimes they have to borrow money, but there is a dread about them, for they trust God to be their father.

And so faith is the art of casting your cares upon him, because he cares about you. And if you were Michael Jordan and wanted to throw basketball through the hoop, you might have to practice it ten million times. If you were Fran Tarkenton and tried to hit a tight end, you might have to practice it a hundred thousand times. Don't think that this is once and it's over. It is a raging ongoing struggle. The anxiety of our life invades and corrodes our life, shrivels us up and brings us to death, and against that we [unclear] cast our cares upon him. So praying is the first good work [unclear].

The Seeking Church

Last week I talked to you about giving thanks. Today, [unclear], let us, my beloveds, in this place, small in numbers, not very much in economic power, certainly not with the glow of

promise coming out of the midst of us. Let us be simply the seeking church.

Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the other things will be added to you. Don't worry that much about tomorrow. You've got a blessing to deal with today. I have set you as a city on the [unclear], God said.

Well, let your life shine so that the people may see your good work. What good work is it? The good work of [unclear], because you've been [unclear]; the good work of giving thanks, because you are a recipient; the good work of seeking him, because he has found you. The peace of the Lord be with all of you.

SOURCE

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Transcribed from an audio recording of a sermon by Kenneth F. Korby (CTSF Media). [unclear] marks words that could not be made out, and a few short passages may be missing.

Several passages of this recording are hard to make out; read it as an approximation and check the audio before quoting.