

The Sovereign God in an Anxious World

Matthew 6:25-33 | Jonathan Dodson | May 18, 2013

We're thinking about the sovereignty of God in an anxious world. Poverty, the economy, war. Kids, finances, grades. Big or small, we all worry, Christians/non-Christians, everyone faces anxiety. Who wants it? It undoes us, woos us away from peace. Then we're on edge. So how does it do it? *How* does worry get to us? *What* can we do about it?

The Illusion of Sovereignty

Prometheus was a gigantic Titan god, who took on Zeus, chief of the gods. Aeschylus, the Greek author of *Prometheus Bound*, opens his story with several gods escorting Prometheus through a mountain gorge to fasten him to a rock. Hephaestus reluctantly bolts the Prometheus to the mountain face. Prometheus' crime? Rebellion against Zeus. He thought Zeus' rule over humanity was oppressive. Mankind had lived a mundane existence knowing the day of their death and ignorant of the Arts and Sciences. Zeus kept the mortals in the dark. Prometheus thought this was unfair and sought to bring them out into the light. How? By stealing "fire from the gods" and giving it to humanity. He gave them three things: a sense of immortality, ambition, and technology. As the story goes, this fire empowered the ambition of man to master many arts and ignite technological change. You might say Prometheus' bondage freed humanity. How? Have we benefitted from human ambition? Well, we've come along way since hunting and gathering, moved into the progress of the industrial era, and now live in a globalized knowledge/tech economy. We push the boundaries of science and technology century after century. Using the fire of the gods, we've healed diseases, extended life, sought to eradicate poverty, end human suffering, clone life. While I certainly don't want to minimize all the advances of humankind that save life and promote human flourishing, I'm not convinced we have been as successful as we think. Not knowing the day of our death, and knowing the Arts & Sciences, has given us, in the words of Prometheus, "blind hope." We hope to change the world but do so blindly. We still haven't eradicated poverty, controlled the economy, eliminated war. We can't change the world. We proceed under the illusion of control, under the spell of human progress, **unaware that we are human because we *can act like gods***. Using Google maps we can pinpoint any location on earth. Using wireless technology we can contact anyone on earth. Using our laptop we can work from anywhere on earth! Many would argue this creates a better quality of life, we can do more for the world and more for the family, but that isn't always true. Our devices and technological leaps detract from time with the family. When I come home, kiss my wife, I hug and greet each of my kids, talk to them about their day, and then check my phone. I may or may not put it away in my office. I'm pulled to check Twitter, email. Are things better? Am I in control? Maybe not. Sure, technology isn't the devil, but we also aren't the gods. In the words of Eugene Peterson, "**we have the technology of the gods without the wisdom of the gods.**" We are controlled more than we control. We have an illusion of sovereignty. Not knowing the day of our death, we live with blind ambition. We possess a sense of sovereignty that tells us we can minimize anxiety, insecurity, even suffering. **We believe the more we control, the less we will worry.** My illusion of control protrudes into my family. After ten minutes of genuine niceties with my kids, disputes and complaints inevitably break out. (They are 7, 6, and 2!) Summoning my sovereignty, I try to

wield godlike control over the chaos. Commanding obedience and issuing reprimands, I try to secure the peace...but it doesn't work. **More control won't lead to less worry.** Why? Because my sovereignty is an illusion. We are not in control of our children's hearts, much less anything else. The only thing we can control is ourselves, and we even need help with that! Control doesn't work because someone else is in control. There is a true Sovereign who is willing something greater than temporary silence and false peace at home. There is a Sovereign who has appointed the chaos of raising kids. God is willing a weaker father, a gentler father, a more patient father, a father who asks more questions than orders given. He could intervene at any moment, but he wants me to trust. Perhaps he has appointed a discomfort for you? With your projects, your life goals, the people you work with, and children you raise? Just because we can act like gods does not mean that we are God.

Jesus & Worry

The deceptive thing about the illusion of control, it that sometimes it works. Sometimes my kids to quiet down when I threaten them. Sometimes that employee does exactly what you want. But sometimes it doesn't. When kids act out, employees blow it, computers go down, anxiety takes us by storm. We're not used to it. We worry. We thought we were in control but have been operating under a spell, which when broken, brings our dreams crashing down around us. Bills, exams, doctor visits. What does Jesus have to say when worry hits? "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?" (Matt 11:25). Don't be anxious? Great, so not only am I anxious but Jesus is telling me not to be anxious. Now I am anxious about being anxious! Food/diet/health (Austin). We must have dietary restrictions per capita than any city (besides Portland). Clothing/fashion/appearance (We work hard to look like we don't care). O, then there's paying for all that stuff. Jobs, income, next position? Jesus says, "Don't worry." [Philippians 1&4] How do we do that? He tells us to compare ourselves to the birds, well fed, and to the flowers, well clothed. If God feeds and clothes them, then will he not take care of us? He tells us to consider the lilies. The word consider is to ponder and learn. In the moment of anxiety, rely on your head not your emotions. Notice what God does. He cares for the lesser, will he not care for the greater? Does that help? It doesn't help me much. Why? Because reason isn't the root of the problem. Use your head, but connect it to faith. "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?" (30). How does faith help worry?

Seek First the Kingdom

How does faith bring peace? Is this a sham? Well, it's not a sham because we all have faith. Regardless of what we look to for help (technology, God, ambition, personality), we look to something. We're creatures of trust. You might trust a spouse, but then you get hurt or burned, so you trust yourself. You think to yourself: I can secure happiness by leaving this marriage. Even though you don't trusting others, you're still trusting. You might trust a great business idea or career move, but what if we hit a recession again and the business goes under? The capital dries up? We all trust, every day. The question is: **Is what you're trusting able to hold you up, no matter what?** Are you in control? Is it in control? Jesus explains: "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, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Jesus said don’t worry by having faith, but now he tells us how: *seek first the kingdom of God*. Three critical elements that have to come together to get us away from worry: seek, first, kingdom. *Seek* first the kingdom. The word isn’t passive; it’s active. It can actually be translated **desire**—*desire the kingdom*. Yearn the kingdom. Crave the kingdom. It’s emotive, strong, persistent. Do you crave the kingdom? Do you pulse with desire for the things of God? If you don’t, you’ll be dominated by worry. How do you know are desiring the kingdom of God? Anxiety will go down and prayer will go up. I’ve been desiring my kingdom at home, trying to enforce peace instead of entreat peace. Worry goes up, prayer goes down. So how do we desire **the kingdom**? *The kingdom of God is the reign of Christ over all things, in his way, and in his time*. So to desire the kingdom is to long for Christ’s way over everything, especially the thing we worry about. Desiring the kingdom is desiring God’s will more than our will. Mueller said: “The will of God is to have no will of your own.” Is this mindless faith? Close your eyes and will it away? Are we to be indifferent about screaming kids, crashing economies, and vocational changes? Oh no, remember, *consider* the lilies. Reason out: Does God create? Does God provide? Does God care? If so, he’s the one that’s really in control, not you or them. He made it all—your kids, your spouses, your world. Trust who’s in charge. When something goes wrong with your Mac. Do you call up Microsoft? Know, you call the one who made it. You trust the one who has the power to fix it. You trust the one in charge. Desire the kingdom. Call upon the King. Trust his way and his time, especially when things seem broken. Desire, Kingdom, First. Seek **first** the kingdom of God. By first Jesus means first. *If the kingdom of God is the reign of Christ over all things, in his way and in his time*, then we would be foolish to not make it first. This is the kingdom of *God*, who dwells in unapproachable light, Lover-Beloved-Love, Restorer of shalom, the very Wind and Word of God, the Holy, holy, holy. His kingdom is first, not our kingdom. For the Christian, the kingdom of God is ultimate, supreme, of chief importance. We must long for it, for him, more than any other thing—more than family, security, technology, and even democracy. It must to be first because it is first. MLJ: “If it isn’t the first thing in your life, then you haven’t got it. Rather, it should have you.” How do you know the kingdom has you? You desire it. You *pray* for it: “Your kingdom come your will be done.” No caveats. The more we pray for it the more we will desire it. Pray it: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.” I’ve been praying this prayer regarding my attitude towards my kids. It’s changing me; it’s changing them. Their mother was gone all weekend. But instead of trying to get an iron grip on the weekend, I asked God for his kingdom to grip me. That I would desire his control first (over my control), in the disputes, trusting his agenda to change me. It’s not true that the more I control, the less I worry. Quite the opposite. The less I try to control, and the more I trust his control, the less I worry. My control is an illusion and grabs at fleeting peace. His control is true, and leads me into true peace. We need the wisdom of God, not just the fire of the gods. What we’ve forgotten is that Prometheus *Bound* is a tragedy, not a triumph. Bolted to the rock by the Vulcan, Prometheus was scorched by the sun and froze by the moon. By day birds came and pecked out his innards, while they grew back overnight. Riddled with anxiety, his suffering repeated itself day after day. We are meant to see that it is folly to trust in ambition and put



faith in arts and sciences. Instead, desire first the kingdom of God, the kingdom where the king is bolted to the tree for our transgressions, for our worries, and liberated for our triumph, for our peace. *Have faith in the reign of Christ over all things, in his way and in his time.*