

Introduction

How often do you clean out your closet? My closet just seems to shrink with time. It is not because it literally becomes smaller. It is rather because I try to squeeze more and more stuff in it. From time to time I just need to get in there and clean it out. This summer in our sermon series we are taking some time to do some personal closet-cleaning. Our lives can get cluttered just like closets in the midst of day-to-day living. The Apostle Paul has instructed believers in Jesus to put off the old self and the wardrobe that belongs to it and to put on the new self, created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. And in the course of the day-to-day we sometimes lose sight of the remnants of the old wardrobe that still remain. In this summer series we are shining the light on some of those pesky remnants that need to be mortified. One of these is anxiety.

We began this two-part study on worry, fear, and anxiety last week. Before we take off this morning, a brief review is in order. Last week we considered the foundational basis for handling fear and anxiety. We saw that even when there are threats to our experience of peace, sinful fear and anxiety express pride and put God in opposition to us because God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. For this reason we ought to earnestly engage to abstain from anxiety. We also saw that a key element in trusting God and casting our anxieties on him is to get our eyes on who he is.

This morning I want us to see these principles fleshed out in the heart of King David who wrote the 27th psalm. As we do, we will observe several strategic elements for putting off the sin of anxiety and putting on trust in the Lord and its corresponding peace and joy.

[Read Text; Pray]

Fear, worry, and anxiety are among the most disruptive sins in which we engage. They disrupt peace and bring physical discomfort. I briefly mentioned some of the negative physical effects last week, even including

panic attacks. Anxiety is just terribly unpleasant. It robs our joy and even makes it challenging to perform basic everyday tasks well. In its wake responsibilities sometimes seem overwhelming. Oftentimes we withdraw. Our flesh tells us the lie that hiding will make things better. In this way we can actually become basically paralyzed by fear.

But there is even more to it than our own unpleasant experience. In fact, what is more is even worse. Fear and anxiety and worry generally result in other sins against God.

I think, for example, of King Saul. A part of the great downfall of Saul was fear. God commanded Saul to strike down the Amalekites and to destroy all of them and everything they owned. Saul did not obey. He led the armies of Israel against the Amalekites. He destroyed much of their people and livestock, but he did not kill the Amalekite king, and he did not destroy the best of the livestock. When Samuel came from the Lord to meet him, Saul defended his actions saying that he had done the will of the Lord; the livestock he spared were for sacrificing to the Lord. Samuel replied, "To obey is better than sacrifice. And because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you from being king." Then Saul said this to Samuel: "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice." The root explanation for Saul's disobedience was fear.

I think also of Peter. He denied the Lord Jesus three times. And why? He was obviously afraid of how he might be seen or what might happen to him if he admitted that he was a follower of the Jesus who was at that moment standing trial before the high priest.

Just like Saul and Peter, we allow our fears and our anxieties to compound and complicate our sin by committing further disobedience against the Lord. Whenever obedience is at stake, fear of unpleasant ramifications tempts us to compromise. When has fear of people and fear of circumstances persuaded you to compromise obedience? Every time an evangelistic opportunity presents itself, the temptation to remain quiet presents itself as well. At times fear of human threat keeps us sinfully silent. When we don't trust God, we don't obey God. We need to abstain from anxiety because it

is sin, but we also need to abstain from anxiety because of the further disobedience in which it results. So let's dig in.

I. Threats to David's Peace

Last time we noted how Peter reveals that anxiety arises when there are threats to our peace. Those to whom Peter was writing found themselves in the midst of affliction and persecution. And as we survey this psalm we observe a number of ways in which the peace of David is threatened as well. In verse 2, David speaks of evildoers who assail him to eat up his flesh. They are adversaries and foes. In verse 3 he entertains the possibility that an army might come or war might arise against him. He even realizes his own sin is his enemy, for he pleads that the Lord will not turn away in anger. His adversaries include liars who witness falsely against him, and they breathe out violence. They attempt to shake his soul with threats.

David was clear about the things that tempted him to worry, fear, and anxiety. He identifies them here in this text. It is well for you and me to do the same. What are the things that tend to upset your peace? What does your flesh tend to reach out and grab onto in order to stir up a storm of anxiety or to subtly undermine the foundation of peace in your life? In order to put off anxiety, one of the first steps we need to take is to identify our anxiety triggers. Identifying these triggers puts us on the alert. We can then pray this psalm with those things in mind. If we will identify them, we can watch and pray that we might not fall into temptation; we can anticipate the battle they will bring and be able to stand in the evil day.

II. Signs of David's Peace

Though David makes it abundantly clear that threats to his peace abound, he also indicates that those threats have failed to disturb the confidence of his heart. He remains at peace despite what assails him.

This is the very first matter to which David draws attention from the outset of the psalm. He asks two rhetorical questions: "Whom shall I fear?" and "of whom shall I be afraid?" These questions express confidence. I fear nothing. I am afraid of nothing. These threats do not scare me. None of them make me anxious. None of them make me worry.

In verse 3 David imagines dire possibilities. Imagine an army coming against me. Many against one. Imagine a war breaking out against me, the intensity of war set in opposition against me. But he says even in the face of these, "my heart shall not fear," and "I will be confident." Deep on the inside is an assurance that will not be shaken. Deep on the inside where everything is that comes to the outside, he is at peace. He is unflappable. He is unflinching. He is assured. He is unruffled. Deep in his heart he does not wring his hands wondering, "whatever will I do?"

In verse 6 there is additional evidence of the calm in the heart of David in the midst of the storm of adversarial threat. His head will be lifted up above those of his enemies. He is not downcast or in turmoil. His head is lifted up so that in effect he looks down on his enemies. They do not threaten him. Indeed his joy is unabated. His heart is filled with happiness as he lifts himself in worship to the Lord.

Finally, we look to verse 13 and see his confidence. He says, "I believe that I will see the goodness of the lord in the land of the living." David is at peace, and his confidence is on full display. No matter what threatens him, he is convinced the goodness of God will be manifest even now. He is unshaken by the storm. When the storm blew up on the Sea of Galilee and the boat was tossed and waves started coming over the sides and the little vessel began filling with water, the disciples panicked. David seems to be saying that as long as Jesus is with me, it is okay. That is how strong are these vivid expressions of confidence and peace in his heart.

David's testimony can be ours. We do not have to be undone by the threats to our peace. Before the temptation to anxiety, we hear the flesh saying, "You just can't help it! You are a victim. Anxiety is like a disease and you can't do anything about it! Things are hopeless! Just tuck your tail between your legs and retreat. Withdraw. Give in. Give up." No. No. We can, like David, say, "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?" "My heart shall not fear; I will be confident." "My head will be lifted up. I will offer sacrifices and I will sing with joy." "I believe." So, how does he do it?

III. The Keys to David's Peace

What is it that fuels the peace and confidence of David in the face of the threats? There are two inseparable determinants which result in his tranquility of soul. We have already seen this in Peter but it is worth seeing and expanding here in the testimony of David. Two determinants of peace.

A. The first is to know God. Know God. David knew God. That is the underlying reason for his confidence. David's knowledge of God was the kevlar to resist the temptations the world was firing at him like bullets from a pistol. So what did David know of God?

1. He knew the power of God. Nothing and no one is stronger than God. Because of the power of God, if he is your light and salvation and the stronghold of your life, nothing can get to you. Nothing can break in. His confidence is that since the Lord is his light, salvation, and stronghold, he has no reason to fear. If God is for him, who can be against him? What can anyone or anything do to him? He really believes the Lord is his defender and guide and savior. And he really believes that there is no one like the Lord, strong and mighty. And this knowledge is crucial to his peace.

2. David was enamored with the beauty of God. Psalm 119:68 says of the Lord, "You are good and do good." The goodness of God is beautiful. This is the one thing David sought. It was to admire the beauty of the Lord. The glorious complexity of the wonder and majesty of the being of God captivated David's soul. He said, "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord ALL the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire/to meditate in his temple."

People who know what it takes to paint well, who have an eye for the skill involved in producing a great work of art, can be mesmerized for hours before the work of a skilled artist. And people who know God and begin to know him better want more than anything to simply know him better and to gaze upon his beauty. All the beauty in the world is what it is because of the beauty of God. And if you would gaze upon this grandeur, then you would be so occupied with what brings the greatest pleasure to your soul

that you simply would not have time nor the desire to be anxious over the little Chihuahuas that make noise at your heels.

3. David was convinced of the strength of the Lord and the beauty of the Lord, but he was also sure that the Lord would certainly protect those who take refuge in him. Marvel with me at verse 5. "For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock." This is protection and stability. Notice it is not that David never had trouble. No. He says, "in the day of trouble, he will hide me, conceal me and lift me." David knew trouble. He knew threats to come after his sheep, and he faced them. He saw and heard a giant calling out against his nation, yet he went before him with confidence. He was confident because he knew the Lord. And the Lord protects his people.

4. David further knew that God is holy and gracious. God's grace is amazing. He does not save people because they deserve it but rather in spite of the fact that they deserve his wrath. David highlights the holiness of God when he says in verse 9, "Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger; forsake me not." David knows his sin and he knows he is unworthy of the protection in which he rests. But he knows God is mercifully full of grace. In verse 7, David pleads, "be gracious to me." The assurance of God's grace feeds confident living. We should take long soaking baths in the knowledge of the grace of God.

5. David also knew that God is faithful. Look at verse 10. "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in." Parents, can a parent forget their children? You know how excited I am about becoming a grand dad? It has become so real this week. I was sitting there at my desk and my phone went off. I had received a text message. It was actually an ultra-sound photograph of my grand child. I have it on my phone and I will gladly show anybody who would like to see it after the service. I can't imagine forgetting my grand child even as I could never imagine forgetting my child. And that is the point David is making about God. It is unthinkable that his parents would forget him. But God is even more faithful to his children than a mother and father ever could be. That means that when threats to your peace begin to rain down and shake you,

you can be sure that if the Lord is your spiritual father through faith in Christ, he will not abandon you. His great plan involves the very things that threaten your peace. You can rest in him. He will NEVER leave you!

6. The last attribute I will mention here is found in verse 11. David knew the Lord. And what he knew about him is that he is a shepherd. He teaches and leads his sheep. "Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies." He entrusts himself to the shepherd of his soul. He is a sheep. He has enemies. They are bigger than him and they threaten him, but God is a great shepherd who will teach him and guide him. This is who God is. And if you don't know him, you are missing out. You see how important it is to know God in order not to fall prey to worry and anxiety and fear?

But David also shows us what is necessary in order to know God. We must seek him. Those who know God in the way David knew him are those who seek God. The one thing David sought was to know God. One thing I have asked and will seek after: to dwell in God's house and gaze on his beauty. "You [Lord] have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, Lord, do I seek." Are you seeking God? Especially you who struggle with anxiety and fear, are you seeking to know God better? You must know him. To know him is to know peace, but to know him you must seek him.

B. Now the second determinant to peace in your life, to putting off worry, is to trust the Lord. To trust the Lord is to rest in him. It is to cast your anxieties on him. It is to rest in the confidence of who he is and what he has said he will do. Know him and rest in who he is. Now, how can you evidence trust in the Lord? Are there actions you can take that express trust? Absolutely! We see them right here in David—four actions by which David manifests trust in the Lord. These are four acts of faith by which we too can put off anxiety. So listen carefully.

1. Proclaim. Proclamation. Proclaim that your trust is in the Lord. Preach it. Preach it to yourself. Preach it to others. Proclaim your trust in him. This is the way David launches into the psalm. "The Lord is my light and my salvation . . . The Lord is the stronghold of my life." And he proclaims not only the safety that the Lord is to him, but he also proclaims the certainty

that his enemies will not succeed because the Lord is his salvation. "When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, it is they who stumble and fall." This is the truth if the Lord is your light and salvation. Assure your heart by proclaiming to it these truths.

2. Praise. Adoration. Praise the Lord for his greatness. Rejoice with sacrifices of praise and singing before him in the day of threat. Sing and make melody to the Lord. In song we affirm with our whole being what we know to be true. In singing our emotions themselves are knit together with our understanding and with our faith proclamation. When you praise God you are brought to speak adoringly and gratefully of his beauty. Your meditations are full with expressions of his greatness and your heart is renewed to flee from things which displease him and to embrace him with affection and joy. So do it.

3. Pray. Supplication. This whole psalm is a prayer, but there are sub-prayers within the whole which underscore letting go of anxiety and casting it on the Lord. Prayer is an expression of trusting God. In Philippians 4, what does Paul say? "Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Do not be anxious but pray. Prayer is a straightforward expression of trust in the Lord. Notice how David prays in this psalm. "Hear me." Implied is "forgive me." "Don't leave me." Implied is "Save me." "Teach me. Lead me." So in prayer, give your anxieties to the Lord. Ask him to sustain you. Ask him to teach you through your experiences and to lead you in the way of righteousness.

Jesus shows us how to pray about things that threaten us. No one has ever suffered anything so great as what he suffered on the cross for our sins. In the hours leading up to the crucifixion, Jesus was painfully aware of the incredible prospect that loomed before him. The reality of the cross was of such a weight upon his mind and he was in such agony that his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground. However, Jesus was not worried or anxious or fearful. What did he do? He prayed. He made known his request. And he trusted. He said, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

He didn't flinch. He didn't fear. He didn't wring his hands. He went willingly with the band that came to arrest him. He bore up under the beating. He carried his cross and was crucified. He paid the full price for atonement. He yielded up his spirit and died. And he arose. He defeated death and the grave for all who will trust in him.

4. Ponder. Meditation. What you think matters. What you meditate on matters. When Paul urges the Philippians to not be anxious but to pray, he adds that they should also be intentional about their thought lives. And, "brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." Let your minds dwell on these things. Ponder. David finishes up this psalm with the exhortation to wait on the Lord. It basically means to trust. Don't get ahead of the Lord in your temptation to be anxious. Don't take things into your hands. Don't listen to the flesh. Especially when it seems like the Lord is not moving in the direction you think he should, and when he is not moving as quickly as you think he should, wait. Wait on the Lord.

How do you wait on the Lord? Make sure you are letting your mind dwell not on the things that are concerning but on him and on what is lovely in his presence. Don't let the thoughts that unsettle your peace remain in your mind. Run them out with the truth, the beauty, the certainty of who God is and what he promises.

So here are four very practical matters for followers of Christ to master in order to put off anxiety. Proclaim. Praise. Pray. Ponder. Or if you prefer, Proclamation, Adoration, Supplication, Meditation. Here is how you wait for the Lord and let your heart take courage.

Conclusion

One of the passages of scripture to which you should turn in times of the temptation to anxiety is Romans 8:31-39. I close with it. Hear the word of the Lord.

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”