

Anxieties

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[0 : 0 0] Now, we want to turn to God's Word this evening, and we want to turn to the chapter we read, 1 Peter chapter 5, and I want to draw your attention to the text for this evening, which is verse number 7, 1 Peter 5 verse 7, where we read, cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

It may well be the kind of verse that you have underlined in your Bible if you're in the habit of underlining verses that speak particularly to you, because this is certainly a well-known verse.

And perhaps as a missionary speaker this evening, you might expect a sermon on some great principles of world mission, or on planting churches, or on the growth and expansion of God's kingdom throughout the world.

Well we spoke about that a little this morning. What I want to turn our attention to this evening is something that is certainly relevant to those of us who are missionaries, and which of us, serving Christ, is not a missionary.

It is not a verse that speaks to us all at a very personal level. It speaks to the missionary who is a long way away from home, and is working perhaps in very difficult circumstances, and quite different circumstances from what we work in here in this country.

[1 : 4 2] This verse speaks to such a person. It has certainly spoken to me in past years. A long way away from family and the traditional support networks.

But it's also a verse I believe that is relevant to every single one of us, because we all have anxieties.

Peter recognizes this basic fact about us, and he says, we have them.

That's really my very brief first point, that we need to recognize that we have anxieties. Now the very alert among you will no doubt be saying, ah, but what about what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 6, where he says, therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear.

Is not life more important than food and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

[3 : 0 8] Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes?

See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin, yet I tell you that not even Solomon, in all his splendor, was dressed like one of these.

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

So do not worry saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. And these are well-known words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount, where he tells us that our priority must be to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these other things.

[4 : 26] What you will eat, what you will wear, how you will clothe yourselves, in other words, all the normal, everyday things of this world and life, these things will be given to you because our heavenly Father knows that you need them.

And while Jesus is certainly there in the Sermon on the Mount, advising us, commanding us not to worry, nevertheless Peter, ever the realist, comes to us and says, cast all your anxieties on the Lord.

Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Now for Peter's first hearers, the issue was very clear.

This was not a theoretical thing. Do you have anxieties? Do you have concerns? Do you have worries? Indeed in this very chapter it's made obvious that his first readers were those who were experiencing fiery difficulties and trials and sufferings.

In other words, this was not a theoretical issue, one for discussion and debate. It was something that in a very real sense was there present in front of them.

[5 : 46] They stood the risk, Peter's first readers of losing their families, being separated from their work and possibly even losing their lives.

And we hear in the 21st century, Christians, believers, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet we are people with anxieties.

And you may have come here this evening with anxiety within you. You may have come here this evening with concerns about the past, about things in the present, your health, your job, your income, your finances in general.

You may have worries and anxieties about these things, or you may look to tomorrow and the future and ask yourself, how will I cope?

How will I manage? What will happen if? And these are thoughts that I believe are common to all of us.

[7 : 11] What our texts this evening addresses is very, very simple. How should we respond? How should we respond when anxieties or distractions or cares threaten to overwhelm us in our Christian life?

And so first of all, this evening I want to say to you, notice please what Peter does not tell us to do in this very simple and this very short verse.

He does not tell us that we should deny our anxieties, to pretend that they don't exist, nor does he tell us to suppress them, to push them under, to hope that one day they'll go away if we just get on with the business of life and somehow we'll wake up one morning and these anxieties will be gone.

He doesn't tell us either that we should run from them and seek in some escapist way to try just to pretend again that they don't exist and live a life without acknowledging their reality.

He doesn't tell us to deny them, he doesn't tell us to suppress them, he doesn't tell us to escape them, nor does he tell us to dwell on them, to feed them, to nurture them.

[8 : 33] He doesn't tell us that anxiety is something that needs to grow to a certain size before it's worth taking attention of. He doesn't tell us that it's something that we should engage in conversation with others all the time about our own little anxieties and concerns and worries.

He doesn't say that we should dwell on them at all. Instead, the word very clearly here in this very, very simplest of texts tells us precisely what we have to do and Peter uses a very graphic word to describe what we have to do with our anxieties, whatever they may be.

He says, cast them. And this word is indeed a very graphic and strong word. It means to throw, to hurl, to chuck.

And it makes me think of the actions of the bin men. Now here in the city of Edinburgh, such a sophisticated city, you have these very elegant lorries that go around that pick up the wheelie bins at the back and lift up and toss all of the refuse inside without almost any human contact.

In Lima where I live and work, we don't have such sophistication. We have a lorry that goes around the streets and behind it are three or four of the bin men.

[10:06] And you've put your rubbish out into the street the night before in black bin bags and the bin men come along and they lift up your black bin bag and they take such delicate care of it, don't they?

Not at all. They pick it up and they hurl it into the back of their lorry. They don't care tuppence about it. And when they hear the tinkle of broken glass, they're glad because the contents have been smashed inside the lorry.

They go along and they just pick up the rubbish from each household and toss it, hurl it into the back of their bin lorry.

And that's the word that Peter uses here. That's what you have to do with your anxiety. You have to throw it away with all of your energy and might.

That's the first thing. And the second thing he says you have to do is, well, it's brought out here in the NIV. We have an imperative at the start of verse 7.

[11:18] Cast all your anxiety on him. And I want to tell you that in the original that's not an imperative but rather a participle.

And you say, oh, come on, does that really matter? And I say, yes, it does. And I'm going to tell you why it matters. Because if we translate this correctly, we would begin verse 7, casting.

Putting cast as a command at the beginning suggests that verse 7 is disengaged from verse 6 before it. But instead, when we put correctly as we ought to, and as the translators ought to have done, the participle casting, we see that it forms part of verse 6, which precedes it.

And if we look at verse 6, we see something that helps us understand this a little further. Verse 6 begins, humble yourselves therefore.

There's the command. Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time, casting all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

[12:36] Do you see what's happening to the sentence? You see that now verse 7 is part and parcel of verse 6. And the command that we have in this sentence is the command at the very beginning of verse 6.

Humble yourselves therefore. Well what does this mean in practical terms? We saw very well to talk about imperatives and participle and so on, but what does that translate into meaningful, something meaningful for you and me today?

Let me put it like this. The presence and practice of humility is directly related to the absence of anxiety.

Let me say that again. The presence and practice of humility as verse 6 commands us is directly related to the absence of anxiety.

Let's explore that a little bit further. People tend to fall in one of two broad categories.

[13 : 54] A broad brush of paroch, I appreciate that, but nevertheless there are those who feel they can do nothing. I can't do anything.

I'm not capable. I'm not worthy. I'm not up to it. I don't have the skills. That kind of person. And there are those who say, I can handle it.

I can manage it. Leave that to me. I'll deal with it. That kind of person. I don't know which kind of person you are. I know which kind of person my wife would say I am.

But you see, if we are seeking to humble ourselves, it's all very well talking about humbling ourselves.

But what do we do in practical terms to humble ourselves? If we are self preoccupied, if we are full of concern about ourselves, if we are absorbed in our own world of cares and concerns and worries, if we dwell on our own problems, and if we love when somebody asks, how are you not to reply with a customary polite, fine thank you, but rather to give them a long list of all the things that we are worried and concerned about and our ailments and our illnesses and our problems and the illnesses in our family, then we have made ourselves the focus of our own little world.

[15 : 43] And I say to you, that is not humbling yourself under God's almighty hand. Why do I say that?

Because Peter tells us here that part and parcel of humbling yourself is casting all your anxieties on him.

And if we don't do that, then we are not humbling ourselves. We think that we are more important.

But then there's the other extreme of person, the sort of person who says, leave that to me, I can handle it, I can do it, no problem, that's fine, I'll deal with it.

And when that person has anxieties or cares or worries, then they tend to say, I'll fix it. I'll sort it. I'll deal with it. I'll speak to that person.

[16 : 42] I'll arrange that situation. I'll deal with it so that that anxiety or worry is taken care of.

And instead of humbling ourselves under God's almighty hand, we also have made ourselves the masters of our own fate.

We have not recognized that God's hand is almighty and that he is the one in control.

And so I say to you again that this has practical consequences for us in our daily lives when Peter writes, cast all your anxiety on him.

It's part and parcel of the process that every Christian has to cultivate of humbling ourselves.

[17 : 42] When we take matters into our own hands, that's an absence of humility. We have to recognize that all of our actions and all of our thoughts and indeed all of our anxieties that perhaps we're not even willing to share with our closest and dearest, that the little anxieties which nag away at the back of our minds in the darkness of the night, these all have to be brought into the light of God's all mightiness.

That is part of humbling ourselves. He knows all that we have to face. He knows every detail of my life and of your life.

And as I said earlier, some of us here might be those struggling with anxieties. He knows the weight that is on your shoulders.

He knows that when the TV goes off, these are the thoughts and anxieties that invade your mind. When you try to go to sleep at night and you lay your head on the pillow, these are the thoughts that race through your mind, anxieties.

And I don't know what they are for you, but God knows. And God has always known.

[19 : 30] And God knows what you can and what you cannot do. And one of the things he makes it clear here is what you should do with those anxieties.

It's not great theology. It's very, very practical. He says you've got to cast those anxieties on him.

He gives us that responsibility. He doesn't give us those anxieties to weigh us down, but if we have those anxieties, he says here's what you have to do.

Are you going to do it? I say again, the presence of anxiety is directly linked to an absence of humility.

It's hard to recognize, I know, that our times are in his hands. That can be very difficult in the pressure of situations that appear to be beyond our control, that appear to be spiraling ever more and more out of control.

[20 : 52] It's hard for us to humble ourselves under the almighty hand of God, casting all those anxieties that are threatening our peace of mind, that are threatening our stability.

It's hard. But that's what the Word says you have to do. And the question is, do you believe it?

And do you believe it enough to do it? And thirdly, and finally, we see why we recast our anxieties on him.

Very simple this evening. Very simple and straightforward. Look at what the Word says, casting all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Now again, notice what Peter does not say. It's always instructive, I think, to notice what an author does not say. Because sometimes we can think that the subtext underneath it says something that it simply doesn't.

[22 : 08] He does not say, I will remove the cause of your anxiety. That is not a promise that we're given.

He does not say, cast all your anxiety on him for he cares for you and I will solve your problems and difficulties.

That again is not something that the Word teaches us. We do not have a magician savior.

Rather we have a savior who is with us in those anxieties and invites us to cast them on him because he cares for you.

Now to Peter's first readers, that was indeed a revolutionary thought. In a world of pagan deities, in a world of the so-called gods, and human beings were simply their playthings to be told that the true living God cares for you was revolutionary.

[23 : 32] That God was not some impersonal force. That there is one in heaven who cares for you was something very, very striking.

And I suggest to you this evening that it's fairly striking in today's world. But as you and I go out from this place, we go out into a world that doesn't care for you and me, that doesn't have any great interest in you or me, but rather carries on in its own impersonal way its own affairs.

We go out into a world that is indifferent. We go out into a world that has embraced a philosophy of the impersonal, that has embraced the great goddess of mother nature and natural forces with the firm conviction that mother nature knows best.

And you know that. And I don't need to go into great detail in that. But it's based on a basic misunderstanding that somehow impersonal nature cares for you.

It doesn't. There was an American writer who wanted to get close to nature and she decided to retreat into the woods and forests of New England.

[25 : 26] And she did so some years back and observed nature very, very closely. And she reported something really quite remarkable.

And she was very honest in what she wrote. She said, what I expected to find was the beauty of nature and the kindness of nature and the loveliness of nature.

And what I saw when I observed nature at close quarters was how incredibly cruel and impersonal nature is.

She wasn't writing as a Christian. She was simply observing what she saw. And yet in our society today we have largely embraced that notion of mother nature.

But Peter's message comes to us in the midst of that and we can take it into the world in which we are placed with these ringing words.

[26 : 33] He cares for you. And that is a remarkable message to take.

Do you get anxious? I do. What do I have to do? I have to cast my anxiety on the Lord.

Maybe it's a long time since we knelt by our bedsides and simply cast all those anxieties that we have onto Him.

And I cast them onto the Lord and I asked myself, who is the Lord that referred to here in this verse? He's the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior, my Redeemer, my friend.

And as I look into His Word and I reflect on my own Christian experience, I recall that His ultimate expression of care for me, which He reminds me of in this verse, is seen on the cross.

[27 : 57] And when I look at that cross, I see that He cares for me. And when you reflect on that cross, on the one hanging there bearing your guilt and mine, Peter's words ring true.

He cares for you. God's ultimate expression of His care for you is seen therefore on the cross. It's heard in His cry, Lord, forgive them.

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they're doing. And He's experienced that care in an instant.

And this day, you will be with me in paradise.

That's the care that He has already shown. That's a fact of history. And now Peter says to you, 2,000 years later, cast your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

[29 : 15] May God bless His Word to us this evening.