

The Monster of Anxiety
Matthew 22:37, Genesis 3:6-11

Slide 1

Last week I talked about Monsters Inc. and how the skilled "scarers" were employed in The Scare Factory to harvest the screams of little children to power their city called "Monstropolis".

However, even if it was just an animated movie, we need to admit that there's a scare factory in existence today.

We struggle with mind monsters because when Adam and Eve encountered the devil in the Garden of Eden. They believed his lies over God's truth.

According to Paul in Romans 5:12, not only did we inherit their sin we also inherited their thought process. So, in the garden not only did we lose relationship, dominion, and authority, we lost our mind, too.

Then Jesus came to redeem, restore, reconcile and justify us just as if we'd never sinned. He was and is on a mission to restore everything we lost.

Jesus preached and taught about another Kingdom; spending His time to get us to learn to think differently and correctly.

He declared that we have a part to play in this path to deliverance and restoration. Matthew 22:37, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."*

In this verse, He tells us that we're made up of three parts: heart, soul and mind. Most of us have allowed Jesus to save our heart and soul but we haven't allowed Him to renew or redeem our mind.

Because of that, we struggle. Paul knew this reality and declared in Romans 7:25a, “...in my mind am a slave to God’s law...” We serve God with our mind.

Therefore, we must understand that we can have a new heart and a saved soul but still have the same mind.

That’s why, after a powerful worship service, or even during the message, your mind can begin to operate in doubt, disbelief and distraction. We must renew our mind.

Adam and Eve choose not to be influenced by the truth of God's Word and discovered their mind was now controlled by Satan’s lies. They began to think differently than what Godly minds should.

They encountered the mind monster that’s still working in our midst today.

Today we’re going to see if that same mind monster is prowling the recesses of our mind on a regular basis.

Slide 2

Genesis 3:6-11, “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

They ate the fruit to gain wisdom or mind power and, in that moment, they were overtaken by two mind monsters.

I could probably argue which one they encountered first but the order isn't important. What's important is that these mind monsters are to this day the favorites of our enemy to use on us!

So, don't get distracted by an argument that I may address them out of order. Let's focus on how to uproot these monsters so that we can free our mind.

Notice first, they ate the fruit and immediately they took action to cover themselves and hide. Why? I would submit that they hid out of fear of punishment or retribution from God.

In their mind, they suddenly developed a preconceived idea that God would be ruthless with them and that they wouldn't be able to survive His reaction.

Think about it. The only interaction they've had with God since day one is that of relationship, camaraderie, companionship, provision, and protection. They've never seen God angry or in a punishment mode.

However, now, in one instance, they jump from trusting God to fearing Him. They instantly came to the conclusion that something bad was going to happen and so, they responded, "*I was afraid.*"

God addresses the origin of this mind monster when He asked who told them that. He's making it clear that He didn't tell them to be afraid.

I believe, in that one moment when they ate of the fruit, the principle of anxiety was established.

There's this sense of doom or dread that tends to rise up in us. Our mind runs away with us. We think worst case scenarios rather than best case.

Haven't you met people who had the world by the tail and yet it seemed they were unexplainably filled with anxiety over what could, might, or may happen?

Even though one clinical psychologist did a study and determined that about 85 percent of the things people worry about never happen, our world is shaped with this constant anxiety in our mind!

We're always waiting for the other shoe to drop. Waiting for the bad report. Waiting for the news that everything is gone.

When you looked in the mirror, do you see someone who should be content and joyful only to see someone who's overtaken and overcome by worry, apprehension, and uncertainty?

It's like a believers who trusts Jesus for salvation but can't trust Him enough to believe the best is yet to come, that He's watching for us.

We sang Bill and Gloria Gathier's song before my message, remember?

*Because He lives I can face tomorrow
Because He lives all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living just because He lives*

The words sound good, but we operate in a spirit of anxiety because we refuse to allow Him to hold the future.

Even though there's no unknown to Him, even though there's no tomorrow for Him, even though He walks into our future ahead of us, we still fear!

So, since we have identified this mind monster that set up residence in our minds long ago, we must go to war to remove him from our heads.

Fortunately for us there is a prescription that effectively overcomes this monster. Paul helps us out with this.

Slide 3

Philippians 4:4-7, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Be anxious for nothing! That's just great. Another person is telling me not to be anxious or worry. Yet Paul goes beyond that. He literally gives us a prescription for overcoming anxiety.

So, let's work through this. First, anxiety is destroyed by the presumption of God's presence!

Remember what happened in the garden? Adam and Eve sinned, then God showed up afterwards. During what they perceived as the absence of His presence they're overtaken by anxiety.

Anxiety is built on the presumption of absence. We assume that His silence means He isn't here.

We assume that He isn't watching. We assume that what we went through was so bad that He had to be on vacation.

It took us by surprise so surely it had to take Him by surprise. Anxiety overtakes us when we think God is absent.

Paul shows us that we can destroy anxiety by not only recognizing God's continual presence, but also by making His presence a certainty by worshipping Him.

He starts it off by saying, "*rejoice in the Lord.*" He's literally saying, "*Worship the Lord*" and then he doubles down, "*I will say it again: Rejoice!*"

Maybe he'd learned the truth of Psalms 22:3 where David informs us that God dwells in the praises of Israel.

In other words, we need to understand that our praises are irresistible to God. He hears and inhabits.

So, Paul says rejoice. Bring His presence to bear. Paul states emphatically, "*The Lord is at hand!*" Our worship brings the Lord to our side!

We need to change our perspective and the way that we think. You don't worry if you recognize that the God of the Universe is at hand!

If we would learn to magnify our God Who's present rather than magnifying trouble that doesn't even exist yet, then our minds would be at peace.

Anxiety is destroyed by worship. Have you ever noticed that you don't worry as much when you are involved in a worship service?

It's only after you stop worshipping, get in your car and head home that worry overtakes you.

Maybe David had it right when in Psalms 34:1 he stated, *“I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”*

Maybe David knew what Paul knew, that if we would be in worship continually, with music or without music, surrounded by other worshippers or in the privacy of our own car that the mind monster called anxiety would have to struggle to operate in that atmosphere.

Every time you start to worry you should start to worship. Rejoice! Don't presume God's absence. Instead presume His presence.

Since this is a war we are engaged in, we should be singing George Henry Powell's World War I marching song, *Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag and smile, smile, smile.*

One of the choruses goes like this:
*What's the use of worrying?
It never was worthwhile, so
Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag
And smile, smile, smile*

Usher in His presence daily with praise! Rejoice! His goodness never ends. Rejoice! His mercy endures forever. Rejoice! In His right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Slide 4

Paul also tells us that anxiety is destroyed by proper prayer. Paul understood our needs. He wasn't naive enough to think that we would go through this life without needs.

Even in the Garden, after the fall, God addressed the needs that the fall created. He discarded man's attempt to cover himself and provided animal skins for clothes.

Needs are real. Needs are constant. However, Paul was teaching us that needs don't have to result in anxiety. He tells us to pray about our needs. Now, that isn't news to us.

We've all been taught to tell God what we need. However, what we miss is that Paul taught that it's proper prayer that destroys anxiety.

It's through proper prayer that the mindset of anxiety is broken. *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with gratitude, make your requests known to God."*

While we're presenting our laundry list of needs, our shopping list, our wish list to God, we're being overcome by anxiety because we fail to approach our needs and our God correctly.

I need a dollar. Anyone have a dollar? Thank you. Again, is there someone who has a dollar? Thank you. I am saying thank you for the completed action before I receive the dollar.

Proper prayer is when we approach God with thanksgiving for completed action. Thanks for what He's already done.

What has He already given you that you can be mindful of so that the fear of what He hasn't done yet is diminished?

2 Peter 1:3, *"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."*

It is finished. It is completed. Our needs are simply an opportunity for us to assert the fact that while I am figuring it out, God is working it out!

I don't have to ask Him what He's already finished and provided. *"By His stripes I am healed."*

I can thank Him for what He has already done! I can thank Him for His protection. Lord, You have commanded Your angels to watch over me. It's already complete.

Then in Matthew 6, Jesus weighs in with His guidance. Matthew 6:25-32, *“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 than food, and the body more 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. Are you not much more valuable than they?”*

Then He concludes this assertion by stating... *“Your heavenly Father knows that you need them.”*

If He knows we need them, then He'll provide. Once we learn this, we learn to approach God appropriately thanking Him for completed actions.

Some of us are full of anxiety because we aren't convinced that He'll come through.

Even our anxiety shows in our prayers! We beg. We plead. We fret. We wring our hands. We negotiate. We make promises.

Listen! Anxiety is destroyed when we pray properly. Thank you for your completed work!

Slide 5

Conclusion

Finally, anxiety is destroyed by humility. Pride and anxiety are a package deal. Adam and Eve thought they were now responsible for their own covering. Prior to this God was seen as their provider.

I believe Peter understood this connection. That's why in 1 Peter 5:6-7 he says, *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."*

Another version says, *"Let him have all your worries and cares, for he is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you."*

Too many of us can't get rid of anxiety because we can't get rid of pride. We feel like we're responsible. We feel like the weight of provision, healing, breakthrough, everything is on us.

We act like the lambs in that chorus of the Whiffenpoof Song.

*We're poor little lambs who have lost our way
Baa, baa, baa
We're little black sheep who have gone astray
Baa, baa, baa*

*Doomed from here to eternity
Lord have mercy on such as we
Baa, baa, baa*

We can't let God have our worries and cares if we think we're in charge!

If we insist on doing it our way, figuring it all out on our own, depending on our ability and ingenuity, it'll produce anxiety. If we have to cover ourselves, then we'll be covered by anxiety.

Instead, when we humble ourselves we will realize that He's thinking about us more than we're thinking about us.

We don't have to be anxious because He's mindful of us. *"He is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you."*

Finally, Paul says, *"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will protect your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*

What does that sound like to you? To me that sounds like the absence of anxiety. Paul promises God's peace!

There's an inferior peace. Peace that's based on bank accounts, popularity, cars, houses, etc. But then there's God's peace.

God's peace is different. It's durable. It's beyond understanding. We're not anxious in the unknown because we have peace that's beyond understanding.

It's just like what the late, great Shirley Ceasar sang about in *This Joy I Have*, *"The world didn't give it and the world can't take it away!"*

Lack can't take it away. Sickness can't take it away. Difficult situations can't take it away. My situation doesn't even have to change, and I can still have peace that's not understandable to the world.

Anxiety has to go because my mind is full of worship. My mind is full of praise. My mind is full of thanksgiving. My mind is full of Him rather than being full of me!

Who told you that you had to be afraid? Who told you I wasn't here for you? Who told you that I wouldn't provide? Heal! Deliver! Focus! Focus on His presence, on His faithfulness and on His peace.