Do Not Be Anxious

Why "fear God" and "fear not" belong in the same sermon

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, October 4, 2026
PASSAGES	Luke 12:22-34; Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 10:28-33; Philippians 1:21-23; Luke 6:20-26; 2 Corinthians 11:24-27
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:18:20 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

In the same sermon, Jesus told his friends to fear God and told them to have no fear. Those are not two moods to balance; the first is what makes the second possible. Once God is what you fear and love most, the things anxiety feeds on — comfort, approval, a full closet, a longer life — lose their grip.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- "Fear God" and "fear not" came out of the same mouth in the same speech. Matt's claim is that they are not in tension at all — the fear of God is the thing that frees you from fearing everything else.
- The man who wrote "do not be anxious about anything" had been lashed five times, beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked three times and left adrift at sea. He was not writing from a comfortable life.
- If we love comfort and fear discomfort, Paul's life is a train wreck and his command is nonsense. Reorienting what the heart fears and loves is what makes the command legible.
- There are worse things than dying. Hezekiah begged for fifteen more years, got them, and spent his reputation and his nation's future in a single act of pride.
- Worry cannot add an hour to your life, and a longer life is not necessarily the best thing that could happen to you. Who we live for matters more than how long we live.

- The ravens and the lilies are not a promise of a well-stocked closet. Jesus had nowhere to lay his head and Paul went cold and hungry, and both were seeking first the kingdom.
- Three verses after "don't be anxious about what you'll wear," Jesus says sell your possessions. If the passage were about getting things, that is an unaccountably sharp turn to the left.
- Jesus interprets his own words, and his reading is the one to use — "it's the true north, it's plumb." A reading that makes him make less and less sense as he keeps talking is the thing that's wrong.

▶ 1:18:20

Last Sunday Matt made the case that Christians are meant to fear God — really fear him, "not just a nod of general respect at the end of an '80s movie," but fear proportionate to his power and to the fact that the universe revolves around him and not around us. He expected pushback and did not get any. This week was the other half of the two-parter, because the same Jesus who said *fear God* also said *have no fear*, and he said both in the same breath.

First, imagine the day he comes back

▶ 1:20:43

Before any of the anxiety material, Matt spent several minutes on something he admitted was his own imagination — offered, in his words, with a grain of salt. Christians do not merely believe you die and go to ghost paradise forever. There is a return of the King, in a resurrected body that can greet you, walk with you and eat fish. So picture it the way Christopher Nolan pictured Batman: gritty, physical, plausible. Jesus standing on the Temple Mount, livestreamed, visible like lightning from east to west, understood in every language at once.

And then picture what he does with the airtime. Rwanda today, France tomorrow. Widows and orphans brought up on stage to tell what was done to them, with Jesus saying: you cried out and thought nobody came, and that ends today. The Tonkawa brought forward here in Central Texas — land taken, people forgotten, and now the whole world knows your story and I am restoring things to you. "The most watched thing of all time could be Jesus going to the UN General Assembly," Matt said, and then, deadpan, that he does not own a television and would buy a big one and put his nose right up against it.

His point in all of it was longing, not prediction. "There's nothing boring about Jesus." And measured against that day, the things we are frantic about now will look a little silly, and some of the things we never worried about will sting.

The man who wrote “do not be anxious about anything”

▶ 1:26:05

> “Do not be anxious about anything, 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.”
>
> PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7 ↗

Then Matt asked who wrote it. Isn’t this the man who was lashed thirty-nine times on five separate occasions, beaten with rods, stoned once, shipwrecked three times — once left adrift in the open sea? In danger from rivers, from robbers, from his own people, from false brothers, with toil and sleepless nights and hunger and exposure (2 Corinthians 11:24–27). He nodded back to Karen’s message on fasting: Paul’s hunger was not a chosen discipline with a meal waiting at the end of it. It was being stoned, left for dead, naked and cold, and there simply being no food.

“He’s the guy who said, ‘Don’t be anxious about anything,’” Matt said. “I think the answer to that conundrum — which is not really a conundrum — is the fear of God.” Run it the other way and the math collapses: if we love comfort, Paul’s life is a disaster; if we fear discomfort, he should have been a wreck every morning; if what we want is the approval of outsiders, we will be anxious messes and the command will not even parse.

There are worse things than dying

▶ 1:29:34

He put a rhetorical question to the room — what is the worst thing that can happen to you? — and then read from *How Long, O Lord*, the Don Carson book he assigns every year in the discipleship course he teaches. Carson’s answer runs through Hezekiah, who was under sentence of death, begged for fifteen more years and got them (2 Kings 20:1–6), and then inside that reprieve destroyed his own reputation for integrity in one incident prompted by pride, with disastrous consequences for his nation.

“That is why I decided there are worse things than dying,” Carson wrote — he would rather die than outlive his love for Christ, than be unfaithful to his wife, than deny by a profligate life what he had taught in his books. Matt let that sit. What we fear in a healthy way and love in a healthy way is what makes obedience to *do not be anxious* possible, and it is what let Paul take actual joy in suffering.

> "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better."
>
> PHILIPPIANS 1:21–23 ↗

"Who we live for is more important than how long we live," Matt said. "The glory of God is more important than the glory of our bank account." When we are in his hands, losing some worldly advantage is not much of a loss — provided that is not what we were clinging to.

Fear the one who can destroy both

▶ 1:32:33

> "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."
>
> MATTHEW 10:28–31 ↗

Matt read "hell" here as *Gehenna*, the valley that Isaiah and Jeremiah use as the picture of God destroying his enemies in judgment. And he pointed out that the terrifying sentence and the tender one are back to back, and that the passage then raises the stakes again:
whoever acknowledges Jesus before men, he will acknowledge before the Father; whoever denies him, he will den
Men can tease you, hurt your body, even take it. They cannot touch your soul. Living for what God actually cares about is how, by the grace of the Spirit, we let go of the things we grip so tightly that they fill us with anxiety.

Ravens, lilies, and what the promise is actually for

▶ 1:34:21

> "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!"
>
> LUKE 12:22–24 ↗

If life really were all about food, Matt asked, what would it say about God that you didn't have a steak dinner last night? And Jesus goes straight at the arithmetic of worry: which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? We do not control the length of our lives, worrying will not extend them, and extending them is not necessarily the best thing that could happen to us anyway. Remember Hezekiah.

▶ 1:36:07

> "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!"
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> LUKE 12:27–28 ↗

Here Matt pressed on the reading most of us drift into. Either Jesus is promising that we will all be better dressed than Solomon from now on, or he is saying something about the kingdom — because Jesus himself was stripped and crucified, and Paul went cold. God knows what we need, he is in charge, he takes care of us, and his understanding of what we need surpasses ours. That is the promise. A full closet is not.

▶ 1:38:05

Jesus' examples were food and clothing; Matt extrapolated to what our own nation seeks after — youth, vitality, beauty, riches, fame, likes — and landed on verse 31: *instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.* He granted the obvious first — all the food we eat and the clothes we wear come from what God has provided — and then set the counterexamples beside it. "Jesus had no place to call his own house. He lived a lifestyle that many of us would call impoverished," and he was stripped of his clothes at the end of it. Paul "was loved and valued by God — I'm sure of that — and occasionally went naked and hungry." Both were seeking first the kingdom. "I don't see any contradictions here." God is in charge and takes care of us, and food and clothing do matter for this earthly life to go well; this earthly life going well is simply not the top concern — not for those who fear and love God, and not for God. "You and who you are and knowing him matters more than your closet."

Fear not, little flock — now sell your possessions

▶ 1:39:46

> "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."
>
> LUKE 12:32–34 ↗

This was the hinge of the message, and Matt's interpretive rule going in was simple: "I usually assume Jesus just makes sense. I mean, I always assume Jesus makes sense." Read the lilies as a wardrobe promise and Jesus makes less and less sense the longer he talks. "If it was about filling our closets, verse 33 is a weird sharp turn to the left. Sell your possessions. I thought we were trying to get them. No, sell them. But what about Solomon's robes?" He stopped on the moneybags too: "Is he talking about money bags? Or is Jesus also like us capable of metaphor?" The kingdom, he said, is a bigger focus in this sermon than our closets.

Read it that way and the whole paragraph holds together: don't be anxious about what God provides, don't be afraid, the Father does want to give you the kingdom, so start investing there. "Sell your stuff here. Build your treasure there." Otherwise you end up with the theology that "the more God loves me and the more I love him, the more leftover money I'll have every month." Track the whole sentence instead, the way you have to with *fear God, do not fear*: do fear God, don't fear man, don't be anxious about the stuff God can provide for you — "and by the way, get rid of your stuff."

Blessed are you who are hungry now

▶ 1:41:40

His last check on the reading was Jesus' own blessings and woes. Take the prosperity reading seriously and Jesus would have to be saying, as Matt put it, "I'm sorry for you those who are hungry now. I guess you didn't trust me hard enough." He says the opposite.

> "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven."
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> LUKE 6:20–23 ↗

"Maybe Jesus had an eye towards the kingdom a lot," Matt said. That, he suggested, is the attitude behind Paul's stoning and shipwrecks — "he's like, this is pretty cool. I don't know. Ask him." And wanting the reward is not a failure of humility: "Some people think it's like a false humility. Oh, I don't want to do things for reward." Jesus is the one who said to accumulate treasure in the moneybags that don't grow old, where there are no robbers and no moths. "I would like to be before him in all his splendor and have him reward me, and then have stuff that I could give him." Though he was careful about whose stuff it would be: "whatever prizes I have, he'll have given me. The only things I can offer him that are of any value are me, my energy, my time."

What he does not want is to arrive and offer as evidence a life that was rich, full, well fed and well liked, only to be met with the woes that follow. He played it out for the room, to its laughter: "See, Lord, I wasn't anxious. In my life, I was rich and full and I laughed and I was popular." Jesus says woe to you who are rich and full and laughing and popular. "But — but you said God would provide, and that's proof that I was living in faith." "No."

His perspective is true north

▶ 1:43:51

"Jesus' perspective is true. It's the true north. It's plumb," Matt said. "So what he thinks matters, and the way he's interpreting his own words is the way I should interpret his words. I don't want to be warped and focused on the things now that matter the least." Which is why the two halves of the two-parter only work together: "being told 'fear not' by Jesus only fits within this context of fear God. And to not be anxious makes sense because I fear and love God. I know into whose hands I will be placed. I know how little these little concerns now actually matter."

It is also why hardship can be received rather than merely survived. "I can actually rejoice when bad stuff happens to me for his name's sake. Not because I cut someone off, but for his name's sake." If something bad happens for that reason, it should be a yes — now there is something to hand over. He sized up his own share of it against Paul's and still intended to bring it: "Paul, these are my tiny potatoes that I'm giving the Lord. I was only shipwrecked zero times. But — can you stand over there?"

▶ 1:45:21

Then the line the whole message turns on: “the fear of God and the love of God will reorient what I’m anxious about, what in this life matters — and all these little things that we are scared about lose their sting, because the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.” A primary concern for the kingdom, he added, is what unlocks Paul: “Why did he act like that? It’s the same attitude. Don’t be anxious about anything, even if you’re being whipped or beaten or stoned or stranded and slandered and shipwrecked.” And he ran the conversation in reverse, which got the laugh it deserved — a modern Christian telling Paul he must not be walking in God’s favor, given all the shipwrecks and all the people saying bad things about him; look at us, well clothed and fed, with the favor of our neighbors; maybe you need to trust God more. “It’s funny now. And it’ll be even funnier and tragic when we see with more clarity.”

Where he left us

▶ 1:46:27

So he ended where he began, with a rhetorical question — but this one aimed at the Holy Spirit rather than at us. “I would like each of us to take this moment of reflection to ask, what fears would God like to deliver us from?” He gave the room a long silence to listen, and a fallback for anyone who came up empty: “If you can’t identify any, we should start with *God, teach me to fear you*… And if that’s a total I don’t know, we’re going to ask for the fear of God all the same.” Then he prayed exactly that — “Holy Spirit, please deliver us from all fear and teach us the fear of God, that we would know you and love you and walk in your ways, in Jesus’ name” — told the room the heart ministry teams would be up front in name tags, glad to pray with anyone about this or anything else, and sent the rest of us out the old way: “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Philippians 4:6–7
- 2 Corinthians 11:24–27
- 2 Kings 20:1–6
- Philippians 1:21–23
- Matthew 10:28–31
- Matthew 10:32–33
- Luke 12:22–24
- Luke 12:25–26
- Luke 12:27–28
- Luke 12:29–31
- Luke 12:32–34
- Luke 6:20–23
- Luke 6:24–26
- Proverbs 9:10

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt asked the room what the worst thing is that could happen to them. What came to mind for you — and what does that answer tell you about what you actually fear and love?
2. Where have you been reading the ravens and the lilies as a promise of comfort rather than a promise about the kingdom? What changes if Jesus meant the second?
3. Carson said there are worse things than dying, and then named his. What would yours be?
4. Jesus moves from “don’t be anxious about what you’ll wear” to “sell your possessions” in the space of a few verses. What would taking both sentences seriously look like in your household?
5. In the silence at the end, what fear did the Holy Spirit put a finger on — and what is one thing you will do about it this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel’s senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church’s governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope’s own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UqqXFBdFRHs&t=4700s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.