

The Question

PHOTO 1 This is the last week of our Be Anxious About Nothing series. It is starting to seem possible isn't it? I mean a few weeks ago it seemed like an impossible thing....right? But now as we are learning how to change our devotion.....to seek first the kingdom of God....and to trust that He holds our future, just like he held our past... Maybe living with a lot less anxiety and worry is doable.

In doing so, we can be a light to those who don't know Christ. Let's review what we have learned so far. There is a correlation between your faith and your worry. We worry because we can't control the future. Don't worry doesn't mean don't care. God is out ahead of us working out our future for us...We do the best we can do today and then trust God with our tomorrows.

Then last week we learned that Jesus wants us to shift our devotion to something else. We learned that the antidote to worry is prayer. Worry is praying to ourselves. Prayer aligns our desires with the Fathers. We learned that Jesus even taught us to seek first the Kingdom of God. We do that by focusing our devotion on God through prayer. Jesus taught us, thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We learned that worry blows up a balloon and submitting your will to God's will deflates it. Finally we learned that when we pray we receive a supernatural peace and when we seek first the Kingdom of God all the things we have been worried about will be added to us or taken care of.

We have said that worry and anxiety dates back to Adam's sin in the garden. That the people of Jesus' time struggled and as a result, Jesus taught on this topic a lot to them...and to us.

I thought it might be helpful to look at a story in the Bible where someone struggled with Anxiety and Worry. In fact, it almost destroyed them. We will see how God used their anxiety to show them a new way....Just as He does for us. In fact, God asks this man a question that is incredible. A question that penetrated to the heart of the matter. A question...that if pondered in the moment of worry....changed his life and will change ours.

In fact, if you are a worrier or you are specifically worried now about your circumstances, you might want to take this question and put it on your mirror or somewhere else where you will see it all the time. Because this is a question that re-centers us as it relates to what we are focused on and what we are worried about. This is a great story so let me set the background for you.

At this point Elijah is riding high and is like a rock star. Elijah is like the hero. Elijah is the guy that God speaks to to turn on and off the rain. Elijah is bulletproof and is a super hero. Nothing should faze him. He has God's favor and has absolutely nothing to fear. He is safe and secure in God's hands.

Meanwhile Ahab has run to town to tell his wife what happened. Does anyone know who Ahab's wife is? Yes Jezebel. There is a name that you don't see much. People don't name their daughters Jezebel. You don't meet kids named Jezebel and Judas at the playground.

Jezebel is Ahab's wife and you should leave this one alone because I am here to tell you that she was bad to the bone. This is where our story begins. I told you all of that to set up the story that we are going to look at.

Background

We have discussed this on many occasions, but the Jewish Nation of 12 tribes went through a Civil War and split into two nations. **MAP 1** Israel to the North and Judah in the south. Our story today takes place in about 860BC and by that time the nation had already split.

The King of the Northern Kingdom is Ahab. Now where else have you heard the name Ahab? Yes, he was a captain of a ship in search of Moby Dick. Very good and he had a first mate. Do any of you know the name of his first mate? Yes Starbucks.

What does Starbucks have to do with worry? I am glad you asked. The place where I worry the most is in Starbucks. **PHOTO 2** All you have to do is to suggest that we are going to Starbucks and I immediately start hyperventilating. Starbucks scares me to death.

Even the logo is freaky- take a close look at it. My hands sweat, my heart pounds and I get light headed just seeing that weird green logo and smelling coffee. Did any of you miss out on the class? You know the Starbucks class? I woke up one day and realized that everyone in the world must have attended the Starbucks language class while I was sleeping. It is as if everyone there speaks in tongues.

They guy in front of me always says something like "decaf grande half-soy, half-low fat, iced vanilla, double-shot, gingerbread cappuccino, extra dry, light ice," The guy behind me always seems to be in a hurry. Then I look over at my wonderful wife of 38 years and I see her open her mouth and say "Grande skinny no foam caramel latte."

She seems to be speaking in tongues and there is no interpreter there for me. Everyone else seems to understand what she is saying. The sizes make no sense. Tall, Grande, Venti and Treinta. What does that mean? How can Grande not be the biggest one? I look and see all these coffees from all over the world but you can't have a cup. They don't serve them...just the beans.

Some of the elite who know the super secret decoder code get their coffee in a real coffee cup. I am not sure if they nod, make a gesture or bury the code in their foreign ramblings. I guess that is why it is a super secret code. They put people who have it all figured out to sit at the tables on the patio. They dress hip and have the Starbucks look.

iPhone, MacBook's, I pads, usually dressed in black and reading the New York Times or their Kindle. Everyone seems to know everyone else but they are low key and cool about it. They are the first wave of intimidation designed to keep people like me away.

Even parking at Starbucks is a weird and has a flow that seems known to those who frequent there and foreign to the rest of us. I think it is designed to get those of us who don't belong to either leave or just go through the drive through. And the drive through...man does that ever amp up the anxiety. In the drive through the pressure is really on. I am telling you that Starbucks freaks me out

So it figures that if we are going to tackle worry, my journey would start at Starbucks. Starbucks was the first mate of Ahab in Moby Dick and Ahab was the King the Northern Kingdom. So you see it is all relevant.

Ahab's wife is far more famous than he is. King Ahab violated God's Law and married a foreign woman. Worse, a woman who worshiped Baal and despised God and His prophets. She was a powerful woman and was very influential. She ruled King Ahab and anyone who opposed them. Her name was Jezebel.

Ahab and Jezebel even sacrificed their own children as human sacrifices on pagan altars. The children were burned alive.

Elijah was God's prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. So God sends Elijah to rebuke King Ahab. God is going to send a drought and ruin the nation's economy. Jesus would later teach that you can't serve God and money and your stuff is the reason you worry. So God is going to wreck their false god of money through a drought.

Elijah tells King Ahab that it is not going to rain again. King Ahab essentially thinks...Yeah right. Elijah you can't turn rain on and off. Long as I remember the rain's been coming down. Clouds of mystery pouring confusion on the ground. And I wonder...still I wonder. who will stop the rain?

Well apparently God...because it doesn't rain for months. Everyone thinks Elijah did it. So God tells Elijah that he needs to go hide.

God provided food for Elijah, but during this time, there is no rain, no crops, cattle die... things are bad. Years go by, actually three years go by, so God tells Elijah to go talk to King Ahab again.

Elijah tells Ahab that God is ready to let it rain again but King Ahab only believes in his false God's of Baal. So Elijah sets up a meeting between all those who worship Baal and himself. Elijah says I want you to meet me on Mt. Carmel **PHOTO 3** and bring all the prophets of Baal. Bring all these people who claim to have a connection with gods that don't exist and I will prove it.

We are all going to Mt Carmel to pray for rain. You and your prophets are going to pray to your god, Baal, and I am going to pray to Yahweh, the God of our Fathers, and we are going to see which one of these Gods can make it rain. To us this is weird but to them it was like WWE Prophet Smack down and everyone showed up for the fight.

Mt Carmel is on the edge of the Mediterranean This is the view of the Valley of Jezreel **PHOTO 4**

They all met on top of Mt Carmel and you can read all about this later. But over 400 prophets of Baal and thousands of people from the surrounding cities came to see what would happen. Elijah tells the prophets of Baal to build an altar and Elijah goes over to a broken down altar that use to be used to worship Yahweh. Elijah begins to rebuild the altar and tells the prophets of Baal to go ahead and start the sacrifice to Baal to see if you can get Baal to make it rain.

Then I will call on Yahweh and we will see whose God is real. So the story goes on and in the morning the prophets of Baal begin to pray to and sacrifice to Baal to make it rain. They are sacrificing animals, dancing around, calling out, shouting, and this goes on from breakfast through lunch. Meanwhile Elijah is making his altar and he begins to make some politically incorrect statements.

You could not get by with this in our culture today. Elijah begins to make fun of their god.. The prophets begin to dance around, cutting themselves, trying to get Baal's attention. Elijah begins to taunt them. Trash talk is not new. Elijah is building his altar and the other prophets are having a big Circus trying to get Baal's attention.

Elijah says, "Shout louder." Then he says, "Surely he is a god isn't he?" "Perhaps he is in deep thought" He is just making fun of Baal. "Maybe Baal is busy or maybe he is traveling." "Maybe he is in the bathroom." "Maybe he is sleeping and needs to be awakened."

This goes on into the evening and they are all tired. Half of them are probably bleeding to death and Baal hasn't done anything. Then Elijah tells them that before his God lights up his altar, Elijah wants them to douse it with water. Now remember they were in a severe drought and water was not easy to come by. It hasn't rained in three years and Elijah insists that they take the water they have and pour it out and drench the altar.

Then Elijah prayed and God lit up that altar. All the people were saying, we are thinking that Yahweh is the real God. They turn on the prophets of Baal and kill all of them for misleading the people. Then Elijah tells Ahab to run as fast as he can back to the city because it is going to rain. So Ahab believes him and runs to the city. Elijah races him and gets back to town before Ahab does. Eventually it begins to rain. 450 Prophets of Baal lay dead at the top of Mt Carmel in the rain. Jezebel is furious.

Our Story

1 Kings 19:1–2 (ESV) 1 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow."

In other words, Elijah by this time tomorrow you are going to be as dead as all my prophets. Your life is over. You would think Elijah would laugh at such a spineless threat. He had just won Prophet Smackdown. His God controlled the rain. If you want to come after my God, and me, bring it. What does he have to be worried about?

She is a powerful woman and perhaps the most powerful person in the Kingdom. She has lions and tigers and bears Oh My. She has troops and soldiers. But God has just done this amazing thing to reveal Himself to Elijah and everyone else. So from our perspective, what does Elijah have to worry about? Nothing.

Talk about riding a wave of momentum. Elijah had to know that he was bulletproof....Superman. Nothing and no one could touch Him. Look at what Elijah does...this is so incredible. He knows God has his back. He knows his future is in God's hands...right? Incredibly not.

1 Kings 19:2–3 (ESV) 3 Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

What? Elijah ran...from Jezebel? Elijah do you not remember what happened.....just a few hours ago? Yeah but what has God done for me lately?

Elijah is ok in the moment. But this moment is not what he is focused on. He has shifted his focus from God's incredible victory to tomorrow's uncertainties. Since He was focused on himself and not God....He bolted...He ran...and like Forest he didn't stop running for a long time.

We read this and think...Elijah what do you have to be worried about? Yet anyone could look over our lives and remind us of God's faithfulness in our past and then ask us the same question.

Do you not remember two days ago, last week, four years ago...Yes but tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow. Elijah and so many of us are so focused on the threats of the future that we totally forget God's faithfulness in our past. Elijah has a devotion problem.

Elijah ran all the way from Mt Carmel in the North to Judah. Much like if we ran from here to Naples. But he doesn't stop there...

1 Kings 19:4–5 (ESV) 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."

Elijah has had enough. He has been running during the drought for 3 years and now he is running from Jezebel. He is exhausted and rests in the shade of a broom tree. He has had enough and he wants to die. He says that he is no better than his ancestors who are dead.

Look at what fear does to Him. Jezebel threatens him and he literally bolts in fear...He is so afraid of dying that he wants to die. Think about how ironic that is. Let me die God so I don't have to worry about dying in the future.

God was with Elijah and He is with him again. God is faithful even when we are not.

1 Kings 19:4–7 (ESV) 5 And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you."

In other words, you are killing yourself. You are so stressed out that you are not even eating. You are exhausted from a journey that was not even yours to take. Even though you are scared, lacking faith, and running from your fear of tomorrow, God has sent me to take care of you.

Your Heavenly Father knows what you need. Right now you need nourishment. God ministered to his physical needs because without those needs met, without rest and food, Elijah is not teachable. Your Heavenly Father knows what you need.

1 Kings 19:8 (ESV) 8 And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

Now this is very significant. He kept running away from Jezebel. He reached the mountain of God, Mt. Horeb. Now Horeb is what we would refer to as Mt. Sinai- it is the same mountain. The total distance from Mt Carmel to Mt Sinai was about 280 miles. He has essentially run from Sarasota, past Naples, through Key West to Cuba. **PHOTO 5**

Horeb is where Moses all alone saw a burning bush and God spoke to Him from that bush. Horeb is the same mountain where Moses went up to meet God and came down with the Ten Commandments. **PHOTO 6**

Horeb is where in the minds of Jewish people the place where God hung out. If you can't be around the Ark of the Covenant, go to the mountain of God to be in His presence. So Elijah spends over a month traveling to this deserted lonely uninhabited place to die but to be as close to God as he could. He did all of this because none of what was happening today made sense and tomorrow was so uncertain. He was so afraid of the future that he would rather die than face it.

Here on this mountain...God asks Him one of the most incredible questions in Scripture. Simple but profound. On the surface superficial but incredibly deep.

1 Kings 19:9 (ESV) 9 There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Look at this question. What are you doing here, Elijah? What are you doing here? What are YOU doing here? What are you doing HERE? WHAT are you doing here? Elijah, you are miles and miles away from where I had you. You are miles and miles away from where I had you because suddenly tomorrow seems threatening. You ran away? Elijah what are you doing here?

Now I love this question because I have a feeling that for some of us who are so stressed out about the uncertainty of tomorrow that we have done some running ourselves haven't we?

Some of us have run mentally. We are so detached from our families because we are so stressed out about tomorrow. Some of us have actually physically run. You have run away from your family, you have run away from a marriage, your hometown, your church family, you have run away from your parents.

Some of us have run to escape from alcohol, drugs, or relationships. Most of us are in some part of our lives running from God. We are in a place that we have never been before emotionally. We are in a place where we have never been relationally. We are in a place we have never been before physically. It is all because of the stress, anxiety, and fear of tomorrow. We are in a place where we have no place being.

What if God showed up in that place and God said to you and me, "Wait a minute, what are you doing here? What are you...doing...here? Why did you run? Why have you allowed the uncertainty of tomorrow, by the way tomorrow is always uncertain; why have you allowed the threat of tomorrow, by the way tomorrow is always threatening; why have you allowed a future that you cannot control, which by the way you have never been able to control? Why have you allowed your fear of the future to drive you to a place that you have no business being? What are you doing...here?"

This doesn't make sense even to us. So you know it makes no sense to God. So Elijah does what we would do. We start to explain ourselves and fill God in on what is really going on. God can I just tell you my sad story? I know that you know my sad story God but I just have to get this out. God here is why I am here...Elijah begins to explain.

1 Kings 19:10 (ESV) 10 He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."

Elijah says, God what do you mean what am I doing here? Did you forget? Jezebel kills prophets and she is hunting for me. I am the last prophet left....God have you been paying attention? Do you expect me to stay back in the vicinity of Ahab?

Do you expect me to stay in the Northern Kingdom? You expect me to stay there under the threat of death? Do you know what is going on around me? Elijah is now hiding out in a cave....so what does God tell him to do?

1 Kings 19:11 (ESV) 11 And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord."

We don't know what Elijah thought but it might have been something like this, "What kind of answer is that? How is this going to help me in any way? God are you totally missing the point? God nobody believes that you are there but me. Nobody pays attention to you but me.

God you have not done anything. Things are bad. My life has been threatened. Jezebel is looking for me. Everyone is looking for me. It is over for me. I am better off dead and you want me to go stand in the mouth of the cave?

1 Kings 19

1 Kings 19:11 (ESV) And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire.

Which means that God is just playing. He is just showing off. God is making His point. The Lord was not in the wind means God was going to pass by but He has not done it yet. The Lord was not in the earthquake. Still hasn't passed by

1 Kings 19:12–13 (ESV) 12 And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. 13 And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Notice that Elijah is not at the mouth of the cave where God told him to be. He stayed in the cave and only now comes to the entrance of the cave. Once again God asks Elijah this incredible question.

Elijah what are you doing here? Elijah if I didn't exist then I understand what you are doing here. You are acting like an atheist. You are doing what someone who doesn't believe in me would do. But there is me. Did you like the fireworks display up on Mt. Carmel? Did you like the mountain rearrangement that I just did in that earthquake you just felt? How about the fire on the altar?

You forgot to add me to your future. When you replayed your future over and over in your mind....you left me behind. You are acting like you have written me out of the future chapters of your life. I am the definition of your hope for and in the future. Why don't you include me in your thoughts about your future. What in the world are you doing here in this place? What are you doing here...Elijah?

And as if God didn't hear him the first time. Elijah begins to repeat his sorry story.

1 Kings 19:13–14 (ESV) 14 He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."

Elijah's world-view is collapsing...a sure sign of stress. He can't see past himself. It is stress-induced narcissism. The only thing that matters is me. Elijah starts to give the same speech that he gave before. I don't know for sure but I think that as Elijah is repeating this story to God he begins to realize just how lame it sounds to God.

He is thinking about the firework show, the earthquake, the provisions, the angels and all the other stuff God had faithfully shown him and provided for him. Perhaps he is beginning to realize that his story does include God.

Apart from God I should be in this cave hiding but in light of what I just experienced, in light of God's path faithfulness to me...what am I doing here? It is true that the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, and killed every prophet except me, I am the only one left and now they are trying to kill me too.

But I guess that is still not a really good excuse for being in this place because you are God and apparently you are still present.

1 Kings 19:14–15 (ESV) 15 And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus."

In other words, go back the way you came. What? Yes God says you have to go back the way you came. Back to the point where you starting running from me in fear. You aren't finished yet....we still have a future to share.

1 Kings 19:15 (ESV) 15 ...And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria.

Wait a minute God. Syria...those are the Assyrians..They border the Northern Kingdom...They are our ruthless enemies. The Assyrians are poised on our border to destroy us. You want me to just go up there and anoint Hazael? You know Syria already has a king right? You are doing something new right God?

1 Kings 19:16 (ESV) 16 And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel,

Ok time out. Israel already has a king God. God his name is Ahab and his wife is Jezebel and oh by the way they want to kill me. God is going, I know. We are going to replace the king. Then it gets even more odd.

1 Kings 19:16 (ESV) 16 and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.

Ok wait wait wait. God you have a prophet. It's me. God says I know, we are getting a new one. Ok God, so you have like thought this through. So you like have a...plan. So all that stuff I have been telling you about how bad things are, you knew that. Like you have a solution. This is all part of you plan....your plan for my future.

Like there is a future...there is a purpose...you are up to something. I did not know that. And God says essentially, That is why I am asking you, what are you doing here? I have not changed. I have not abandoned you. I am not giving up on you. You have run almost 300 miles over months, but I am still God. So what are you doing here?

1 Kings 19:17–18 (ESV) 17 And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. 18 Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Elija all those who worshiped Baal will be destroyed. Including Ahab and Jezebel. They are no threat to you. I had them taken care of long before you became afraid of them.

In other words, Elijah you think that you are the last man standing but you are not. You think you know all that there is to know so you ran. But you didn't know all that there was to know. I am cleaning house. Bringing justice to those who worshiped Baal.

While you have been looking at yourself you missed 7000 other faithful people in Israel that I have kept who have not worshipped Baal. While your were running...I was working

Overview

Right now, many of us are running from something. Our worry has triggered our flight or fight response and we flew. We are scared of our future and we are missing our present.

Our fear has impacted...us...those closest to us...and caused us to do some things that didn't make sense. Decisions made in fear that did not honor God. I think God wants to step into your present today and ask you the question that He asked Elijah.

What are you doing here?

Are you an atheist? Why are you acting like one?

God wants to remind us that we have a history with Him. He has been faithful in our past. When we didn't understand what was happening, we could look back at it later and see that God had it all along.

Most of us have enough history with God that the truth is there is no excuse for us to be where we have allowed worry to cause us and to drive us to be.

And God is still in control. God still has a plan and purpose for your life. You need to take God's advice to Elijah and you need to get back to where you were and face tomorrow with confidence that God is there in your tomorrow.

Some of you through your worry have made things worse than they were. Not only as Jesus said... has your worry not added a moment to your life, but it has removed good things from your life. You and I have missed out on so much because we have been focused on our fears.... missed the present.... and seemed to erase God's past faithfulness?

Worrying seems to cause us to erase God's faithfulness. Because in our moments of worry we forget God's past faithfulness and we go places we have no business going. It is amazing how today's worries not only freak us out about tomorrow but they erase God's faithfulness from our past. The worries of today make us doubt whether God will be there tomorrow.

The point of this whole series is one Elijah learned the hard way. Here is the point. God did not tell us to be careless, irresponsible or passive. He tells us to do everything that we are responsible to do....

And when those whispering voices come and your mind begins to go down the trail of worry and you begin to make a decision that is going to take you off center...In that moment of fight or flight....you must shift your devotion. You must seek first the Kingdom of God. You pray...God reminds you of who He is....of how faithful he has been...and how He is already working in your future.

Like Jesus in the Garden, you pray until you can say from the core of your Spirit....Thy will Lord not mine. God I have done all that I can do today. I will see you in my tomorrow. Tomorrow is uncertain and tomorrow has been and will always be uncertain. I am not going to allow my stress, my anxiety and my worry to drive me to places I have not business being. I am going to walk into tomorrow confident that my God is with me, that He is Immanuel.

Your other option of course is to live like the atheists. You can spend a lot of time and energy focused on things that you can't do anything about. You can dance around, pace the floor, and do whatever you can think of to find peace separate from God. Just like the prophets on Mt Carmel who were worshiping their false gods.

Have you have allowed your fear of tomorrow to shape you into someone you didn't want to be. Some of you need to contact some folks and ask for forgiveness. You have been short, snappy and insensitive because of stress over your future. Some of you have turned to alcohol, drugs, gambling, shady financial deals, or stealing to escape your fear of the future. You have to go back.

God's invitation to you today, God's invitation to us every day, is I want you to go back because you have no business being here. Because I am the God who has invited you to call me Father. You do what you can do today and then you trust me with your tomorrow.

My prayer for you is that the light of those at Remnant will shine brightly to those in the darkness of fear, anxiety and worry because we have not allowed circumstances to drive us to places God did not want us to go. They see that we are clearly different than the atheists around us.

Do all that you can do...and then call it a day. The hands that once shaped the mountains... created the universe... and knit you together in the womb....hold your future. Once that truth becomes your reality...you can be anxious about nothing and get your life back to live in the present with Christ. Let's Pray.