

Beware Of Worry

Luke 12:22-34

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I first want to read verses 22-23 of Luke 12 to get us started. “Then He said to His disciples...” it’s very clear who He’s addressing in the crowd “...‘Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.’”

In Luke 12:1, Jesus warned us to beware of hypocrisy. He warned us of the dangers of being a hypocrite. In verse 15, Jesus warned us to beware of covetousness. He gave the parable of the rich fool, who had a bumper crop and a lot of wealth, and what he decided to do with it was to build bigger barns to store it and “eat, drink, and be merry.” But God told him he was a “fool,” because that very night he would die. “Then whose will those things be which you have provided” or “stored up?” “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Without skipping a beat, Jesus goes from the parable of the rich fool into these words in verse 22. So He goes from the subject of covetousness to the subject of worry. Covetousness means we can never get enough, and worry is afraid we may not have enough. Someone said that “Worry is the emotional reward of material preoccupation.” Worry is destructive.

The English word “worry” literally means “to strangle.” It strangles us of strength when we are worried about tomorrow or are anxious about our past. We need to learn to trust in God if we are His disciples.

So in verse 22, we see that Jesus is clearly speaking to His disciples, His devoted followers, who had taken up the cross in following Him. He wants us not to worry.

There are five sections in this passage. In the first section, verses 22-23, Jesus commands His disciples not to worry. He didn’t address the Pharisees, the religious leaders or the crowd. What is a “disciple”? He said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24). You must die to yourself and follow Jesus. So He was speaking to true believers and true followers of Jesus Christ.

What He was saying to them was not to worry, not to be anxious, verse 22. “Then He said to His disciples, ‘Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on.’” There is a lot in this text that deals with these two categories—food and clothing. Then He gives us the rationale, in verse 23, behind His statement. “Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.”

So it is a present imperative command—“Do not worry.” I almost titled my sermon “Don’t Worry; be Happy,” but that’s not quite the text. It could be titled “Don’t Worry; be Holy,” and that would be apropos. “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things...” material things “...shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

Keep in mind in our text today that He just told the parable of the rich fool, who had all the “things” stored up, but he wasn’t rich toward God; his priorities were wrong, so he lost everything in eternity. So don’t worry, don’t have anxious thoughts about what you will eat or what you will wear.

Some of you don’t even hear the sermons on Sunday morning. I can see it on your faces; you’re thinking about where you’re going to go to lunch. We’re talking about spiritual realities, and you’re thinking about stuffing your face! Or “Did I dress right today? I should have worn that other shirt.” We’re so self-absorbed! We can’t watch commercials on TV without thinking, “What shall I eat?” We take the body and pamper it and tan it.

The whole tenor of this passage is to get your mind on the kingdom of God, on the things of the Spirit. Jesus isn’t saying you can’t eat, you can’t wear nice clothes; He saying not to worry about them or be anxious about them or be consumed by them. That’s the purpose of this text. Jesus tells them very clearly, in verse 23, “Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.” That’s the principle: don’t be so hung up on what you’re going to eat and what you’re going to wear.

Remember the foolish farmer; he was all wrapped up in his goods and stored them in his barns. He thought he had many years to “eat, drink and be merry,” but he didn’t realize he would die that very night and he hadn’t gotten right with God.

The second section of our text is we aren’t to worry about food, in verses 24-26. Jesus mentions it in the first section where He says not to worry about what you’re going to eat or what you’re going to wear. Now he deals with food specifically. “Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them.” What a contrast this is to the foolish farmer! The farmer sowed, reaped and had storehouses and barns.

“Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest?” If you can’t do the simplest thing, why would you worry about what you’re going to eat and drink?

It’s interesting that when we are worrying, Jesus encourages us to become bird-watchers. One time in the early ‘70s before I was married, I was worrying about how I was going to pay my \$65 rent. I could take Coke bottles back and pay my rent! But I didn’t have the money, so I read this verse about the birds. Then I looked up under the eaves on my porch on a rainy, cold day and saw a little sparrow with a French fry in its beak bigger than he was! I thought, That’s not fair! I have to buy the French fries, and he gets it for free! I think God created fast-food restaurants to feed the birds French fries. But the Bible tells us here that we should look at how God provides for the birds. They “neither sow nor reap.” They don’t store up their food in barns.

These verses aren’t saying that we shouldn’t work. Even the birds have to scratch the ground,

pick the berries, dig for the worms and fly around looking for their food. They're industrious and we should be too. What He is saying is that if God provides for the birds, He'll provide for us, because we're more important, more valuable to Him than the birds. Don't you logically think that God would provide for you? So He moves from consider the birds to consider yourself.

"How much more" is a key phrase in this passage, in verses 24 and 28. It is called the argument "from the lesser to the greater." Jesus used this all the time. If God provides for birds, the lesser, He'll provide for you, the greater. "Of how much more value are you than the birds?"

Verse 24 begins with "ravens" and then ends with "birds." The word "ravens" in the Greek is the generic word for "birds." So we don't know what kind of birds. In Matthew, He uses a different word for "birds"; He says "sparrows." He talks about how insignificant they are. So it's a generic term for fowl.

Think about your self-worth. You are a child of God, you were created by God in His image and likeness, you are more valuable than birds or any other animals. Animals are not on the same level with human beings. Praise God for animals! We should love them and take care of them, but they're not on the same level as human beings. Nor is plant life. You were made in the image of God. And if you are a Christian, you were redeemed by God. You were born again by the Spirit, so by right of creation, you are His, and by right of regeneration, you are His special child. He sent His Son to die on the Cross for your sins. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

So we consider the birds, our value over the birds, and we are His people and trust in Him. Someone put it in a poem:

"Said the robin to the sparrow,

'I should really like to know

Why these anxious human beings

Rush about and worry so.'

Said the sparrow to the robin,

'Friend, I think that it must be

That they have no heavenly Father,

Such as cares for you and me.'"

The truth is that we do have a Father in heaven. He is the birds' Father because He is their

Creator and He feeds them. But He is our heavenly Father. The Lord's Prayer begins, "Our Father." The word for "Father" is "Abba."

A few days ago, my daughter-in-law sent me a video of two of my grandsons saying, "Hi, Papa! Hi, Papa!" I played it all day long. It's music to my ears just hearing their cute little voices saying, "Hi, Papa!"

And what kind of joy do you think it brings to the heart of God when we say, "Papa," when we say, "Abba," when we say, "I love you, Father"? The whole Lord's Prayer was based on relationship; you are His special child. You're the apple of His eye (Psalm 17:8). He'll provide for you and take care of you.

Also in this section, we need to consider worry an absurdity, verses 25-26. "And which of you by worrying..." or "being anxious" "...can add one cubit to his stature?" Here we can't be absolutely sure whether Jesus is talking about worrying about not being taller in height or about worrying about how long we'll live. In the context, it would seem that it would refer to length of your lifespan. But worrying about how long you'll live will actually shorten your lifespan.

Jesus is saying that by worrying, you can't increase your height. A cubit is 18 inches, and very few people want to grow another 18 inches, unless you're very short. And neither can you increase the length of your life. Worry will lead to stroke and heart attack and other illnesses. God is in control of our days. The rich farmer thought he had many years left, but he died that night. So we can't lengthen our days.

Verse 26, "If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest?" Worry is illogical and irrational. It doesn't help; it only hinders and compounds the problem.

Now in verses 27-28, we are not to worry about our clothes. We were bird-watchers in verse 24, and now we are botanists—we're looking at the flowers. Jesus said, "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon..." famous for his splendor, glory, majesty and wealth "...in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Here's the rationale: "If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven..." again, lesser to the greater "...how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith?"

I like to look at flowers, because I like art. I like their colors, texture and design, and some of the most amazing flowers are found in tiny weeds. These tiny flowers are small and frail and to think that God designed the flower and its colors! I've also noticed that all the colors in the flowers and in the birds harmonize. He never puts the wrong colors together like we do sometimes when we put our clothes on. So it's a blessing to look at the gloriousness of the flowers.

And Jesus said that "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Now here's the lesson of the lesser to the greater: yet the flowers, like the grass in the field, today they are, but tomorrow they're thrown into an oven.

What's the deal about the "oven"? Fuel for their fires was scarce in those days. They didn't have a lot of wood or timber, so they used flowers or grass to fuel the fire in their ovens to cook their food. So Jesus was saying that today the flowers and grass are blooming, but tomorrow they're burning. You see how insignificant they are.

The point is that if God feeds the birds and clothes the grass, He will care for you. And the key is at the end of verse 28: "O you of little faith." That's the problem. You know why you are worrying right now? Because you have "little faith." Jesus commands us not to worry, and worry is sin. It is one of the "acceptable" sins of the saints. But worry dishonors God. Worry doesn't glorify God. Worry damages your testimony.

And worry is detrimental to your children. As Christian parents, you need to give a good example to your children of trusting in God. If you bring them to church on Sunday and try to bring them to the Lord but you worry on Monday, it won't work. They must see your faith and trust in God. You can't worry and freak out all week and then say, "We're going to go worship the Lord." How can you not be an example of trusting in the Lord? So we need to be careful not to sin against God by anxiety and worry.

The problem is "little faith." When Jesus was in a boat on the Sea of Galilee with His disciples and a storm came up, He was asleep.

The first time I was in a small boat, a 25-footer, we were out by the Channel Islands doing fishing off the boat and surfing. We spent the night on the boat and a huge storm came up. We were buffeted and jostled all night long. I was so glad when the storm stopped the next day, and I got off that boat! I never spent the night on a small boat again!

Jesus was asleep during the storm. What a picture of faith and trust in God His Father! Someone said, "No storm can sink the ship where lies the master of earth and sea and sky." I like that. But the disciples freaked out! They worried and were full of anxiety. They woke Jesus up and said, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38).

How often we do the same thing. We start freaking out. "Master, don't You care?! Don't You care about my mortgage payment? Don't You care about my marriage? Don't You care about my health? Don't You care about my children? Don't You care about my job?"

And Jesus actually said to the disciples, "O you of little faith." He rebuked them. Then He stood up in the boat and He "rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, 'Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?'" (Matthew 8:26-27). The disciples didn't trust Jesus.

The reason we worry is because we are of "little faith." Someone said, "A little faith will take your soul to heaven..." to salvation "...a lot of faith will bring heaven to your soul" right now in sanctification. So we can go to heaven and be with Him, but we're not trusting Him here on earth and experiencing heaven on earth.

So Jesus first talked about not worrying about what we eat or what we wear. Now in verses 29-32, Jesus gives us “do’s” and “don’ts”. “And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father...” notice that “...knows that you need these things.” We have a Father in heaven who knows what we need. And knowing that He knows helps us to trust Him. “But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Let’s look first at the “don’ts,” verses 29-30. They were not to worry about what they should eat or drink, and they shouldn’t have a doubtful mind. “Anxious” has the idea of being “up in the air” or “upset” or “all worked up.” It was used for planets in space. And Jesus used it when He said, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things” (Luke 10:41). He rebuked her for her worry and fear. We would use the phrases “worked up,” “up tight” or “upset.” Charles Swindoll translated this “spaced out.”

So don’t be of a doubtful mind. Why? He gives us the rationale in verse 30. “For all these things the nations of the world seek after.” The phrase “nations of the world” refers to nonbelievers or pagans or heathens. The nonbelievers seek after these things: what we should eat or drink or wear. “And your Father knows that you need these things.” The emphasis here is “your Father.” You are a child of God, and He knows you have need of these things.

One of the things that should give us peace is knowing that God knows. We don’t understand or comprehend all the time, but we know that He knows.

When Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick, they basically could have told Jesus, “Come here quickly! Come heal him!” But they simply said, “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick” (John 11:3). That’s all they needed to do. They knew that Jesus knew, and they rested in that.

It’s interesting that they had the words “love” and “sick” together for one person. You can be loved by God and still be sick. But God knows and cares; He is in control. Even Job said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15). I don’t know what God is doing, but I know I can trust Him.

Rest in His omniscience. Rest in His providence. Rest in His care. Nothing can happen to you as a child of God but what God your Father has allowed. And it has purpose and design for your good and for God’s glory. “Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8).

Verse 31 is a “do.” “But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.” And another “don’t” is in verse 32. “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

I believe that where He says, “Seek the kingdom of God,” that is the antidote for worry and fear.

Matthew 6:33 says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things..." what we will eat and drink and wear "...shall be added to you." It's not saying that if you seek the kingdom of God you'll be rich and healthy. He's saying that God will provide what you eat, what you drink and what you wear.

So if we want to be free of anxiety and worry, we need to seek God's kingdom. If we're more concerned with God's kingdom and Christian character, we'll be less worried than when we focus on our comfort. When we focus on our comfort over character and God's kingdom, it's when we get upset or we worry.

In Philippians 4:19, Paul said, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." If you are worrying right now, read and meditate of Psalm 23. Verse 1 says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Kenneth Taylor's Living Bible says, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I have everything I need." He makes me to lie down and gives me rest. "He... leads me beside the quiet streams." He gives me right paths to walk on. If I go through the deep, dark valleys of the shadow of death, God is with me. "You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over." Wherever I go, He is watching over me. And all through my life, "goodness and mercy shall follow me," and at the end, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

So when the Lord is your shepherd, you have everything you need. Notice that in verse 32 He says, "Do not fear, little flock." It's funny that He says, "Don't be afraid; you're a bunch of sheep." You'd think He would say, "Don't be afraid, you lions. Don't be afraid, you bears. Don't be afraid, you tigers." He calls us sheep because we have a Shepherd. We have a Father who watches over us.

And "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." You have the kingdom of God right now—"righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17)—and you'll have it when Jesus returns in the Second Coming. He'll establish His earthly kingdom for 1,000 years, and we'll reign with Him and share with Him in His glory and victory. Your Father's pleasure is to give you the kingdom.

The Lord's Prayer starts, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name." At the top of the list is, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done." Before you say, "Give us this day our daily bread," you say, "Your kingdom... Your will be done."

If you are seeking God and seeking first God's kingdom, you can trust Him to take care of all your temporal needs that He had promised in His Word to provide.

The power to live above worry is found in this positive command in verse 31: "Seek the kingdom of God."

The last section is in verses 33-34. Jesus closes by saying that we should be givers. He said, "Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." So Jesus starts with "Do not worry," then

He continues with "Do not fear" and now He says to be generous.

I believe that the life of generosity brings liberty from anxiety. If you're worried about something, just give it away. If you're worried about your money, just give some of it away. Keep a perspective that your contact with the world is as light as possible.

When Jesus is saying, in verse 33, "Sell what you have," He's not saying that every Christian should sell everything he has and give it to the poor. What He actually is saying is that we should be generous, and that our contact with the things of the world should be as light as possible. We should be benevolent. We should be givers. He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Before something gets ahold of my heart, I can give it away for the kingdom of God, and I can exchange earthly treasures for heavenly treasures, which "neither moth nor rust destroy...and thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:20-21). Your heart and treasure always go together.

Your heart is your inner person, the thing that excites you, the thing that makes you come alive, the thing that you think the most about. That's where your treasure is. If you're thinking about God, if you're thinking about heaven, if you're thinking about spiritual things and spiritual reality, then your heart is in heaven and not on earth.

Philippians 4:4-7 perfectly wraps up everything we've just covered by way of application. "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" If you want victory over worry, over fear, over selfishness, then "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"

Verse 5, "Let your gentleness..." or "moderation" "...be known to all men. The Lord is at hand." Let people know how generous you are, how magnanimous you are, how caring you are, because the Lord is coming soon.

In verse 6, here it is directly: "Be anxious for nothing..." which means, "Don't worry about anything" "...but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." Again, I like Kenneth Taylor's Living Bible which renders this, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank Him for His answers."

Then notice the result, in verse 7: "And the peace of God..." a perfect peace "...which surpasses all understanding, will guard..." or "garrison" or "protect" "...your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Your hearts are your feelings; your minds are your thinking.

So don't worry about anything, pray about everything, tell God your needs and don't forget to thank Him for the answers. If you do this, you will experience God's peace.