

Luke 12:22-34
November 10, 2019

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Why is worrying about things problematic in our lives? [Let people engage]

Q: Is worry a sin? [Let people engage - But it's a sin that rises from a failure to understand God, a failure to understand His sovereign love, a failure to understand His sovereign care, a failure to understand His sovereign resources.]

Transition: It has been estimated that 40 percent of our worries are about things that never happen; 30 percent of our worries concern things that are in the past that can't be changed; 12 percent of our worries are needless worries about our health; 10 percent are petty, miscellaneous worries; and, only 8 percent deal with legitimate issues. It's not wrong to think about things that we can do something to change, but it is futile to consume our thoughts with matters that we can't change.

Worry has been described as "a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained" (Arthur Somers Roche, in *Reader's Digest* [6/88], p. 64). The world sings, "Don't worry, be happy," but this secular advice is nothing more than blind optimism. But the Christian can and should sing, "Don't worry, trust God." This is far from blind optimism, because it is based squarely on the nature and character of God and His many promises to us. Let's read today's text, and I think you'll agree that Jesus offers us anxiety-free living. Let's begin.

BOOK:

Do Not Worry

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

²⁷ "Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰ For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

³² "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near, and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

God's pleasures and our treasures must go together. We must look at earth from heaven's point of view and make sure that we put God's kingdom first in everything. The main question is, "Where is your heart?" If our hearts are fixed on the transient things of earth, then we will always worry. But if we are fixed on the eternal, then God's peace will guard our minds and hearts (Phil. 4:6-9).

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 221-222). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Beware of Worrying (Luke 12:22–34)

The rich farmer worried because he had too much, but the disciples might be tempted to worry because they did not have enough! They had given up all they had in order to follow Christ. They were living by faith, and faith is always tested.

Worry is destructive. The word translated “anxious” in Luke 12:22 means “to be torn apart,” and the phrase “doubtful mind” (Luke 12:29) means “to be held in suspense.” It is the picture of a ship being tossed in a storm. Our English word *worry* comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word that means “to strangle.” “Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow,” said Corrie Ten Boom; “it empties today of its strength.”

Worry is also deceptive. It gives us a false view of life, of itself, and of God. Worry convinces us that life is made up of what we eat and what we wear. We get so concerned about *the means* that we totally forget about *the end*, which is to glorify God (Matt. 6:33). There is a great difference between making a living and making a life.

Worry blinds us to the world around us and the way God cares for His creation. God makes the flowers beautiful, and He even feeds the unclean ravens who have no ability to sow or reap. He ought to be able to care for men *to whom He has given the ability to work*. Jesus was not suggesting that we sit around and let God feed us, for the birds themselves work hard to stay alive. Rather, He encourages us to trust Him and cooperate with Him in using the abilities and opportunities that He gives us (2 Thes. 3:6–15).

But worry even blinds us to itself. We can get to the place where we actually think that worry accomplishes good things in our lives! In Luke 12:25, Jesus pointed out that our worries do not add one extra minute to our lives (Ps. 39:5) or one extra inch to our height. The rich farmer's fretting certainly did not lengthen his life! Instead of adding to our lives, our worries take away from our lives. People can worry themselves into the hospital or into the grave!

Once again, Jesus argued from the lesser to the greater. If God feeds the birds, He will surely feed His children. If He beautifies the plants that grow up one day and are cut down the next, surely He will clothe His own people. The problem is not His little power, for He can do anything; the problem is our little faith.

Worry is deformative. It keeps us from growing and it makes us like the unsaved in the world (Luke 12:30). In short, worry is unchristian; worry is a sin. How can we witness to a lost world and encourage them to put faith in Jesus Christ if we ourselves are doubting God and worrying? Is it not inconsistent to preach faith and yet not practice it? The late chaplain of the United States Senate, Peter Marshall, once prayed “that ulcers would not become the badge of our faith.” Too often they are!

How do we win over worry? The first step is to realize that *God knows our needs*, so we can trust Him to meet them. We are sheep in His little flock, children in His family, and servants in His kingdom; and He will see to it that our needs are fully met. It is His *pleasure* to give us His kingdom, so will He not give us everything that we need? (see Rom. 8:32)

But God's pleasures and our treasures must go together. We must look at earth from heaven's point of view and make sure that we put God's kingdom first in everything. The main question is, “Where is your heart?” If our hearts are fixed on the transient things of earth, then we will always worry. But if we are fixed on the eternal, then God's peace will guard our minds and hearts (Phil.

4:6–9). We must “hang loose” when it comes to this world’s goods and be willing even to sell what we have in order to help others (Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–35). It is not wrong to own things so long as things do not own us.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 238)

c. *Jesus’ teaching about anxiety (12:22–34) (Matt. 6:25–34)*

The section builds to a climax in verse 31 when the disciples were instructed to seek God’s kingdom. In building to that climax Jesus said three things about anxiety.

12:22–24. Jesus first noted that anxiety is foolish because **life** consists of far **more** than what one eats or wears (cf. v. 15). Jesus again referred to **birds** (cf. vv. 6–7) to point out that since His disciples were **more valuable** than **ravens**, which **God feeds**, He cares for them. (Unlike sparrows, ravens were not sold for they are scavengers.)

12:25–28. Jesus next pointed out that **worry** is foolish because it cannot change the situation. Not one **hour** can be added to one’s **life** so it is ridiculous to worry. Again, Jesus went to the natural realm (**lilies** and **grass**) to point out that **God** takes care of what belongs to Him.

12:29–31. Finally, Jesus pointed out that **worry** is foolish because worry is the attitude of pagans. **The pagan world** is concerned with the material things of life and not with life’s ultimately important spiritual realities. On the other hand, one who pursues spiritual matters (seeking God’s **kingdom**) will also receive from God material provisions.

12:32–34. Jesus then told His disciples not to fear (cf. vv. 4, 7). He compared them to a **little flock**, a seemingly defenseless group which could be preyed on. To make them even more defenseless Christ instructed, **Sell your possessions and give to the poor**. (Luke later came back to this subject in chaps. 16 and 19.) This is also what the early church did (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37). Jesus’ point was that if His followers had a treasure on earth they would think about it. But if they instead had **a treasure in heaven**, which is safe from theft and decay by moths, and were “rich toward God” (Luke 12:21), they would be concerned with matters pertaining to **the kingdom** and therefore would not be in a state of anxiety.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1539). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

12:22–34 Was Jesus recommending a passive and unthinking approach to life and the future? Absolutely not. He used dramatic rhetoric to highlight the inconsistency of claiming faith in God while remaining anxious about daily needs. Jesus’ advice to sell one’s possessions and give to the poor (v. 33) fits into this context. It is not an absolute command but an illustration of the kind of faith that trusts God more than worldly security. For more on worldly security, see note on Mk 10:21.

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 353-357). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

Having given a negative example of the principle in 12:15 in the parable of the rich fool (12:16–21), Luke provided a corrective to the believer’s relationship to possessions. What follows is material for the disciples, not for the crowds (cf. the introduction to the parallel material in Matt 5:1–2), for they alone know God as their Father (12:30, 32), are God’s flock (12:32), and possess the kingdom (12:32). The catchword that unites this section is the word “worry,” which occurs in 12:22, 25–26. (The synonym in 12:29 is also translated “worry.”) Two other sections on possessions will follow in 16:1–31 and 18:18–30.

Jesus said the disciples need not worry about their need for daily bread or clothing. In his sovereign care of his creation, God feeds the ravens and clothes the lilies. Having established God’s care of these lesser species, Jesus completed his *a fortiori* argument. How much more, then, will God provide for his children. If the ravens and lilies do not worry, how much less should the disciples who, unlike the ravens and lilies, are conscious of God’s promises and loving care. Having prayed to their Father for daily bread (11:2–3), they need not fear. If evil parents take care of their children, how much more will God take care of his (11:11–13). Besides, who can change anything by worrying (12:25)? Unbelieving Gentiles might worry about such things, but believers need not, for they know that their Father realizes they need such things.

Rather than worry about “things,” believers should concentrate on the concerns of the kingdom. Having focused their prayers on God’s kingdom, disciples should with singleness of mind focus their wills upon it as well (12:31a). God will provide the basic needs (12:31b).

Luke then added a word of encouragement (12:32; cf. John 21:15–17): they are God’s “little flock.” Although insignificant to the world, they are nevertheless cherished by God. This is followed by a final exhortation to sell their possessions and give to the poor (Luke 12:33) and a proverb that summarizes the problem caused by the accumulation of possessions (12:34). Human desires and longings will be focused on the place where the person’s possessions are concentrated. Death either unites people with their heavenly treasures, which can never be taken away, or deprives them of everything (12:20–21).

Comments

12:22 Then Jesus said to his disciples. The following material consists of teachings addressed to believers. The non-Christian must first of all repent and believe.

Therefore. “Therefore” calls attention to the rationale for the following command: “Do not worry about your life” because of what happened to the rich man in the preceding parable; i.e., “because it is folly to concentrate one’s life on the accumulation of possessions.”

Do not worry about your life. “Life” is literally *soul*, but here it refers to the whole human being, including his or her eating capacity.

Or about your body. “Body” refers to the human being as one who needs clothing. Note the synonymous parallelism in 12:22c, d and in the following verse.

12:23 The first reason given for the exhortation in 12:22 is that there is more to life than eating. As Jesus stated in 4:4, “Man does not live on bread alone.”

12:24 Consider. Compare 6:41; 12:27; 20:23.

Ravens. The Matthean parallel (Matt 6:26) has “birds of the air.” Luke’s ravens, who do not exhibit the rich man’s folly and greed (Luke 12:18), bring God’s care even more to mind because of Ps 147:9 and Job 38:41. In contrast to humans, “they do not sow and reap.”

How much more. This introduces an *a fortiori* argument (see comments on 11:11) and the second reason for the exhortation of 12:22: the believing community is precious in God’s sight, and “he will take care of you.”

12:25 Who of you? Compare 11:5.

A single hour? Literally a *cubit*. As a measure of length, the cubit was about eighteen inches. The next expression, “life” or “span of life” (RSV), can have either a physical or temporal meaning. In 2:52 and 19:3 it refers to stature, but here it refers to length of life, for adding a cubit to one’s height would be more than a “little thing” (12:26). “Cubit” must therefore refer not to a measure of length but to a measure of time. This verse asks whether believers can extend the length of their lives in any way by worrying. The assumed answer is, of course, no. This then is the third reason for the exhortation of 12:22. Due to human impotence, worry is pointless.

12:26 Worry cannot prolong life even in the slightest way. It cannot contribute anything positive to one’s life. (The negative effect that worry and anxiety have upon the quality, health, and length of life is becoming more and more recognized.) Whereas the following verses teach that the believer need not worry, these teach that worry is futile.

12:27 Lilies. Although the exact flower designated by the Greek term is uncertain, the meaning is clear.

Labor or spin. Jesus’ audience may have recognized an Aramaic pun/play between the words “labor” (*hamal*) and “spin” (*hazal*), but Luke’s readers would not have understood it because the pun did not carry over to their Greek text.

Solomon in all his splendor. Compare 1 Kgs 10 and 2 Chr 9.

There is extensive parallelism between Luke 12:27–28 and 12:24: “Consider the ravens”—“Consider the lilies”; “They do not sow or reap”—“They do not labor or spin”; “Yet God feeds them”—“God clothes the grass”; “How much more valuable you are than birds!”—“How much more will he clothe you.”

12:28 Grass ... which is here today. Grass frequently is used in the OT as a symbol for the transitory nature of life.

Thrown into the fire. “Fire” is better translated “oven.” Wood was relatively scarce in Israel, and grass was used for fuel to bake bread.

How much more. Jesus’ downgrading of the lilies to “grass” increases the strength of his *a fortiori* argument.

O you of little faith! The expression “little faith” is found not only in the parallel in Matt 6:30 but also in Matt 8:26; 14:31; 16:8.

12:29 Do not set your heart on. Literally *Do not seek*. Matthew 6:31 reads, “Do not worry.” “Seek” is used here to balance the “seek” in Luke 12:31, so that we have, “Do not seek ...” (12:29) but instead “Seek ...” (12:31).

Do not worry. Compare 12:22, 25–26. This is a synonym for the Greek word used in the three earlier references.

12:30 For the pagan world. “Pagan world” is literally *nations*, i.e., the unbelieving Gentiles who do not know God (cf. 1 Thess 4:5).

All such things. “All” can go with “nations” (RSV) or “these things” (NIV) but is best understood as modifying “things.”

Your Father. This address indicates that this teaching is for believers (see comments on 11:2). Believers who pray daily to their Father for food (11:3) need to be reassured that the Father will care for them even better than earthly fathers do (11:11–13). The word “your” is emphatic.

12:31 But seek his kingdom. Matthew 6:33 adds “and his righteousness,” which is a strong emphasis in his Gospel. The exhortation means to pursue those things involving the kingdom of God rather than material possessions. To “seek his kingdom” can be understood as: (1) desiring the consummation of the kingdom (Luke 11:2), which in turn may include the thought that

believers can in some way advance the coming of the kingdom; (2) praying the Lord's prayer; (3) seeking the blessings of the kingdom, i.e., treasure in heaven, rather than earthly possessions; (4) submitting to God's rule. In the present context (12:21 and esp. 33) the third alternative makes the most sense.

12:32 Once again there is an exhortation followed by a word of assurance (see comments on 12:11).

Do not be afraid. Although this is literally a command (the verb is an imperative), it functions as a reassuring word (cf. Josh 1:9). Two reasons are given. The first is found in the address "little flock" (cf. Matt 26:31), which identifies the believer as part of the true people of God (Mic 2:12). Even if sent out as lambs among wolves (Luke 10:3; cf. Acts 20:29), they need not fear, for God is with them. The second reason is that God has been pleased to give them (note the past tense, an inceptive aorist) his kingdom (cf. Luke 22:29–30), i.e., has made them part of his kingdom.

12:33 Sell your possessions. Compare 18:22. See Introduction 8 (7) for a discussion of how to understand this Lukan teaching.

Give to the poor. Compare 3:11; 6:34–35, 38; 11:41; 14:12–14; 19:8; cf. also Tob 4:7–11; Sir 3:30; 29:12; 35:2; 1 Tim 6:17–19.

Provide purses ... that will not wear out. "Purses" is a metaphor for the contents contained in them. One should use one's purse, i.e., money, to lay up treasure in heaven so that it will not be wasted. How one's money can be lost is given in the next two examples and was also illustrated in the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:20).

Treasure in heaven. Heavenly treasure is a reward on deposit with God (cf. 12:21; 18:22).

That will not be exhausted. Such treasure will not be exhausted when at death or the parousia, naked and without possessions, one confronts the eternal God (cf. 16:9). Such treasure cannot be affected by the dangers that earthly treasures encounter.

Where no thief comes near. The sense of the verb is "gets to it and takes it." Luke lacks "where thieves break in" (Matt 6:19). Luke's omission, if deliberate, may have been because his readers lived in a different kind of house from Jesus' Palestinian audience, where a thief would "break in" (literally *dig through the walls*). Compare however, Luke 12:39.

And no moth destroys. In ancient times one common form of wealth was clothing, which could be ruined by moths.

12:34 The concluding proverb teaches that if one's treasure is invested in the kingdom, especially through helping the poor (12:33), one's heart will be focused on God's kingdom as well. On the other hand, if one concentrates on the accumulation of earthly wealth, one cannot focus attention upon God. These are mutually exclusive concerns. One cannot serve God and money (16:13), but one can serve God by the correct use of money.

The Lukan Message

Luke continued his teaching on possessions by including various teachings of Jesus concerning this subject. Although most of the material is traditional, the Lukan emphasis is nonetheless clear. Why Luke emphasized this topic cannot be known with certainty. A "mirror reading" of the material might suggest that Luke's audience was particularly materialistic and that he was trying to change their orientation, but this is mere speculation. They might also have been practicing these principles already, and Luke might have been seeking to reinforce the practice (1:4) by reassuring them that this was in accordance with Jesus' teachings. Yet despite lack of agreement on why, we do know what Luke was saying to his readers.

The Lukan emphasis on stewardship has been shown earlier and need not be repeated here. See Introduction 8 (7). What is important in this passage is Luke's unique contribution to the traditional material found in 12:32–33. These teachings on stewardship must be understood in light of the coming of the kingdom and in the sharing in its blessings. Because of the kingdom's surpassing worth believers should practice such magnificent almsgiving as Luke proposed in 12:33 and recorded in Acts 2:44–47; 4:32–37; 5:1f. By so doing, the great reversal is even now taking place. The “poor” (Luke 6:20) have treasure in heaven, and the rich, like the fool in the parable (cf. 16:19–31), lose all: their possessions and their very lives (12:20; 9:24–25).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 12:22-34). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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