

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message #20 There is No Need to Worry

Scripture Luke 12:22-34

Jesus devoted a lot of His time to the training of His disciples, in particular the Twelve Apostles. Jesus emphasized over and over that the attitudes and behaviors and priorities of His disciples were to be radically different than people of the world.

Most of the teaching grew out of situations in which Jesus and the Twelve found themselves. For example, Jesus' teaching about hypocrisy, the subject we thought about in the previous message, came out of a chaotic situation in which a large crowd was divided in their opinions about Jesus. Some in the crowd supported the Pharisees who were critical of Jesus, and some supported Jesus who pointed out the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of the Pharisees.

In the verses we will read and think about this hour, Jesus talked about another aspect of the disciple's lifestyle — freedom from worry and anxiety. The background to this teaching was a request from someone in the crowd who wanted Jesus to arbitrate a family dispute over an inheritance. Jesus refused to become involved in this matter, and He used the occasion to teach on the priorities of life. His main statement was, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." He gave a warning against those who store up things for themselves but are not rich toward God.

Read Luke 12:22-34

Jesus made it clear throughout His training program that the focus of a disciple's life was, first and foremost, relationship with God; and second, relationship with others. On one occasion, Jesus stated that all the Law could be summed up in those two relationships: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind," and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (*see Matthew 22:37-40; Luke 10:27-28*). Living in relationship with God and relating well to others must, therefore, be the main focus of the disciple's life. Material possessions are not as important as God and others.

Jesus wanted His disciples to have spiritual priorities. More than anything else, the disciples were to "seek God's kingdom" (verse 31), and to focus their hearts on heavenly treasures. They were not to be obsessed with the material needs of this life.

There is an interesting way to compare true disciples and materialistic non-believers. Non-believers tend to use people in their efforts to acquire material possessions. This is seen in the greed and selfishness and exploitation of individuals by self-centered evildoers. On the other hand, true disciples unselfishly and generously use their material resources in efforts to bring people into relationship with Jesus Christ. There is a sharp distinction in the orientation of people in regard to their attitudes and use of their possessions.

Food and clothing are two of the basic needs that people have. Jesus said that the pagans in the world run after food, clothing, and materials things. Their minds are set on these things. Materialistic thoughts dominate their thinking. If believers are not to pursue material things, then how should they go about meeting their physical needs? The simple answer to this question is "trust God." That answer is implied throughout the passage. Jesus actually gave four instructions which, if followed, would require the disciples to trust God. Jesus said, "do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear" (verse 22), "do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink" (verse 29), "seek God's kingdom" as first priority (verse 31), and "do not be afraid" to trust God (verse 32).

In the first command, disciples were forbidden to worry or be anxious about taking care of their needs. As Jesus said, "Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes." To illustrate this point, Jesus used two examples from nature; birds (verse 24) and lilies (verse 27). The first illustration is focused on food, the second on clothes.

Ravens were one of the wild birds in the land of Palestine. According to the Old Testament Law, they were an unclean species (*Lev 11:15; Deut 14:14; Job 39:13-14; Ps 147:9*) because they were scavengers. Most Jews would consider these unclean birds to be unworthy of God's care. Jesus pointed out that ravens did nothing to take care of themselves; they could not grow their own food, nor was it their instinct or within their ability to store up food for future needs. Ravens lived day-by-day, and they only lived because God was concerned enough about them to provide their food. Jesus then applied the illustration to the disciples. God, who was concerned about the well-being of these detestable birds, was much more concerned about the physical needs of His people. Compared to the ravens, disciples were much more valuable to God, and hence, disciples could trust God to take care of them.

In verse 25, Jesus tosses into His teaching a practical reason not to worry: worry just doesn't do any good; it doesn't change anything. Worrying does not increase the length of one's life. The point here is that it is futile to worry about small matters, such as one hour in a person's lifetime. If we have no control over such a small desire, it is even more futile to worry about the larger matters which are even farther beyond our control.

Let me talk about worry for a moment. Worry never changes anything in a positive sense. In fact, medical science informs us that worry can actually shorten a person's lifespan. Worry is an indication of the tension that builds up within us when we feel that life is out of our control. It is a helplessness that wastes a lot of emotional energy. The person who is an obsessive worry-er typically feels isolated and alone. True disciples can have freedom from worry because they know that God loves them and cares for them.

From a biblical standpoint, the opposite of "worry" is "trust." This is why Jesus, in verse 28, accused His listeners of having inadequate faith, insufficient confidence in God. The disciples had not yet learned to completely place their trust in God. Jesus wanted them to have a more explicit confidence and trust in God.

The second illustration from nature concerns lilies. Jesus contrasted the grandeur of Solomon with this common wildflower. Solomon was surrounded with the opulence of royalty. He could afford the finest cloth. He had many workers to supply him with the finest of garments. Yet, according to Jesus, God arrayed the flowers of the fields with even greater splendor than Solomon's, and the flowers didn't have to work at being beautiful. They just had to be the kind of flower that God wanted them to be.

The comparison between the lilies and God's people concerns the grace of God. If God gives ordinary wildflowers such beauty, just imagine what God can do for those individuals who commit their lives to Him and trust Him for their needs. The comparison continues in verse 28. Lilies, unfortunately, have a short lifespan. The beauty with which God endowed them lasted for only a brief time, after which they became fuel for the fire. I'm sure the disciples understood the application: If God cares for these short-lived plants, how much more will He care for and clothe us who are promised eternal life in His presence.

God provided food for ravens. He clothed the lilies with beauty. Food and clothing — they are the items that God knows are needed by all His creatures. Jesus was assuring His disciples that God would certainly take care of them. As Jesus said in verse 22, "do not worry about ... what you will eat or ... what you will wear." Verses 29-30 sum up this teaching. "Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry. ... Your Father in heaven knows that you need them." Disciples are to believe that God will fulfill this promise.

When Jesus rebuked His listeners with the statement, "O you of little faith," He went to the heart of the problem of worry and anxiety. Worry by a disciple comes from lack of faith in God. It is a form of doubt — doubt that God truly cares for them, or has the ability to care for them. Keep in mind that Jesus was addressing His disciples, individuals who were committed to God and learning to live in God's kingdom. And yet, those disciples were very much like believers today. There are too many believers who, after placing their trust in God for eternal salvation, fall into a state of unbelief when it comes to the day-by-day problems they face. The Apostle Paul made a statement in his letter to the Romans which fits here: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (*Rom. 8:32*). In other words, if God did the greatest thing in saving us, can't we trust Him to take care of comparatively lesser matters on our behalf?

Jesus made His expectations of His disciples very clear. First He told them what they should not seek; that is mentioned in verses 29-30. Then, He told them in verse 31 what they should seek. Disciples must set their hearts on and seek after the ways of the kingdom of God. The priorities of the followers of God and the pagans of the world are clearly contrasted. The high priority of genuine disciples is their relationship with God, and in order to maintain a close relationship they will “Love the Lord their God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their strength and with all their mind.” That’s the kind of concentrated focus that disciples must have.

There is a promise connected with Jesus’ command to seek the kingdom. He said that God would provide the earthly and material needs of His followers. However, verse 31 is a conditional promise. In other words, if we major on the values and behaviors expected of kingdom people, then God is committed to our care. To know that God knows our needs is the source of our assurance and calmness in this life.

Let me emphasize here that Jesus is not implying that His followers can be lazy and neglect their ordinary work and responsibilities. Verse 24 informed us that God provides for the birds, but, as one commentator observed, God does not just plop worms into their mouths as they sit in their nests. Both birds and disciples have to exert some efforts to obtain the food that God makes available. Everyone must perform the daily tasks that God makes available through employment and in the home to the best of their abilities. Employment is one of the special provisions of God.

The point of this passage is that people must not allow their hearts to become attached to material things. They must not allow their work efforts to be centered on the material benefits/possessions which can be gained through selfish ambition and all-consuming work. The spiritual well-being of a disciple requires the disciple to keep his/her life centered on God and God’s kingdom even as he/she is engaged in the work-a-day world.

We must keep in mind that food and clothing and material possessions are just for this present life. Hence, disciples should consider these needs as of secondary importance and not become anxious about them. As Jesus said, there is more to life than earthly necessities. People seem to have two extreme attitudes toward possession and wealth. They can be covetous and greedy when they do not have the possessions they want, and, if they have a lot of possessions, they can be anxious and worried over the things which they have. Jesus warned against both extremes. He instructed His followers to trust God for what was really necessary, and to hold loosely whatever else God granted to them.

In verse 32, Jesus referred to His disciples as His “little flock.” As the good Shepherd, Jesus was responsible for feeding and nurturing those under His care. He knew about the dangers and difficulties that the disciples would face in the future, and did not want His disciples to be afraid of or worried about any of the circumstances they would face in life. Fear and worry did not have to be part of the disciples’ lives because certain benefits of the kingdom were already available to them, including the promise that God would take care of them, thus freeing them from worry.

Jesus was trying to convey to His disciples the need for a kingdom orientation to earthly life. The disciples were to place their complete confidence in God. They were not to waste their emotional and physical energies on earthly ambitions and the accumulation of material possessions. They were to honor God by orienting their lives around God’s kingdom purposes, by trusting God to supply the necessities of their lives, and by serving others with the resources that God would provide to them. If they did this, they were promised a worry-free life on earth. They were expected to share their resources with people in need because, first, God expected them to “love their neighbors as themselves,” and, second, because they were assured that the Father would take care of them if they took care of kingdom business.

True followers of Jesus must be concerned about two kinds of treasure, the treasures of heaven and of earth. They must be most concerned about the treasures they are laying up in heaven. This is the kind of treasure which is indestructible and never at risk of loss. This treasure comes out of a life of self-denial, out of service to others for the sake of the kingdom, and being a faithful witness for Jesus Christ. The questions that disciples must ask themselves are: Do I honor God in everything I do? and Do I value people more than things?

On the other hand, earthly treasure is always at risk, whether to thieves, to moths, to disasters, or to the greed and manipulation of evil people. People who seek earthly treasures expend a lot of time and emotional and physical energy on acquiring things and then protecting what they have. Non-believers tend to value themselves and their possessions more than people in general. Jesus wants us to consider carefully our values. Where do we want our treasure to be? The answer to that question will be an indication of where our hearts are focused.

Let me summarize this teaching. Jesus wanted His disciples to be free from unnecessary anxiety as they transitioned from earthly ways to kingdom ways. In order to protect them from future anxieties He, first of all, reminded them that life consisted of more than material possessions (*verses 22-24*). Second, He told them that worry is foolish because it doesn't change anything (*verses 25-28*). Third, He noted that worry is a characteristic of pagans and not appropriate for God's people (*verses 29-31*). Then He assured them that the benefits of the kingdom would be given to them (*verse 32*). Finally He urged them to make sure that their assets were invested in heaven, rather than earth (*verses 33-34*).

Our lifestyle here on earth should be characterized by peace of heart and mind. We can face all our circumstances here with confidence, which is the opposite of fear. We don't need to worry about the future if we believe in God the Father and we accept His promises.

The Psalmist wrote (*in Psalm 55:22*) "Cast your cares on the LORD." The Apostle Peter wrote (*in I Peter 5:7*) "Cast all your anxiety on Him."