

Luke 12:22-34 *Lasting Word for a Little Flock*

All of us can probably look back on our lives and see a time or two when we were spared from some great disaster. Maybe it was a very close call on the highway, or maybe you changed your mind last minute on a major life decision.

I remember a time when I was around 7 years old, and I crossed a major highway on my bike, but failed to look both ways before I crossed. A car came to a screeching halt just a few feet from me.

God spared my life. If I had crossed seconds earlier or the car was driving a little faster, I would have been critically injured or dead.

Every disciple has been spared from eternal disaster.

Disciples are spared from eternal disaster (v20), but that does not mean that the life of a disciple will be obstacle-free. The path of discipleship is full of obstacles. Anxiety and worry are among them and the focus of our text.

- What is anxiety?
- First, it is not always bad and sinful, just like we saw with fear earlier. Fear of man is bad, fear of God is encouraged, vv4-5.
- The word Luke uses here for anxiety (v22) can also describe a positive care in the NT. (Phil 2:20—Epaphroditus) ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be *genuinely concerned* for your welfare.

(1 Cor 7:32-34)

³² I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. ³³ But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife.”

- See how there is a distinction between sinful and godly anxiety.
- So when Paul says he has a daily anxiety for all the churches he planted (2 Cor 11:28), I don't believe he is confessing sin. Godly anxiety is a God-directed zeal and concern that is tied to the kingdom, and serving people in the church. To be anxious about these things is not wrong.

If, when we leave here today, we are able to flip a mental switch off and forget about this church and the people in it, and their cares and burdens or if our missionaries and their work is a remote thought to us most of the time, it may not be the case that we are easygoing, laid back, and a worry free people. It may simply be that we don't care enough.

—The obstacle of anxiety and worry that Jesus talks about here is tied to earthly things. Mainly material things (v33); things tied to our body and not our soul.

Main Idea: The obstacles of anxiety and worry can be overcome by focusing on God's providence, seeking his kingdom first, and evaluating the treasure of our heart.

1. Focus on God's providential care (vv22-30)

- The words of Jesus not to be anxious comes as a command, not just advice or a suggestion.
- Jesus mentions two things that create a worry trap: food and clothing.
- In our day clothes are so mass produced that we can pick them up dirt cheap; but in Jesus's day, some clothes carried large wealth. (e.g. soldiers gamble to secure Jesus's clothing at the cross, Jn 19:23-24)
- So in our day, for this to make practical sense, we may think of anything that translates to wealth— a 401k, retirement, property value.
- The point: Life is so much bigger than what we worry about. If we live in worry, we miss what life is about. *Life is primarily about our relationship with God and caring for others.*

Jesus gives several illustrations to flesh this out:

- —(v24) how God cares for ravens (from either Ps 147:9 or Job 38:41) God provides food for the young ravens that cry.
- —(v27-28) God arrays the wildflowers and grass with beauty.

This all falls under what we call Providence.

**Understanding, believing, and resting in the truth of God's providence is one of the main ways to overcome the obstacle of anxiety.

1689 Baptist Confession of Faith *Divine Providence*

*From The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith in Modern English by Stan Reeves.

“God the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom, upholds, directs, arranges and governs all creatures and things from the greatest to the least...to the purpose for which they were created. He governs by the free and unchangeable counsel of his own will...Thus nothing happens to anyone by chance or outside of God’s providence.”

- That last sentence is critical.

In order to overcome the obstacle of anxiety we need to get this rooted in our hearts. Nothing will ever happen by chance, or outside of God’s providence.

Last year right around this time it started to become clearer that God was calling us here. We were excited about that, but there were stacks of details that were unknown. If you are a person prone to fretting, then you know what it’s like to lay in bed and start going through the list of “what if’s”

Worry tends to speculate about the future and project the worst outcome.

- After the great illustrations of God’s providence, Jesus gets us to the root of the problem with the concept of “little faith.” Little faith is a lapse into practical atheism.

Application: Which means the battle over anxiety and worry is a *battle for faith*. It boils down to a *trust* issue. Do I trust in my father’s providential provision? Do you? In the vast complexity of all he does, do we believe he truly cares about us, and has it all under control?

2. Seek God’s kingdom first (vv30-32)

- So the first way to overcome the obstacle of worry boils down to trust.
- But Jesus stresses another way to address anxiety, by pursuit.
- First, note in v30, Jesus mentions how the nations (unbelievers) set their energy on temporal things.
- Jesus says there is a better way for disciples (v31): Seek his kingdom and these will be added to you.

This also reminds us that God’s kingdom is the defining purpose of a disciple. If disciples are to get “worked up” about anything, it should be God’s kingdom.

- Jesus speaks with loving affirmation (v32) — “Fear not, little flock”

Jesus's words are so fitting: God does not delight in his people because we are a strong, mighty, and self-sufficient bunch. He delights in our smallness and weakness.

- We also have another reminder in v32: Sheep need a leader. Specifically, *sheep need a leader who guides and directs their future.*

Anxiety is almost totally a future-oriented problem. The fact that we are not God, and can't know or control all events in the future is what causes much anxiety.

- Anxiety (Oxford Dictionary) "a feeling of worry or unease about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome."
- Archaic use of imminent is "overhanging"

That's what creates anxiety in our hearts;. whatever is overhanging.

But Jesus flips it: let God's kingdom be the main thing overhanging in your life. There is a trickle-down effect "these things will be added."

If you are prone to lose sleep at night, or lose weight, or gain it due to ungodly anxiety think: will what you are worried about really matter 1 billion years from today? That's the principle in v25. Worry is pointless.

Jesus reminds disciples that worry is wasted energy.

3. Evaluate the treasure of your heart (vv33-34)

- The final part of overcoming the obstacle of worry is evaluating our treasures.
- V33 Jesus suggests that we travel light.
Disciples are at their best in this world when traveling lightly.
- Jesus locks in on wealth and possessions, a major obstacle for many disciples, and the cause of much energy spent on worry.
- Jesus gives us his wisdom. The way not to worry about stuff is to detach from it.

Accumulating, hoarding, stockpiling stuff is really not kingdom-living. Kingdom living includes *caring for others.*

This does not mean that we need to part with everything we own. But if we are serious about Jesus and his kingdom, v33 is not optional.

What does it look like for you to apply the words?

What does it mean to loosen our grip on things and live with open-handed generosity? It seems that our society is built on such a buying mindset.

But a discipleship mindset is not "buy, buy, buy," but should be "bless, bless, bless".

Based on the benevolence and giving patterns at TRB, some are doing this well

obviously. God is honored and pleased. You are representing Jesus. Others may need the challenge this brings.

John Wesley made a list of accountability questions (21 of them).

#10: "Do I pray about the money I spend?"

It's really a call to use our possessions to love God and neighbor, or what we can call holistic discipleship.

- Finally, Jesus states plainly (v34) that our heart will always be wrapped up in our treasures.

This means that if the gospel is our treasure, it will have a firm grip on our heart. The gospel will transform the way we see wealth, generosity, and by extension anxiety.

- In the gospel, we cherish the generosity of Christ.

(2 Cor 8:9)

"⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

Have you come to grips with and embraced that reality? Do you know Jesus as a generous Savior, who gave up eternal wealth to save poor, destitute sinners like us from eternal disaster.

The offer of salvation is Christ extending his generous hands to us. It is the gospel that opens our hearts up to become open-handed disciples.

Every act of generosity reflects the character of Jesus in our lives.

Conclusion

The final call is to evaluate where our treasure is.

Many say they have given their life to Jesus, but the question is: have we given our stuff to Jesus?

Heart and treasure go together. Always.

A good prayer of commitment is found in *The Valley of Vision* prayer called "The Infinite and Finite"

*Let me remember that life is short and unforeseen,
And is only an opportunity for usefulness;
Give me a holy avarice to redeem the time,
To awake at every call to charity and piety,
So that I may feed the hungry,*

*Clothe the naked,
Instruct the ignorant,
Reclaim the vicious,
Forgive the offender,
Diffuse the gospel,
Show neighborly love to all.
Let me live a life of self-distrust,
Dependence on thyself,
Mortification,
Crucifixion,
prayer.*