

Sermon File # 1094

Scripture Text: Luke 12:22-34

Sermon Title: *The Remedy for Worry*

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The Remedy for Worry

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to Luke 12:22-34. As we noted two Sundays ago, in the sermon on the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21), Jesus was responding to a request from a man in the larger crowd that was surrounding Jesus and his disciples. Jesus had been addressing the smaller circle of his disciples in the first part of chapter 12 (verses 1-12), and giving them warnings and encouragement about the need to trust in God and rely on the Holy Spirit to be his faithful witnesses in a hostile environment. The interruption by the man who wanted Jesus to act an arbiter in his financial dispute with his brother gave Jesus the opportunity to address the larger crowd with a parable that speaks to the danger of materialistic greed (verses 16-21).

Now Jesus turns back to the smaller group of his disciples and gives them a corrective and follow-up on the ever-present danger of greed. He had concluded his parable with a warning about selfishly storing up material things in place of being rich towards God (verse 21). Now Jesus is ready to tell his disciples how that they can avoid greed and worry over the material in life and indeed become rich toward God, as he gives them the remedy for worry.

Follow as I read: **Luke 12:22-34.**

Cathleen Henning Fenton, writing on <http://panicdisorder.about.com> says,

“In our busy world, it's not unusual to feel worried at times. You may worry about your family, your job, your health and other personal issues. You may worry about friends and your community. And you may worry about issues facing the entire world. Sometimes, though, worry becomes a problem. Worry might disrupt your daily routine, hampering your ability to focus at work, for example, or keeping you from falling asleep at night. More seriously, you might find yourself unable to do anything about worry, until it gets to the point where worry controls your life.” And then she describes the symptoms of undue anxiety that becomes panic disorder and urges readers to seek the help of a health professional. And that may be necessary and part of the path for Jesus' healing for you.

The key word in our text is “worry.” It literally means to be unsettled about something, to be “up in the air,” like a ship tossed by the waves (See Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel according to S Luke*, ICC, page 328). Ms Fenton, in the above-quoted Web site, refers to how anxiety often keeps us awake at night. We all know what it is to worry, perhaps tossing in our beds during sleepless nights, as we are unsettled by anxious thoughts of what might happen to ourselves, our families, possessions, relationships, careers and future.

But for most of us, Jesus simply wants to give his remedy for worry and expects us to obediently trust him to replace our worry with a calm trust that will not necessarily change our outward circumstances, but will calm our tossing about in needless anxiety and will root and establish our minds and hearts in his care. Worry is such a part of human life and daily experience that only the grace of God can overcome it and replace it with quiet trust in God.

From childhood we are taught to worry. From early childhood we are taught to worry about what we put in our mouths, and parents, fearing we may never have the initiative we need to succeed in life, tell us we'd better start worrying about finding a summer job! As if there were not enough to worry about in our personal lives and with our children or grandchildren, we can find plenty to worry about in this information age. If we watch too much television news, we begin to worry about our health, whether we are eating the wrong foods or are being poisoned by the environment. We certainly can find much to worry us over the apparently insoluble conditions of the economy and wars, famine and pandemics of all kinds.

Jesus comes to us today, with all imaginable circumstances, and he says we need not live in a state of unsettled, tossed about worry. He gives us a remedy for worry by, first of all, calling us to...

➤ **Obediently trust the Father**

In these words to his disciples, Jesus admonishes us to obediently trust our heavenly Father as the antidote to worry. Our emotions do not exist in a vacuum, and when we seek to overcome worry there must be a positive replacement for that negative emotion. Notice first...

- *The command to not worry*

In our text, Jesus doesn't just suggest or counsel trust in the Father, but uses the imperative, he issues the command to not worry, just as he often commanded the his disciples and those in trouble to stop being afraid (Matthew 10:28; Mark 5:36; John 14:27, etc.). Faith is trust in the sovereign power and faithfulness of God to do what he has promised. He has promised to provide for the needs and the spiritual protection of his children. This is not to say there won't be trials, storms and tragedies in life. But Jesus says we are to not be afraid, that is, to put faith in God's power, faithfulness, goodness and love in the midst of life's storms and in the midst of our position of need and our concern for essential provision and protection.

I suppose that, because we are fragile and mortal creatures, we cannot help the initial reaction of fear or worry, in the light of our vulnerability. Yet, as we remember that God is perfect love, power and wisdom, our ongoing worry is disobedience to his command and is a needless exercise in futility. Solomon gives this sage advice:

"It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives his beloved sleep" (Psalm 127:2, ESV).

Ongoing worry, like all sin, is not only futile but is also destructive to our spiritual life. Jesus posits the question of futility: "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (verse 25). In fact, the opposite is more likely. Constant worry can take years off of our mortal life and render our life for God less effective.

The late Corrie ten Boom said that worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow but rather empties today of its strength (quoted by Warren W Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate: Luke: A Call to Be more Like the Savior*, page 140). As with these disciples, so with us, Jesus seeks to get our focus on following him in faithful, trusting service. And worry keeps us, like the man who delayed in following Jesus, always looking backwards (Luke 9:62).

And that leads us to the reminder of...

- *Our value to God*

Once again Jesus uses the “how much more argument” (as in Luke 11:13) to underscore our value to God. The Father provides for the ravens, “scavenger birds of the lowest rank” (verse 24 and Darrell Bock, *NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, page 349). How much more will he not provide for us, for whom he gave his Son? (See Romans 8:32).

We are baffled as we see the circumstances of some of God’s best people in the light of this truth. Yet we are inclined, earthly minded as we are, to assess people’s worth in the light of their earthly, temporal circumstances. But we need to understand that God has the long view in mind. His primary concern for his children is not to see them always enjoying the comforts of this life, or even being spared suffering in this life. He is at work to give extra grace to his suffering children and he is making his sufferers into people who are weaned from the things of this world and whose hope is in the world and glory to come (Hebrews 11:13-16).

By faith we are to learn to affirm our value in the eyes of the heavenly Father, who actually delights in us as his children, more than we could ever love our children (Luke 11:11-13).

- *The promise of God*

The promise of God in our text is that God will meet the needs of his children. He cares for us far more than he does for the ravens and the grass and flowers of the field, which are all dispensable. He views us as having more splendor than the brilliance of the flowers that exceed the lavish clothing of Solomon.

God desires to endow and provide us with all that we need to become his Jesus-reflecting children. And when we know God and join him in his mission, we can rest assured that he will give all we need to do his work and complete the assignment he has for us. He doesn’t give us all that we want, but certainly he provides all that we need. And, as Paul says, he gives, not out of his glorious riches, but *according to* them, which means in abundance and perhaps also beyond our expectations (Philippians 4:19).

I think it’s instructive that Jesus compares God’s provision for us with is provision for the birds. All that ravens can do is scavenge for themselves and their little ones. They depend on what God provides, but also they are always busy. (I read or heard somewhere that birds eat several times the equivalent of their weight each day!) And we also are to be busy, as Paul says, working with our hands, so we will have enough for ourselves and for those in need (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15).

And so, when you have surrendered your will to the will of the heavenly Father, you can be sure he will provide your daily bread. If you are here in Belgium under God's orders, you can rest assured that he will meet every need that you and your family might have, whether financial, educational, social, health or emotional. God will not send you without also providing for you. He is far more adequate than any government or business sponsor. So, when we are tossed about in worry, we need to anchor our minds and hearts in God's promises, such as in Philippians 4:6-7. And, as Paul says, being thankful reminds us of how he has cared for us in the past:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, *with thanksgiving*, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Our only problem is...

- *Our little faith*

Because Jesus used the imperative and thus gave the command to not worry, then this makes our state of unresolved worry and overriding anxiety a sin. And Jesus referred to the worrying disciples as people "of little faith" (verse 28). Whatever "does not come from faith is sin," writes the Apostle Paul (Romans 14:23).

Needless worry and anxiety are what is called "practical atheism," thinking and living as though God does not exist, even though we would never admit this to our Christian friends. If we do admit God exists, then ongoing worry means that God is not perfect love.

I recall reading the testimony of Bible teacher, Henry Blackaby, when his daughter Carrie was diagnosed with cancer. Henry and his wife obviously felt an impulse of fear, dread and probable worry over the life their daughter. Yet Henry said that they immediately thereafter placed Carrie before the cross. With the backdrop of the cross they would always be reminded of and never doubt the love of God for Carrie. With the love of God in focus they could obey the command to not worry about Carrie. And as we read these words of Jesus commanding us to not worry, he sprinkles this teaching with reminders of the Father's love and care. And yet now we have the greatest evidence of his love for us, in the cross of his Son (Romans 8:32).

In the light of such incontrovertible evidence of God's love, the sin of worry, the sin of unbelief comes into full view. When I see how God's grace enabled the Blackaby family to rest in faith regarding the wellbeing of their daughter, under attack by the horrible disease of cancer, my anxiety and worry over much smaller things appears heinous. The Lord Jesus, who so loved me and gave himself for

me, has the right to command my leaving worry and my calm trust in him to meet my every need.

Next, in his remedy for worry Jesus calls us to...

➤ **Actively seek the Kingdom**

Jesus knows that we by nature will set our hearts on and seek after what is of value to us, which is what he says in verse 29 (“And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink...” “And do not seek” these things (ESV). These are the concerns that are anxiously pursued by the pagan, unbelieving world (verse 30). Then Jesus assures us that the Father knows that we need these things, meaning that he is not oblivious to our needs, but rather he cares about us and will meet our needs. And the good news is that we don’t have to go grasping after our needs, but we can accept God’s provisions from his loving hand.

When our children were very small we gave them little glass piggy banks, where they could store their pennies and cash them in for something they eventually might want to buy. There was a slot at the top where pennies were deposited into the little bank and an opening at the bottom that was covered by a cap that was to be removed only when the bank was full of pennies. One day our son, Kyle, decided to “rob” his bank prematurely, and the opening at the bottom was just large enough for him to slip his hand through and grab a handful of pennies. He came crying to his mother, saying his hand was stuck in the bank. Because his fist was tightly holding the pennies, he could not pull his hand out of the glass bank. Nancy eventually persuaded him to let go of the pennies so that his hand could slip back out of the jar, then he could simply let the pennies fall through the hole.

Much of our worry and distress would be resolved if we learned to let go of our grip on things and let lose of all that causes us worry and stress. Then the Father will let his blessings fall to our empty, trusting hands. And then we are free to seek after the true and lasting blessings of the kingdom.

“But seek his kingdom, and these things will be yours as well” (verse 31).

The issue we face is whether we are willing to shift our worry over temporal matters and things to active concern for and pursuit of kingdom of God and eternal things. And we are guaranteed success in seeking the kingdom of God because of what Jesus says about...

- *The gift of the Kingdom*

Jesus adds that we need not be afraid of deprivation or destitution. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom”

(verse 32). Jesus assures us again that we are the sheep of his pasture, whom he has rescued and gathered safely into his fold (Luke 15:3-7; John 10:1-18).

Jesus reminds his disciples that the Father has been pleased to give us the kingdom. This tells us that to be under the reign of God and safely in the fold of salvation is a free gift of grace. Of course it is not a cheap gift, having cost the life, suffering and death of the Son of God (John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:18-19). But it is free in that we can never earn or deserve this gift in any way. All we can do is acknowledge our desperate need and humbly accept this free gift (Ephesians 2:1-9).

To be given the kingdom means that under God's gracious rule and as children of the king, we have access to all the riches of our inheritance in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3-14). As we noted earlier in the eleventh chapter of Luke, we are given every need and the greatest gift of all—the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). We through the Holy Spirit, have access to God's wisdom and the riches of his fellowship and the power of his love. We also are being re-made into the likeness of God's Son through the fruit and virtues of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:3-9).

If we focused more on the reality and the riches of the kingdom of God we would be more aware of how we spiritually speaking are living beneath our means. We tend to live more like paupers than kings. As I approach old age I realize more than ever that my spiritual graces are not keeping pace with my birthdays. I recall a dinner conversation with a godly seminary professor, who continues to teach evangelism and mentor hundreds of students and pastors each year. He shared with me about 7 years ago when he was approaching his 80's that his number one prayer was to be sweet and godly in his old age. No amount of ministerial success in church life could ever compensate for a failure to be godly in character and conduct. This is the gift of the kingdom that Jesus says the Father is pleased to give us—not just our final eschatological salvation, our getting through the gates of heaven, but the kingdom blessing of God's righteousness (more fully expressed in Matthew 6:33).

Next, Jesus says that we are to join him in accepting and pursuing...

- *The agenda of the Kingdom*

In verse 33 we must ask if these words were applicable to only that first group of disciples who were an itinerate bands of followers or if it is a timeless prohibition of private ownership of property. In the balance of Scripture, which addresses the obligation of the wealthier members of the church to share with the needy, it's apparent that Jesus is calling not for a renunciation of all wealth and personal resources, but for the willingness to use our resources as though they were not our own (2 Corinthians 8:13-15; 9:6-11).

When our focus is on the kingdom of God and pursuing his righteousness we are given the grace of contentment. A lot of our worry would diminish if we were content with what we already have. This is what Paul told young pastor Timothy:

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1Timothy 6:6-10).

If we were in active pursuit of the kingdom of God, we would find greater joy, satisfaction and “success” in our prayer life. In his new book on prayer, Philip Yancey confronts head-on the many questions and difficulties we Christians tend to have regarding Jesus’ promises of answered prayer and the many instances in Scripture as well as in our personal experiences of unanswered prayer. What about all these promises, such as if we believe we will receive whatever we ask for in prayer (Matthew 21:22, etc.)? Yancey helps us to understand that these promises were made to disciples who were willing to follow Jesus and to take on his kingdom agenda. In the context of following Jesus, we are not in the habit of bringing him a “grocery list” of personal needs, with a few extra wishes thrown in. Rather, the more we seek Jesus and follow his agenda, the more we learn to ask and the more we desire to ask for those things that will make us more like Jesus and that will advance the cause of his kingdom. Yancey reminds us that prayer is the cultivation of our relationship with God, who not only invites us to join in his kingdom work, but delights to bless us in kingdom living and serving (See Yancey’s *Prayer: Does It Make any Difference?* Hodder, 2006).

Jesus reminds us that when we actively seek the kingdom we are making...

- *Our investment in the Kingdom*

Jesus calls us to overcome worry by investing in purses “that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (verses 33-34). The only truly safe place for even our material and financial investments is God’s kingdom.

Nancy and I have our pension and other investments in the hands of a financial investment counselor, who seems to use good judgment in making as safe and low risk as possible. Yet we realize that a stock market crash or a financial depression of any kind could erase a lot if not most of all of those investments in things, such as property, stocks and bonds. We have decided that the safest investment is our tithing, our giving ten percent of our gross income to this church, as we have to each church we have served since the beginning of our

marriage nearly 40 years ago. We still have growing to do in faith and sacrificial giving far beyond the tithe, but we have seen God honor and bless our giving, as we have sought to obey him in this area of our lives. It's been our safest investment of all, one that cannot be taken from us or erode before our eyes.

The Message paraphrase says:

“Get yourselves a bank that can't go bankrupt, a bank in heaven far from bankrobbers, safe from embezzlers, a bank you can bank on. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.”

I have read about the great stock market crashes in the US, when bankers and investors, upon hearing the bad news of their financial loss, summarily got pistols and shot themselves. Obviously their heart was with their treasure and when they lost their material treasure they lost the will to live. But if we invest in the kingdom, our hearts will always be blessed because God's kingdom is unshakable and our giving to the kingdom has eternal implications and results. When you give to God's kingdom through his church, which I believe to be the storehouse and main distribution point for the kingdom (Malachi 3:10; 1 Corinthians 16:2-3), you have the joy and blessing of seeing lives blessed and changed and of joining Jesus in his kingdom work.

Many of you know that my father was a church planter in the Midwest of the US and later became the director of a convention of over 500 churches in the state of Ohio that were begun under his aggressive and effective leadership. Many times he would allow me, during my childhood, to accompany him on a Sunday day trip when he would drive to a city in Ohio where he would preach for a special occasion in a church. (I later discovered that when he asked my mother which of the four children she wanted him to take, she would usually name me. Apparently my absence from the family created the most peaceful conditions for her). Usually my dad would preach in one church in the morning, after which we would enjoy a church-wide dinner or a meal in a home. He would then preach in that same or another church that evening and then we would begin the drive home that Sunday night.

When we would get into the car for the return trip I would pick up his Bible and look for an envelope that would often contain a paycheck, known as an honorarium, for his preaching services for the day. On more than one occasion there was no envelope and I would ask my dad where it was. Sometimes he would inform me that the pastor or church treasurer assured him that the check would be mailed the next morning. But I also remember what he would say when there was no paycheck then and was none forthcoming. “Well, son, that's one we can put in the heavenly bank.”

Those ones he “put in the heavenly bank” were probably his safest and surest investments and receipts. Although my dad never made a large salary, never as large as his colleagues in denominational life, I always respected and later marveled at the way he provided for his wife and four children. His main pursuit was the kingdom of God through the leading of the lost to Christ and the building of churches in the Midwest. And God added to him, and us, everything else we needed.

Verse 34 tells us that the object that we most invest in becomes the object of our affections and desires. If we invest in people, we learn to love them as Jesus invested in and loved us. As we invest in the cause of the kingdom of heaven our greatest desire will be its advancement and our greatest joy will be in those brought into the kingdom. The more we live for the good of the kingdom and the glory of God, the more we will be heavenly minded people of hope.

We also must invest in God himself, what Jesus referred to in verse 21 of this chapter about those, like the rich fool, who live only for this life and are not rich toward God. The sure antidote to worry is to, in the words of John Piper, “go hard after God,” to seek to find all our joy and delight in him; then we need never worry about lesser things. When we learn to delight in God himself, sometimes God delights to give us “delightful extras.”

I recall hearing an African American preacher, Immanuel Scott, describe how that his grandson would often visit him in his study in the church where he was pastor. Sometimes they would converse, but often the grandson would just sit contentedly occupying himself until his grandfather was finished with his work.

One day the grandson asked his father if he would buy him a pair of basketball shoes, which at the time were the rage. These rather expensive shoes were named after the most famous basketball player of the time, Michael Jordan, and the shoes were called “*Air Jordans*.” Pastor Scott gladly took his grandson shopping for these shoes. When they returned home, Scott’s daughter, the boy’s mother, was displeased by the extravagance. “Daddy, why did you buy him those expensive shoes? Cheaper shoes would have worked just as well for him.” The indulgent pastor/father/grandfather replied, “I was glad to give him something he wanted because of all the hours he spent with me and didn’t ask for a thing.”

I believe that’s the way the Father is with us. If our hearts are content to be in his presence, if we learn to delight in him, then he delights to take care of our needs and perhaps even throw in a little extra, a little “extravagance,” which may not be material but will be evidence that God is able to exceed all our expectations (Ephesians 3:20-21). I think God has nice surprises for those who learn to find the highest joy simply in his fellowship. That, it seems, is the real blessing of prayer. This is anything but the “wealth and health gospel” that I hear preached by television evangelists, who promise that if listeners have enough faith (and

show their faith by making a donation to said evangelists!) they will be cured of their illnesses and of their financial woes. Indeed, “the *real* believers will be financially wealthy,” is the heresy I heard just a few weeks ago. The truth is, God wants us to be rich in godliness and in a life of fruitful service that honors him. And he promises to meet our needs; and he is not parsimonious in his provisions, but gives *all* that we need.

Conclusion:

It seems then that we have the choice, or worrying about things and temporal conditions like income, health, children’s needs or we can learn to trust and to seek the eternal and indestructible things of the kingdom. We seek either this world’s stuff, just like pagan unbelievers, or we become cross-cultural God-seekers, joining him in kingdom seeking, trusting that he will sponsor us in meeting our needs.

Continual worry is more than just a weakness or proclivity of disposition; it is sin, the failure to trust in the Father’s love, wisdom and ability to provide all our needs. It’s to deny the active care of a loving Father, to think and live as though God doesn’t exist; thus, it is practical atheism. Sin, whether it be of the flesh or of the spirit, calls for repentance. If we are honest with ourselves and with God, there will be some repentance here today.

Perhaps the place, after repenting of sinful anxiety, is to begin is to turn our worries into prayer. Philip Yancey writes about how sometimes it is difficult to concentrate in praying for others because of our anxious thoughts. He advises that we should thus begin to pray about these anxieties, giving them over to God, who teaches us to pray for our daily bread, meaning the meeting of any needs or solving any problems in our lives (Luke 11:3. See above citation, page 179). If your prayers are interrupted by worries, then pray first about your worries and then go hard after God and his kingdom! Then the things that caused our worries begin to fade in importance. Our hearts are once again anchored in the assured love of God, who promises to meet every need of ours.

We will partake in a few moments of the meal of our Lord Jesus, who commands us to remember his sacrifice for us. May this Communion today be a reminder of his great love and care for us. As we eat the bread, recall that he is the Bread of Life and our greatest satisfaction and joy is to be found in him. As we drink the cup, remember that his life courses like blood through our veins because his blood was shed for us. Perhaps today we should come to the table as a sign that we are seek after him and his righteousness and stop seeking after the cause of our worry and fear.

I pray right now that God will give us grace to repent of habitual worry, cast all of our anxiety on him (1 Peter 5:7), and re-commit ourselves to living fully and wholeheartedly for the kingdom of God.

Questions and thoughts for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. Can you think of ways that you were “taught” to be a worrier during your childhood?
2. List the worries that might tend to keep you awake at night.
3. What is the basis for worry and anxiety?
4. Why is worry useless, according to Jesus?
5. In what ways can worry be destructive?
6. How is needless, excessive worry an expression of “practical atheism”?
7. Why is seeking after the kingdom of God an antidote to worry?

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