

LUKE 12:22-34 STUDY

This is vital teaching because of the connection with what we saw last week. Jesus has just told a story of a rich man who stored up his riches, who believed he was secure and could now just live the good life full of pleasure and comfort, but he died. God took his life. And the punch line of the parable was verse 21 – “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God”.

Jesus has been teaching us that life is more than what we make or own. How we stand before God is ultimately what counts. The next word Jesus says is “Therefore”. The rich fool was an example of how not to live. Jesus is giving us the positive commands about how to approach life and possessions and God. It’s not good advice. It’s about avoiding the fate of the rich fool. Do you want to get to the end of your life and hear God sum you up as having been a “fool”? If we do we should ignore what Jesus is saying here.

What Jesus says here is for everyone. Don’t be tempted to think that Jesus talks to the rich in verses 13-21, then the poor from verse 22 onwards. It’s easy to think that – the focus on food and clothing. But the connection is closer than that. Worry is what drives the rich fool to build bigger barns, and when he has got them he feels free of worry. Although when you are rich (as most of us are) you don’t think about your next meal, you do think about next year, or your future. That drives our life. That drives our worry about jobs and the future. But Jesus says “do not worry”.

DO NOT WORRY

The problem with worry is, it’s not simple to stop. It feels like you can’t just flick a switch and turn off the worry in your brain can you? It would be great if you could!

But Jesus gives reasons why we should not worry. He gets into our head and shows us the lies we believe when we worry about our life.

In verse 23 Jesus says **we worry because we forget what life is really about**. Worry is foolish. “Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes”. The rich fool did not realise there was an eternity. He thought life was just about the here and now. So do we when our minds are filled with worry about next week or next year. “Will I get that job”? “Will I get that house?” If those things crowd everything else out of our mind – in the way they do when worry takes over – then we’ve got the wrong perspective on life.

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I saw a terrifying documentary a while ago about the ferry the Herald of Free Enterprise which capsized in the English channel in 1987 killing 193 passengers and crew. The shocking thing about what happened to that ferry was that it capsized because the bow doors (where the cars came on and off) were left open! And when there were investigations about what happened it became clear that although there were clear procedures in place for all aspects of how the ship ran (getting the cars on and off the ferry for example), there was no clear procedure for who shut the bow doors! It just happened. There is no point in having small things under control when you are in danger of missing out the most important thing. Yet we do that. In our lives we try and bring the small things under control and we attempt to deal with them, yet so often we neglect the big things – like eternity and our relationship with God.

Not all worry or concern is wrong. The apostle Paul is filled with concern for all the churches. He has unceasing anguish in his heart about his fellow Jews who did not believe the gospel. He had worry (if we can use that word) about people's eternity. Yet our worry is so often it's just concerned about the here and now.

What does that worry say how we view the world? It says we believe that tomorrow or next year is all that matters. Then that worry starts to feed in to how we make our decisions. We make decisions about how we want life to be for us next year, and we ignore how we want eternity to look (for ourselves or for others).

In verse 24 and verses 27 and 28 Jesus says we worry because we forget God cares and provides for us. **Worry is unnecessary.** Jesus takes us into the garden and says "look at the ravens". I'm no bird expert but apparently it's not a particularly beautiful or loved bird (in fact to a Jew a raven was unclean). But God feeds them. Jesus says look at the lilies and the grass – they come and go and God feeds and grows them. Jesus says – look at yourself. If you trust Jesus you know that God as your Father. He loves and cares for you far more than he cares for the ravens. He sent Jesus to die for you. So why worry about your life? It's not your responsibility.

You may have had the experience of being responsible for organising something, perhaps at work, and you've got it all under control. But there is someone, not your boss, someone less senior than you, who is constantly expressing their concern it isn't going to work out. That's difficult isn't it? You just want to say "I've got it sorted, it's not your responsibility, stop questioning my competence".

Jesus is not saying you shouldn't plan or work. Jesus isn't talking to a bunch of 20 something males sat in their pyjamas playing computer games who think that their

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parents will look after them for the rest of their life. Being laid back and apathetic isn't the opposite to worry. If that was Jesus audience he'd probably take them into the garden and show them the ant like the writer of Proverbs does. We are to work hard, we are to plan, we are to take personal responsibility, we are to take risks with our life. Birds work hard, they feed their family. But we fulfil our responsibilities trusting that God will fulfil his.

We also worry because we wrongly think we are in control (see vs 25 and 26).

Worry is a waste of time. We don't achieve anything by it. There is a bit of a debate as to how to translate verse 25. It could be "who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life", or it could be "who of you can add a single cubit to his height". All the commentators think it is "year to his life" because they can't seem to believe anyone would worry about adding a cubit to their height – that just tells me the commentators are all over 5'6"!

Either way the point is the same. To God those things are "little". To us – we can't do them. So worry achieves nothing. No one looks back on their life and says "it was my worry that got me that job". No one ever says "I'm glad I lost that night's sleep".

Then Jesus says we worry because **we set our heart on the wrong things**. "Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink, do not worry about them" (vs 29). Ultimately worry is idolatry, it shows what we love, it shows what we worship. Our heart here stands the centre of our being, what guides our decisions. If our heart is on an easy retirement, on a big house, on a large bank account, that will fill our mind and our horizon until we get there, and if at any point it's threatened, then worry comes in.

Jesus is saying that worry is sin. To put it more pointedly - Worry is what happens when your sin meets the reality of the world you are living in. What does sin do? Sin is us believing we are in control and that there is no God, or at least we are better than God. It is believing we rule. But it is obvious we are not in control. So what happens then when life does not go your way and you are a sinner? You worry. It throws us into panic. Worry is the natural sinful reaction to life – because we deny God's loving control and because, like the rich fool we forget about eternity. Which is why Jesus gives this simple command. "Do not worry".

BUT SEEK GOD'S KINGDOM

But Jesus also knows it is impossible just to act on a negative. Telling someone who is worried not to worry is like telling someone not to think of pink elephants – it's

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the first thing you do! The only way we can overcome worry about life, which is so ingrained into the way we think and act is by replacing worry with something else. Worry only comes when something else is not there – it takes the place of a right action and thought process. See verse 31. “But seek his kingdom, and all these things will be given to you as well”.

There are 2 options in this passage, and they are opposites. Worrying and seeking God’s kingdom. Do you see how they are opposites? Worry is what happens when we wrongly think we are kings. Seeking God’s kingdom is us viewing the world rightly. It’s recognising that God has a kingdom and that Jesus is King. It’s recognising he is in control, and that you are the subjects in the kingdom. It’s recognising that as King, God is also a loving Father who will provide you with all your needs. It’s making a decision to seek that Kingdom – to more than anything want and work for that kingdom to grow, rather than having a desire for our personal kingdom to grow. It’s knowing that even if all we have is one meal a day and one pair of clothes to wear, yet we are part of God’s kingdom, then we are secure because God’s kingdom is coming, and one day will be fully here and we will be better off with him than even if we are all kings and queens here.

But it’s a daily choice we all have to make to do this. This passage is not a one off piece of teaching we hear and obey and then get our life sorted, so we can think “yes, I’ve got worry sorted, let’s move on to the rest of my life”. No – the very words Jesus uses shows he knows how ingrained worry is into our thinking and behaviour and how we don’t naturally seek God’s kingdom.

Literally Jesus says “do not continually worry” and “keep seeking God’s kingdom”. Every day when you wake up you are faced with a choice – who is King of your life? Are you going to seize control over your life, and worry about it, or are you going to rejoice in the fact that God is king, and seek his kingdom, and trust him for our food and clothing? And then make all the wise choices we are called to make about life, in the light of that?

To help us make that decision Jesus gives 3 reasons to seek God’s Kingdom. First Jesus says **God’s Kingdom is yours**. “Do not be afraid little flock, for the Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom”. We worry about things that are not ours – or at least not ours yet. Will we have that house? What will our retirement look like? But God’s Kingdom is ours! We are Sons of the Father. The Father has given us the Kingdom because he has given us the King – his Son Jesus Christ. That’s why we can have confidence in his loving care. That’s why we can call him Father. When Jesus returns, then it will be clear that we belong to the Kingdom and it belongs to us as

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we are co-heirs with him of it. But until then, we wait knowing that is where this world is going. We seek it – look for it to grow and be extended in our life, as we put everything under his rule, and in the world.

Second, **God's kingdom is secure** (vs 33). It is wise to invest in God's Kingdom. It is something worth giving to. Our treasure in heaven will never be destroyed. Any treasure we get here can be taken from us. But Jesus is saying – there is something you can invest in with your money and time and effort which will never lose its value. It's worth having a lower standard of living to invest in treasure in heaven. The benefits of living with God as King, of giving to his cause are immeasurable. You won't regret it! But it involves having a perspective that sees beyond this life – a common theme in this chapter. Our friends, our family may think we are mad to invest in God's Kingdom. They just see a mustard seed (small churches, tiny influence, no personal benefit) – but we see the universe transformed by the glory of God.

Third, **God's Kingdom is transformative** (vs 34). As we put our treasure into God's Kingdom and as we seek it, this changes us. It seems like it's the wrong way round - we might expect our treasure to follow our heart, rather than our heart following our treasure. But imagine you go to Beverley racecourse and put £50 on a horse. When he races, your heart will be fixed on that horse because you've put your treasure on him. Jesus is saying, don't wait until you feel like it to obey him here - we can change our behaviour first, and then our hearts will follow.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

(These are possibilities only - please add/subtract/reword)

How did Jesus end the parable of the rich fool (vs 21)? How does that lead into what he says next?

Why does he go on to talk about being anxious? What kind of things are we not to be anxious about? Why is "not being anxious" different to the attitude of the rich fool? (Vs 23)

Why aren't we to be anxious about those things? What reasons does Jesus give in vs 23 and vs 24?

Does anxiety produce anything? (Vs 25-26)? Where will the things we need come from?

"We worry because we think we are in control or are concerned we are not". Do you think this statement is true? Do you relate to that? Who is in control?

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What does it mean to “seek after these things” (vs 29/30)? How does this wrong kind of “seeking” produce anxiety?

The Psalms tell us “The fool says in his heart ‘There is no God’” Why is worry foolish?

What positive thing can we do to avoid anxiety? (Vs 32)

Why is this the opposite to the attitude we have when we worry?

Why does the truth of vs 32 ease our anxieties?

We worry because of what we don’t yet have, or we are anxious that what we have will be taken away from us. Why is investing in God’s kingdom different?

Does the way verse 34 is worded surprise you? Why does Jesus put it that way round? Should we wait until we feel the right thing before we invest in God’s kingdom?