

What Not to Worry About, Part 1

Luke 12:22-28

Well, we are in Luke's Gospel, Luke, chapter 12, and we are looking at the subject of anxiety. If you're a bottom-line kind of person, I'll let you know up front that Jesus is against it. You need to know more than that, but Jesus understands worry and anxiety. He knows exactly where those sins come from. He also knows that there is no need for it. And so Jesus commands us believers in clear, very direct language, "Do not be anxious."

And that is the main command in the text found in Luke 12:22, but there are two other imperatives in that section as well, and they're the same word, the same imperative: "Consider the ravens" and "Consider the lilies." Those commands about considering or reflecting, they support the main command, "Do not be anxious." So this whole section is Jesus prohibiting, denying us the sin of anxiety and worry, and he's using simple illustrations, drawing from things anybody can observe, and he

gives us several reasons why we should not be anxious, and this is for us as Christians.

Like covetousness, worry or anxiety is a sin that takes place in the heart. Anxiety whittles away at conviction. It steals our joy, and robs us of confidence and initiative. Anxiety produces within us a sense of uneasiness, a sense of foreboding about the future, a sense of fear about the future, wondering what might happen. And it's never wondering what might happen in a good way; it's wondering what might happen in a bad way. Anxiety creates a churning feeling in the stomach, little acids that start to boil inside of us. Anxiety can exercise such a powerful and crippling grip on the mind and on the will.

Anxious people are subdued by negative thoughts, dark imaginations about what the future's going to look like, a future, by the way, that they can't possibly predict, because like all creatures, we are limited in our perspective, limited in our knowledge. My wife likes to call this "forecasting grief," because anxiety is like an unreliable but a very influential weatherman in our souls, forecasting grief in the

newsroom of the soul, always predicting bad weather, storms ahead.

Statistically, in our country, anxiety is the leading mental health disorder. It is crippling in the modern world, especially in the United States. Just a quick footnote to that: When I speak of anxiety as a “mental health disorder,” and I put that in air quotes, and I call it a plague in the modern word and it’s not because I agree with that terminology, that it is a mental health issue. Mental pertains to the mind, and the mind is our spirit. Spirit by nature is immaterial. Health pertains to the body; it pertains to the physical.

So I make a distinction between those things, so that when we see those terms, mental and disorder, jammed together in the term disorder, then that puts us under the purview of psychology. Psychology is informed by a godless worldview. So I’m not assenting to the language even though I may cite the language, here, just because I’m pulling from statistics from the mental health industry.

It is becoming apparent that along with the advancement and dominance that we have had in the modern world over the issues of nature and the restrictions and limitations of space and distance, communication and all the rest, the sins of covetousness and anxiety have advanced apace. They're always one step ahead. So covetousness and anxiety ruin what we might benefit from in the world, so that happiness and satisfaction always remain as elusive as ever. We're always chasing the carrot and never ever getting there. Fear, anxiety, worry: they're all variations on the same sin; it's the sin that holds humanity firmly in its grasp.

The US population as of this year is estimated to be 330 million, that's 260 million adults and 70 million children, roughly. According to several sources that track mental health statistics, of the 260 million adults, 40 million of them are diagnosed, that is, diagnosed, clinically diagnosed with anxiety disorder, which is the most common mental health disorder in this country. Nineteen million adults experience specific phobias; fifteen million adults have social anxiety; 7.7 million have PTSD; 6.8 million adults have generalized anxiety, I guess that's a bucket to drop everything else in, and then six million

adults have panic disorders, like it's acute. That's among those who are diagnosed, 40 million. Among the countries of the world, the US, which is arguably the most developed, most advanced, most prosperous, safest, wealthiest country in the world, at seven percent, the US has the highest rate of anxiety than any other country in the world, and those, again, are among those who are just clinically diagnosed.

This is proof, though, that anxiety is not about having enough to eat. It's not about having clothes to wear. There's something else going on, something deeper. Anxiety is an issue of the heart. Anxiety is about, it's a matter of thoughts and the mind, and that puts anxiety into the category of sin and righteousness. When it deals with our thought life, God commands our thoughts, and you either think righteously or you think sinfully.

Anxiety, it's just that simple. It's a matter of sin and righteousness. And that's why Jesus commands us, here: "Don't be anxious." He expects us to obey this command. Why? Because it's a matter of sin and righteousness. That is freeing, by the way. If

this is a disorder, something to do with bad wiring in the brain, something to do with our body that's malfunctioning, there's no hope of being free from it. You have the body you have. But whatever Jesus commands is a matter of sin and righteousness, and when that's the case, well, there's freedom from anxiety. There's freedom from worry. We don't have to be afraid. This isn't something we can just blame on the brain, and that actually does us no good, anyway. This isn't something we can just attribute to a malfunctioning body in a very complex world. This isn't something we can excuse and blame on a difficult childhood or unfortunate circumstances or an unhealthy environment.

Fundamentally, anxiety occurs in the mind. It's in the thought life. It's rooted in unbelief. It attacks the goodness of God by insinuating doubts about his ability or his willingness to provide for us and protect us. Now does that have physiological effects? You bet it does. It plays all kinds of havoc, doesn't it? Our thought life affects the way we think. It produces that churning in the gut. Feelings of nervousness, restlessness, tension, increased heart rate, restlessness, breathing, sweating, sometimes even shaking, trembling,

tiredness, fatigue, trouble sleeping, trouble shutting off the mind, all that is evidence of anxiety.

So symptoms of anxiety: We understand how those symptoms are common to the world, common to the unbelieving mind, how anxious thinking actually characterizes an unbelieving mind, that's true. But the sin of anxiety is most unfitting for the Christian, because the Christian knows better, because the Christian by Christ has a relationship with God the Father, and God the Father is omnipotent, and he knows the future, and the future is his, as was the past. Our hearts at rest with God; at least it should be.

And that's why we read, Luke 12:22, "He said to his disciples. "therefore, I tell you do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on, for life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.'" Notice, first, in this, that Jesus has turned his attention, as Luke narrates for us, Jesus is turning his attention from the unbelieving crowd, that he was just addressing in verses 13 to 21, and now he turns his attention to his disciples. He's speaking directly to them.

This is instruction that doesn't apply to the unbelieving crowd, not until they're converted, not until they're born again to new life. Until then, they will suffer the symptoms of unbelief. They will be trapped with an anxious mind that's troubled because they don't know a God who is fundamentally good and kind and generous and gracious; a God who's powerful, who is everywhere present, a God who promises to provide and to protect with a good and kind providence.

So Jesus leaves the unbelieving crowd to the side to ponder the significance of the parable of the rich and covetous fool, and then he takes the truths of that parable, which are easily grasped by the disciples, and he presses the implications of those truths to their minds, and he says, "Therefore, I tell you, don't be anxious about your life." That is in contrast to the rich fool, who is anxious about his life. Therefore, you don't be anxious about your life. Now, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, if you've been reconciled to God because of the death of Jesus Christ for your sins, and your conscience is clear from evil works, and you stand before God in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, no doubt you affirm emphatically

what Jesus says here: Life is more than food, the body is more than clothing.

But what do your day-to-day anxiety levels reveal about you? What about those symptoms? Nervousness, being ill at ease, decisions coming up, relational conflicts, financial worries, issues at work, issues at home, what do your anxiety levels reveal? I know you believe; how much do you believe what Jesus says here?

Listen, when we live and move and have our being amidst a nation of worriers, I mean, 40 million-plus of them; when we work and shop and raise our children in such an angst-ridden culture always crippled with anxiety, always choked with the powerful grip of fear, every time we turn on the news, you're seeing anxiety, anxiety, anxiety, everything to actually stoke the flames of tension. Every news program you listen to, whether it's from the right or the left, all of it is stoking your anxiety. It's giving you something to be angry about, something to fear, something to worry about. And that's why you gotta get out there and vote. That's why we gotta get this legislation

passed. That's why, you gotta get this done. Buy gold. Buy guns. Buy, buy rice. Buy bullets. Buy water. Whatever. It's not hard to see how some of that is bound to rub off on some of us, too, right?

And Jesus wants us free from anxiety. He wants us living in the glorious freedom of God's children. He wants us living with spiritual prosperity and joyful abundance because we are citizens of an eternal kingdom. Fear, worry, anxiety: Those sins have no place whatsoever in the life of a believer because they rob us of all the hope and the joy and the comfort and the confidence that we have in believing in the first place. Those sins turn our eyes as believers, they turn us away from the glory of God, from his majesty, from his power, all the realities of our salvation. And those sins fixate our eyes on mundane, trivial matters of life, things like food and clothing.

What do we know about our future as Christians, if we're reading our Bibles? All good! This is the closest to hell that we'll ever come. And we are continually escaping the grip of this world. We're continually being more and more conformed to the

image of Christ. And our future is glorious; it's full glorification, it's the absence of sin, the absence of weakness. What do we have to worry about?

Jesus, as the God-man, divine nature, human nature, one in this, he wants to obliterate any hint of temptation to worry and anxiety in his disciples. This is so gracious, isn't it? To set us free. He knows, verse 32, that it is the Father's good pleasure to give his children the kingdom itself, so what do they have to worry about at all?

So Jesus gives his disciples several reasons here not to worry, several reasons to help combat that temptation to anxiety, to see it when it's coming, and to shoot at it. So useful for us, so encouraging. And I want to say up front, in this passage, verses 22 to 28, his argument is not, God provides for our physical needs, so don't worry about it. That's not his argument. That is true, and it is explicit in what he says here, but that is not the summation of his argument.

The greater argument, here, the deeper point that he's making, is what's implicit in what he says. And what's implicit is found in the comparative language he uses here. Notice in verse 23, we already said this, "life is more than food," "the body is more than clothing." It's comparative language. Verse 24: "How much more value are you than birds." Verse 26: "As small a thing as that." And verse 27: Solomon's clothing compared to how the flowers are adorned. Verse 28: "How much more will he clothe you?" That's comparative language. He's pointing to something deeper, here.

So as Jesus tells us what not worry about, he's also telling us what to look forward to. He's telling us what to see. He's telling us what to understand. He's telling us what to discern in God's obvious care for us. So, obviously, don't worry about sustaining, preserving, or adorning your life. Gods' got all of that under control. Don't worry about it; don't be anxious. Here's the outline: God sustains your life, God preserves your life, and God adorns your life.

So first, God sustains your life. Jesus says in verse 24, "Consider the ravens. They neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them." The verb, there, consider, *katanoē*, it means to reflect on something, on what something means. It means to discern the significance of something. So here it's, think about the significance of how God cares for ravens. The word, raven, *korax*, it can refer to any number of large black birds that are part of the Corvid family. This is commonly known as the crow family. Crows, ravens, rooks, jackdaws, they're all scavenger birds, right? That means they eat dead things. In addition to grains and seeds and nuts and fruits and berries, worms in their diet. Ravens and crows don't mind making an occasional meal out of roadkill, Carrion, bodies of dead or dying animals and humans.

Ravens are on the list of unclean birds in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, and according to Leviticus 11:13, the Raven is not merely unclean, but along with all the other carrion birds, birds that feed on the decaying flesh of dead things, ravens are to be detested among the birds. They're an abomination. That's why ravens, crows, vultures, they came to symbolize death itself. So ravens and crows, they're detestable to the Jews, and that is

Jesus' point in using them as an illustration. There are probably ravens right nearby, so it's easy for him to point to them.

But he wants his disciples to consider the implications of God's provision, how his care extends even to sustain the life of these detestable, kind of scary birds, birds that feed on death, birds that are consuming, as it were, the curse itself of death. They're a symbol of divine judgment. And God still feeds them. And Jesus says that those ravens, those birds, "neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouse nor barn." What's that doing? That's connecting back to the parable of the rich fool, right, who tore down his barns to build bigger ones, and he's anxious about storing up all his stuff.

Ravens don't do that at all. They don't store up stuff. They don't pack anything away. They don't have any possessions, nothing at all. They show no interest in storing anything or working for that. Even though they are unclean, detestable birds, God still feeds them. He continually feeds them. The verb says, is a continuous action, present tense. He's continually feeding them.

He's always feeding them. He's faithfully feeding them. Even when you're completely out of your mind. You're not thinking anything about some raven in some hill, he's taking care of it.

Here's the point, here's the implication for us as Jesus' disciples, the end of verse 24: "Of how much more value are you than the birds?" How much more value? The verb means, to be superior to, to be more value than, more worth than. The pronouns, adjectives all grouped together. Jesus is communicating a superlative value. He is making a comparison of relative values contrasting the value of his disciples with the value of birds. There's no comparison. And the way he stated this rhetorical question, his question, "of how much more value are you than the birds," the answer is, there is no comparison, because you are superlatively of more value than the birds. And so the point that we're to take from what Jesus is saying is this: that there is not a one-to-one comparison, here. That is, God feeds the ravens, so he'll feed you, too, so don't worry. That is not his point. It's not just, God feeds them, so he'll feed you, too, but how much more will he sustain you.

Ravens, unclean, detestable, the very symbol of death and judgment. So when God feeds the ravens, he is demonstrating for all you disciples the magnanimity of his goodness, the great extent of his kind and faithful provision, an immutable faithfulness in God to sustain creatures that we call, unclean and detestable. So to make sure your life is sustained by food, to make sure you're able to eat your daily bread, if that's what he does for unclean, detestable creatures, and since you are of far more value than they are, simply feeding you every day, which is what God does with birds? That is not what demonstrates your superlative value to God. Of course, God is going to take care of your daily needs. God's care for us, the way that he sustains us, sustains our life, this goes way beyond food. Jesus said, verse 23, "your life is more than food." The word, your life, there is your soul. Your soul is more than food, which means that sustaining your precious life, your precious soul demands something more than food.

Back in Luke 4:4. When being tempted by the devil, you remember Jesus said, "Man shall not live by," what, "Bread alone." He was citing Deuteronomy 8:3, where Moses told Israel that God wants them to know and understand that man does not

live by bread alone, but man lives," by what, "by every word that comes out of the mouth of God." Unlike the ravens, unlike any other creature, we are created in God's image. What's required to sustain our lives goes way beyond the birds. We don't just need food, we need God's Word. We need truth. As creatures made in God's image, our needs far exceed that of the birds or of any other animal.

We need our souls cared for, which means we need our churches which means we need Word and sacrament, which means we need the Word of God proclaimed in preaching, proclaimed in Trinitarian baptism, proclaimed in the fellowship ordinance of the Lord's Table. Since all Scripture is "breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness," we need fellow members of the body of Christ to be teaching one another, admonishing one another, reproving one another, correcting one another, training one another in righteousness. Why? "So that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." We need the ministry of Christ in and through his saints applying the Word of God to our lives. We need the singing of songs and hymns and spiritual songs. Our hearts need to be bursting with gratitude and joy. We

need the smiles, hugs, the give-and-take of friendship,
rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep.

And that is why, beloved disciple of Christ, food and physical sustenance is not something that you need to worry about. Your needs go way beyond that, and God takes care of those. God's got your daily bread covered. That's what he does for the lowliest of the unclean detestable birds. He sustains you in far greater ways. He ministers to you in so much deeper ways and needs meant for your soul, and those are things that food does not attend to. So don't worry. You're of more value to God than birds are.