



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 12:22-34

To understand why we should worry less.

“Age of Anxiety”

In 1947, just two years following the Second World War, W. H. Auden penned a long poem in six parts known as “The Age of Anxiety.” The poem, in eclogue form, describes humanity’s quest to find significance and meaning in an increasingly industrialized world. It won a Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1948, and inspired a symphony by composer Leonard Bernstein known as “The Age of Anxiety (Symphony No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra),” which in turn was used for both a 1950 ballet by Jerome Robbins and a 2014 ballet by Liam Scarlett. While it was written nearly 60 years ago, it seems more and more appropriate for our current world. Susan Orsillo and Lizabeth Roemer write, “According to the New York Times, Americans are among the most anxious people in the world. One study found that Americans are significantly more anxious than residents of nations like Nigeria, Lebanon, and Ukraine. We spend billions of dollars every year on anti-anxiety medications and additional millions to fund research into the causes and cures for anxiety disorders. *Time* magazine recently devoted its cover story to teenage anxiety, and the headline was: “The Kids Are Not All Right: American teens are anxious, depressed, and overwhelmed.” The article claimed that today’s adolescents “are the post-9/11 generation, raised in an era of economic and national insecurity. They’ve never known a time when terrorism and school shootings weren’t the norm. They grew up watching their parents weather a severe recession, and, perhaps most importantly, they hit puberty at a time when technology and social media were transforming society.”

What is clear is our need to hear the words of Jesus: “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” (Lk. 12:22-23). Instead, Jesus says: “Seek first His kingdom, and these things will be added to you” (Lk. 12:31). Anxiety comes from the unknown, and yet Jesus reminds His people that the God we serve and love knows all things and is able to provide all things for the providence of His people.

Don't Worry!

Verse 22 immediately follows the previous passage regarding the parable of the rich fool. Jesus has just reminded His followers to store up treasures in heaven that will last for an eternity, unlike the earthly treasures of food, clothing, and materials that will immediately be rendered obsolete when death comes. However, this would have drawn out some anxiety in His followers: “If I don't prioritize food and clothing, how will I survive?” Jesus reminds them of some important truths that are outlined below.

LIFE IS MORE THAN THAT

In verse 23, Jesus says, “For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.” This sets the stage for the following things Jesus will say in this discourse. Life is more than simply staying alive. There is purpose beyond mere survival. When we put an overabundance of attention on the basic mechanics of living, we miss the great purpose God has assigned to us as His Image bearers (Gen. 1:28).

THE RAVENS

Jesus then begins with an object lesson: “Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!” Unlike the rich fool in the parable Jesus had just told who built bigger and bigger storehouses to stockpile his crops, Jesus draws our attention to the raven who depends on the providence of God to survive. The implication is that we are to demonstrate the same kind of dependence on God as the ravens (and the rest of creation for that matter).

DOES ANXIETY WORK?

In verse 25, Jesus asks a question that is meant to highlight the futility of worry: “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” (Lk. 12:25). Jesus' question is not really a question as much as it is a statement, because the answer is painfully obvious - no one adds a single hour to their life by worrying. In other words, when you weigh out the practical benefits of anxiety, it doesn't work. It is true that anxiety is difficult to tame, especially when you are dealing with clinical anxiety or post-traumatic stress. If anxiety were able to be tamed through merely recognizing how ineffective it is at actually accomplishing its goal, it would be a significantly smaller problem in the world today. However, it is helpful regardless to understand what theological assumptions underly your thoughts and beliefs.

THE LILIES

Jesus uses a second object lesson to illustrate the care God gives to His children: “Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!” (Lk. 12:27-28). Solomon is seen as the poster child for material goods (1 Kg. 10:1-29; 2 Chr. 9:1-31). As much as Solomon possessed, it doesn't compare to the beauty of the Lillies in a field, and yet God will destroy even those things in the eschaton. If He is willing to provide in such a dramatic fashion for the Lillies, how much more will He be interested in providing for the very people for which He has sacrificed His Son?

SEEK THE KINGDOM

The divine directive is then given after many examples: “Instead, seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you.” Matthew’s Gospel adds “and His righteousness” in the parallel account (Matt. 6:33). The point is that we are meant not to worry about what we will eat or drink or how we will survive but trust that God will provide for us as we pursue the things involving His kingdom and His Gospel. In other words, this is an extension of last week’s passage wherein we are reminded to value the things of heaven, not the earth.

Little Flock

Jesus summarizes His thoughts in verses 32 through 34 wherein He tells His followers: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk. 12:32). In other words, as we seek the kingdom, God seeks to give it to us. There will be no struggle or convincing needed. How do we do this? By loosening our grip on our worldly possessions, being radically generous to other people, and focus on things of eternal weight that cannot be taken from us. For, “wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Lk. 12:34).

What About Now?

One takeaway might be to evaluate how much thought space you give to day-to-day problems in place of ministry minded objectives. This passage does not condone living foolishly or carelessly with your money and making unwise choices under the guise that “God will take care of it.” You still need to live with wisdom. But living with wisdom and living scrupulously and ungenerously are different things. Another takeaway is embracing the love that God has for His children and accepting that He *wants* to give us the kingdom as we seek after it.

Study Questions**Day One**

1. Read Luke 12:22-23. What does Jesus command His disciples not to do? What does Jesus say life is not all about?

2. Read Luke 12:24. What illustration does Jesus use in this verse? What is He illustrating?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 12:25-26. What is the main point of this question? Why does Jesus ask this?

2. Read Luke 12:27-28. What illustration does Jesus use in these verses? Why does He mention Solomon? What is the point of this illustration?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 12:29-30. What are Jesus' disciples not to seek after? What do all the nations do?

2. Read Luke 12:31. What does Jesus command His disciples to seek after in place of worldly treasure?

Day Four

1. Read Luke 12:32. What does Jesus call His disciples? Why? What does He tell them?

2. Read Luke 12:33-34. What examples are given to illustrate how to seek the kingdom? What does this mean, practically, today?

Week 49 Discussion: Worry

In Luke 12:22-34, Jesus continues His discourse on the vanity of earthly treasure. Anticipating a concern about what they will eat and drink and wear, Jesus teaches them about the providence of their loving Heavenly Father and how He cares for us. Talk as a group about the difficulty of being wise and responsible but also not over exaggerating your needs to a point of anxiety or stress.

1. Icebreaker: What do you worry the most about on a day-to-day basis?
2. Do you struggle with anxiety? If so, share how it affects you with your group.
3. How do you alleviate worry in your own life? What helps you relax?
4. What does your trust in the Lord have to do with your anxiety about things in your life?
5. How has being worried negatively impacted your calling?
6. What are practical ways you can begin working through your worries and angst?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus tells His disciples not to worry about what they will eat or wear because God will care for them.
2. Jesus tells His disciples not to worry because it doesn't accomplish anything anyways.