



“Reaping Ravens and Laboring Lilies”

Luke 12:22 - 34

May 12, 2019

We are going to be in Luke Chapter 12 this morning. Please join me there.

Sometimes it is etched into our faces by lines that we call wrinkles. Sometimes it is sprouting from our scalps in hair that quickly turns white. Sometimes it is visible in rings that start to appear under the eyes.

Not only is it seen, but sometimes it can be heard as well. It can be heard in the sound of footsteps pacing back and forth across the floor in the quiet hours of the dark. It can be heard on a mattress, tossing and turning in bed with yet another sleepless night. It can be heard in the sound of weeping in a quiet corner of the house, or in the sound of deep sighs at the dinner table with everybody else.

In the pages of Scripture, it is referred to with the English words *worry* and *anxiety*. As we have spoken of multiple times here at Bethel Grace, the Greek word that is used to talk about that condition is *merimnao*. It is a compound word. *Merim* and *Nao* is the language of having a divided mind—to divide and think

So the picture of that Greek word is a mind that is racing all over the place with thoughts about the past, present, or future. Our mind is going back and forth. Is it the good or is it the bad? Does God see, or does He not? Does He care, or does He not? Am I going to get through this, or am I not? We go back and forth and the mind races. It is a word that speaks to the condition of the mind.

However, this experience of anxiety does not remain there, does it? When I think about anxiety, and, yes, your pastor often experiences stress. My experience of anxiety is that it rarely stays in my mind. I often feel it going down into my chest and stomach. Sometimes it seems that it can even go out my very fingertips.

Sometimes stress goes even further to the immaterial part of us. A soul can become fatigued. The language of Psalm 42 and 43 is that of a downcast soul, burdened with concerns, weary with anxiety.

This morning our Savior who understands, who knows, who cares, and who is concerned, He is going to speak to us about this matter of anxiety from the perspective of His everlasting Kingdom of holiness and light and joy. He is going to speak to His little flock about the burdens we experience and the anxieties they feel.

I found it to be a stroke of providence as we continue through our verse by verse study of the Gospel of Luke that we come to this passage on this particular day. It is Mother's Day!

Speaking by observation and not by experience, there is something within a mom that not only carries her own burdens, but carries the burdens of her children as well. For some moms, they might carry the burdens of their children with an even greater weight than they carry their own. So moms know what it is to be anxious, not only for their own lives but also for the one's that they love.

However, this is relevant for us all because our fallen minds run away with worry all the time with a divided racing mind. What we need is for our running minds to run to Jesus, to go to the Throne of Grace, to go the holy and merciful Savior—to the One who can help us in the way that only He can.

This morning as we open Luke, Jesus is going to address the issue of anxiety. The Bible speaks and addresses anxiety as it comes from many different sources. There are all kinds of things that lead to people being stressed out.

In this particular portion of Scripture, Jesus is addressing our basic need, where we wonder if we are going to be okay and have enough to get by. Jesus is going to speak to us, telling us not to worry. The principles here, while they apply to that, I think that they spread out with truth that ministers to anxiety no matter what the cause.

I want to read through this portion of Sacred Scripture together. I pray that its power will be released into our hearts as we do. These are the words of the Son of the Living God. Let's read from Luke Chapter 12 and Verses 22 through 34:

²²And 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. ²³For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴Consider 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! ²⁵And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ²⁷Consider 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. ²⁸But 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! ²⁹And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

³²Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Here we have the teaching of the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ about the condition of worry. We notice how Jesus addresses it in such a thorough way.

We have twelve verses on the topic before us. In these twelve verses, Jesus uses various forms of speech. He began with one verse of prohibition, which is kind of the heading of the rest of the passage. Verse 22, He said, *Don't worry. Don't be worried.* He issued forth a command.

Then that is reinforced later in the passage in Verse 32 when He said, *Don't be afraid.* Isn't it true that worry and anxiety go hand-in-hand? So, Jesus used that form of communication. He issued forth His prohibition about worry.

However, Jesus did not stop there. He went on with six more verses contained in Verses 23 to 28, where He used a form of speech that we might think of as persuasion. He has all authority to issue forth the command, but then He went so far in His mercy and grace and understanding to say, *Here is why you don't need to worry. Here is why you ought not worry. Let me give you some reason and illustrations.*

From that prohibition and persuasion, Jesus went into exhortation in the final portion of what we just read in Verses 29 to 34. As I meditated on that, I feel that Jesus gives us understanding of what a worry-free life will then look like. We are not seeking after all the goods of this earth. That language of *seek is passionate pursuit.*

Jesus was saying, *This world is filled with people passionately pursuing earthly things, but when I'm filling your life, you are going to be seeking passionately the Everlasting Kingdom and its realities.*

Jesus then went on to talk about how when we are set free from worry, we will be set free for generosity and will know the joy of that. So, then Jesus gave this exhortation to His people, to His little flock.

This morning as we dig into this portion of Scripture, it has been on my heart to explore that persuasion portion of this text, the heart of the Messiah helping us to understand why we ought not to worry and allow things to turn over and over in our minds, to the point that it affects our very health.

I want you to notice that twice in that persuasion portion of this text, Jesus used the word *consider.* It is in Verse 24 and it is in Verse 27. With that word *consider,* Jesus anchored down His persuasion with two illustrations from the realm of nature.

Going back to what we have been talking about, anxiety starts in the mind. It is a word of the racing mind. The word *consider* used here is another word of the mind that intensifies our thinking. In the Greek the word is *katanoel* and means to think carefully about these things. This is from heart of the Messiah to you today. Think carefully about these things. This is from Jesus.

With this language of thinking deliberately about certain things that we can see around us. Jesus speaks to us to alleviate anxiety. He goes in a direction I don't think anybody else goes. You can go to the healthy mind and worry section at Barnes and Noble and get all the books they

have on anxiety. I bet that if you stacked all those books up, they would probably be taller than me. But I don't know that any of those books will go where Jesus did when He said not to worry, but to consider the ravens and how God provides for them. Then Jesus said to consider the lilies. Here is a construction worker. Consider the lilies and how God adorns them. He pays attention to those things.

Remember little flock that it is God's good pleasure, not His reluctant willing, to give you the Everlasting Kingdom. He is a Father who provide. We need to follow Jesus and see what He points us to. We must follow what He is saying here and take it into our hearts by His Spirit. Apart from the work of His Spirit, we are going to be wallowing in a worried mess. We need the Spirit of Jesus to do what we by ourselves can't accomplish and really live worry-free in light of God's promises.

To alleviate anxiety or better yet, to eradicate anxiety because Jesus did not say to worry less. He said don't worry! To help us with anxiety, first Jesus said first:

1. Consider the ravens (12:24-26)

Verses 24 through 26:

²⁴Consider 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!
²⁵And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?

Jesus said to take a good look at those birds. This is the only New Testament reference to ravens that we have. The people of Israel familiar with the Law of Moses might have wondered why Jesus wanted them to look at the ravens. Ravens were considered an unclean bird.

Ravens are from the same family of birds as crows. There are some really cool things about crows, but there are some obnoxious qualities about crows too. I have had many Fridays off where I get to sleep longer than usual, then the crows wake me up with their obnoxious cawing! It is not a gentle chirp. They don't sing, but they caw very loudly. It's horrible.

Ravens are from the same family. I found a recording on-line where they recorded crows and ravens, and ravens are worse. A raven call is deep, loud, powerful, and it rattles. And ravens run that list of unclean birds in the Law of Moses.

Some think that Jesus mentioned them because they are unclean birds in the Old Testament and the Lord's argument is that if God cares for these lowest of scavengers, won't He meet your needs? That is something that Jesus wants us to take in.

Looking at what Jesus said here, it seems to me that Jesus was having a little bit of fun because He told them to look at the ravens, when do you ever see ravens sowing and reaping and building a barn and storehouse?

Jesus was painting a picture of a flock birds scurrying about in their anxiety, saying, *We are not going to have enough. We are not going to have enough. Are we going to have enough? I don't think we are going to have enough. Let's build a barn!*

These questions come from anxiety and Jesus was saying that ravens do not do that. Ravens just fly around, doing what God designed them to do and that is what they do for their appointed life span. Likewise, Jesus was telling us to be like the ravens. Do what God created us to do without getting all stressed out about whether there is going to be provisions in the future.

This text is not saying that human beings should not just say that God is going to take care of their needs, so they don't have to work or labor or put in effort. That is not what this passage is saying because Scripture is also crystal-clear that God designed human beings, not only to work, but to find satisfaction in that work.

We are to build things up. Get things done. Help things out. But as we do, in what God designs us to do, we ought not have all this worry and anxiety rising up. Rather, we just keep our hands to the plow. We keep our eyes on God's faithfulness and trust Him to provide. This what Jesus was saying to us in this text.

This passage goes on to say in Verse 25:

²⁵And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

Some would argue that people diminish the length of their lives by anxiety. Psalm 139 teaches us that our life span is in the sovereign hand of God. That is an amazing thing to try and wrap our minds around. Amid whatever span of years that we have, we, this little flock of God, are to trust God for His provision through its extent. How we need the Spirit of God to fill our hearts with this truth.

Let's continue. Jesus reasoned with us from another perspective. He tells us to:

2. Consider the lilies (12:27-29)

We go into Verse 27:

²⁷Consider 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. ²⁸But 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!

Jesus was not speaking to people about the absence of faith, but about the deficiency of it. By His Word, He was seeking to increase faith.

In so doing, once again, Jesus was using something of an amusing picture for us. He brought this language in of laboring and it is laboring in the form of spinning. This is the language of First Century sewing machine.

Somebody is at the sewing machine and they are burdened and cast down and stressed out, thinking they are not going to have enough to wear or not have the right things to wear. So, they are busy at that machine spinning for themselves clothes.

If you take a closer look, who is it that is doing the spinning? Who is it but the very lily of the field? Jesus was saying, *You never see that, but look how they are adorned by your Father.* So trust in the Lord to provide that necessity of a clean wardrobe. Trust in the Lord to provide.

The argument is advanced here that if the Lord can care for the blossoms of the earth, how much more can He and will He care for those who are objects of His salvation? I realize that Jesus was speaking here of the basic necessities of life. He was telling us to trust God to cloth us.

However, for the student of Sacred Scripture, how can our thoughts not be raised to another level, to a higher plane when we hear this language of God clothing His people—thinking about how the Lord adorns us with His everlasting saving grace?

I think that Jesus intends for us to think about this too, this everlasting clothing of God, because He invoked imagery of the brevity of life here. I think He was echoing Psalm 103 and Verses 15 through 17:

**¹⁵As for man, his days are like grass;
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
¹⁶for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.
¹⁷But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to
everlasting on those who fear him**

That is language of the brevity of life. Then it seems that Jesus echoed something like that when He said

**²⁸But 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!**

There is the ultimate sense in which God cloths those who come to Him with humble hearts, knowing that He is holy and that they are fallen in sin—that they need from Him grace for His cleansing.

Among His many gifts, there are two gifts that God gives to those who approach Him, saying, *I am fallen in sin. Lord God, I am all messed up inside. It comes out in so many different ways. Lord, I am fallen. I have some tweaked out desires. I need Your grace to save me. I need You to purify me. I need You to renew me and set me straight. I need You to forgive me.*

When somebody comes to the Lord in this kind of humility looking to Jesus our Savior, God washes their sin away. He cleanses their heart and soul through and through so that before the holiness of God, they are holy in Christ.

He washes and cleanses you, but He does not leave simply washed and cleansed. In addition to that, He robes you. He adorns you. He cloths you in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He adorns you in the garments of salvation, so that as you proceed into eternity into the Kingdom of God, you do so adorned in the royal array of Jesus Christ; with garments that are going to exceed anything that Solomon wore with garments that even exceed the lilies which are pretty impressive.

Jesus will adorn and cloth His people in that ultimate sense, so with that in view, doesn't that make it matter less. In this world, what do we care whether we are clothed from Nordstrom, Saks Fifth Avenue, Target, or the Goodwill? We are going to be adorned in Christ forevermore. This reality is it meant to alleviate the anxiety or is it meant to eliminate it altogether? I think that is where Jesus wants us to go with this.

This gives us perspective. This life is a vapor. Brothers and sisters in the church family are repeatedly getting struck with that reality. Life in Christ is everlasting. We will be adorned in Him, in His goodness, and in His grace. He gives us these truths to help give us perspective and to make it so that all that worry gets reduced.

Spurgeon said, *Clothes must not be made much of for in our finest array, flowers far excel us.* Jesus said here that there is more glory in the garden than in that of high-end fashion. We are clothed in Christ and I pray that this is a truth that the Spirit of Jesus brings powerfully into our hearts to help with the burdens that we experience in this life.

This is the persuasion of the Lord. Then from this persuasion, Jesus went into words of exhortation. He began giving some instruction and, in that instruction, I think you can find a vision of what the worry-free life in Christ begins to look like.

The worry-free life:

3. Seeks after the Kingdom of God (12:30-31)

Verses 29 and 31:

²⁹And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried.

³⁰For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

The life that is being freed from the bondage of worry is a life that is being set free, basking in eternal realities.

Finally, life that is set free from worry is set free for generosity.

4. Practice generosity (12:32-33)

Verse 32

³²**Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.**
³³**Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.** ³⁴**For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**

There is a link between our generosity in this life and what we will experience in the life to come. You can't take your earthly treasures with you into Heaven, but Randy Alcorn in his book *The Treasure Principle* says,

But you send them on ahead. As you are generous to the needy in this world, there is a sense in which you are storing up treasure for yourself in heaven.

That is pretty awesome. May the Spirit ignite us in that.

Then Jesus said,

³⁴**For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**

Jesus did not say that how you give and how you are generous will not give a sign of where your heart is, it will help influence where your heart is. As the Spirit prompts you to give to people in need, you are going to have more and more of a heart for them. As you give to different purposes of God, you will have more and more of a heart for that purpose. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

A life that is being set free from worry, it is going to experience a more passionate pursuit of the Kingdom of God and more generosity issues forth in eternal rewards. These are teaching from teachings about worry and how to be free from worry and what it starts looking like when the Spirit of God is filling our lives so that we don't worry as much.

Now I think I am going to give you a glimpse into Pastor Jeff's week as he was studying on this topic of worry. There I was studying about worry, yet what was I doing all week? Worrying! I was digging into the truth of the Living God about worry and preparing a sermon about worry, and I experienced worry as I prepared to preach about worry.

There were moments digging to the Word where my heart was so refreshed, where my thinking and my soul were stirred, and I felt worry being lessened. There were other moments where I was being pressed down with worry again!

I had two bouts with insomnia this week. Up all night twice! I don't know what it is, but everything seems worse at three in the morning. I am confident that I know Jesus. I have a relationship with Him. I hear from Jesus. I am getting fed from Him. I am delighting in the

truth of Jesus. Then inside of me I am doing the exact opposite of what Jesus said. What's up with that?!?

I am a man in such a need of a Savior. This is an ongoing sense throughout this life and all that it holds. I need Jesus Christ to be my Rescuer and my Redeemer. I need Him to forgive me not only from the penalty of sin, which He has done. I need Him to rescue me from the power of sin. In this case, anxiety in this context would be a failure to trust in God's good plan.

I experience worry against that all the time. So, what is the answer? Is the answer for me to say, *Ok, Jeff, gadzooks! Buck up, man! Man up! What is wrong with you? Strengthen yourself. Gird up your loins. Goodness! Stop stressing out. Why are you so weak?*

Is it to look within myself and tell myself to come on? By the power of the Spirit, there might be an element to that. But I think the response is that whenever I see my frailty, I am to go back over and over again and fall into the mercy of my Lord and my Savior—my Jesus, who came into this world as a sympathetic Savior.

Not only will Jesus deliver me in a moment upon repentant faith, not only will He save me from the penalty of sin, but as I draw close to Him—as I fall into Him—He is going to be slowly but surely, maybe with some ups and downs along the way, delivering me from the power of sin. The key to this is relational.

You all could relate when I told you I was up at three in the morning due to some stress. We need to fall into Jesus repeatedly, saying, *Jesus, I need You to work Your power in me, because if You don't renew me by Your truth and grace, I am going to go along with faulty and worrisome thinking all the time, every single day. Jesus, I just need You. I need to be close to You. I need You to draw me in. I need You to purify my heart and my thinking. I need for You to renew my mind. I need You to do this in me and if You don't do it me, it is never going to get done. I need you, Jesus.*

Let's bring the topic of stress to this conclusion: You need Jesus who is concerned even about these things. I wish I could say that I have now experienced my last of stress. I would be very happy if that were the case. I want that to be the case. I may struggle throughout this life and you may too.

But I pray that in that you will have the Spirit of God prompting you back to Jesus, following Him and falling into Him and trusting in Him, because the Christian life from beginning to end is not one of self-effort. That is futile. That is going to get you nowhere but smothered. Rather, it is all about abiding in Jesus and knowing His love is seeing you through.

With that I am going to close with a Scripture reading that I pray will minister to your heart and drive you close to the Savior, who can help you and lift your heart and who can in fact make your thinking new, so that these burdens become less and less and His glory and joy become more and more dominant in your heart as you grow in Christ.

Hebrews 4:14 – 16. Listen very carefully.

¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Let's pray.