



Sunday School Lesson Summary for January 27, 2008

Released on Wednesday, January 23, 2008

"Inspired to Trust" (Combating Anxiety and Worry).

Lesson: Luke 12:22-34

Read Background Scripture: Luke 12:22-34

Devotional Reading: Psalm 31:1-5.

LESSON TEXT Luke 12:22-34

22 And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.

23 The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.

24 Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?

25 And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?

26 If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?

27 Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

28 If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?

29 And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.

30 For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.

31 But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

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

TODAYS AIM

Facts: to show that God will take care of physical and material needs of believers while they seek the kingdom of God.

Principle: to learn to trust God for everyday needs and make His work primary.

Application: to prioritize our goals so that kingdom concerns are primary and earthly things are secondary.

INTRODUCTION

A cartoon shows a husband and wife sitting in their living room. She is knitting, and he is reading a paper. The wife, with a worried expression on her face, says, "Oh, dear! I forgot what it was I was going to stop worrying about!" Perhaps this is not too far from reality. How easy it is to multiply our anxieties! And when we find we have none, we look for new ones.

Ours is an age of worry. People worry about threats to world peace, the decline of morals, the direction of the economy, and the price of gasoline. Teens worry about their status with their peers. College seniors worry about getting a job. Married couples worry about their finances and their children. Businessmen worry about their investments. And those approaching retirement worry about their health and reduced incomes.

There is no end to the possibilities for worry. How can we avoid worry? Jesus has told us how. Tracing it to a faulty view of life itself, He challenges us to a life of trust based on a worldview that places God's kingdom at the center of our lives.

QUESTIONS

1. Is it possible for the poor to be materialistic? Explain.

This week's passage is part of a larger discourse on pitfalls related to material wealth. A man in the crowd had asked Jesus to arbitrate an inheritance dispute between him and his brother (v. 13). Jesus refused, pointing out the dangers of greed (vs. 14-15). He illustrated this through the parable of the rich fool, who had accumulated earthly treasure but neglected his relationship with God (vs. 16-21).

Jesus knew that hoarding was not the only temptation related to wealth. For those who lacked it, the greater danger was anxiety over how to survive. In their own way, they could be just as materialistic as the rich man in the parable.

Don't Worry (Luke 12:22-26)

2. Why might the twelve disciples have been tempted to worry (Luke 12:22,23)?

So Jesus turned and addressed His disciples. "Therefore" (Luke 12:22) connects His teaching with the preceding parable of the rich fool. "Take no thought," He said, "for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on." These were real concerns for the twelve. They had left all to follow Jesus, who sometimes had no place to stay. They must have raised these very issues.

The parallel verse at Matthew 6:25 is helpful. Whereas Luke has recorded the verse before us right after the Parable of the Rich Fool, Matthew has recorded it directly after the teaching that a person cannot serve two masters. This is summarized as, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

When we focus on our material needs, we negate an important reality: the *life* of a true disciple extends beyond the physical to the eternal. The fact is, though, that we are a combination of both physical and spiritual. Thus Jesus does not say we should totally ignore food and clothes. These are important, but they deal only with the physical aspects of life. We are to see such things as physical means to spiritual ends. If we make them the point of life, then we subordinate our spiritual life to the physical (compare Philippians 3:19).

Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; 7:23 that Christians must understand themselves to have chosen to relinquish "ownership" of their bodies. That is, with the blessing of salvation comes the sacrifice of our worldly interests. The body belongs to the Lord. To use the body to achieve worldly interests at the expense of spiritual ones is to reject Christ's sacrificial purchase of body and spirit.

3. What lessons did Jesus teach through God's care for ravens (v. 24)?

Just because food and clothing are not the essence of life does not mean God is unconcerned about them. He provides the physical needs of all His creatures, including ravens. These birds of the crow family were considered unclean because of their scavenging habits (Lev. 11:15). Yet God cared for their needs, and He did it without their sowing, reaping, or storing food (Luke 12:24).

Jesus gave this example not to encourage His disciples to be idle or careless in providing for themselves but to argue that in God's sight they were more valuable than birds. If God provided for them, how much more will He provide for His own children. Knowing this, we ought to avoid worry and commit our needs to Him.

4. How did Jesus illustrate the uselessness of worry (vs. 25, 26)?

Jesus added another argument against worry—worry accomplishes nothing. "Which of you," He asked, "with taking thought (worrying) can add to his stature one cubit?" There is some question as to the exact meaning here. If taken as translated here, it would mean adding about eighteen inches (a cubit) to one's height. But would adding eighteen inches qualify as "that thing which is least"?

The word translated "stature" in Luke 12:25 can also mean age, or time of life; so in this context it might mean that one cannot add any extra time to one's life span by worrying. This translation would fit well with Jesus' parable of the rich fool, whose life came to an abrupt end. No amount of anxious concern could have changed that.

Whether interpreted as height or length of life, Jesus' lesson is the same: worry cannot add to either one. And if it is useless in what is "least" (Luke 12:26), why resort to it in larger matters that are equally beyond one's control? "Why take ye thought for the rest?" means "why worry about anything else?"

This practical argument is not hard to understand; we all know it is true. Yet we all have at times acted as if worry did help. Not content to do what is humanly possible to solve our problems, we keep trying to accomplish what is not. We ignore Paul's advice in Philippians 4:6 that, instead of worrying, we should pray about our needs. As a result, we are robbed of the peace of God that passes all understanding (v. 7). Our minds remain in turmoil, and God does not have the opportunity to glorify Himself.

Trust God (Luke 12:27–31)

5. What lesson did Jesus teach through the lilies (v. 27)?

Jesus called attention to how these lilies grow. They did not labor or spin. They did nothing to produce the colorful apparel they wore. Yet even Solomon, in all his regal robes, could not match them in beauty and glory. The glory of what Solomon created for himself does not compare with the glory that God creates in simple *lilies*, however. The importance of this fact is demonstrated in the next verse.

Now in verse 28 Jesus applied this illustration to His disciples. He pointed out that although flowers of the field were part of the grass that was here today and gone tomorrow, God cared enough to clothe them gorgeously while they lasted. Their transitory glory would be cut short when they were cut down with the other grass to be used as fuel. Yet for this brief moment they outshone the splendor of Solomon.

If God lavishes this much attention on flowers, how much more will He care for the needs of His own people? The flowers are here but for a day; His disciples are created for eternity. No one can justifiably question His loving concern for them. The problem is that of having *little faith*. At its heart, this is an unwillingness to let go of this world and cling to God.

6. Why do you think some Christians worry, despite Jesus' promise that God will take care of us? How can we help lift one another out of his or her worries?

Some try to justify worry, calling it "concern" or some such. Jesus is very clear, though: worry comes from a lack of faith. And faith means focusing on Jesus. When Peter started to walk on the water, he was successful until he took his eyes off of Jesus (Matthew 14:25–31). The same is true in our lives: when we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we have no reason to worry.

It may be impossible, though, to stop worrying solely through force of will. Most of us cannot simply decide, "I will not worry anymore." Successfully battling worry requires approaching the problem from different directions. Praying alleviates much worry, as we surrender problems to the one best able to deal with them. Study of Scripture, especially study of God's faithfulness to His people, can ease one's mind. Accountability to someone who can remind us of God's commands and God's commitment is valuable.

7. Why can Christians live on a higher level than mere physical survival (vs. 29,30)?

Jesus now returned to the principle He stated in verse 22. Disciples were not to be anxious over what they would eat or what they would wear. He also added another exhortation. "Neither be ye of doubtful mind" (v. 29). It implies restlessness, and emotional instability.

Jesus told His disciples that this unstable frame of mind was unnecessary for them, for their heavenly Father, who knew what they needed, had every-thing under control. This contrasts with the outlook and aspirations of the unbelieving world.

"All these things" (Luke 12:30) refers to the material essentials of life about which Jesus had been speaking. "The nations of the world" (unbelievers) seek after these things. Lacking any future hope, they set their desires on the material things of earth. "Seek after" is an intensive verb that means "pursue." This makes sense for those who consider these the essence of life.

Believers, however, need not fret over such matters. Jesus said their Father knew that they needed those things. What a wonderful assurance! Christians can live above

the level of mere physical survival. It should be sufficient for them to know that the heavenly Father knows and supplies their needs. They can use the energy others expend on worry to pursue life's higher goals.

8. What does God promise to those who seek His kingdom (v. 30)?

Up until now, Jesus has been telling us what to avoid doing. Now He reveals what we should do. This verse can be taken several ways, especially if read out of context.

Jesus spoke of the higher goals the trusting disciple was free to seek. They centered on "the kingdom of God." Matthew's parallel to this also includes "and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). The real purpose in life is to promote the sovereign rule of God, especially as it relates to the affairs of mankind (see Luke 11:2). Jesus had come to introduce this rule (see Mark 1:14-15), and He expects His disciples to have this consuming passion as well.

The present tense of "seek" (Luke 12:31) implies that it is a continual habit of life. The faithful disciple commits himself to representing God on earth by following His will and bringing glory to Jesus, the crucified and risen King.

How can believers commit themselves to this priority without anxiety over material needs? "All these things," said Jesus, "shall be added unto you" (Luke 12:31). We must be careful, of course, to take "all these things" in its context. Jesus is not teaching that true disciples will always have a guarantee of food and water. Faithful Christians die of starvation and thirst. This has been so since Jesus' time. Yet if God wants us to continue to live on this earth and serve His kingdom, then He will enable us to do so through His provision of life's necessities.

Don't Fear (Luke 12:32-34)

9. What did Jesus imply by calling His people "little flock" (v. 32)?

Having set their sights on the kingdom, can God's people be sure of entering it? Jesus reassured them, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). By calling His disciples "little flock," Jesus emphasized His tender care over them. The term also denotes their vulnerability and dependence. They are not the influential of the world, and they need assurance because they foresee persecution.

It is to these that God has been pleased to give His kingdom. Some of the kingdom blessings, such as a secure relationship with Him, can be realized in the present life. Others are reserved for Christ's future reign. Taken together, they constitute the true life of the saints, far superior to the meager material existence pursued by the world.

10. Do generous believers lose their riches (vs. 33, 34)?

Jesus clarifies the underlying exhortation from the previous verses. We can summarize the verse in contemporary language: "Let go of this temporary world and grab hold of the eternal."

The idea of selling what we have is consistent with what Jesus teaches elsewhere (compare Luke 18:22). Jesus' ministry exhibits a concern for the material needs of the poor, and today it may be through our hands that their needs are met as we *give alms* (compare 1 John 3:17). This leads us to conclude that material needs are understood by Jesus to be basic to life. Continual effective living for God does require that basic needs be met.

Generous believers do not lose their riches; they merely exchange them for a treasure in heaven that will be safe. Jesus described this treasure as bags, or purses, that do not

become old and wear out. It is preserved forever in a place immune to thieves and moths. What this treasure consists of Jesus did not say. Perhaps it was not possible to describe it in terms we can appreciate now (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9). But we can be sure the Father's reward will be abundant.

Laying up heavenly treasure gives the present life an eternal focus, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:34). Hoarding earthly wealth cannot lift our eyes any higher than the earth itself. Here, then, are two contrasting ways of defining life—in terms of either material wealth or spiritual riches. The first is fatally flawed (v. 15) and cannot satisfy. The second brings joy that lasts forever.

11. When you look at your own life, what tells you where your heart and your treasure are truly located (self-examination question, no verbal response needed from class)?

When measuring a life, three barometers are quite useful in determining where a person's heart is. The first is *time*: how do I spend it? The second indicator is *money*: again, how do I spend it? The third indicator is *talent* or *giftedness*: where do I focus my creativity?

None of these is fully indicative by itself. Nor is there only one right way to spend time, money, or talent. The mother devoting her life to a developmentally challenged child may be no less "heavenly treasured" than the missionary in the jungle. When we look at our own lives, though, we usually know whether we are spending time, money, and talent in the right way and for the right purpose. Through the study of God's Word and prayer, we can all determine where our treasure truly lies.

CONCLUSION In most cultures, older people are considered to have the wisdom of experience to share with younger people. Perhaps you could have two or three veterans of the faith ready to give testimonies of how God has blessed them for pursuing spiritual goals during their lifetime. This could be an encouragement to others.

You might want to close the class by turning to a parallel passage in 1 Timothy 6:6-8: "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content."

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

An eternal perspective is the cure for materialism.

PRAYER

Our Father, You have given us so much. Help us use Your gifts for You. Help us to see how we can use finite things for eternal good. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Study **Luke 10:1-12, 17-20 "Summoned to Labor."** In addition to twelve close disciples, Jesus also sent out seventy followers to expand His ministry. His instructions are still relevant for us today.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY Willie Ferrell, Jesus Is All Ministries www.jesusisall.com