

Christ's Counter to Worrying

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to Luke chapter 12 and looking at this passage from verse 22 down to verse 34. As we said there is an obvious continuation from the previous passage, the parable of the rich fool.

And as we are following Jesus on this journey to Jerusalem that we have been looking at for some time, we will find that these are the kind of things that he teaches as he goes along on the way.

And the fact that there is a continuation here or if you like almost a repetition of the same theme, although it is developed in a different way, it shows us that the things that he is dealing with, such as being aware and being against and guarding against covetousness, and here in this passage the related issue of not being anxious about material things and the things of this world, these things are important.

Jesus would not have mentioned it, and here he is especially addressing his disciples. As you see in verse 22, it is his disciples especially that he is addressing with the teaching of this passage.

We tend perhaps to think that such issues as these are of very much secondary importance, compared to the likes of justification by faith, or these more theological topics, which of course the Bible does set out as of great importance.

[1 : 32] But for Christ, these things also were important, as he showed in teaching his disciples. Because they were important to the teaching of his disciples, because they actually tend to destroy the things that are of most importance spiritually.

They take you away from focusing on what ought to be the priority or the primary issues of life. That's why he's putting it in such a way previously, in the previous passage, as saying that a man's life does not consist in the things which he possesses in this life.

And here it's the same kind of thing. So we're looking first of all at the primary concern that Jesus mentions here, which is that life is more than what you find in the material.

The second thing we want to look at is the promise of God's care to those who trust in him, rather than look to their own resources or the resources of the material things of this world.

So the primary concern, first of all, is here, as he says to the disciples, therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, not about your body, what you will put on.

[3 : 07] For life is more than food. There's the primary concern that we're to have. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

And we should say immediately that Jesus is not suggesting or teaching us that we should not take care about providing for ourselves, for our own well-being, for the well-being of our families.

The Bible elsewhere talks about the sin of neglect, the sin of laziness, slothfulness, not going about our business in a way that seeks to provide adequately for ourselves, for others, for our families.

That's not at all displaced by what Jesus is saying here. There is such a thing, as we know elsewhere in the Bible, there's such a thing as proper planning ahead.

Even if we put God willing, as we do with what we hope to do tomorrow or in the weeks ahead, it's still proper for us to prepare. It's still necessary for us to make our plans, to fill up our diaries, to go about actually organizing life in the most efficient way we can.

[4 : 21] Nothing of what Jesus is saying here is against that. What he is saying here is that our primary concern is not to be with a worldly attitude or with worldly lifestyles.

Because the life that we live is more than food and the body more than clothing. And you notice he's dealing there with both what is internal and what is outward.

The things that we eat, the food that we eat, and also the clothes that we wear. When you look around you, when you watch television, when you read magazines, when all of these things you see, the spirit that Jesus is counseling us against.

You find that it's very much the primary concern of the world and of worldliness to live for what you eat and for what you put on.

The fashion houses of the world, the great restaurants of the world, we're not decrying good food, we're not decrying proper clothes, but the excesses that you find in abundance in the world in which we live, in those very issues, are very much what Jesus is warning us against.

[5 : 48] Life does not consist in food, nor does it consist in clothing. It's not how grand your dining is.

It's not how exquisite your clothes are. These are not the primary concerns of the Christian. And in fact what he's saying is that the more we're taken up with, these things as a priority, the things of this world, the more inevitable it is that we will be anxious.

Stress is inseparably linked to worldliness. That doesn't mean that Christians don't get stressed out. That doesn't mean that proper Christian activities don't leave us stressed at times.

But what he's telling us here is that if our focus is primarily on the world, on the things of the world, on the material things that we think we need in our lives, if our materialism is taking over our lives, then we're going to be stressed, and we're going to be stressed out.

Because the person who makes that their priority is going to really be anxious when they don't have as much as they would like of it, and they're going to be anxious when they have to do without.

[7 : 02] In other words, the gains and the losses of worldliness, of materialism, actually cause untold stress in the lives of many people.

It's very, very difficult to be content and have as your priority a mindset that looks to what you eat and to what you put on.

What Jesus is actually saying is not a criticism of being rich, nor is it a commendation of poverty.

The Bible does not commend actual physical poverty. Poverty in our world is a great blight on human lives.

Poverty is something we should be interested in and committed against. Poverty is something that people have to live with the whole course of their lives in some parts of the world in great multitudes.

[8 : 05] Poverty is very often, in fact most often, caused by human mismanagement, by human greed, by the simple excesses of human attitudes and human ambitions, and especially when that is found in those who have absolute power.

Poverty itself is an evil. Yes, we're counseled to be poor in spirit, and that those who are poor in spirit are blessed. Yes, we're told that God takes regard of the poor, and that he notices those who are poor through no fault of their own in this world.

But poverty is not a virtue. And there are millions in the world today who would desperately, desperately want to be taken out of poverty.

Let's never forget that. Jesus is not commending poverty. By saying that he's against covetousness, or that we should have an emphasis, not on food or on clothing, but on spiritual things.

Nor is he criticizing actually being rich. There are many rich people of God mentioned in the Bible. They're never condemned for their riches. Abraham was an exceedingly rich man.

[9 : 23] So was Job. They were both godly men. There's nothing sinful in itself in being rich. What is sinful is the love of riches.

The love of the world. The love of materialism. The love that wants more just for the sake of having it. The love that wants excess and doesn't know where to end.

The love that becomes anxious when you don't have as much as you would like. Or because somebody else has more than you have. That is what Jesus is telling his disciples about.

Life is more than food. And the body is more than clothing. Now that is set against the background of the previous incident, the previous passage and its teaching.

Take care and be on your guard against covetousness. for one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possession. And he told them about this fool.

[10 : 26] And that's how God described him. This is God's, as we saw it, God's definition of a fool. It's a person who has nothing more in his outlook than the things of this present world.

It's a person who is tied to living for now. Who has given no regard whatsoever to the things of eternity. And that's what causes so much worry, so much anxiety.

Because the more we're taken up with the things of the present world, the things of this material world, and the less we're taken up with eternal issues and with depositing our lives into the hands of God, the more stressed out we will be.

Because we can never manage these things ourselves. We can never depend on our own resources. We can never actually organize life the way we would like it to be organized if we're living without having God as the organizer of it.

Contentment of heart does not come from putting God aside trying to do it yourself. It's the other way about it.

[11 : 47] And what Jesus is saying is precisely that. Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, not about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing.

What is our primary concern tonight? Is our primary concern our physical well-being? Is our primary concern how we look, how we dress, how we are in the opinion of other people?

Is our primary concern what the world thinks of us? How we fit with the fashions of the world? Are we keeping up with what is currently up to days in the world's thinking? Is that our primary concern?

If it is, then we are going to fail. Because all of these things, not only will they not give satisfaction, not only will they not last, but they are wrong to have as a priority.

And you see, Jesus then gives lessons from nature, as he often did. He talks firstly about the ravens. Consider the ravens, they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them.

[12 : 56] What a great contrast to the fool in the previous passage, who was so concerned about his barns, and having his barns stuffed full of the goods that his ground had produced, and he was going to build bigger barns, so they could put more of that stuff in them.

And he would just keep building it up, and relax, and put his feet up, and live life as a rich millionaire. You fool, said God, tonight your soul is going to be required of you.

Whose then will these things be? The ravens are a contrast, Jesus is saying, they don't have the ability to build storehouses, nor barns, they don't sow, neither do they reap, yet God feeds them.

And the fact that Jesus chose the raven seems significant, because in the Old Testament, the raven was regarded in the way in which things were done in the Old Testament days, the raven was regarded as an unclean bird.

It was amongst the birds categorized, like other animals do, as unclean. The people of Israel were taught to regard certain animals and certain birds as unclean, in a ceremonial sense.

[14 : 10] The raven was one of them. And when Jesus is saying, picking the raven especially, and emphasizing that God, even this unclean bird that's regarded as unclean in a ceremonial way, in a religious way if you like, that God feeds them.

And if God feeds a bird that's regarded as ceremonially unclean, how much more of value are you than the birds?

He's saying to the disciples. If God is indeed as he is taking care of the ravens, will he not take care of us as his disciples?

Why should we live in a way that seeks to live by the material things of the world to give that a priority? The raven doesn't bother with that, yet God looks after them.

And what Jesus is saying is, we too have to be as that raven is dependent upon God and satisfied with God and with what God has prepared to give us or to keep from us.

[15 : 22] and not only that, but he goes on to speak about the flowers, the lilies as it's called here. It's a different idea and commentators of what flower precisely is meant by this, but it would appear that it was one of those field flowers that when they were all open in a field seen full of these lilies as it's put here, they would have a lovely bright golden color sparkling in the sun.

And that's why he's comparing that with Solomon's wonderful glistening garments. Solomon in all his glory. And when you read in the Old Testament about the riches of Solomon, and the way Solomon would be decked out, and the gold that Solomon brought into his kingdom, and the sheer magnificence of his court and of his palace, then you get some idea of what it must have been like just to see Solomon and his entourage in all their finery.

Here is Jesus saying, but I tell you that these lilies, they don't grow, as they grow, they neither toil, nor do they spin. Yet I tell you, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

It doesn't matter what human hands produce. There was a photograph recently somewhere, I think it was on television, I saw it, on the internet, but somewhere in India, a man had actually produced, or had produced for him, a garment that was made of pure gold.

I don't know if you saw it or not, I can't remember how much it was worth. He loved gold, this man, he was decked out in gold. And this garment was like a short jacket, but it was actually woven out of strands of pure gold.

[17 : 30] And it looked, as you saw the photo of the man, it looked just absolutely gorgeous. Well, it is, if you like gold, that is. But, even looking at that, and the best that human creativity can produce, using the best materials known to man, you look at your favorite flower, I love delias, what's your favorite flower, it doesn't matter, you look into the depth of it, you look into the beauty of it, you look into the color of it, you just look into the finery of that flower, and you'll say to yourself, Solomon could never look like that, nor could he produce that, nor can any human being produce it, it's the work of God.

And not only so, but as God has created that flower, that flower can't look after itself, it doesn't toil, it doesn't spin, it's not anxious about how it's going to look, and God makes it look that way.

So he's saying, if that is true of the grass, as he puts it later, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven. They were gathered up in the harvest as the grass was mown, the flowers weren't picked necessarily for their beauty, and put in a vase, they would just be bundled up and discarded.

And he's saying, if God is doing that with the grass of the field, how much more will he clothe you, all you of little faith? There are the ravens, they don't worry about what tomorrow brings, there's the flower of the field, it's in its magnificence decked out more than Solomon ever was.

Why then, if they are like that, should we worry about tomorrow? because God himself will fully take care of all our needs.

[19 : 40] So don't be anxious about what you will eat or about your body, what you will put on. And worrying changes nothing. Now, worrying is not something that I'm immune to, and I'm sure you're not as well.

To some extent, every human being, even every believer, every saved person, has an element of worry entered into their thinking at some times in their lives, and possibly even every day.

And what Jesus is saying is that worrying is actually not in any way going to change things. what he's saying is that the way in which we cannot add to the span of our lives, that seems to be what's meant in verse 25, that which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to a span of life?

Literally he's saying can add a cubit, that measure, to their lives. And it would appear that it's translated here that the best way of taking it is to not to add to your actual height, literally, which is impossible anyway, but to try and somehow extend your life beyond what God has appointed.

Or to add to your life in whatever way beyond what God has appointed, whatever way you take the meaning of it, that it seems to be in terms of years and the span of your life. You can't do it.

[21 : 16] You can't do it. And worrying is not going to do it. Which of you by taking thought, by worrying, by being overanxious, can add in any sense to the length of your life?

Worrying changes nothing. As somebody put it, today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday.

Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday. And as Jesus put it elsewhere, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

The things of today, while it doesn't preclude planning for tomorrow, but we're not yet living in tomorrow. And the things of today are the things that we must reckon with.

let tomorrow be taken care of by God, just as he's taken care of today for us. Worrying is not going to change it.

[22 : 22] Whether it's financial, whether it's to do with your work, whether it's to do with relationships, whether it's to do with people in your family, whether it's to do with the condition of the world, whether it's to do with the church and where the church is going, whether it's to do with anything else and all of these things besides, what Jesus is saying is, even if you don't know at all how it's going to work out, and even if you think you're going to be disadvantaged by these things, and you may have questions as to how you're to cope, what he's saying is, don't worry about it.

As a Christian, leave it with God. Now, there's a big difference between that and the way that the words don't worry are often used in common usage today.

Because you'll find some people, and that's the counsel that they give to those who have a problem, to those maybe who have a serious problem, whether it's a physical problem, a medical problem, a financial problem, a moral problem, some people just come up and say, don't worry, it'll be alright, it'll take care of itself, it'll work itself out.

That's not the kind of thing that Jesus is saying when he's saying, don't worry. That's not the advice he's giving us.

He's not telling us, don't worry about these things, they're not significant, somehow or other, they'll work themselves out, something will turn up. No, what he's saying is, don't be taken up so that you've got that as your great concern.

[24 : 01] Leave it with God. Put it into God's hands. Put your trust in him. Let him be in charge of your life. Let him take over the reins of your life.

And that way, whatever things happen, your life is secure. God will look after you. And that brings us to the promise of God's care.

Four points very briefly. A contrast, a comfort, a council and a connection. There's a contrast, first of all, mentioned, verses 30 to 31.

And this is important for every age group, and I hope all of these things are important, and that the young folks here are able to follow the teaching that Christ is giving us in this passage as well, because it's important in our younger days that we take note of these important principles for our lives, and apply them and carry them through into adulthood.

What he's saying here is that the people that are anxious, he's saying here the nations of the world, in verse 30, they seek after these things, and your father knows you need them.

[25 : 17] Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Now, the nations of the world in the days of Jesus were the dark, pagan nations around Israel. The gospel had not yet gone out to places like Corinth, and Athens, and Ephesus.

They lived by mere human philosophies, by pagan superstitions, by various ways in which they approached life very differently to the way of God's revelation.

And what Jesus is saying is, when you look around you and see people who don't live by God's standard or God's direction, that's why they're anxious. the nations of the world, they seek after all of these things.

But your father knows, your father knows, that you need them. In other words, he's saying to them, it's understandable why those who live without God would be anxious, would be anxious about how their life is lived and where their life is going, in terms of material concerns.

But not for you, he's saying to the disciples, because your father knows already, and you know that your father knows already, and you know that your father will give you according to what he sees you need, not according to what the world thinks you need, or even what you think you need yourself.

[26 : 43] There's a big difference. It's what God himself sees we need, and we are in need of, and he imparts to us, or dispenses to us. It's always the case when we're children, isn't it, when the sweets were being rationed out, well, at least it was when I was young, maybe it's not so much nowadays, but we're still rationing out sweets, we don't give them all at once to the children, but you'll always see the child's face, when you're counting out the sweets that they're going to get on that particular occasion, there's always a sense or a sign of dissatisfaction, as to say, why not a few more?

it's just a little bit small, an amount, or rather it was just a bit different to what you had given me, but sometimes we're like that with God. As our father rations out, or gives out, or dispenses, and he doesn't give meagerly, it's not that he keeps back from us, and what he gives to us, he gives to us reluctantly, he gives us things wisely, he apportions things to us as he sees best, and who sees as he sees, who knows as he knows, he looks into our future, and he gives us today, what he knows is appropriate with regard not only to today, but our future as well as it's in his plan, and therefore we come to him and we ask him, give us this day our daily bread, and we wait for him to give us the amount that he sees we need, to go beyond that is to be anxious, or to be covetous, or to be greedy, or to live for this world, or to be dissatisfied with our father's hand, as children of God, as his disciples and children, we have no right to complain of his dispensing to us, whatever he dispenses, nor have you any right to complain what he keeps from us that he may have given to others, gifts, goods, whatever, because the more you go on in life, as a Christian, as a disciple of Jesus, the more you're taught to thank him for what he didn't give you, as well as what he did.

And you'll understand that as I understand that, the more life goes on. Sometimes we complain that we didn't get this and we didn't get that, but as we understand things more fully as life goes on, then we begin to understand, well Lord, if you had given me that, I would have misused it.

My life would have gone the wrong way, and my life would not be as rich as it now is. For you're withholding it from me. As Job put it, the Lord gives, and the Lord takes away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Oh, that you and I would learn more to say that with conviction, with love for God, with an acknowledgement and acceptance that life does not consist in what we eat and what we put on, or in our own opinion of these things.

[30 : 18] It's more to do with what God has for us. So there's a contrast between how we must live as Christians and how the world lives.

That's how we show ourselves as Christians. That's how we show ourselves as the children of God, as people who have God as old father. and tonight if your trust is in God, then your life is different.

And it's different in its priorities and it's different in its primary concerns and it's different in its outlook and it's different in the way that you live your life outwardly and ordinarily, not just spiritually.

It's not just that you attend prayer meetings and that you come with God's people to worship them. It's not just that you read your Bible when you're at home by yourself. It's not just that you have family worship.

It's that you look out on the world with a whole different outlook to the way the world itself sees things. Because God is your father and because you see things as he sees it and as he wants you to see it.

[31 : 21] And there's comfort as well as contrast because fear not he's saying little flock for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

God as a father is committed to look after his people. And here again the imagery often used in the Bible is used by Christ the flock and the shepherd. How often in the Bible you find that emphasis.

Psalm 23 The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want, I shall not be in need. David is part of God's flock. And that flock is small in terms of comparing it with the great world in which the flock is placed.

This was a very small group of disciples. They were going to have to go out with the gospel. They were going to have to cope with and deal with the way that Jesus was no longer going to be physically with them.

They were going to have to cope with his death on the cross and try to understand what this death on the cross of this leader that they had come to put their trust in, what it ultimately meant, why did it happen?

[32 : 28] They were going to have to face the might of paganism and darkness throughout the Roman Empire. with the message of the gospel, with the message of a crucified redeemer, despised by worldly thinking.

Little flock, tonight as a Christian, you're vulnerable too. We are as people of God facing the might of the world.

There are things that happen in the world that make us at times tremble. We feel the weight of unbelief. It affects us deeply.

We become afraid. But Jesus is saying, don't you be afraid, my little flock. Don't you be afraid because it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

see what he's saying? You are actually provided for by your father and your father who is in heaven is not just providing for you, but providing for you out of his good pleasure.

[33 : 39] He takes delight in giving to you the things of his kingdom. you know where God is pleased to give to his people.

There's no power on earth or in heaven or anywhere in the universe can actually displace that or deal with that in a way that stands in the way of God giving his people.

It is his pleasure to give it. And where God's pleasure is, that's where his will is done. Don't be anxious about this world and having the things of this world.

Don't be as the world itself in your mindset, in your outlook, in your attitude, in your actions. Because you're a child of God. You're not under the provisions of the world.

You're not at the whim of the world. You're not under the control of the world. You belong to your father. And where is there anything like the fatherliness of God?

[34 : 47] A poor and pathetic even the best human fathers are compared to the fatherliness of God. The consistent, loving, dependable fatherliness of God.

Don't be afraid, he's saying. That's who's looking after you. And it's his good pleasure to give you the kingdom. And then there's, along with contrast and comfort, there's counsel.

The counsel that he gives in verse 33. Sell your possessions, give to the needy, provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and where no moth destroys.

Let me just bring things to a conclusion, because I know it's getting on in time. He's not saying here, literally just give away everything you have.

Give away all your possessions and give what you receive from that to the poor. And you'll be rich in heaven. Some people did that, literally, the early church brought all their goods, as you know, and together they shared things and had them in common.

[36 : 01] And he's not here saying to us, literally, you have to actually go home today, put everything you've got for sale, get rid of it all, live without them, and then you'll be rich spiritually.

What he is saying, this is Christ's way of saying, don't be attached to this world. Don't make these things that are in your possession the things that govern your life, the things that dominate your thinking.

Don't be anxious to the extent that these things, your possessions, the money that you have, the treasure that you have, literally, the clothes, the houses, the cars, whatever else you put into the whole bundle.

Don't be attached to them. Don't think that that's where your security is. Don't be tied to them. so as to be reluctant to lose them, even if it needs to be the case.

Instead, seek the kingdom of God. And Matthew adds, and his righteousness. You seek his kingdom, verse 31.

[37 : 21] Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. you see, there's the great promise and the counsel that he's giving us.

If we live detached from, though we have to use the things of the world, and though there's no sin in being rich itself, there is in the love of riches. And in fact, Paul, writing to Timothy, put it so strongly, that this is the root of all evil, the love of mammon, the love of the world, the love of riches, the love of material things.

He went so far as to say it's the root of all evil. It leads to all kinds of sinful excess. You seek, he says, the kingdom of God.

Seek it for yourself. Seek that you will be a member of it. Seek it in the sense of promoting it to others. Seek to bring others into it. And he says, all these things will be added to you.

See, what he's saying is, if we don't put the material things first and we put God's kingdom first, we won't go without the material things. God will add these things to us as he sees we have need of.

[38 : 38] That's how it reverses the thinking of the world. And provide yourselves money bags that do not grow old without treasure in the heavens.

There was the rich fool the money bags were all stored up nicely. The barns were all full. And he was promising himself a long life of luxury.

What a fool. Not only were the things that held his treasures, not only were they liable to decay all too soon, but he couldn't take a single one of them with him.

When you go up to agony cemetery, when you look around at the graves in agony cemetery, when you go to a funeral, it should be obvious to us every time we're there how little of this world these people took with them.

all he took with them was a death shroud and a casket for their bodies. That's all.

[39 : 57] And it's so difficult for me to get that into my head, for you to get that into your head, into your heart, because we are naturally prone to live for the things of this world, to hold on to the things of this world, as if we were going to be able to hold on to them forever.

And Jesus is saying, seek first the kingdom of God, provide for yourselves the kind of treasure, in other words, spiritual treasure, put your investment in God's bank, where is God's bank?

It's in heaven, it's in Jesus Christ, put your investment there, invest in him, he's saying, and there will be no decay. and there will be no decline, there will be no depreciation in your investment.

It will be forever one that will provide for you eternal security. What he says, this is the third, final thing, the connection, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Friends, tonight these two things are inseparably connected, our treasure and our hearts. There's a spiritual treasure, there's a worldly treasure.

[41 : 19] Our heart is attached to both of these, whichever one we make our treasure, that's where our heart is going to be. If our treasure is in heaven, that's where our heart is going to be.

If our treasure is in this world, that's where our heart is going to be, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. That's the word of Jesus. That's the opinion of the Son of God.

He's not mistaken. Because we concentrate our energies on what we value most.

And if what we value most is the things of heaven, the things of salvation, the things of God, that's where our heart is, that will be our treasure.

If we value most the things of this life, that's where our energy will be, that's where our heart will be, that will be our great loves.

[42 : 26] Invest in heaven, invest in Christ, life does not consist in anything else, but what you find in him.

May God bless his word. Let's pray. Eternal God, we do again give thanks that your word sets before us the different values that human beings in this world have in the outlook of their lives.

We thank you that you teach your people and place in their heart a desire for spiritual things, a desire that does not despise material things in themselves, and yet does not look to them as a priority.

We pray, O Lord, that you would teach us to hold all things that we have in our possession in the light of eternity. Teach us every day, we pray, how short life is, how certain it is that we shall die, how certain it is that we cannot carry the things of this world with us.

Lord, help us, we pray, to place our confidence in you, and to own and acknowledge you as our loving Father. Hear us now for your glory's sake.

[43 : 48] Amen.