

## Better than the Birds

### You Asked For It, Part 10

*Luke 12:6-31*

I have read that a dense fog – so extensive that it covers seven city blocks a hundred feet deep is actually composed of no more than one glass of water; water, of course that's divided into more than 60 billion droplets of water.<sup>i</sup>

Just a couple gallons of water can cripple an entire city.

In many ways, this perfectly illustrates the substance of worry. Just a little bit of it can spread and deepen and ultimately cripple the mind and the heart of even believers.

One author put it this way when he wrote, "Worry is a thin stream of fear that trickles through the mind, which, if encouraged, will cut a channel so wide that all other thoughts will be drained out."<sup>ii</sup>

I find it extremely gracious of our Lord that whenever He addressed the subject of worry, and He did on several occasions, He went much further than simply saying, "You know better than that . . . worrying isn't good for you . . . it'll mess up your mind . . . isn't right . . . stop worrying right now!"

Instead, Jesus graciously causes us to think through this vaporous substance of worry; He gives us several reasons to stop worrying and He even condescends in His patience to give us illustrations – effectively – giving us principles to teach us why we really don't ever need to worry.

And several of His key principles are the form of questions.

Let me invite you to Luke chapter 12 where Jesus asks some profound questions.

He's teaching His disciples – this chapter in Luke corresponds to His sermon in Matthew's Gospel.

Now if you've ever read His sermon, you'll notice that He goes from one subject to the next –

almost randomly touching on a series of different topics.

Jesus is actually employing a Jewish teaching style called Charaz – which means, stringing pearls.<sup>iii</sup>

In other words, Jesus will string pearls of wisdom on a number of subjects, like someone might string together a rare necklace of pearls.

And one of the pearls He adds to his string of pearls is this subject of worry.

Let me give you four principles in this regard as we work through His comments on overcoming worry.

The first principle to understand is that:

#### **1. Worry denies the gracious care of God**

And He proves His point by asking two questions – notice His first question at *verse 6*. ***Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God.***

Now if you compared this account with Matthews account, we're told that 2 sparrows were sold for 1 penny.

The Greek term for this coin refers to a small brass coin worth about 1/10<sup>th</sup> of a day's wage for a working laborer.

Which is a long way of saying, sparrows were the cheapest meat sold in the marketplace.<sup>iv</sup>

They were the food of the poorest of the poor. You barely got a mouthful of meat from a little sparrow.

In fact, Matthew's Gospel tells us that you can buy 2 sparrows for a penny and Luke here tells us

that you can get 5 sparrows for 2 penny's; how's that add up?

Well, we know from history that during the days of Christ, sparrows were so abundant and so cheaply sold to the poor that if you bought 4, you got one thrown in for nothing.

And that's what Luke alludes to here – ***are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God.***

Now watch this – Luke is effectively saying, even the free sparrow is not forgotten by God. Even the sparrow that got thrown in for nothing matters to God.

You want to know why you never need to worry? Because to God you are never lost in the crowd.<sup>v</sup>

Not only does God not lose track of even one sparrow – he doesn't even lose track of one single hair from your head.

Notice further in verse 7. ***Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered.***

I've read that the average person's head holds more than 100,000 hairs. Some of us are down to a few hundred.<sup>vi</sup>

A few dozen . . .

Now some commentators don't think Jesus is being serious here – that He's just exaggerating to make a point.

I mean, come on . . . He counts the number of the hairs on our heads? That number changes daily. Surely God doesn't bother with that kind of detail. Gary Hallquist – 60,000; Dr. Burggraaf – 12 . . . hundred.

No, I think that's exactly His point. The glory of God revealed here is that He actually does know!

Jesus is effectively asking us, "Look, do you really think you can slip out of your Heavenly Father's care – that you can somehow slip out from underneath the radar of His divine omniscience? Do you think He's forgotten about you or that your problems are too numerous to keep up with?"

I mean if He can keep track of 100,000 hairs on somebody's head of hair, do you think He'll get frustrated with you coming to Him over and over again to give Him your worries?

Do you think He's going to say, "Look, there's only so much room on my ledger and you've already been here a dozen times today . . . I just can't keep track."

Listen, if God is actually such a gracious, omniscient God – that He doesn't overlook a single

sparrow – even the one that gets thrown in for free – He will never overlook you either.

**Worry denies the gracious care of God**

## **2. Secondly, worry depreciates the higher value of mankind**

***He's not finished with the birds yet – notice verse 7 again – the last part – Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.***

***Matthews account says, "Are you not worth much more than they?"***

In case we didn't pick up on the lesson – in case we're a little slow – God's care of the lesser creation ensures His care of His highest creation.

Evidently Jesus thinks we just might be a little slow on the uptake here – or maybe find it hard to believe – so He circles back around to this subject again and adds another pearl to the string – look over at verse 24. ***Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, they have no store room nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds!***

Maybe Jesus repeated this lesson simply because He knew that billions of people one day would struggle with believing they were less valuable than animals.

Was God peering into the 21<sup>st</sup> century or what?

You sit through the average Animal Planet program or read the latest evolutionary textbook taught to middle schoolers and you'll get the message loud and clear that human beings have messed up the circle of life; humans have interrupted the food chain; humans are in the way and if we'd only get out of the way, the animals who evidently have the right to be on the planet – because they evolved first – would get what they deserve; if we'd just go back to living in caves, the animals would be able to enjoy their lives so much better.

That message is coming across loud and clear! Whenever you remove the glory of God's created order, Genesis 1 and 2, where mankind was made in the image of God and given the right to rule earth – to train and subjugate and benefit from the animal kingdom – you end up with a culture where animals ultimately matter more.

You now exist to serve them; you now live to make their lives more comfortable.

Now I'm not defending animal abuse, by the way. We're to be good stewards of earth and the animal kingdom.

But go visit India today, and watch, as I did, sacred cows which have been given superior rights within their culture – watch them meander across busy roadways and down streets cluttered with starving children – and begging mothers with babies on their hips; where a child starving to death is less important than a cow having something to eat.

How do we know that human beings are more valuable than animals? How do we know that?

Apart from God, we don't.

Apart from the words of Jesus Christ, the creator of all things (Colossians 1), we might be confused – look again at *verse 24 – you are more valuable than the birds.*

Is that radical news or what?

And this really got the attention of Jesus' Jewish audience, by the way, because Jesus used ravens as an example here – ravens were considered unclean according to Mosaic Law (*Leviticus 11:13-15*).<sup>vii</sup>

The ravens were unclean birds.

I'm sorry for how that makes you Baltimore Ravens fans feel – I'm sorry you had to find that out – you've been cheering all along for unclean animals . . . you already knew that.

Here's why this was so stunning an analogy for Christ to make: It's one thing to be insignificant like a sparrow and be cared for by God – it's another thing to be unclean and despised and be cared for by God.

And you know why I'm so glad Jesus added this illustration?

Because the enemy of our heart and spirit and joy will more than likely come and whisper in our ear – sparrows might be cheap, but at least they're clean animals – no wonder God cares about them; but you're more like an unclean bird . . . despised and unclean according to God's holy law . . . you don't deserve God's attention.

You have very reason to worry about your life.

But notice – *verse 24. God has managed to care for them too – He effectively feeds them too – and get this – “How much more valuable you are than the animal kingdom!”*

**Worry denies the gracious care of God  
Worry depreciates the higher value of mankind.**

### **3. Thirdly, worry distorts our perspective in life**

In other words, worry makes you start living only for the here and now!

*Go back to verse 22. And He said to His disciples, “For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat, nor for your body, as to what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.”*

In other words, life is really about more what we're going to eat and what we're going to wear?

Jesus delivers encouragement to those in his day who could honestly be worried about the lack of water and food. In His culture, workers were paid daily, they bought their food daily – which is why they were taught to pray for daily bread – which we don't worry so much about because our loaves of bread will last a couple of weeks.

In Jesus' day, nobody was praying for bread next week – that was simply too far ahead.

Add to that the fact that their government offered no security; there wasn't insurance, workman's comp or benefit packages.

But there were taxes to be paid. New Testament scholars estimate that as much as 40% of their income went to taxes.

All that to say, this challenge by Jesus was staggering to them – and a great challenge to their faith in God's provision.

In our generation, this isn't so much an encouragement as much as it is an indictment.

While the average person has food in the fridge, clothes in the closet and a car in the driveway, what you eat and what you drink and what you dress in and what you drive have become national obsessions.

We are effectively worried that our clothes aren't costly enough; our cars aren't new enough; our food isn't gourmet enough; our bank accounts aren't big enough.

Jesus says, to that generation and this one – your life is about much more than that . . . don't live for stuff that runs out or wears out – or goes out of style.

He promises here, not that He'll meet our greeds, but our needs.

Oh, and by the way, if you want to talk about really splendid clothing – *verse 27 – Consider the lilies, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory, clothed himself like one of these. (now here's the pearl of wisdom) 28. But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you? You men of little faith!*

Jesus probably had his audience look around on that hillside – perhaps He gestured at the irises, the Turk’s cap lilies, the gladioli and scarlet poppies along with a smattering of wild flowers that bloomed for a day or two on the hillsides of Palestine.<sup>viii</sup>

He clothed them brilliantly and they don’t eve last that long!

The word for *furnace* here is a reference to the ordinary clay oven of this day – used primarily to bake bread. When the cook wanted to raise the temperature of the oven quickly, they would have handfuls of these same field flowers and dried grasses bundled nearby and they would grab a handful and throw it into the oven.

Something destined for the oven was still designed by God with brilliant colors and creative genius.

And all these wildflowers didn’t necessarily make it to the oven.

Martin Luther the converted monk and church reformer in the 16<sup>th</sup> century said that there were lessons of God’s glory in such beautiful flowers destined for such short life spans – he wrote “it seems that the flowers stand there and make us blush and become our teachers. Thank you flowers, you who are to be devoured by the cows!”<sup>x</sup>

In other words, birds and flowers and nature around us teaches us the glory of God’s creative ability and His care and delight to have designed animals and flowers that live only briefly.

My wife has added birds to our backyard – strategically hanging feeders so that our back yard sounds like a constant aviary.

Yellow finches, hummingbirds, the elusive blue bird, the brilliant cardinal, sparrows, finches by the dozens, chic-a-dees, wrens, mourning doves, the unwanted mockingbird who thinks he owns the backyard and our deck and our house too.

Marsha and I often talk about the marvel of God’s hidden designs – noticed by so few. God created so much variety – to take the time to design splashes of white underneath large black eyes; to stripe transparent wings with burgundy and brown – to design symmetrical patterns of blue and gray.

Why? To declare His glory and to bring such sights for us to enjoy and marvel over His creation . . . and another reason – to remind us not to worry.

For if God so cares about the details and designs of little birds and wild flowers – how much more does He care about us – His chief design, made in

His image to talk with Him and walk with Him and worship Him and fellowship with and one day reign with Him.

In fact, notice *verse 32. Do not worry – don’t be anxious or afraid – little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.*

In other words, we haven’t seen anything yet.

Don’t worry! Why?

**Worry denies the gracious care of God**  
**Worry depreciates the higher value of mankind**  
**Worry distorts your perspective in life to the present –the here and now**

One more:

#### **4. Worry diminishes our distinctiveness as believers**

*Look at verse 29. And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying [about it]. 30. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek.*

Even as Christians we can get caught up in the world’s idea that we live because of our bodies. And since we think we live because of our bodies, we start living for our bodies.<sup>x</sup>

That’s the way the world lives . . . it’s literally all about your body – your body – what you do with it, what you do for it, what you do to it – what you put on it, what you put in it.

That’s the passion of the world - the body.

Further, one author wrote it this way, “it is characteristic of the secular world to be obsessed with economic questions, to be almost entirely engrossed by consumer concerns, to be preoccupied with finding and getting better and better things.”<sup>xi</sup>

Jesus says, effectively, all these things are the things the nations of earth are after.

But maybe you’re thinking, well, somebodies got to worry about my stuff!

So be careful here . . . let’s be balanced. Jesus isn’t advocating that we just stick our heads in the sand and everything will be alright.

The truth is, the animal kingdom is busy. Those little birds work hard . . . just watch them sometime. I doubt any of them get 2 weeks of vacation.

The question is, are you actively stewarding or managing what God has given you or are really at heart worrying about what God hasn’t given you or what He might not let you keep?

One author reviewed statistical percentages and summarized that:

- 40% of our worries are about the future
- 20% of our worries are about the past
- 22% of our worries are about our health
- And 8% of our worries are about petty things we can't do anything about; which means, 90% of what we worry about are things we can't change.

Which is why one man wrote, "Worry is like a rocking chair – it gives you something to do but it never takes you anywhere."

But what do we do about stuff we worry about?

I read about one man's solution. He told his friend, "I have a mountain of debt; I've lost my job, my car was repossessed, our house is in foreclosure and I'm not even worried about it!"

"You're not?" his friend said, "why not?"

"Well, I've hired a professional worrier. He does all the worrying for me, and that way I don't have to think about it."

"That's fantastic. How much does your professional worrier charge you for his services?"

"Fifty thousand dollars a year."

"Fifty thousand dollars a year – where are you going to get that kind of money?"

"I don't know . . . that's his worry!"<sup>xii</sup>

There's got to be a better solution than that.

**Jesus effectively challenges us with two solutions.** They're not easy . . . but they're right.

### 1. Make sure God and His kingdom stays first!

*Verse 31, Jesus says, 'But seek His kingdom and these things will be added to you.'*

In other words, He's promised to give you the Kingdom – vs. 32 – now live with the Kingdom of God in mind.

Imagine it this way. Imagine that after this service, I showed you a will that my uncle left – he was a multimillionaire and he just died and showed you where he left all his money to you – all 25 million dollars. He didn't leave it to me – his nephew – he left it to you - my former friend. You used to go to church here.

Now all you have to do is go to the bank tomorrow morning, sign the papers and deposit that 25 million dollars into your personal bank account.

Now tell me. How would you feel about your car on the way home? Would you pull up at a red light and be embarrassed that it's so old? What about the interest rate on your home? Would you worry about

that? What about the stock market forecasts on the evening news tonight? Would you be worried about the meeting your boss has asked for tomorrow afternoon . . . would you lose any sleep over any of that?

No . . . why not? Because you are even now a multimillionaire, even though you don't have one nickel of that money in your account.

But it is effectively already yours.

Jesus says, "You're going to be given the kingdom – you are a king and queen in the coming spectacular reign of Christ on earth.

Between now and then, how are you going to live? You don't have the crown or the robe or the throne – but it's already yours. So keep that in mind live for that . . . pursue that . . . seek first that kingdom . . . keep your future in mind.

### 2. Make sure God and His kingdom stays first!

Matthew's account adds another phrase to Luke's account that provides the second solution.

*Matthew records in 6:34; So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Can you believe Jesus said that? Don't worry about tomorrow – it has enough trouble just waiting for you.

Is He being pessimistic?

No . . . He's also handing out another pearl of wisdom.

Here it is . . . not only should we make sure we put God first; secondly, we should make sure tomorrow stays put!

I'm not sure about the grammar, but you get my point. Make sure tomorrow stays put.

Now, Jesus isn't saying don't plan for tomorrow; He's saying, don't pull tomorrow's problems and challenges into today.

God gives grace for today – and He doles out His grace one day at a time; which means Satan will try to crush our spiritual shoulders by trying to make us carry tomorrow's burdens with only today's grace.

So, overcoming worry means you develop the art of living one day at a time.<sup>xiii</sup>

Hudson Taylor often said, "When you are walking with God [today], the responsibilities [of tomorrow] rest with Him."<sup>xiv</sup>

In the meantime, make sure you put God first; make sure tomorrow stays put.

The truth is, and the convicting challenge in these final questions we've explored, is that you are better than the birds – now live like it . . . live up to your value as you trust your sovereign Lord – who cares about every detail of your life now – and He's even preparing a kingdom with you in mind.

Martin Luther, that reformer centuries ago once described his favorite preacher. He wrote, I have one preacher I love better than any other; it is my little tame robin who preaches to me daily. I put his crumbs upon my window sill, especially at night.

He hops onto the sill when he wants his supply, and takes as much as he desires to satisfy his need. From thence he always hops to a little tree close by, and lifts up his voice to God, and sings his carol of praise and gratitude, then tucks his little head under his wings, and goes fast to sleep, leaving tomorrow to look after itself.<sup>xv</sup>

That's quite a preacher . . . quite a sermon to begin living up to – let's live up to it, today.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/28/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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