

“BUT SEEK HIS KINGDOM”

Luke 12:22-34
Key Verse: 31

“But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”

Good morning, this morning I’m going to share with you the second half of Jesus’ teaching about money, a subject I know very little about. I’m sorry that as you know, I’m the very last person who should be giving this message. I wanted to get out of giving this message because I don’t practically know what I’m talking about. But sometimes the best message is one where we humble ourselves before the word and accept our great deficiency. I hope that is the case today. I do understand the big problem of worry over money. When I was young I never worried about money, even though I never had any. But now I have a baby to feed, and those crushing day-care bills. I feel such a heavy burden to provide for my family and give them good things but first I have to pay off my school loans. So, maybe like me you let out a great sigh of relief when the tax refund check came. **It’s so easy to put our hope in a little money isn’t it?** And it is also easy to worry when the savings account is empty. It’s a dog-eat-dog world out there and it is only natural, even prudent to worry about the future. So, we start thinking “God is good for Sunday, for my thought world but practically I have to make money, no one will make it for me!” But really money is not the problem the problem is our faith. In the end this isn’t a passage about money but what it means to live a kingdom-centered life that puts money in its proper place in our heart. However, this isn’t a passage just for families trying to provide, there are actually many things that we seek and run after, that we think we need and they seem to be elusive and we worry. For some it is marriage, recognition, personal dreams each of these also must be put in their place. When we seek God’s kingdom all the other things we seek will be given to us as well but seek his kingdom.

First, “Life is more…” (22-23).

Jesus began his teaching on money by teaching the foolishness of greed and materialism to the crowd there, which is a very basic teaching about money. But now, Jesus turned away from the crowd to his disciples to teach a much deeper lesson, and said, **“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear” (22).** They did not have a problem with greed—except one—but when Jesus turned to them, he revealed what was in their hearts: worry. Peter said desperately in Luke 18:28, **“We have left all we had to follow you. Jesus insinuated to one hopeful disciple candidate that following him came with no future security (Lk 9:58).** Practically, it was very hard to follow Jesus without any security and it led them to worry about the future.

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We can understand them, the need for security is hardwired into us. **I discovered this through the birth of our first son Nathan.** I was just going along trusting that we had what we needed or would pick it up as it needs arose, but in the seventh month of Sharon’s pregnancy, her nesting instinct kicked in. She yelled at me, “Why haven’t you built the bassinet yet, why haven’t you bought a crib, we don’t even have a car seat, we can’t even bring the baby home from the hospital, you don’t care about our baby!” Now, I should tell you that this is really, really out of character for Sharon and I may be imposing the way that I heard it but anyway she was right. I perked right up “yes dear” and I think I had everything you could possibly need for a baby assembled and purchased by the end of the week, two months ahead of his birth. **I’m told by women, that women need to feel safe,** they need to feel that their husband will provide for them and always be there for them. Men feel an immense pressure to provide and be like a rock for their wife, never showing their insecurity and doubts.

When we hear Jesus’ words “Do not worry...” it sounds like Jesus is dismissing our very real concerns. “Do not worry...” can be misunderstood in our modern English because we say “don’t worry” all the time and what we mean is “just don’t think about it,” “pretend the problem doesn’t exist and it will just go away.” Of course this kind of statement of “don’t worry” would be irresponsible and belittling. Jesus is not telling us here to ignore our problems, the very real needs of our families for food and clothes. This is one mistake I made as a young believer. I thought Jesus was telling us just ignore money, it will all just solve itself. When I was young, I was carefree. I could live on almost nothing. In school they really encouraged us to spend our free time practicing and not to get a job, so I lived off of the few lessons I taught—I once ate nothing but sweet potatoes for one month. Another time I ate nothing but fried rice for so long I developed a sesame oil allergy. But several times I almost had all my classes canceled because I was late on my tuition payments and went through the first several weeks of class without books and I think I still owe M. Daniel Yang several month’s rent from when I was in college. I should have had a proper concern about money and gotten a job.

Concerns are not the same as worry here. The original Greek word “merimnao” (mer-im-nah’-o) means to be over-anxious, literally falling to pieces, being torn apart, to the point of being totally distracted thinking about it. The ESV more accurately translates it as “Do not be anxious about your life.” The word “life” is “psyche” (psoo’-khay) the vital breath of life, that is to be alive. So, Jesus is essentially saying, “Don’t get super-over-anxious and stressed out worrying all the time how you will provide for yourself to stay alive.”

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Interestingly, finding food to stay alive is the primary concern of all living things. It seems irresponsible not to be concerned about real needs. **But when we become full of harmful anxiety we can't think about anything else**, were completely distracted. The dangerous part of anxiety is that it reorders our priorities. It puts survival as the greatest need and spiritual matters last—it only reacts to what is seen and ignores the unseen. Such a priority system makes man into just an intelligent animal fighting for survival rather than a spiritual being made in the image of God.

Jesus expressed it saying in verse 23, **“For life is more than food and the body more than clothes.”** That is “you don't live to eat and you don't have a body for the purpose of clothing it—life is more.” Jesus began this in verse 15, saying that **“one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions”** (ESV). Now here he says that life is more than eating and its more than the clothes we wear. Eating represents our critical needs and clothes may represent our perceived needs—both are essential but they are not why we are alive. Colossians 1:16 says, **“all things have been created through him and for him.”** Again Ephesians 2:10 says, **“For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared for us in advance”** (NIV 1984). The fundamental truth that we must accept is that we are made for God and we cannot let worry reduce us down to the level of being an animal. We are spiritual beings made in the image of God, we cannot make survival the purpose of our life—life is more. The greatest priority of our life is God's purpose for our life.

Second, Consider the ravens and the lilies (24-28).

Let's read verse 24, **“Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!”** The word “consider” is from the Greek **“katanoeo”** (kat-an-oh'-o) which means to think from up to down and come to a conclusion. He's not just saying think about this, but think about this until it fundamentally changes the way you think about providing for yourselves. **Do you ever worry that the squirrels and birds are going to starve?** It is because God so perfectly provides for them that we pay no attention to it. **Actually, the complexity of how each thing eats another thing and becomes food for something else is so complex that no** one could have programmed this into each plant and animal or kept it all in balance. But our infinite God perfectly provides for the myriad of different animal species from the depths of the soil, to the deepest ocean, to the darkest caves, to the highest aeries thousands of feet in the air. Now consider would you ever remember to feed the dog and forget to feed the baby? If it came down to it you'd feed the dog to the baby so it would

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survive. Then **don't we think that God who provides all things for animals with such precision and unimaginable wisdom will all the more provide for his children that he loves?**

Verses 25 and 26 say, **“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?”** I love that Jesus says adding an hour to our life is a very little thing for God or literally, “the least thing.” **Google started a new company several years ago called Calico and wants to spend \$3 billion** a year in research to extend human life¹. But man has no control over when we die, it is in God's hands. So why do we pretend we can control the rest by worrying?

Again verse 27-28a say, **“Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field that is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you...”** Here we're moving away from critical needs for survival to perceived needs of being human. Strictly speaking, we don't NEED clothes, in fact they weren't even part of the original design—they were necessitated by sin. Yet God literally clothed the first people because as a good Father he understood why we needed them. It's the same with flowers. **We may think that flowers are brightly colored to attract bees and aid in pollination.** But recently scientists found that bees see mostly in the ultraviolet spectrum. **They discovered that when they lit up flowers with ultraviolet light, flowers have patterns** on them naked to the human eye but perfectly visible to bees, that direct the bee to the nectar and the pollen². The beauty of a flower is lost on bees, to them it is just a painted runway to food. **God made flowers beautiful for our enjoyment because he understands our aesthetic needs.** God doesn't only provide for real needs but even perceived needs.

I heard a beautiful story about P. Mark Vucekovich and his son Abraham. When he was in grade school, Abe really wanted a pair of shoes that everyone else was wearing. Since, they were popular and everyone wanted them, they were obviously unnecessarily overpriced but P. Mark saved up and eventually bought his son the shoes. Abe held onto those shoes because to him they represented his father's love—he didn't need them, but his father bought them because to Abe it was a need. Is our father God any different? Isn't he a father who is far more caring and knows what we need, even if it isn't a necessity, won't he provide?

¹ <http://googlepress.blogspot.ca/2013/09/calico-announcement.html>

² <https://www.visualnews.com/2013/04/08/hidden-patterns-how-a-bee-sees-the-world-of-flowers/>

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He finishes saying “**O you of little faith**” (28b). The root of all anxiety is having too little faith. If we trusted in who God is and the relationship we have with him we would know for certain that he is a good Father who will always feed and clothe us. Always the fundamental problem of a lack of faith is to doubt God’s love. **In the garden Eve was tricked by Satan to believe that God didn’t love her.** When she believed this lie, she tried to become her own god and ate the forbidden fruit. But she was deceived and people have been believing that same lie throughout history, that God doesn’t love them, he won’t provide for them and they need to be their own god. **Our children don’t ever wonder if they will have food,** they completely take it for granted, because they trust in our love. Growing up, I ate like a horse or two horses because I was always in a growth spurt but I never was lacking. Later, I learned that because my mom had me at 16 we were very poor and she skipped many, many meals to keep me well fed but I was oblivious. That is the heart of a parent. **If we, though we are evil, know how to provide for our children, won’t God all the more provide for his children whom he loves dearly? (Lk 11:13)** God loves us so much that he gave his one and only Son, surely we can trust his love to provide for our small needs.

Third, Seek God’s kingdom (29-34).

In these last verses, Jesus gets to the heart of the matter of money that is changing what the heart seeks most. Overcoming the outward, negative emotions of greed and worry requires only behavior modification, a change of mindset. **But to change what it is that our heart desires is much deeper.** In fact, it requires the help of the Holy Spirit. One of the first changes that I really noticed after giving my life to Christ was that my desires changed, specifically I stopped being materialistic. In verses 29,30, and 31 the same verb **zeteo (dzay-teh’-o) is used which means to seek by inquiring, to desire.** So the ESV more literally translates these verses as, **“And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.”** This word seek speaks to what our heart seeks out and wants most. As those made in the image of God, we should not want food and drink or any material thing most because **firstly, this is fundamentally pagan.** Pagans live to please the flesh but we live to please the spirit. **Secondly, our Father knows that we need them,** so he will provide for us far better than we for ourselves as a good Father does. **Lastly, because we are made to seek his kingdom.** But what does it mean practically to “seek his kingdom” and what is “his kingdom.” Jesus told many parables to explain the

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kingdom to us. Among them Matthew 13 stands out, where Jesus told 7 short parables that explain the kingdom clearly to us.

Firstly, we must seek his kingdom through his word. Jesus said the kingdom is like a farmer who spread seed everywhere hoping it would grow. The seed represents the secret of the kingdom which we know is the word of God. So firstly, to seek God’s kingdom we must seek to hear and retain and most importantly practice his word.

Secondly, we must seek to spread his kingdom across the world. Jesus told a parable about a farmer who spread seed but an enemy sowed weeds and they grew up together. Jesus explained that the field is this world and in it are people who are part of his kingdom but must live next to people of the evil one till the day of judgment. This tells us that the kingdom we are seeking is not only in heaven but is here in this world. The kingdom is in the hearts of those who recognize God as their king and become subjects of that kingdom. They are like seeds spread all over the world and multiplying each day. Jesus compares the kingdom to a mustard seed and yeast which both start off very small but grow exponentially. Spreading God’s kingdom and his salvation is God’s number one heart’s desire—it is like a net that is spread far and wide to pull in as many different people as possible. Practically seeking God’s kingdom means to participate in the kingdom work of world salvation and spreading the kingdom to the ends of the earth.

Thirdly, we must treasure the kingdom of heaven above everything we have on earth. Jesus told a parable about a man who found treasure hidden in a field and in his joy, went and sold everything he had to buy the field and possess the treasure. Again it was like a merchant looking for fine pearls, who finding one of great worth sold everything he had and bought it. Perhaps, this is the hardest point of seeking God’s kingdom, because to seek it we must treasure it above all things. In fact, we must be willing to lose everything in this life to possess it. Jesus expresses this in verses 33-34. Where we practically invest our money will decide where our heart goes. Many people don’t value the kingdom because practically they haven’t invested in it, but they’ve spent thousands on toys for themselves. God is not cheap. Sometimes we think that grace is cheap but in the Old Testament God said two times through two different authors that he must be sought with all our heart. Deuteronomy 4:29 says, **“But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.”** Again Jeremiah 29:13 says, **“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”** The desire for this kingdom must eclipse all other worldly desires that we have. In Hebrews 11, it is said of the various heroes of faith, **“By faith [Abraham] made his made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents as did Isaac**

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and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God...////If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (Heb11:9-10,15-16). These people, were so looking forward to the heavenly kingdom that the things of this earth lost their appeal.

Verse 31 ends saying “...and all these things will be given to you as well.” For some “all these things” is not money and security but a husband or wife. They know they should trust God but deep in their heart they don’t really trust him to provide and so they do many things to get attention, to try to attract the one they want. Pastor Tony Evans said that when he sought after women, he couldn’t find the right one but when he became heavily engaged in ministry suddenly he was introduced to his future wife. He almost passed up the opportunity because he didn’t think it was the time, but while seeking God’s kingdom first, God provided. For some, they don’t know if they should take that job that interferes with ministry, or if it is ok to work on Sunday. These things are not really the issue but the issue is our heart. **Is God’s kingdom our all-surpassing desire? Is God’s kingdom what we seek and invest in the most?** If we are really seeking the kingdom practically in our life, **God will take care of the rest.** But more than anything, he wants us to learn faith. Actually, it is most likely that he caused or allowed our need so we may learn to turn to him and learn faith.

Personally, since coming to Christ I didn’t care about money. Once my Bible student had a very debilitating and embarrassing problem that could be solved by \$120 device, it was all I had but I had to buy it and the problem was easily solved. Another time, I was given a gift card to the grocery store at Christmas and bought a delicious beef roast. At the same time I invited the children’s chorus over to my place, so I made a huge pot of beef stew which they inhaled in 5 minutes without my getting a bite. Twice a year I bought pizza and paid the pianist at our concerts often without reimbursement spending all I had but I never felt a loss, I felt God’s pleasure. However, now that I have a family, I look at my wife and baby squeezed into a little apartment with crumbling walls, serious mold problems and an ant infestation and I feel a deep sense of shame. There’s a part of me that feels that if I could just buy a new car and a house for them, then life would be good, but they seem like things I could never obtain. I found in this passage two major areas in my life that need repentance concerning money. One was that I don’t bring my practical needs to God because I didn’t think of him as my Father who wants to provide, I thought of him as my boss who shouldn’t be bothered with such things. As such I stress out thinking

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everything depends on me when I should ask my Father who is rich and loves me. Second, I found that while I try to do many things, ultimately I seek my will and my desire first and not God’s kingdom. When I reflect back on my choices in college and in seeking jobs, I never really sought what God wanted but always made decisions based on what I wanted and this led to my deplorable financial decisions. Over the years many loving servants of God tried to help in various ways but I always did what I thought best in my pride. We can only receive the promise of all these things being given to us if we are seeking God’s kingdom, that is the duty of man.

Jesus says, **“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.” I pray that seeking his kingdom may become the focus of each of us.** This world is like a veil pulled over our eyes keeping us from seeing the spiritual world. The needs of this world can make us forget about God and live to eat and then die like a wild animal. But let’s remember that life is more. God loves us. God will provide. Let’s seek his kingdom and surely all these things will be given to us as well.