

## What Not to Worry About

Luke 12:22-28

September 27, 2020

Well, we are in Luke's gospel, Luke, chapter 12, and we are looking at the subject of anxiety. If you're a bottom-line kind of person, I'll let you know up front that Jesus is against it. You need to know more than that, but Jesus understands worry and anxiety. He knows exactly where those sins come from. He also knows that there is no need for it. And so Jesus commands us believers in clear, very direct language, "Do not be anxious." And that is the main command in the text found in Luke 12:22, and the section we're covering today is going to be Luke 12:22-28. That section has, as I break it down, actually probably three sermons in it, but as I'm starting to feel I may not live long enough to finish Luke, I figured we'd do all of this in one sermon. So if there are things you want me to cover that I've left out, you'll have to pardon me. But Luke 12:22-28.

But there's the main command found in Luke 12:22: "Do not be anxious." But there are two other imperatives in that section as

well, and they're the same word, the same imperative: "Consider the ravens" and "Consider the lilies." Those commands about considering or reflecting support the main command, "Do not be anxious." So this whole section is Jesus prohibiting, denying us the sin of anxiety and worry, and he's using simple illustrations, drawing from things anybody can observe, and he gives us several reasons why we should not be anxious, and this is for us as Christians.

Like covetousness, worry or anxiety is a sin that takes place in the heart. Anxiety whittles away at conviction. It steals our joy, and robs us of confidence and initiative. Anxiety produces within us a sense of uneasiness, a sense of foreboding about the future, a sense of fear about the future, wondering what might happen. And it's never wondering what might happen in a good way; it's wondering what might happen in a bad way. Anxiety creates a churning feeling in the stomach, little acids that start to boil inside of us. Anxiety can exercise such a powerful and crippling grip on the mind and on the will. Anxious people are subdued by negative thoughts, dark imaginations about what the future's going to look like, a future, by the way, that they can't possibly predict because, like all creatures, we are limited in our perspective, limited

in our knowledge. My wife likes to call this, forecasting grief, because anxiety is like an unreliable but a very influential weatherman in our souls, forecasting grief in the newsroom of the soul, always predicting bad weather, storms ahead.

Statistically, in our country, anxiety is the leading mental health disorder. It is crippling in the modern world, especially in the United States. Just a quick footnote to that: When I speak of anxiety, "mental disorder" and I put that in "air quotes," and I call it a plague in the modern world, it's not because I agree with that terminology, that it is a mental health issue. Mental pertains to the mind, and the mind is our spirit—spirit by nature is immaterial. Health pertains to the body; it pertains to the physical. So I make a distinction between those things, so that when we see those terms jammed together in the term "disorder," then that puts us under the purview of psychology. Psychology is informed by a godless worldview. So I'm not assenting to the language even though I may cite the language, here, just because I'm pulling from statistics from the mental health industry.

But it might seem surprising, maybe somewhat ironic, that anxiety is the leading category of mental health disorders that plague the modern. I mean, isn't the modern world about the triumph of progress? Isn't the world about delivering on the promise of safety and security and provision? Isn't the modern world, with all its advancements, freed from every worry, with every man under his own vine and every man under his own fig tree? The age of discovery charted all the seas, mapped all the continents, so that there are no resources that are hidden from our eyes, and if we missed anything, GoogleEarth® is there to help us, right? The age of science and the growth of technology turned all those resources we discovered and found around the world into different advancements that improved our lives. We conquered all forms of different maladies. We are gifted with blessings and delights, pleasures and joys, foods. The age of industry mass produced all those blessings and distributed them into every single home. Thank you, Amazon, right?

It is becoming apparent that along with the advancements and dominance that we have had in the modern world over the issues of nature and the restrictions and limitations of space and distance, communication and all the rest, the sins of covetousness and anxiety have advanced apace. They're always one

step ahead. So covetousness and anxiety ruin what we might benefit from in the world, so that happiness and satisfaction always remain as elusive as ever. We're always chasing the carrot and never ever getting there. Fear, anxiety, worry—they're all variations on the same sin; it's the sin that holds humanity firmly in its grasp. The US population as of this year is estimated to be 330 million, that's 260 million adults and 70 million children, roughly. According to several sources that track mental health statistics, of the 260 million adults, 40 million of them are diagnosed, that is, clinically diagnosed—with anxiety disorder, which is the most common mental health disorder in this country. Nineteen million adults experience specific phobias; 15 million adults have social anxiety; 7.7 million adults have PTSD; 6.8 million adults have generalized anxiety, I guess that's a bucket to drop everything else in, and then 6 million adults have panic disorders, like it's acute. That's among those who are diagnosed, 40 million. Among the countries of the world, the US, which is arguably the most developed, most advanced, most prosperous, safest, wealthiest country in the world, at 7% the US has the highest rate of anxiety than any other country in the world, and those, again, are among those who are just clinically diagnosed.

This is proof, though, that anxiety is not about having enough to eat. It's not about having clothes to wear. There's something else going on, something deeper. Anxiety is an issue of the heart. Anxiety is a matter of thoughts and the mind, and that puts anxiety into the category of sin and righteousness. When it deals with our thought life, God commands our thoughts, and you either think righteously or you think sinfully. Anxiety, it's just that simple, it's a matter of sin and righteousness. And that's why Jesus commands us, here: "Don't be anxious." He expects us to obey this command. Why? Because it's a matter of sin and righteousness. That is freeing, by the way. If this is a disorder, something to do with bad wiring in the brain, something to do with our body that's malfunctioning, there's no hope of being free from it. You have the body you have. But whatever Jesus commands is a matter of sin and righteousness, and when that's the case, well, there's freedom from anxiety. There's freedom from worry. We don't have to be afraid. This isn't something we can just blame on the brain, and that actually does us no good, anyway. This isn't something we can just attribute to a malfunctioning body in a complex world. This isn't something we can excuse and blame on a difficult childhood or unfortunate circumstances or an unhealthy environment, a toxic whatever in our environment. Fundamentally, anxiety occurs in the mind. It's

in the thought life. It's rooted in unbelief. It attacks the goodness of God by insinuating doubts about his ability or his willingness to provide for us and protect us. Now does that have physiological effects? You bet it does. It plays all kinds of havoc, doesn't it? Our thought life affects the way we feel. It produces that churning in the gut. Feelings of nervousness, restlessness, tension, increased heart rate, breathing, sweating, sometimes even shaking, trembling, tiredness, fatigue, trouble sleeping, trouble shutting off the mind—all that is evidence of anxiety.

So these are symptoms of anxiety. We understand how those symptoms are common to the world, common to the unbelieving mind, how anxious thinking actually characterizes an unbelieving mind, that's true. But the sin of anxiety is most unfitting for the Christian because the Christian knows better, because the Christian by Christ has a relationship with God the Father, and God the Father is omnipotent, and he knows the future, and the future is his, as was the past. Our hearts at rest with God, at least it should be.

And that's why we read, Luke 12:22, "He said to his disciples, 'Therefore, I tell you do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on, for life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.'" Notice, first, in this, that Jesus has turned his attention, as Luke narrates for us—from the unbelieving crowd that he was just addressing in verses 13-21, and now he turns his attention to his disciples. He's speaking directly to them. This is instruction that doesn't apply to the unbelieving crowd—not until they're converted, not until they're born again to new life. Until then, they will suffer the symptoms of unbelief. They will be trapped with an anxious mind that's troubled because they don't know a God who is fundamentally good and kind and generous and gracious, a God who's powerful, who is everywhere present, a God who promises to provide and to protect with a good and kind providence.

So Jesus leaves the unbelieving crowd to the side to ponder the significance of the parable of the rich and covetous fool, and then he takes the truths of that parable, which are easily grasped by the disciples, and he presses the implications of those truths to their minds, and he says, "Therefore, I tell you, don't be anxious about your life. That is in contrast to the rich



fool, who is anxious about his life. "Therefore, you don't be anxious about your life." Now, you here, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, if you've been reconciled to God because of the death of Jesus Christ for your sins, and your conscience is clear from evil works, and you stand before God in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, you no doubt affirm emphatically what Jesus says here: "Life is more than food, the body is more than clothing." It's why you're here on a Sunday morning and not still sleeping in bed. As a Christian, you profess all this to be true. You know that.

But what do your day-to-day anxiety levels reveal about you? What about those symptoms? Nervousness, being ill at ease, decisions coming up, relational conflicts, financial worries, issues at work, issues at home, what do your anxiety levels reveal? I know you believe; how much do you believe what Jesus says here?

Listen, when we live and move and have our being amidst a nation of worriers, I mean, 40 million-plus of them; when we work and shop and raise our children in such an angst-ridden culture always crippled with anxiety, always choked with the

powerful grip of fear; every time we turn on the news, we're seeing anxiety, anxiety, anxiety, everything to actually stoke the flames of tension. Every news program you listen to, whether it's from the right or the left, all of it is stoking your anxiety. It's giving you something to be angry about, something to fear, something to worry about. And that's why you gotta get out there and vote. That's why we gotta get this legislation passed. That's why you gotta get this done. Buy gold. Buy guns. Buy rice. Buy bullets. Buy water, whatever. It's not hard to see how some of that is bound to rub off on some of us, too, right? But Jesus wants us free from anxiety. He wants us living in the glorious freedom of God's children. He wants us living with spiritual prosperity and joyful abundance because we are citizens of an eternal kingdom. Fear, worry, anxiety, those sins have no place whatsoever in the life of a believer because they rob us of all the hope and the joy and the comfort and the confidence that we have in believing in the first place. Those sins turn our eyes as believers away from the glory of God, from his majesty, from his power, all the realities of our salvation. And those sins fixate our eyes on mundane, trivial matters of life; things like food and clothing.

I like how Philip Ryken describes anxiety or worry as a thief. That's exactly the right metaphor. He writes this, "Worry steals our time. Our thoughts turn to our troubles, and rather than praying about them or doing the things God is calling us to do, we waste our time worrying about them. Worry steals our rest. We lie awake at night, anxious about tomorrow, and then we get up too tired to work hard. This only adds to our anxiety. Worry steals our health. We suffer the physical effects of our anxiety. Worry steals our obedience as it tempts us to other sins like irritability, addiction, laziness, or on the other hand, overwork. Worry steals our hope as we fear the worse about the future. All kinds of difficulties arise in our minds, most of which never come to pass."

I'd just add to that: What do we know about our future as Christians if we're reading our Bibles? All good! This is the closest to hell that we'll ever come. And we are continually escaping the grip of this world. We're continually being more and more conformed to the image of Christ. And our future is glorious; it's full glorification, the absence of sin, the absence of weakness. What do we have to worry about?

Listen, when Jesus knows what he knows to be true, what he's seen in his divine nature as the second Person of the Trinity, knowing what he knows about the plans that the Father has in store for these disciples and for us disciples, in his human nature, his mind completely unencumbered by sin, not held back by any weakness, flawless, he believes in his human nature all the promises of Scripture for those who believe. So Jesus, as the God-man, divine nature, human nature, one in this—he wants to obliterate any hint of temptation to worry and anxiety in his disciples. This is so gracious, isn't it? To set us free. He knows, verse 32, that it is the Father's good pleasure to give his children the kingdom itself, so what do they have to worry about at all?

So Jesus gives his disciples several reasons not to worry, several reasons to help combat that temptation to anxiety, to see it when it's coming, and to shoot at it. So useful for us, so encouraging. And I want to say up front, in this passage, verses 22-28, his argument is not, God provides for our physical needs, so don't worry about it. That's not his argument. That is true, and it is explicit in what he says here, but that is not the summation of his argument. The greater argument, here, the deeper point that he's making, is what's implicit in what he says.

And what's implicit is found in the comparative language he uses here. Notice in verse 23, we already said this, "Life is more than food," "the body is more than clothing." It's comparative language. Verse 24: "How much more value are you than birds." Verse 26: "As small a thing as that." Verse 27: Solomon's clothing compared to how the flowers are adorned. Verse 28, "how much more will he clothe you?" That's comparative language. He's pointing to something deeper, here.

So here's the outline we'll follow. As Jesus tells us what not worry about, he's also telling us what to look forward to. He's telling us what to see. He's telling us what to understand. He's telling us what to discern in God's obvious care for us. So, obviously, don't worry about sustaining, preserving, or adorning your life. God's got all of that under control. Don't worry about it; don't be anxious. Here's the outline: God sustains, preserves, and adorns your life. **1** God sustains your life; God preserves your life; and God adorns your life.

So first, God sustains your life. Jesus says in verse 24, "Consider the ravens. They neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them." The verb,

there, consider, *katanoē*, it means to reflect on something, on what something means. It means to discern the significance of something. So here it's, think, about the significance of how God cares for ravens. The word, raven, *korax*, can refer to any number of large black birds in the Corvid family, not COVID. This is commonly known as the crow family, those black birds that frankly scare you. I walked in one day here, and in the parking lot, no one was here, it was just me, walked in and there were crows, five of them, and they're all pecking at a crow that's lying on its back squawking. It was filling the entire neighborhood with its noise. This is like a bullying session or something, and they're pecking at this thing. I walked over, and the thing jumped on its feet, and they just started being crows again. Really weird. Weird, weird birds. They're spooky, aren't they? Crows, ravens, rooks, jackdaws—they're all scavenger birds, right? That means they eat dead things. In addition to grains and seeds and nuts and fruits and berries and worms in their diet, ravens and crows don't mind making an occasional meal out of roadkill, carrion, bodies of dead or dying animals, and humans. Ravens are on the list of unclean birds in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, and according to Leviticus 11:13, the raven is not merely unclean, but along with all the other carrion birds, birds that feed on the decaying flesh of dead things, ravens are

to be "detested" among the birds. They're an abomination." That's why ravens, crows, vultures came to symbolize death itself.

Proverbs 30:17, a very useful parenting verse, "The eye that mocks the father and scorns to obey the mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures."

Yeah, I used it. But it's a serious point, isn't it? Dishonoring parents puts children under God's curse. And the idea, there, in that verse is that if you're following the wrong crowd, you engage in a bad lifestyle, one day a deal is going to go wrong. One day you're going to offend the wrong person, and your dead body will get dumped out in the desert wastelands, where no one can find it, there's no burial, no one cares, and what are the ravens and vultures going to do? Feed off your little dead body.

So ravens and crows are detestable to the Jews, and that is Jesus' point in using them as an illustration. There are probably ravens right nearby, so it's easy for him to point to them. But he wants his disciples to consider the implications of God's provision, how his care extends even to sustain the life of these detestable, kind of scary birds, birds that feed on death, birds that are consuming, as it were, the curse itself of death. They're a symbol of divine judgment. And God still feeds them. In fact, according to Psalm 147:9, we get the sense of compassion

of God for even these detestable creatures: "He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry." It's God himself who asks, when he cross-examines Job, "Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God for help and wander about for lack of food?" God does, right? God feeds them. And Jesus says that those ravens, those birds, "Neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouse nor barn." That's connecting back to the parable of the rich fool, right, who tore down his barns to build bigger ones, and he's anxious about storing up all his stuff. Ravens don't do that at all. They don't store up stuff; they don't pack anything away; they don't have any possessions, nothing at all. They show no interest in storing anything or working at that. Even though they are unclean, detestable birds, God still feeds them. He continually feeds them; the verb is a continuous action, present tense. He's continually feeding them; he's always feeding them; he's faithfully feeding them. Even when you're completely out of your mind and you're not thinking anything about some raven in some hill, he's taking care of it.

Here's the point, here's the implication for us as Jesus' disciples, the end of verse 24: "Of how much more value are you than the birds?" "How much more value?" The verb means, to be superior to, to be more value than, more worth than. The



pronouns, adjectives all grouped together, Jesus is communicating a superlative value. He is making a comparison of relative values contrasting the value of disciples with the value of birds. There's no comparison. And the way he stated this rhetorical question, his question "Of how much more value are you than the birds," the answer is there is no comparison, because, you are superlatively of more value than the birds. And so the point that we're to take from what Jesus is saying is this: that there is not a one-to-one comparison, here. That is, God feeds the ravens, so he'll feed you, too, so don't worry. That is not his point. It's not just, God feeds them, so he'll feed you, too, but, how much more will he sustain you.

Ravens, unclean, detestable, the very symbol of death and judgment. So when God feeds the ravens, he is demonstrating for all you disciples the magnanimity of his goodness, the great extent of his kind and faithful provision, an immutable faithfulness in God to sustain creatures that we call, unclean and detestable. So to make sure your life is sustained by food, to make sure you're able to eat your daily bread, if that's what he does for unclean, detestable creature, and since you are of far more value than they are, simply feeding you every day, which is what God does with birds? That is not what demonstrates

your superlative value to God. Of course, God is going to take care of your daily needs. God's care for us, the way that he sustains us, sustains our life, this goes way beyond food. Jesus said, verse 23, "Your life is more than food." The word, your life, is your soul. Your soul is more than food, which means that sustaining your precious life, your precious soul demands something more than food.

That should be ringing some bells for you. Remember back in Luke 4:4. You're like, "No, I can't remember that." But when being tempted by the devil, remember Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone by," what? "bread alone." He was citing Deuteronomy 8:3, where Moses told Israel that God wants him to know and understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by what? "By every word that comes out of the mouth of God." Unlike the ravens, unlike any other creature, we are created in God's image. What's required to sustain our lives goes way beyond the birds. We don't just need food; we need God's Word. We need truth. As creatures made in God's image, our needs far exceed that of the birds or of any other animal.

Let's get specific, okay? In today's culture, today's context, we don't need mere protection from a virus. We need our souls cared for, which means we need our churches open, which means we need the Word and sacrament, which means we need the Word of God proclaimed in preaching, proclaimed in Trinitarian baptism, proclaimed in the fellowship ordinance of the Lord's Table. Since all Scripture is "breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness," we need fellow members of the body of Christ to be teaching one another, admonishing one another, reproving one another, correcting one another, and training one another in righteousness. Why? "So that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." We need the ministry of Christ in and through his saints applying the Word of God to our lives. We need the singing of songs and hymns and spiritual songs. Our hearts need to be bursting with gratitude and joy. We need the smiles, hugs, the give-and-take of friendship, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep. And that is why, beloved disciple of Christ, food and physical sustenance is not something that you need to worry about. Your needs go way beyond that, and God takes care of those. God's got your daily bread covered. That's what he does for the lowliest of the unclean and detestable birds. He sustains you in far greater ways. He ministers to you in so much deeper ways and needs meant

for your soul, and those are things that food does not attend to. So don't worry. You're of more value to God than birds are.

Let's look at the second reason not to worry, something else you do not need to worry about, and something you need to think deeper about. Second reason: God preserves your life. God doesn't just sustain your life with his Word; he preserves your life. Look at what Jesus says in verses 25 and 26, "And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If you, then, are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?" Literally, it's "which of you worrying is able to add to his span of life a cubit?" A cubit is roughly 18 inches, used here not to measure physical length, but to measure time, which is why "single hour" is a good way to translate this word "cubit."

Discovering the fabled Fountain of Youth has always been something man has pursued. We've been always trying in vain to discover the fountain of youth, to extend physical life. Listen, this produces so much anxiety among humanity, especially in our modern world, because the promises of science are so intoxicating, aren't they? So powerful! We believe our culture

around us, anyway and bow to the god of progress. It's always, science will figure that out. There will be some development, some achievement by which cancer will be eliminated, AIDS will be taken away, COVID will be vaccinated, whatever. Take whatever fear and worry: Science will take care of it. We have advancements in medicine. We've made such progress in understanding nutrition, all by the grace of God. But in a sinful attempt to escape the curse, the unbelieving world uses the gifts of science to try to circumvent the grave itself. Look, it's all in vain. Health food industry, dieting schemes, fitness crazes, all this has infected our culture like a madness. Living a long life is something many people are worrying about, seeking, even paying big, big money for it. You heard about this thing called cryogenics. Seems at least once a month, maybe more, I see a headline about the super-rich paying \$100,000 and up to have their brains frozen. I mean, every kid knows how to get a brain-freeze, right? But they want to be put on ice for 200 years and then reawakened when science can bring them back to life. It's got to be the biggest scam out there, right? If I weren't a believer, I mean, there's so much money to be made by the stupid, right? There's one story I read that quotes a wealthy businessman saying, "I thought I'd invest a little money in this." I love that word, invest! Invest means

you get a return. He's going to be dead 200 years. Like, What's this thing, a brain? What are we doing with this? Throw that away! I'd thought I'd invest a little money in this. I may wake up in 200 or 2,000 year's time and be able to experience a whole new life. I can't think of anything more exciting. This story didn't get a quote from the people taking his money, but I'm guessing that they're pretty excited that he's pretty excited, so enthusiastic about their little scam.

Look, with all of our progress in medicine and nutrition—and make no mistake, I mean I'm not diminishing the fact that those are evidences of common grace. But we haven't moved the meter at all on the span of life, have we? Has that escaped anybody's notice? I mean, Moses said, Psalm 90:10, Moses lived a long time ago, okay? He said this, "The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength, eighty. And yet their span is but toil and trouble. They are soon gone, and we fly away." Just a footnote to that: According to Deuteronomy 34:7, Moses was 120 years old when he died. He says in that psalm, Psalm 90, "The years of our life are seventy or even eighty." He knows that his life is supernaturally extended by God. He's 120 years old when he died; "his eye was undimmed, his vigor unabated." I wonder when we're going to see the next trendy

Christian diet. You know, you've got the 'Daniel Plan,' you've got the 'Moses Diet.' Must of been all that manna.

No one, no one, can add a single hour to his span of life, not by being anxious about it or any other way, not with a \$100,000 brain freeze, not by preserving DNA in a test tube, not by dieting, exercise, health food, staying current on your vaccinations and health check-ups and all the rest. The day of our birth and the day of our death are things decreed by God. They're determined by his perfect, sovereign will. And as the rich fool learned, our days are numbered, and our souls are on loan from God, and one day he's going to call that loan due. Don't be foolish. Don't get caught up in all this.

There was one man, who in finding out his impending death, appealed to God. God added some length to his life. Remember that man? We just read in our Bible reading. If you've been reading along in our Bible reading, we've been reading through Isaiah. Go back to Isaiah, chapter 38, and consider this situation with Hezekiah, you remember? Have you ever wondered whether it's a good idea to extend your life? Let this help you decide and cure you of any desire of wanting more than your

allotted time on earth. Hezekiah has been a stalwart. He has been faithful to God. He's been a good king of Judah. He's lived a good life. He's lived a godly life. All that there is to say about Hezekiah commends him. We read this in Isaiah 38:1, "In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, 'Thus says the Lord: "Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover."' Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, and said, 'Please, O Lord, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.' And Hezekiah wept bitterly."

You know, it's precisely because Hezekiah had walked before God in faithfulness, with a whole heart; he'd done what is good in God's sight. His life was adorned with good works. That's why God sent Isaiah to him, to inform him of his departure so he could put his house in order. A great kindness was shown here to Hezekiah, a great honor. Foolishly, Hezekiah wanted to stick around. "He wept bitterly." Then verse 4: "Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah: 'Go and say to Hezekiah, "Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: 'I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your



life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city.'"

Just like that, with a word! God gave Hezekiah not just an hour, but a span of fifteen more years of life on earth. When you read ahead in chapter 39, you see that Hezekiah commits a major blunder during this little extra time he's been given even though it happens according to the sovereign will of God, according to his plan. Foolishly, he took the Babylonian emissaries on a tour through the treasury. There was nothing he didn't show them. You know what it's doing to covetous Babylonians? It's stoking the flames of their covetousness. It's like you looking at a catalog: I gotta buy that. I gotta get that. Right? That's what it did, and it was a major gaffe on his otherwise spotless reign.

Stay here in Isaiah, but the question Jesus asks in Luke 12:26: "If you then are not able to do such a small thing as that." That, is what? Adding a single hour to your life. "If you, then, are not able to do such a small thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?" And here's God, in contrast to "A small thing as that," adding fifteen years to Hezekiah's life,

and it was effortless. Effortless is the promise he made, and just to put an exclamation point on the power of God in contrast with our own weakness, look at Isaiah 38:7-8. God said, we find out later that this is the sign that Hezekiah asked for: "This shall be the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing that he has promised: Behold, I will make the shadow cast by the declining sun on the dial of Ahaz turn back ten steps.' So the sun turned back on the dial the ten steps by which it had declined."

I don't know how to comprehend geophysical implications. What happens when you stop the earth's orbit, back it up so the sun's shadow goes back ten steps? I mean, I know the rotation of the earth, and all the stuff had something to do with winds and tides and such and water moving. He kept the oceans in place, he kept tides moving, he kept gravity in place. I mean, I think the spinning actually keeps us firmly fixed on the earth. We don't spin too fast and fly off into space. We don't spin too slowly and get sucked into the earth's gravity and get crushed. All this for a sign to Hezekiah! God's power is evident in this fact: The one act is as effortless as the other. Adding time to his life and backing up the rotation of the earth: nothing to an all-powerful God.

Now go ahead and turn back to Luke 12. Consider again what Jesus says in verse 26: "If then you are not able to do such a small thing as that." Again, superlative language here, comparative language, this time applying the language in a diminutive sense; that is, you're unable to do such a small thing, this tiny little thing like adding an hour to your life span, why, then, are you anxious about the rest of the things you can't control? Listen, your powerlessness ought to settle in on you, and rather than making you afraid when you trust in an all-powerful God, it should cause you to realize that God is the one who has your days marked out. God is the one who holds your life in the palm of your hands, so why worry?

I came across this little poem; it seems like a good place to insert it: "Said the robin to the sparrow, 'I should really like to know, / Why these anxious human beings / Rush about and worry so.' / Said the sparrow to the robin, / 'Friend I think that it must be, / That they have no Heavenly Father, / Such as cares for you and me.'" We have that heavenly Father; we do not need to worry. Once again, remember what Jesus said back in the statement, verses 22-23: "Do not be anxious about your life," Why? "because life is more than food, the body more than

clothing." God does not merely preserve our lives, i.e., extending more time on this earth. Listen, living a longer life in this sinful flesh on this fallen planet in this sin-cursed, sin-saturated world is not a gift, it's a sentence. How does God go beyond the mere preservation of our lives in giving us an even greater gift of life? You know the answer: because you have this gift by faith in Christ. God gives eternal life in Christ, not so much eternal in the sense of quantity; that is, an infinite succession of moments. Who wants more time if the quality of life that we are experiencing now in this sinful flesh goes on forever and ever and ever? I don't know about you, but the older I get, the less I want to live with myself. It's more like hell than heaven. No, God gives an eternal quality of life, an eternal kind of life. Put this simply: He gives us the life of God himself. And that's the gift of eternal life, the very life that he possesses as an essential attribute of his being. That's what he gives.

Jesus loves talking about this. If you doubt that, go read the Gospel of John. You're going to find it over and over again. Eternal life, eternal life, eternal life. It's in one of our favorite verses, right? John 3:16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not

perish but have eternal life." John 4:14: "Whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." John 6:27: "Do not work for the food that perishes, but work for the food that endures to eternal life." God is the one who sustains and preserves our life, and in Christ we will live forever in an eternal God-like quality of life, fullness of joy, reaping forever the pleasures of God. That's what eternal life is. That's the gift of God to us who are of more value than the creatures.

Since we know all of that to be true, this next question is all the more piercing. He says, "If you are not able to do such a small thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?" What's he doing here? Provoking a little bit of self-examination. Well yeah, why am I anxious about the rest? Hmm. Hold that thought because the question will be answered in the next point.

Number three: So God sustains your life, God preserves your life, and then one more, third point: God adorns your life. We're already prepared, here, to see that God adorns our life in such a way to surpass the flowers. Nevertheless, verse 27: "Consider

the lilies, how they grow." Consider them. The word, lilies can refer specifically to a lily, but it can also be a general term for all kinds of beautiful, colorful wildflowers. Jesus wants us not to just consider the flowers, but to consider and reflect upon not just the fact that they are well-adorned, but how they grow, how they get to be such. So continuing, he says, "consider the lilies, how they grow." How do they grow, how do they adorn themselves, how do they look so good? Well, "they neither toil nor spin." Okay, so that's taken off the table, not working hard to get it, not spending two hours in the bathroom in the morning. "Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

To answer the question how do lilies grow, Jesus paints a contrast between King Solomon and, notice, it's a single flower, not a meadow, a single flower, "one of these." Verse 27. Amazing statement, isn't it, considering the variety of Solomon's wardrobe? In 2 Chronicles 9:22-24, here's what we read, "Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. Every one of them brought his present, articles of silver and of

gold, garments, myrrh, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year."

For all of Solomon's wealth, coming from the far reaches of his vast empire, for all of Solomon's effort and toil, no doubt he acquired the best silks and fabrics of the earth, gathering them through all these gifts, and for all of his wisdom that he applied to those gifts to turn them into a textile industry, all the skill of expert clothing designers and tailors, all instructed by his wisdom, even Solomon in all his glory could never be dressed as well as just one of these tiny little delicate lilies of the field. The lily has no wealth, no reach around the world, no resources, exerts no effort, spins no thread, enlists no designer, employs no dressmaker. The lily just sits there. God dresses the lily, and all the other flowers of the earth as well, season after season, year after year. God's design, God's knowledge, God's creativity, God's joy in the colors and the textures and the look and the intricate design, all of his power, not to mention his faithfulness and attentiveness to keep the flowers clothed, not just here but all over the world in places we'll never see! Incomprehensible to us! When God clothes the lily, its covering is appropriate, its beauty is unparalleled, its perfection is complete, it extends out from

the hidden root through the stalk through the branches and the leaves to the outermost edge of its most delicate petal. And when viewed through a microscope, the detail is intricate, the design is astounding.

And then look at verse 28, "If God so clothes the grasses of the field, which are alive in the field today, and tomorrow are thrown into the oven." Wow! It seems almost like a crime, right, to throw those flowers into the oven? Why would you do that? Well, in a land where wood for cooking fuel was not plentiful, wild grasses were gathered up, and they heated up small, portable, domestic ovens that were owned by individual families. Obviously, they didn't mourn the burning of flowers of the field. Wildflowers going into the oven, so insignificant compared to the daily demands of feeding children their daily food and bread. Burning grasses and wildflowers just passed without notice. They could, in fact, only be noticed by someone with the insight and observation skills of our Lord. As Jesus, I love this about Christ, when you think about him and his humanity walking the earth, and what does he think about? He observes the daily routines of women in the village. He watches them taking care of their family, sending the children out to gather grasses so they bring them back and feed the flames of their ovens. And



he thinks about those individual flowers going into the ovens. Of course, he cares about families being fed, but he's thinking also about his pleasure in adorning all those individual flowers, giving each flower, each kind its individual, unique beauty, individual characteristics, all of them that we can identify and characterize and specify, genus, species, and all the rest. How easily that beauty is missed, isn't it? The intricate detail, the father's work often goes unnoticed.

So verse 28 again, what Jesus observes. He says, "If God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!" It's not lost on Jesus, certainly not lost on God, the relative importance of enjoying aesthetic beauties, the delight of wildflowers, and then contrasting that with the need to cook food, to feed one's family. Obviously, the preservation of human life is more important than preserving intricate, aesthetic beauty and all of that. But the point is this: If God has so adorned transient grasses of the field season after season and year after year, and he's done so with such magnificence and such beauty, how much more will he clothe you? Just like the grass of the field, we, too, need God to dress us well. We need God to cover us in garments of beauty

that he made for us. If we try to adorn ourselves, well, we come to his feast dressed in our personal best, and that is not going to go over well.

Jesus presents that scene in a parable about a wedding feast, Matthew 22, a guest that was not properly dressed for the occasion. Verse 11 says, "When the king came into take a look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment." Just came in in his own best. He didn't have a wedding garment. "He said, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment,'" and the man was speechless. "The king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" Whoa! Why is that? Because entering the king's banquet without one of his wedding garments, without a garment approved by him, that's a metaphor, isn't it, for being dressed in the spotless robes of righteousness. Entering his presence with our own righteousness is not going to count. Dressed in our own personal best, dressed in our own righteousness, we'll be cast out! Isaiah 64:6 says, "We have all become like one who is unclean, all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade away like a leaf; our iniquities like the wind take us away." Don't try coming to God with your own righteousness. Don't

try coming to him with your own good works and say, Here, take this. I've done this. I've done that. I've been pretty good in these areas. I've been pretty good in those areas."

God doesn't require your, pretty good; he requires Christ's perfection. Like the grasses of the field, we, too, need God to adorn us with the beauty of his righteousness, and God adorns us with a beauty that goes way beyond the glory of Solomon, way beyond the beauty of wildflowers. God makes sure that his people are clothed, yes, physically, that's a given, but God shows his superlative concern for what we wear by adorning us with spiritual garments, spiritual raiment, clothing that is fit not just for a wedding feast, but fit for the King's banquet and for the bride and groom; his groom being his Son, the bride being his church. Consider this, Isaiah 61:10, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul shall exalt in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness." As a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with jewels. I mean, take male imagery and female imagery of what is beautiful for each sex. God does so much greater than that in adorning us. Paul must have had something like that in mind, when he's rejoicing to be adorned in the garments of

salvation, robed in righteousness, to be found in Christ. In Philippians 3:9, he says, "not having a righteousness of my own, one that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith."

So back to the question that Jesus asked in verse 26, "Why are you anxious about the rest?" "God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him." In the language of adornment, if we put this in metaphor form, God dressed Christ, he covered Christ's righteousness with the dirty rags of our iniquity. He covered him with our sinful deeds, and then he punished him for what he was wearing. For us, though, having taken away our sin, God dressed us in Christ's perfect righteousness, and we're ready to come to the feast. And that adorning of righteousness is a spiritual reality. But that doesn't mean it's an invisible reality only. The more we grow as Christians, the more that invisible adornment is made visible, and what's spiritual shows up on the outside. You see this in what Peter commends to Christian women. 1 Peter 3:3-5, "Do not let your adorning be external, the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear, but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a

gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves."

It's why Jesus died and rose again, giving himself up for us, Titus 2:14, "to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." Look, as Christians we are adorned in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We're continuously being adorned with good works. We're bringing glory to the invisible God in our visible lives. So why do we worry about lesser things? Jesus in verse 28 answers the question: because we're weak in faith, because our faith is small. It's not mature enough, it's not strong enough, it's not informed enough. Our faith needs to grow up. He says, "How much more," verse 28, "will God clothe you, O you of little faith." Weakness in faith is what causes Christians to be anxious and to worry and doubt and fear. But beloved, when we remember that it is God who sustains and preserves and adorns our lives, when he does so in such a profoundly significant way, in a way that lasts for all of eternity, when he shines through our lives such beauty and brilliance, the life of Christ shining out through us to a watching world, this is a beauty that can never fade away. This

is why worry and anxiety and fear are so unfitting for Christians.

Our valuation in the Father's sight was set before the foundation of the world. Our Father decided to count us valuable, and so he chose to sacrifice his own Son for our sakes: his one and only beloved, his perfect, spotless Lamb of God. So beloved, what do we have to worry about? "He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" There's so much more to cover; we're out of time. Let's pray:

Father, we just want to thank you for Christ. We thank you for your sustaining us, preserving our lives, sustaining us by your Word, preserving us with eternal life, and adorning us with the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. We're so thankful for him because the more we study him, the more perfection we see, the more reason for praise, the more majesty we find, the more glory, the more beauty. And as you conform us by your Spirit, by your Word, as you conform us more and more to his image, the beauty of Christ shines forth in our lives, too.

O, Father, please continue to grow us. Let us never be caught up in this deceptive sin of anxiety, fear, worry, all produced by covetous hearts. Let us repent of those things and treat them as the vile temptations that they are, to doubt your goodness and kindness and faithfulness. Let us trust you instead, seeing you as all-glorious, all-good, kind, compassionate, caring; trust that you would sustain us and preserve us and adorn us with perfection, the perfection of your own Son. In his name we pray. Amen.