

I don't know about you, but I really enjoyed the "Work Reimagined" series that Tanner shared with us over the past four weeks. He did an incredible job, so if you missed a week or two, you need to go listen to those on our website.

Today we are going to pick back up where I left off the last time that I preached. If you remember, we looked at a pretty heavy text where Jesus launches into one of his strongest rebukes in all of the Gospels aimed directly to the religious leaders of his day: the Pharisees and Scribes. Look at how they responded (11:53-54). Jesus accused them with their forefathers of killing the prophets and now they are going to kill Jesus along with many of his followers. Put yourself in the disciples' shoes. Wouldn't you be scared to death and filled with all kind of worry? In our passage today, Jesus instructs his disciples on how they should respond to the many worries this life has to offer.

What are you worrying about today? What's consuming your mind? What is your mind drifting on to even as I speak? There are countless things that we could be worrying about:

- Will it snow again this year?
- Who will be the next Pope?
- When will Springstep be sold?
- Will the stock market continue to rise?
- When will I be able to find a job? A Wife?
- What about my health? Cancer? Heart attack?
- Will I be swallowed up in a sinkhole?

There's always something to worry about. Some of you are even beginning to worry right now about the very things I just mentioned. You might even be worrying about worry. The solution to our worries is to Fear God, not to be afraid of God, but to revere, respect, and worship Him. You can "fear not" the worries of this life when you "fear God."

The point: Disciples should fear God with life, death, money, and possessions.

I. Fear God in the Face of Persecution (4-12).

Jesus is well aware of the opposition rising against him and of what it will mean for him and may mean for his followers. The OT prophets and John the Baptist did not escape rejection and neither will the Son of Man and his followers (Jesus never guarantees to protect my physical life). In the face of persecution, Jesus gives four reasons why we shouldn't fear people and why we should fear God.

a. God has authority over eternal life (4-5).

- When we fear people, persecution, and even death, we have a limited and temporal perspective. We crave immediate acceptance and praise and minimize eternal acceptance and praise from God.
 - ILLS: How many of you in Middle & High School gave into peer pressure because you wanted to be accepted? Where are those people now? Does it matter what they think of you?
- Ultimately, it only matters what God thinks of you. He has the ultimate authority to determine your eternal destiny (Yes, Jesus believed in hell). We will give an account for our lives (Rev. 20:11-15).
- Are you ready to die today and stand before God and give an account for your life?

b. God knows you and cares for you (6-7).

- ILLS #1: The cheapest thing sold in the market was sparrows. You could get 5 for 2 pennies (an assarion was a coin of very small value). The point: If God doesn't forget even the most insignificant of sparrows, surely God will remember and care even more so for you.

Isa. 49:15-16: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me."

- ILLS #2: God knows the number of hairs on your head (for some that's easier than others ☺). There are over 7 billion people in the world and God doesn't miss one piece of hair. Surely if he takes the time to know how many hairs everyone has, then he also knows your situation in life.
- Does God know your situation in life? YES! Does God care? YES! Will you believe this today?

c. God accepts you through Jesus (8-10).

- You have two options: you can accept Jesus or reject him; there is no neutral position.
- Why should you accept Jesus, the Son of Man?
 - The Son of Man has authority to forgive sins (Luke 5:24). One of the main questions you have to answer is this: "How can God let a sinful person into heaven?" To ask another way, "By what basis does God either allow someone into heaven or cast them into hell?"

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:13-16).

- Have you placed your faith in Jesus to forgive you of your sin? Jesus is seated at the right hand of God (Luke 22:69) interceding for those who place their faith in him (see Acts 7:55-56).
- 1. Does this mean I'll lose my salvation if once I fail to stand up for Jesus and acknowledge him?**
 - Look at Peter: He denies Jesus three times right before his crucifixion (22:54-62) but yet later regretted his act and responded with numerous public declarations of Jesus.
 - Jesus is not referring to a single decision but to a life characterized by denial.
 - 2. What does it mean to blaspheme the Holy Spirit? Have I committed the unpardonable sin?**
 - Jesus speaks of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit also in Matthew 12:22-32 and Mark 3:22-30 and in both of those instances Jesus was responding to the scribes who said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons" (Mark 3:22). In both cases, the scribes were attributing the evident work of Jesus to Satan.
 - Wayne Grudem in his Systematic Theology says: "...this sin consists of unusually malicious, willful rejection and slander against the Holy Spirit's work attesting to Christ, and attributing that work to Satan" (508). The problem isn't that the sin is so horrible that Jesus' redemptive work on the cross couldn't cover it but rather that the "sinner's hardened heart puts him or her beyond the reach of God's ordinary means of bringing forgiveness through repentance and trusting Christ for salvation" (Grudem, 508). If you think you've committed this sin and yet you still have sorrow for sin and a desire to seek after God, that's evidence in itself that you are not guilty of it. See Paul as an example; he was formerly a blasphemer (1 Tim. 1:12-16).

d. God will lead you by his Spirit (11-12).

- When you are persecuted for Jesus' sake, don't worry about what you should say. God will give you immediate spiritual provision ("in that very hour") and will help you answer your accusers.
- Because of this promise you can call upon God in great faith similar to that of the early church: "*And now, Lord, look up on their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,*" (Acts 4:29-31).

II. Fear God by being immeasurably rich toward Him (13-21; 33-34).

Read 12:13-15: Someone from the crowd asks for Jesus' help in resolving an estate dispute with his brother. We aren't really given any specific details beyond this concerning the problem. Jesus refuses to get involved with the dispute and warns the crowd (not just the brother) against covetousness/greed and excessive possessions. He's addressing one of the ten commandments: do not covet. Then Jesus continues with the Parable of the Rich Fool to teach a lesson.

Read 12:16-17: The harvest for the year was extremely productive and this left him in a very favorable situation. The surprise here is that the man has a perfectly natural dilemma. There's nothing wrong with having a great harvest. He earned his wealth honestly. This man has a dilemma: what's he going to do with this large harvest? He doesn't have anywhere to store it.

Read 12:18-21: Based on God's reaction, he obviously made the wrong decision and ultimately wasn't rich toward God. I believe Jesus hints at four reasons for why we should be rich towards God.

a. Life is more than possessions (13-15).

- Greed, covetousness, and materialism stems from a superficial and temporal perspective on life.
- Superficial: money and possessions will not satisfy you. You can never have enough.
- Temporal: you won't take anything with you when you die (1 Tim. 6:7).
- We are to use money in such a way that shows to everyone that money is not our treasure, God is.

b. God owns everything (16-18).

- He wants to preserve his crops but his perspective is wrong: MY crops, MY grain, and MY goods. The problem is an exclusively selfish interest. This is MY wealth because I earned it. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell in it" (Ps. 24:1).
- You may think, "I've given God his 10%, I can do whatever I want with the other 90%." Newflash: God is just as much concerned with the 90% that you keep as he is with the 10% that you give.

c. You are God's money manager (19-20)

- If God owns everything then you are his money manager. Your job is to figure out what God wants you to do with his money. The problem with the rich man in this parable is that he gave no thought to how God wanted him to use his money. He morally mismanaged his wealth. The reason the Bible gives so many warnings to the rich is because with great wealth comes great responsibility.
- One of your central spiritual decisions is determining what is a reasonable amount to live on. God lets you set your own salary. Most of us at least live a lifestyle that matches the income that we receive..
- What happens when after you've set your own salary, you have money left over? Do you raise your standard of living? Bigger house? Nicer car? What if God prospers us not to raise our standard of living but to raise our standard of giving (Randy Alcorn)?

d. What you give to God is touched with immortality (21, 33-34).

- Jesus isn't saying that earthly treasures are bad, they just won't last. The solution: store up treasures in heaven that last forever. In other words, you can't take anything with you, but you can send it on ahead. How do you send it ahead? You invest it into the kingdom.
- Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Giving is the only antidote to materialism. Why?
- Your heart always follows where you put God's money. Show me your checkbook and I'll show you where your heart is. Do you want a heart for missions? Give to missions and your heart will follow.
- "How much money should I give to God?" C. S. Lewis says, "If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot because our charities expenditure excludes them." Your giving ought to require you to trust God.
- Don't just give to the church, look for ways to be generous to those in your relational spheres.
- When you understand the gospel, how much does God want should become how much can I give?
- Equipping Class: 7 week class on Sunday mornings from 9-10am (biblical and practical).

III. Fear God with absolute trust in his gracious provision (22-32).

I can hear Jesus' disciples reaction: "If I'm rich toward God and I store up treasures in heaven, will I have anything to provide for the basic necessities of life: food, drink, clothing, and shelter? Jesus, if we just store up some treasures here, then we won't have to "worry" about these things. What's the main reason keeping you from being rich toward God? Is it worry? Why do you worry? You worry when you want something that you might not get and central to worry is the illusion that we can control things. When we can't control something, we worry about it. In the following verses, Jesus gives you six reasons to live without worrying. Do not worry because...

a. God gives you ultimate purpose in life (22-23)

What you worry about reveals what you are truly living for. What you eat, drink and wear should not define you. The glory of God should (1 Cor. 10:31). When you worry about temporal things, you show to everyone around you, that life is about you and not about God. Go through your worry list one by one. Jesus promises, "Your life is more than _____."

b. God values you greatly (24)

Creation testifies to the providence of God. He is so sovereign over the universe that even the feeding of birds falls within his concerns.

- The point isn't that disciples don't need to work. Birds don't simply wait around for God to drop food into their beaks. They work hard to find food every day. Birds don't have refrigerators to store food or leftovers. They don't have a storage pantry. They live day by day.
- You are worth far more than birds, created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). Lesser to the greater: So, if God provides for the birds, surely he will provide for you. Trust him.

c. God controls the length of your life (25-26)

- "a single cubit (18 inches) to his stature" or "a single hour to one's life"; 2nd option is best.
- The point: Worrying does no good. Nothing is gained by it. Ironically, worry is more likely to shorten your life than prolong it. Ultimately, God is the one who controls the days of your life. You are wasting precious energy when you worry about things over which you have no control.

d. God will clothe you in his glory (27-28)

- Look at the lilies: They don't labor or spin and are more beautifully clothed than Solomon, the wealthiest king of Israel (2 Chron. 9:13-28). If God cares for flowers, he will care for you.
- Look at the grass: here today and gone tomorrow; grass is insignificant, and yet God still tends to it.
- The point: you are more important than lilies and grass so God will provide for you. He rebukes them (you of little faith) because they seem to forget this. He rebukes them also because they forget that God is in complete control. Do you believe you are valuable to God and that God is in control?

e. God knows exactly what you need (29-30)

- "Do not seek...": what are you going to be *about*? What are you going to obsess over?
- The nations/Gentiles are obsessed and driven by material and temporal things: food, drink, and clothing. Why? Because they don't believe their lives were made for something bigger and better than themselves.
- Your life should be radically different because of your faith and trust in God. If you worry like the pagans, maybe it reveals you are pursuing the same things they are. Your worry advertises to the world that you don't believe God knows what you need.

f. God desires to give you the kingdom (31-32).

- Don't worry because God desires to give you the kingdom. God is overflowing with generosity in regards to the kingdom. God is not stingy!!!
- What does this mean: God desires to give you kingdom blessings that are the product of pursuing the kingdom. Of all the blessings we get, Jesus is highlighting in this passage that we get a secure relationship with God, one that brings control and certainty.
- Application: Do not fear! Do not worry! Seek the kingdom. Pursue the kingdom. Define your life by the kingdom. You are not simply to *refrain* from the *pursuit* of temporal things, you are to *replace* such pursuits with goals of far greater significance.
- "To seek first the kingdom is to desire above all to enter into, submit to, and participate in spreading the news of the saving reign of God, the messianic kingdom already inaugurated by Jesus (Carson, *Matthew*, EBC, 181-82).
 - Enter into the saving reign of God through repentance and faith
 - Submit to the saving reign of God through radical obedience
 - Spread the news of the saving reign of God through joyful boldness
- The promise: You pursue the kingdom and God will take care of the rest.
- Which promise of Jesus speaks to you most? Which one is most necessary where can you say, "If I remember _____, I'll be a different person this week"?

The point: Disciples should have absolute trust in God with life, death, money, and possessions.