

## Luke 12:22-34 – Coping with Fear

I had the daunting task of preaching the first online sermon and now after 66 weeks I have the joy of preaching the last. I am certainly looking forward to no longer preaching to a camera. A special thanks goes to Luke Summers who has put the service together every single week.

Today we are looking at the topic of how we cope with worry/fear and the difference Jesus makes. There are lots of worries around at the moment and maybe some of you have worries about returning to church, the virus and being in a larger group again. Covid has caused many worries and worries then turn to fears. These are understandable but as we look at what Jesus says today my pray is that God will remove those worries from you.

Most of you will know the phrase Hakuna Matata. It comes from the Swahili language of East Africa and you'll certainly be familiar with it if you happen to be a fan of the Disney animation The Lion King. The Lion King popularised the phrase hakuna matata when they incorporated it into one of the most memorable songs in the whole film, a song that was sung by a laidback meerkat called Timon and a lazy warthog called Pumba and they sang the song to a very anxious stressed out young lion cub Simba and they sang it to him closely following on from the death of his father king Mufasa. Hakuna matata simply means no worries and according to Timon and Pumba it's their philosophy of life.

Here's some of the lyrics in the song that they sing (I'm sure lots of you already know it off by heart)

hakuna matata what a wonderful phrase hakuna matata ain't no passing craze it means no worries for the rest of your days it's our problem free philosophy Hakuna matata

no worries for the rest of your days – what a great thought.

That's a great sentiment isn't it. It's a fantastic idea, it's a wonderful aspiration no worries for the rest of your days but the question I am left with is, is that even possible? Is it possible to really live a worry free life? Is that something that's attainable for you and me? Can we live free of the stranglehold of anxiety over our lives? Especially in light of the last 15 months and with the ongoing Covid pandemic and constant change.

You know it's a fun and catchy song that song isn't it but it's actually devoid of any foundation for living life free of worry. Listen to some of the other lyrics in that song you would find that there is no real foundation there for living a worry free life.

Well this morning we're going to hear Jesus say something very similar to that musical duo of Timon and Pumba. We're going to hear Jesus tell us his own version of hakuna matata only Jesus when he tells us not to worry, when he says no worries, he actually gives us some good foundational reasons for not worrying he tells us some of the reasons why we ought not to worry. You know the bottom line is that Jesus wants all of those who follow him all those of us who love him all of us who tracked through our lives as his disciples to live worry free and we know that because of what Jesus says it chapter 12 verse 22. He says to us

there and to all of his disciples do not worry, do not worry about your life what you will eat do not worry about your body what you will wear.

What we will eat and what we will wear are two of the most basic primal concerns that we human beings have aren't they? Yet Jesus says look even these most basic primal concerns that you have are things that you ought not to worry about! We are just going through one of the worst health crises the world has ever seen, a crises which not to mention the loss of life and health has resulted in so many people losing their jobs, losing their livelihoods, losing their regular income, it's not difficult to imagine is it that many people are actually going to be worried about how am I going to put food on the table, how am I going to cloth myself and yet Jesus actually commands his disciples don't worry even about these things.

The word worry comes from a Greek word that means don't be preoccupied with or don't be constantly disturbed about. So Jesus is saying don't be preoccupied with what you're going to eat don't be constantly disturbed with what you're going to wear don't let those things keep you awake at night and you know in singling out these two most basic most primal concerns that we have as human beings really Jesus was saying look disciples of mine don't worry about anything. It's no exaggeration that Jesus was saying don't live your life worrying about stuff now.

I don't know what you think when you hear those words and that command from Jesus. Maybe you are a worrier. I have to be honest and say when I hear Jesus words they land on me as hugely challenging words because I worry about all sorts of things. I can think of many things that cause me great concern and great worry and maybe you're like that as well, maybe you are a natural born worrier but the truth is even if you're not a natural born worrier you probably do worry about somethings in life let's be honest and so in one way or another Jesus words land on all of us probably as a huge challenge when he says to us do not worry.

So how do we stand a chance of actually complying with this command from Jesus because that's what it is, it's a command. it's not a suggestion, it's not a recommendation, Jesus actually commands us not to worry.

Well as I alluded to a moment ago Jesus doesn't leave that command hanging in mid-air he actually based it on certain principles. He makes several statements in Luke chapter 12 which are really designed to drive worry far from our minds, far from our hearts. He wants to help us to break free from the stranglehold of worry over our lives and we're going to home in on some of the things Jesus says. We're going to do so under four different headings in the things that Jesus says. Here's the first heading Jesus says:

### **Ponder Gods care**

His first strategy to help us to live worry free lives is to ponder God's care over the fauna and the flora of the natural world around us and he wants us to allow that to be a springboard for our confidence that he will take care of us as well.

Look at what Jesus says. He says in the 1st place take a look at birds (and in particular he singles out Ravens probably because Ravens were very familiar to the disciples they were

large birds they were difficult to miss). Jesus says to his disciples and he would say to us consider the Ravens, they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn yet God feeds them and then he adds this little suffix he says and how much more valuable you are than birds.

Then jump down to verse 27 when you get to verse 27 you'll see Jesus doesn't just call us to ponder God's care over birds he then talks about God's care over the wild flowers or maybe in your translation it says the lilies. In verse 27 Jesus says that the lilies, the wild flowers, they do not labour or spin yet not even Solomon in all of his splendour was dressed like one of these. Now Solomon was the richest king he was a hugely wealthy man and he would have been well kitted out, well dressed. His wardrobe would have been full of fine clothing and yet Jesus says he wasn't even a patch on the intricate beauty and splendour as the tiniest wild flower God looks after the plants and then Jesus goes on to drive home a really powerful point he says if that is how God clothed the grass of the field which is here today and tomorrow then thrown into the fire how much more will he clothe you.

Go out and check the flora and fauna of the natural world says Jesus, observe it consider it ponder it ponder how God clothes the flowers even without any work on their part ponder how God feeds the birds even though they have no hand in producing their food no hard work on their part goes into providing the food that they need and then bear in mind that these flowers and these birds are nothing like as precious to God as you and I are.

You know twice in those two verses Jesus uses the 'much more' phrase and he says to us you are much more precious than birds and flowers you know contrary to what David Attenborough might tell you or what any other naturalist might tell you these days you are way more precious to God than anything else in the natural world. Many naturalists would have you not believe that but it is true, God says you are more precious more valuable than anything else in the natural world.

You know the very opening chapters of genesis tell us that we human beings of all of creation are made in their image and likeness of God. That is not said about any other part of creation, you and I are made in the image and the likeness of God. What's more if you read those opening chapters of genesis what you will hear said is that the very first human beings had life breathed into their nostrils by God himself you won't find that life giving description given of anything else in creation - no plant no animal no bird no insect ever is spoken of as having God's breath breathed into them through their nostrils and yet that is what is said about human beings. You are way more precious to God than anything else in all of creation as a human being and you know the big point of course is this - if God cares enough for birds and flowers to feed them and clothe them if God cares for them which are a lesser importance than you are don't stress over whether he'll provide for you because he certainly will. He can be counted on you can have confidence in God that he will provide for your needs. So friends the next time you're tempted to fret or worry about whether your needs are going to be met go out and do a nature study

Recently I've been watching from my kitchen window male Blackbird that's come into the garden just about everyday and it hops around the garden and as it hops around worms pop their heads up and this Blackbird grabs them and some days I see him with a big full of

worms and they'll fly off and presumably his feeding young in a nest somewhere and you know God wants me to observe things like that so that I will know the same God who was provided food for that Blackbird it's going to provide food for me

I love what the reformer Martin Luther wrote years ago as he reflected on these words of Jesus, he wrote this "God is making the birds my school masters and teachers it is a great and abiding disgrace to us that in the gospel a helpless bird should become a theologian and a preacher to the wisest of men whenever you listen to a bird singing you are listening to an excellent preacher it is as if it is saying I prefer to be in the Lords kitchen he has made heaven and earth and he is the cook and the host everyday he feeds and nourishes many little birds like me out of his hand"

So Jesus urges you and me in the 1st place to ponder the care that God gives the birds and flowers so that we might learn to trust him to meet all needs instead of fretting anxiously about them

Then secondly Jesus goes on to say something else which is also part of his design to drive worry from our lives he urges us to

### **Perceive God's responsibility**

Where do we see that? well you get a strong hint of that in verses 25 to 26. Take a look. Jesus makes this perceptive point about worry that's kind of a masterstroke of common sense if you think about it. Jesus says very simply have you by worrying added a single hour to your life? since you cannot do this very little thing why do you worry about the rest?

You know there's absolutely no doubt that if you worry about things you can add certain things to your life like a stomach ulcer or a migraine or high blood pressure but all of those things we don't want do we but the one thing we can't add to our lives which we would be delighted to be able to add to our lives is an extra hour to our life span but we can't do it! We simply cannot do it.

No amount of worrying is going to lengthen the time that you live on earth in fact the contrary if you live a life of worry it might put you in an early grave and it's going to make your journey on the way to the grave miserable, stressful and troublesome.

You know it's interesting isn't it to note that Jesus isn't beyond giving us a piece of common sense, a piece of common wisdom. Worrying is totally pointless he says it won't change anything for the better in actual fact it may make some things a whole lot worse and I never forget reading something one stressed out Christian guy wrote one time he wrote about lying in bed one night: as he was laying there he was full of worries worrying about his own life worrying about his family and their needs worrying about the world that he lived in and some of the troubled things that were going on in the world and by his own definition what he said was this he said I was trying to hold the whole world together with my worrying I wonder if you've ever felt like that you like you're trying to hold the whole world together with your worrying well this Christian guy said that as he lay there all of a sudden as he was fretting and stressing it was as if God himself spoke straight into his life and said this to him hey Jim it's alright go to sleep I will sit up and take care of the world for you

That's brilliant isn't it, go to sleep I'll take care of the world for you. I wonder how many of us need to hear something like that from God today - hey take it easy, go to sleep let me take care of the world. I created the world I'm in control of the world, the world works to my plan I am well equipped to, well capable says God of taking care of the world you don't need to worry about it you don't need to stress out about it.

When I heard that story and when I think about those things I'm reminded of psalm 121 and it says this "I lift up my eyes to the hills where does my help come from my help comes from the Lord the maker of heaven and earth he will not let your foot slip he who watches over you will not slumber or sleep the Lord watches over you he is your shade at your right hand the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forever more".

What a great reminder that Psalm is that God is sovereign over our lives and God is in control of what's going on in our world and God is in control of what's going on in the whole universe. The same God is in control of what's going on in your life and mine, he can be trusted to handle what needs to be handled and to strengthen us to face whatever we need to face. Hebrews 1: 3 points to this when it speaks of our God and saviour Jesus sustaining all things by his powerful word. Romans 8 verse 28 speaks of him working in all things for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose for them.

You know if you're a disciple of Jesus if you love the Lord your God and if you've been called by him, he is well capable of working everything out in your life for good even those things that today right now feel like there are cause of worry to you so you can let go of those things, relinquish them to him and trust him.

Perceive that he is responsible for your life and how it pans out. The more we perceive God's responsibility the responsibility of our good and our gracious king over our lives the more our worries will be silenced the more our anxieties will release their stranglehold over our lives.

So Jesus urges us to ponder God's care, to perceive God's responsibility but then thirdly he encourages us to do something else. He urges us to prioritise gods Kingdom

### **Priorities God's Kingdom**

If you want to live a worry free life prioritised gods Kingdom let it be the number one priority in your life and it will be an antidote to anxiety. Look what Jesus says in verse 31, he says to his disciples seek the fathers Kingdom and the things you need will be given to you as well. To seek gods Kingdom is a multifaceted kind of thing there are many different aspects to it if you like.

To seek God's Kingdom is to worship God and to love him with all your heart soul mind and strength, to make your whole life an act of worship to God. To seek God's Kingdom is to regularly spend time in his word and to seek to bring your life into line and into tune with the direction that God calls you to live, to seek God's Kingdom is to live your life to love your neighbour as God has loved you and as you love yourself and it is to be connected to the local church in a meaningful way. It involves your personal life and your home life and your

work life and your family life. As well as all that if God is at the centre of your life to seek first God's Kingdom is to earmark some of the resource is that you have, the earnings that you receive the income that you have and then used that money to further the work of God's purposes in the world.

Interestingly Jesus goes on in verse 33 to say to his disciples, sell your possessions and give to the needy. The poor are never far from Jesus mind when it comes to seeking God's Kingdom.

So there are many different ways that we can seek God's Kingdom that we can make God the top priority in our lives as well as making a priority of the things that matter most to him and you know if we prioritise these things Jesus actually says to us everything else that you need, notice he doesn't say want, he doesn't say everything you want he says everything that you need God will provide for you. Seek gods Kingdom first as a priority and everything you need God will provide for you – what an amazing promise that is.

It is a promise designed to drive worry far away from your mind to release the stranglehold of anxiety over your heart. It occurs to me that many of the worries that we are inclined to carry around in life arise because we fail to seek and prioritise God's Kingdom. The only alternative to prioritising and seeking gods Kingdom is to prioritise and seek the Kingdom of this world and you know if we seek the Kingdom of this world it seems very likely that we're going to experience anxieties and worries and stresses.

Again I was reading something else during the week that was written by the late Christian teacher John Stott he wrote about a magazine that dropped through his door called 'accent' and it was a new glossy magazine it was crammed with pictures and articles about how to live the high life in this world and here's what he wrote

*"in it there were enticing advertisements for champagne, for food, for clothing, for antiques and carpets together with a description of a lavish weekends shopping trip in Rome. There were articles about the latest technology, offers of winning a luxury cabin cruiser or 112 bottle cases of Scotch whisky and how 15 million women can't be wrong with their cosmetic choices. We were then promised in the following months issue alluring articles on Caribbean holidays, high fashion, the delights of reindeer meat and snowberries. From beginning to end the magazine concerned the welfare of the body and how to feed it, clothe it, warm it, cool it, refresh it, relax it, entertain it, titivate it, and titillate it" and then he goes on to make this point which is very accurate while I'm sure he says "that anyone who lived their life restlessly pursuing all of these things these worldly enticements would be more likely to end up with stomach ulcers and more worries rather than less worries living for this world alone for the attractions and the enticements of this world has been proved by many people, and you probably know some of them, to be a greater cause of anxiety and stress than living the simple life seeking and pursuing and prioritising gods Kingdom"*

You know its God who created us who knows best how our lives work and how our lives should tick. If we want to live a worry free life we need to first seek God's Kingdom. Let that be the priority for your life and if you do God will provide what you need.

I wonder if you're prepared to listen to Jesus? are you prepared to take Jesus seriously on this matter? are you prepared to put your faith in what he says? because if you are that's a wonderful promise isn't it you will live worry free because you will know that God will provide for you. It won't always be easy but it's the right path to take.

So, ponder God's care, perceive God's responsibility, prioritise God's Kingdom then finally he says picture Gods future.

### **Picture God's future**

You want to live a worry free life then picture gods future. Here's what he actually says to his disciples he says in verse 32 'do not be afraid little flock your father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom'. You know this is a follow-on thought from Jesus command to them to seek first the Kingdom it is yet another promise God the father will actually give his Kingdom to those who seek his Kingdom, those who were disciples of Jesus

what does that mean exactly. Well the Kingdom that God will give to those who seek his Kingdom is actually referred to a couple of verses further down as heaven. Those who seek Gods Kingdom will be given heaven, the treasures of heaven by God himself.

As we saw a moment ago one of the particular ways of seeking God's Kingdom that Jesus mentions in verse 33 is that of giving to the poor. It's one of many ways that we seek gods Kingdom and you know in that way and in every other way that we seek God's Kingdom off the back of that Jesus says God will provide a treasure in heaven for those who seek his Kingdom. Jesus says in verse 33 what actually happens every time a disciple of his seeks his Kingdom is that they are storing up a treasure in heaven a treasure that's never going to be stolen away from them. A treasure that's never going to be eaten away by moths. In other words Jesus says that if you live your life seeking God's Kingdom you're actually making an investment in heaven and that investment is guaranteed to bring you a lavish return a healthy return because those who invest in heaven are one day going to spend their lives in heaven.

One day those who seek God's Kingdom are going to spend their life with God in heaven in his eternal home you know every time you do something in your life that is an act of submission to God and love for God every time you do something motivated by a desire to serve God and his Kingdom it's like making an investment in the bank account of heaven and the return on that investment is more wonderful than anything you could ever imagine because one day those who have invested their lives on earth for God and his Kingdom will receive that welcome from God into his heavenly home forever and you know that heavenly home is going to be a place of absolute abundance there will be an abundance of security in heaven there will be an abundance of joy in heaven there will be an abundance of love in heaven there will be an abundance of peace in heaven.

When we get to heaven there's going to be no more sorrow no more suffering no more weakness no more frailty no more need no more poverty nothing that threatens to make us worried in this world will ever exist in heaven. That heavenly home is going to be where we are in a place of absolute bliss forever with God at the centre and Jesus says that's where the disciples of mine this little flock he says are going to be.

That's the future that you're heading for, it's the future that I'm heading for, if we're disciples of Jesus and Jesus mentions it here in Luke 12 as if to say to you and me hey look picture gods future for you, picture the awesome amazing realities that God has prepared for you in the world to come beyond this world. Picture how wonderful it's going to be when you're there and you know the more we picture that the most free of worry we will be here on earth. Our earthly worries and concerns will dissipate when we remember the great and wonderful future that we have ahead of us.

So you know Jesus calls all of us as his disciples to seek God's Kingdom with the promise that God will meet our needs here now but he also says seek God's Kingdom with the promise that you'll have an amazing future ahead of you. One day treasures in heaven that no thief can ever take away from you that no moth can never eat away and destroy. Picture that future the next time you're worried about something and it will serve as yet another antidote to your anxiety

To all of us who are inclined to worry Jesus would command us today just as he did his first disciples do not worry but he doesn't leave that command hanging in mid air he gives us these four strategies to help us do exactly as he commands he urges us to ponder gods care to perceive gods responsibility to prioritise gods Kingdom at the picture gold's future. May God help us to live worry free lives as we put in place these 4 practises into our daily lives.