

What's the Worry?

The Lukan Journey Narrative 3

Luke 12:1 In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, “Beware of **the leaven of the Pharisees**, which is hypocrisy.

² Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.

³ Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

⁴ “I tell you, my friends, **do not fear** those who **kill the body**, and after that have nothing more that they can do.

⁵ But I will warn you whom to fear: **fear him** who, after he has killed, **has authority to cast into hell** (*geennan*). Yes, I tell you, fear him!

⁶ Are not **five sparrows** sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God.

⁷ Why, even the **hairs of your head** are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

⁸ “And I tell you, everyone who **acknowledges** me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God,

⁹ but the one who **denies** me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

¹⁰ And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against **the Holy Spirit** will not be forgiven.

¹¹ And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say,

¹² for **the Holy Spirit** will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

14 But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”
15 And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all **covetousness**, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”
16 And he told them **a parable**, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully,
17 and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’
18 And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.
19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” ’
20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’
21 So is the one who lays up **treasure for himself** and is not rich toward God.”
22 And 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.
23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.
24 Consider **the ravens**: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!
25 And which of you by being **anxious** can add a single hour to his span of life?
26 If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?
27 Consider **the lilies**, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
28 But 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!
29 And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried.
30 For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.
31 Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

32 “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

33 **Sell your possessions**, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

35 “Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning,
36 and be like men who are waiting for **their master** to come home from **the wedding feast**, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.

37 Blessed are those servants whom the master finds **awake** when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.

38 If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!

39 But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into.

40 You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

41 Peter said, “Lord, are you telling **this parable** for us or for all?”

42 And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?

43 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

44 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

45 But if that servant says to himself, ‘**My master** is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk,

46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful.

47 And that servant who knew his master’s will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating.

48 But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

49 “I came to **cast fire on the earth**, and would that it were already kindled!
50 I have **a baptism** to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!

51 Do you think that I have come to give **peace on earth**? No, I tell you, but rather division.

52 For from now on in one house there will be **five divided**, three against two and two against three.

53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

54 He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens.

55 And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens.

56 You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

57 “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?

58 As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison.

59 I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”

(Luke 12:1-59)

Don't Worry

What is **the relationship between worry and readiness, persecution and judgment**? Probably this exact question has

never entered your mind like this. Someone *might* think about persecution vs. judgment. But who thinks about worry vs. readiness? And who puts those four things together like this?

Worry is one of those great sins that nearly all people are prone to at least at some moments in their life. Some are prone to it nearly all the time. What causes worry? Why do we worry?

Often times, when people seek to alleviate their worries (or especially the worry of others), they do so with the law. “Stop worrying,” as if the brute command will just magically make it all go away. That rarely works. Sometimes we tell ourselves not to worry by replacing it with something else, “Don’t worry, be happy” (Bobby McFerrin). That can work in the short-term, especially as you hum the short catchy song to yourself. Other times we try to give ourselves a reason in the midst of worry. “Don’t worry, about a thing, ‘cause every little thing’s gonna be alright” (Bob Marley). “Don’t Worry Baby, everything will turn out alright” (The Beach Boys). But what’s that rooted in? Do we have *real* reasons or is it just wishful thinking? Today we will look at this idea of worry and see how Jesus deals differently with this topic than most would expect. It is a powerful

word capable of truly helping this great problem of the human condition, but *only* when it is understood and believed.

“Worry” and the Structure of Luke 12:1-59

Worry is at the center of the first half of a long but simple structure of the third of seven parts of *Luke’s Journey Narrative*. According to the general outline we’ve been following, it consists of the entirety of Luke 12—some 59 verses.¹ At its simplest, the chapter can be broken down as an AB-BA:

- A. Hardship for Jesus’ followers (those who kill the body): trials before religious authorities. The need to confess Christ in times of danger (12:1-12)
- B. Seeking first the kingdom of God (where a thief does not draw near) (12:13-34)
- B’. Faithful service to others in God’s household (what hour the thief is coming) (12:35-48)
- A’. Hardship for Jesus’ followers: division in the home. A time of decision (12:49-59)²

“Worry” appears explicitly at the end of the “A” section (11), and in the middle of the “B” section with the word

¹ Nolland sees it as 12:1-13:9. John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, vol. 35B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 675.

² H. Douglas Buckwalter, “The Hike of Hikes—Luke’s Travel Narrative (Luke 9:51-19-27),” *Evangelical Journal* 33.2 (2015): 68-81.

“anxious” (22, 25, 26). The word *merimna* “refers to that which is existentially important, that which monopolizes the heart’s concerns.”³

In fact, it is the central point of this “B” section (13-34):

- 1a) Luk 12:13-20, Beware of covetousness (treasuring possessions);
- 1b) Luk 12:21, So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God;
- 1c) Luk 12:22a, Do not worry about your life;
 - 1d.1) Luk 12:22b, What you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on;
 - 1d.2) Luk 12:23, Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing;
 - 1e) Luk 12:24, Consider the ravens; God feeds them + you are of more value than they;
 - central axis) Luk 12:25-26, “And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest?”
 - 2e) Luk 12:27-28 Consider the lilies; God clothes them + how much more will He clothe you;
- 2d.1) Luk 12:29, Do not seek what you should eat or drink, nor have an anxious mind;
- 2d.2) Luk 12:30-31, The world seeks these things, but you seek the kingdom of God;
 - 1a) Luk 12:30a, For all these things;
 - 1b) Luk 12:30b, The nations of the world seek after;
 - central axis) Luk 12:30c, And your Father knows that you need these things;
 - 2b) Luk 12:31a, Seek the kingdom of God;
 - 2a) Luk 12:31b, And all these things shall be added to you;
- 2c) Luk 12:32, Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom;
- 2b) Luk 12:33, Provide for yourselves treasure in heaven that fails not;
- 2a) Luk 12:34, For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.⁴

But since it has a double-center (B, B’), the B’ section gives us the mirror and key of not worrying. This is found in vv. 35-48 which tells us, of all things, to be ready, to be awake. The passage begins, “Stay dressed for action and keep your

³ Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 409.

⁴ Christine Smith, “Luke 12,” *A Little Perspective* (Mar 18, 2016).

lamps burning” (35), and then Jesus gives a parable of staying awake. Thus, readiness is the unexpected complementary idea and key to overcoming anxiety and the angst of life.

But **awake for what?** The word “**awake**” appears in **vs. 37** and it is interesting to think of it in light of two mutually exclusive ideas that are being used today in the culture through words that are nearly identical, but mean the exactly opposite thing.

The first word is “**woke.**” “Woke” is **the past tense** of “awake.” According to a recent edition of *Webster’s Dictionary*, to be “woke” is **slang** for being “**aware of an actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice).**” It derives **the origin** of the slang to a 2008 hip-hop song by Erykah Badu called “**Master Teacher.**” But it suggests that the term is used as **a pejorative** for anyone who is or appears to be politically left-leaning. In fact, just like the subversion of the tense of the word (it makes no linguistic sense to use a past tense as a present tense), the reality is that the word *isn’t really* about *just anyone* on the left, but those who hold to **communist ideals**. There is nothing wrong with sensitivity to racial and social injustice, but that isn’t what the word signals. For example, it isn’t really talking about *equality* but **equity** [what “social justice” really means as well in this

upside-down world]—the racist Marxist subversion of equality that forces one group down and lifts another up through artificial and compulsory discrimination against those born with “[privilege](#).” It’s just the bourgeoisie vs. the proletariat all over again. But we won’t go down that rabbit hole any more today.

The other word is “[awake](#),” the same word we find in our passage. This word is being used to talk about anyone [on the right or left](#) politically speaking who finally sees the evil actions of politicians on the left *and right*, along with their cohorts and elite in education, big-tech, big-pharma, Hollywood, who are deliberately trying to end Western Civilization and create a one-world utopia with about 15 out of every 16 people now living eradicated from the face of the earth, as the Georgia Guidestones put it in its Ten Commandments of the New World Order.⁵ And make no mistake, the elites are talking about this and they aren’t hiding it. Their depopulation agenda is quite easy to find if you just go and look for it.

It doesn’t bother me to talk about being “awake” like this, but [it does bother me](#) if someone thinks that this is what Jesus meant by the term. Jesus most certainly is not talking

⁵ For those Ten see the *Wikipedia* on the Georgia Guidestones at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia_Guidestones.

about becoming a communist, but he is also not talking about waking up politically or culturally, much less waking up to your cosmic self and your Christ-consciousness like New Agers like to talk about it (and in some circles the whole “awake” language has itself been coopted by New Agers). **So what then must we be awake for?**

It is interesting at this point to notice something about Luke 12 in relation to **the other Gospels**. In one sense, the entire chapter is unique to Luke alone.⁶ In another, Luke is pulling again from different places in Matthew and Mark.⁷

Luke	Matt	Mark	Matthew Context
12:1	16:5-6	8:14-15	
12:2-9	10:26-33		
12:10	12:31-33	3:28-30	
12:11-12	10:19-20	13:11	
12:13-15			
12:16-21			
12:22-32	6:25-34		Sermon on the Mount
12:33-34	6:19-21		Sermon on the Mount
12:35-48	24:42-51		Olivet Discourse
12:49-53	10:34-36	10:38	
12:54-56	16:2-3		
12:57-59	5:25-26		Sermon on the Mount

⁶ For example, in his harmony, Robertson does not have any material from Matthew, Mark, or John going with this chapter. **Archibald Thomas Robertson**, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ*. Harper & Brothers, 1922, § 108.

⁷ The following is the harmony in **Kurt Aland** (ed.), *Synopsis of the Four Gospels: English Edition* (United Bible Societies, 1982), 17987.

Most interestingly, things from the B sections mainly parallel the Sermon on the Mount and *the Olivet Discourse*! The Olivet Discourse is, of course, Jesus' great sermon on Last Things that was given in Jerusalem the day before he was betrayed.

This in turn tells us what we are truly to be awake for: Jesus' coming again, as the creeds say, "to judge the living and the dead." That then takes us to the outer "A" parts of the passage. Our chapter begins with a warning. One scholar says it "provides the threatening edge to the challenge for change that Jesus' ministry brings."⁸ That threatening edge focuses on the Pharisees hypocrisy that he has just spoken about (Luke 11:37-54). But it becomes a warning to those who deny Christ. That threat brings up the power of God to throw us into hell as we fear those who have the power of those who can kill the body. Yet, in the middle of this, there is more discussion that reminds us of "worry" (see vv. 6-7), which if you think about it makes a lot of sense, for some people do worry a lot about going to hell.

The context here appears to be persecution that Christians will undergo at the hands of those who hate Jesus.⁹ The parallel A' unit (49-59) also speaks of persecution, and does

⁸ Nolland, 673.

⁹ Dennis M. Sweetland, "Discipleship and Persecution: A Study of Luke 12,1-12," *Biblica* 65.1 (1984): 61-80.

so again in the context of judgment, but this time of *our* need to make a right judgment about who Jesus is, is doing, and will do in the future. This then sees the second half of my question, persecution and judgment being added to worry and readiness. Put them together and we have a powerful antidote to the worry that so often besieges us. But since it is not the normal way people think about this subject, we need to look deeper at the chapter to understand.

Burnt Leaven (Luke 12:1-12)

We begin with the transitional phrase, “In the meantime.” Jesus has just pronounced a series of “woes” upon the Pharisees and Lawyers and he now says, “... when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees ...’” (Luke 12:1). Luke presents the material having the same crowd present throughout the chapter, which leads me to believe that even though we find similar material in different places in Matthew and Mark, that Jesus must have combined those teachings at this time into one place.¹⁰ The situation seems to be that they have

¹⁰ This kind of idea is never what you find in skeptical commentaries which seem to suppose that Jesus could never have repeated anything.

left the Pharisees house, are now out in the open country, and the people from Samaria/Judea, having heard of this Jesus, are now flocking in mass to see him, to hear him, and to be healed.

But he **keeps talking about the Pharisees**, that is, those religious separatists of Israel, experts on Moses and the law. He says that they are full of **leaven**. What is leaven? It is an agent, usually yeast, that causes fermentation in carbohydrates, creating beer, wine, spirits, and causing dough to rise. The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* uses the interesting language that it is a “**physical phenomenon of infiltration**,” which provides the basis for the symbolic use of the word.¹¹

Jesus gets more specific calling **the leaven of the Pharisees** “**hypocrisy**.” What is hypocrisy? This is when you **pretend to be one thing when you are its opposite**. It is when you deceptively conceal your real character or motives. This is a word that a lot of people throw around like candy, as they call people hypocrites for judging others, not realizing that they are judging them as they do it, thus being a hypocrite. The Pharisees did this all the time. In fact, they just did it with Jesus, when they said he cast out demons by Beelzebub, even though they themselves were casting out demons.

¹¹ “Leaven, Leavening,” *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 498.

Jesus hates hypocrisy. And so he tells you that why you shouldn't be one. "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known" (2). What is he pointing to here? Revealing the covered and seeing the hidden is **exposing hypocrisy**. He says basically the same thing in the next verse. "Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops" (3). The verse **intensifies the previous** by getting at what people say in the dark, in secret, about others where no one else will hear. Plots and conspiracies, slander and lies conceived behind someone's back that are meant to harm them. But God hears. And these kinds of things, Jesus says, will all be exposed. The light will shine on the dark words. The whispers of mischief will be told to the whole world as they are yelled from the housetops.

But **when is Jesus talking about?** Some think Luke has in mind **some present crisis** when he wrote his Gospel (Sweetland). Perhaps Jesus is warning the hearers about **some coming persecution?** After all, it continues, "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who *kill the body*, and after that have nothing more that they can do" (4). And again in **vv. 11**, "*And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and*

the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say.” And certainly that is not a wrong interpretation.

However, I think there is something much **more immediate**. The Pharisees are presently planning, in secret, **to put him to death**. He is warning the people, starting with this singularly evil act, that *it* will be made known to the whole world. They will not be able to keep their plot secret. From that moment until he returns in Glory, all such conspiracies to harm his people will be brought into the light. Read in this way, it puts the coming events at the end of this Gospel and the things Jesus will do to obey his Father in much more brilliant light. Whatever he is going to warn the people about (including anxiety and worry), it must first be known that Jesus himself was tempted but overcame for them.

They are plotting and will soon “**kill**” his body after they put him into a monkey trial. But Jesus knows that there is nothing more they can do after that. This becomes a **solemn warning** for the true context of this first section of the chapter. “**But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed,**¹² **has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you,**

¹² YLT: “*after the killing.*” The ESV’s, “*Fear him who, after he has killed, has the power ...*” makes it sound like God (“he”) has killed the person. Of course, God is the first cause of all things, but the previous verse talked about *the men* killing the body, not God. So it is better in my opinion to keep “he” out of the phrase (it isn’t there in Greek). The idea is that after they

fear him!” (5). This context, as you can hear, is Judgment Day and the fires of hell. Importantly, this is the only time Luke mentions “hell.” And it is not the word Hades, i.e. Sheol, the place of the dead in the OT. Rather, this is Gehenna, the *eschatological hell*, perhaps the place Hades itself is thrown into (Rev 20:14), the lake of fire, the final eternal end of the wicked. Gehenna takes its name, not from a mythological garbage dump outside of Jerusalem that never stopped burning; such a place has never been found. Rather, it comes from the Valley of Hinnom, where Ahaz and other kings murdered their own children in sacrificial fires to Molech (2Kg 16:3; 23:10-11; 2Chr 28:3; 33:6).

It is important here to see what is being judged. It is hypocrisy, lies, secret deceits, these very particular sins of the wicked. It is not talking here about all the sins of all people, even if they are forgiven by Jesus, being shouted from the rooftops or like some video replay of your life shown to the world on Judgment Day. Jesus is warning us against hypocrisy and that which comes with it—unbelief and rebellion against God. This is seen in what comes next.

First, we have God’s love. “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And no one of them is forgotten before

have killed you, someone else has an even greater power. Thus the literal translation: “Fear him [God] who, after the killing...”

God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:6-7). Remember, Jesus is talking to his “friends” (4), that is, his disciples, those who follow him. He wants to comfort them with the Gospel that even as he tells them to fear the God who has the power to throw people into Gehenna, that God loves them and they are not to be terrified of God’s judgment against them. Our fear of God is not of his raw power and is not to be a kind of anxiety or worry about how terrifying he is, but of his grace, mercy, and holiness. How can such a God love me? Well, we are more valuable to him than many sparrows, so much so that he has numbered the hairs of our head—all of them. This is unfathomable particular inexhaustible love for his children.

That he is talking about *believers* here is clear in the next verse, even as it was from his “*friends*.” “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before me, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God...” (8). Note here that this is not a negative statement. It is a positive statement that has his friends in mind. They have acknowledged Jesus before men, therefore they may be sure that God loves them.

What is this bit about the angels though? This is a divine council passage and it has in mind God’s heavenly family.

These particular angels are the “sons of God,” those who rule in the council. In acknowledging before angels all who acknowledge Jesus before men, Jesus is welcoming them into his heavenly family, his human brothers (**Heb 2:10-15**), sons of the Father.¹³

The reverse is also true, however. “But the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God” (**Luke 12:9**). Here, I must bring up an early church controversy, especially in light of the verse that follows: “And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven” (**10**).

This whole idea of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is found in Matthew and Mark in the Beelzebub story. Luke has it here and it therefore gives it a slightly different context. Many people wonder what this sin could possibly be and a wide variety of sins have been suggested.¹⁴ One of the earliest was came in the Novatian controversy where the African

¹³ Heiser writes, “Jesus presents believers destined for heaven not only to God, but also to the heavenly host. It is not that Jesus or the believer whose name is in the book of life need an administrative stamp of approval from the divine assembly. Rather, the scene is one of introducing a new family member into their heavenly home. The council validates or enthusiastically endorses those who are in Christ who have endured in faith to the end.” We’ve seen this idea of God’s “children” throughout Luke 9-11.” See **Michael S. Heiser**, *Angels: What the Bible Really Says about God’s Heavenly Host* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 139–140.

¹⁴ On the history of interpretation see **William W. Combs**, “[The Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit](#),” *DBS* 9 (2004): 57-96.

presbyter Novatian (200-258) declared that **no one who had lapsed and denied Christ under the threat of persecution could be forgiven** this mortal sin. Read here with just **Luke 12:9-10**, that sort of sounds right. And it is understandable. Imagine you have been threatened with torture and prison and refused to recant Christ and ended up facing the consequences, while your brother took the easy way out, recanted, and faced no consequences, but then wanted back in the church after the persecution was over?

But while understandable and while such cases would also need much wisdom and discernment for readmission, this isn't the context in Matthew or Mark, and in fact, even Luke has **the Pharisees** in mind. It is very clear that the sin originally in mind was **attributing the miraculous works of Jesus to the devil**. These works, Jesus said, were performed by the finger of God, the Spirit of God. Thus, the Pharisees were literally calling the Holy Spirit Satan and saying that Jesus was in league with the Dragon. **The reason it is unforgivable** is because those who commit it do not want forgiveness and will not seek it. But of course, no unbeliever wants forgiveness about any sin and do not seek it, so what makes this one different? My guess is because there's **nothing more God can offer than his own Son doing miracles before**

your eyes. If you reject that, what else is there? So he gives men over and will not bring them to repentance. **Can it be committed today?** My guess is no, because such signs and wonders are not being performed today by Jesus or his Apostles, and that is clearly the context. But even if one could, those who worry that they have committed it have not committed it, because people who have committed it couldn't care less.

Luke's point is to **set us up for Judgment Day.** God is coming to judge the living and the dead. Those *who will not acknowledge* his Son, he will not acknowledge them, and in this he will cast them into Gehenna. Even for his "friends," and especially in the face of persecution, this idea could cause **great anxiety**, and indeed it still can today.¹⁵ Therefore, Jesus concludes this part by telling them, **"When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and authorities, do not be anxious** about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" (**Luke 12:11-12**). Perhaps continuing with **Exodus typology**, Luke's language is closely related to **Moses**, who used his stuttering problem as an excuse

¹⁵ I recently watched *The Witch*, a movie about 17th century settlers to New England, clearly Calvinists, but hyper-Calvinists, who just had no concept that God could actually love and really forgive them of their sins. This show is a horror movie and is not for the faint of heart. But its depiction of the family was interesting.

not to go before Pharaoh, but God told him, “I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to say” (Ex 4:12).

There are several in what Jesus says here that people have radically misunderstood or twisted. For example, this has been used by people to justify never reading your Bible or learning apologetics or figuring out how to defend your faith, because the Spirit will magically just give you all the right words in that hour. Of course, that’s nonsense and makes a mockery of plenty of other passages.¹⁶ Another is, think about how ironic it is that Jesus tells you not to worry right here in the context of this blasphemy of the Spirit and yet worry that they’ve committed it, even though they’ve acknowledged Jesus publicly. Oh, how we twist the Scripture to our own harm. Jesus is showing you who does and does not commit this sin, and those who acknowledge him are his friends and are loved by his Father!

To me, what seems most important for you to understand is that Jesus himself, who had prepared his whole life in knowing the Scriptures, would soon undergo the thing he is warning his friends about, as he went on trial for his life and ours. Don’t make this about you. It is about Christ. What he said was very little. It got him killed, but it was the right

¹⁶ See Pao, 329.

words to do what was necessary for our salvation. Because he went through it victorious, any of his followers, even to this very day, who face such challenges before men, should know that the Holy Spirit will not leave or forsake them, but will lead them through victorious as they acknowledge Jesus as Lord in the face of terrible consequences. And indeed, the history of the church is paved **with the blood of the martyrs** who gave the good testimony of their Savior. They were not afraid of he who kills the body, but feared him who can throw us into Gehenna.

Coveting the Kingdom (Luke 12:13-35)

Now, we are investigating **this problem of worry**. We've just seen that it can cause great stress when we are placed on trial before men for our faith. Jesus now, through the question of "**someone in the crowd**" (**Luke 12:13**) takes us deeper into this inquiry. The man asked, "**Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me**" (**13**). In one way, the man "got" Jesus' teaching, for Jesus has just been talking about **inheriting sonship** as Jesus acknowledges us before the angels.

But in the most important way, **he totally missed the point**. Like a classic Liberal or Fundamentalist, this man kept

things on the physical level and did not grasp eternity that Jesus was talking about. So Jesus answered, “**Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?**” (14). It’s **an ironic reply**. Jesus is the Judge! Curiously, this is the very language that the two Israelites used with Moses when he tried to stop their fight (**Ex 2:14**). Yet, also ironically, Jesus did not come here to be merely a new Moses or Solomon, judging court cases about inheritance money when a father dies.

Jesus saw that this man’s **love of money** kept him from understanding his teaching about eternity. This is one of those things that those of us in the First World really need to consider. He warns the man about **covetousness**. “**Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions**” (15). **Coveting** is the one command that you can make no law forbidding, for there is no way of judging another person’s heart. It is an internal sin, a sin of motive, a sin of treasure. And in fact, Jesus will come back to treasure at the end of this (34).

But he wanted to explain what he was talking about in such a way that **those who actually cared** would think about it. So he told them **a parable** (16). “**The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall**

I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, *Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.* But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (16-21).

What is the teaching? Is Jesus here telling you to **deny all material goods**? Is he saying **don't save up for retirement**? So many people have such wrong opinions about what Jesus says. At every turn they will make Jesus the communist or the anarchist or the revolutionary. Jesus is not saying that he is against investing in the future, as he tells other parables exactly to that point. And yet, the warning is, **if you are trusting in what you've accumulated**, in *your* wisdom, in *your* business savvy, in *your* financial stewardship, you could very well have a problem you don't even realize. For such things have a subtle way of turning our hearts from the kingdom, without us even knowing it. Retiring to have fun, never going to church, giving up ministry, retiring from helping others and the church and worshiping God with his people. The traps are endless.

Covetousness causes us to look inward, at what we want ... **the ME monster**. So, **you do everything for yourself**. It is selfishness. It is not done for love of God or love of neighbor. This is why it is the **summary commandment** of the Ten. But it also arises out of a general **unbelief for God's provision and providence and goodness**. In the case of the parable, the man did **not not** believe in God, he just didn't care. It reminds me of Belshazzar and the writing on the wall (**Dan 5**), for that very night, God took his kingdom away and gave it to another.

In a series of **narrowing statements**, Jesus takes us to **the heart of worry**. It begins, “**And he said to his disciples, ‘Therefore I tell you, *do not be anxious* about your life’**” (**Luke 12:22a**). “**Life**” is general, so he gets specific. “**... what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on**” (**22b**). These are two very different kinds of worry. The one you worry about when you are **starving**. The other you worry about when you want to **impress others**, for everyone literally has some kind of clothing. For each though, “**Life is more than food, and the body more than clothing**” (**23**). For some people, life is only about worrying about the next meal or figuring out ways to impress others. **They have missed the meaning of life.**

An example is inserted. It is about a bird. “Consider *the ravens*: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!” (24). Ravens eat. They scavenge for food. But they do not sow it in the ground and then reap it at a harvest time. They live moment to moment and God feeds them. And ravens are unclean birds (Lev 11:15), yet God still cares about them!

Jesus’ teaching next has become famous and it is the center of the “B” pair. “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?” (Luke 11:25-26). This is all found in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and as such is a kind of “new law” of living in the world, but here it is in the context of helping us further keep our minds on what matters.

Jesus returns to a second parallel example, this time a flower. “Consider *the lilies*, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (27). The raven was about the food part; the lilies are about the clothing part. God feeds ravens and clothes flowers. The places flowers grow astonish me (high up a cliff face, under the dark canopy of a jungle, in the

low alpine tundra of the Antarctic, in the deserts of Sudan), and the vast majority of them will never be seen by a soul on the planet. Yet, God clothes them still. And “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!” (28). The oven may be a throw-back to the fires of hell. Flowers fade and die in the hot sun, as do the wicked in the afterlife. But you who love the Lord, are loved by the Lord, and it is his love for you that is the chief reason why you are not to worry.

Jesus continues by returning to the food and drink. “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” (29-30). God even loves the world and gives them their food and drink, so how much more you?

Therefore, having taken care of that, you now have the spiritual motivation to go outside of yourself and no longer be covetous. “Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you” (31). “Kingdom” is repeated in the next verse, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (32).

This kingdom is a **spiritual, heavenly, and eternal kingdom**. One that is not perishing or fading away, one that cannot be destroyed or looted or pillaged by **thieves**. Therefore, you have **motivation** now **for doing good** to others, and when you do good to others out of this motivation, your worry in life melts away. “**Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys**” (33). The opposite of **Marxism, which is forced and coerced selling** of all you have to give to the collective (i.e. the state to make it richer), this is **voluntary selling**, giving what you have out of your abundance and thankfulness to give to individuals that are in need, people you meet, people you know, people you can interact with. Marxism is the Bizarro-Superman anti-kingdom, perverting good things at every turn in hopes of creating utopia in earth. We already have utopia, and it is the kingdom of God in heaven. Therefore, the world fades for us and we can help those in the world because we know the kind of God that we have. And through it, **we stop worrying**.

Jesus finishes by returning to coveting. “**For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also**” (34). **To covet isn't**

just wanting what isn't yours, it is treasuring your own possessions so much that you horde them like Smaug hordes his gold. But if we treasure Christ and his kingdom, knowing that God will add to us *but not doing it for that reason*, we are freed to serve others—the definition of love in the Bible.

Readiness, Awake! (Luke 12:35-48)

The parallel to this section comes in the “B” unit and its focus is on *staying alert, being ready, staying awake*. This is implied in what we just saw, but now becomes explicit. Remember, the point of this reinforces how not to be anxious. What is the antidote? Readiness. Our Lord begins, “*Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks*” (Luke 12:35-36). His “home” is the parallel to the previous unit’s kingdom of God.

It is fascinating to me that these verses are found in Matthew’s Olivet Discourse. In doing this, Jesus is now applying eschatology, end-times theology to the question of worrying in the here and now, even as he brought up hell earlier! The image of burning lamps is used of the *virgins* who were awaiting the bridegroom (Matt 25:1-13). But here, Jesus uses

it of **men** awaiting the return of the master from a wedding feast. How interesting. One of women, representing the church, the bride of Christ. The other of men standing ready as if guarding the walls of the castle until the king returns. One innocent virgins. The other warriors and guardsmen. When the king arrives, you do not want his gates to be closed! You would lose your head.

Thus, Jesus pronounces a **blessing**. “*Blessed* are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline *at table*, and he will come and serve them” (37). **Food!** God knows that you need it. But now, he knows it as the Lord who is feeding his faithful watchmen.

“If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, *blessed* are those servants!” (38). It doesn’t matter when it he comes, and he isn’t going to tell you when that will be, so **we must all be on watch**. Just here, there is another warning, “But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour *the thief* was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into” (39). Jesus has just talked about the thief who cannot break into the kingdom of God (33). The thief is very likely **the devil**, who comes to steal, kill, and destroy (cf. **John 10:10**). Those who

are not awake will not be alerted to that thief and thus, they will perish in the ambush.

“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” In Matthew, Jesus is talking about his **Second Coming** (**Matt 24:44**).¹⁷ That can certainly be the case here, although it seems to me that Jesus “comes” at many times before that, in judgment, even as a thief in the night to those who call themselves believers who are not watching, ready, or awake (cf. **Rev 3:3**). And so the warning is here for all, even if Jesus does not return in our lifetimes in glory.

At this point, **Peter wanted to know who Jesus told the parable for**. “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?” (**Luke 12:41**). He is talking here about the parable of Master and the Wedding Feast, not the one of the rich covetous man.

Jesus gives a long answer, “**Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he**

¹⁷ My basic take on the Olivet Discourse is that the first half deals with 70 AD, while the second half deals with the Second Coming. This falls in the second half. See **R. T. France**, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 886ff.

comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. And that servant who knew his master’s will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more” (42-48).

Hendriksen summarizes what has just happened here. “An understandable inference would be that The Twelve and some other constant followers would be the ready ones; the rest of the people, the unready ones. Yet, from verse 22 on the Master had been directing his attention to his disciples, and not nearly as directly to the vast multitude. Did the Master mean, then, that even among his disciples there would be those not ready to welcome him? To whom was Jesus telling the parable?”¹⁸ He then shows you how Jesus has just turned

¹⁸ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 11, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 678.

the question on its head. “Never mind asking questions stemming from curiosity pure and simple [Peter]. What you should do is try very hard to be a faithful and sensible manager.”¹⁹ In other words, Jesus didn’t answer Peter’s question, because it was **the wrong question**. As Judas and even Peter himself would learn soon enough, *they* would not be ready. They would not be *awake*. But blessed is the one who is. And in fact, **Jesus was fully awake** in all the ordeal that was soon to come. And because of it, Peter’s sleepiness would be forgiven. And will all who turn to the Lord in faith.

The Coming Baptism and Division (Luke 12:49-59)

I must say, I really can’t help myself in making this kind of application about Christ, and I think it is exactly what we should be doing based on **the final section** of this chapter. For in it, Jesus himself starts to talk about this.

He begins, “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!” (**Luke 12:49**). That’s **not exactly the hippie Jesus of Woodstock** that so many people think about when they hear his name. This is **a third reference to fire**, and it parallels the fires of Gehenna in the first

¹⁹ Ibid., 679.

section. But this is a fire *on earth*. He will soon tell you what it means, but not before telling you the event that must precede it.

“I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!” (50). This verse (and its twin in **Mark 10:38**) became a major pillar in my argument for credobaptism and (under normal circumstances) immersion, because in it I realized that Jesus was baptized *a second time*. Those aren’t my words; they are his.

Part of the argument of infant or pedobaptism made by Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Anglicans is that we are to sprinkle rather than immerse. It is amazing me the amount of ink that has been spilt over this question from all sides of that debate. Baptists will usually argue that baptism means “to immerse.” And often it does. But this does not settle the argument. Sometimes it has the idea of suffering an ordeal.²⁰ It can also have the idea of “merse” as in “merging” such that the old self is destroyed and we become new creations.²¹ In fact, Hebrews says there were “various baptisms” (**Heb 9:10**) in the old covenant. Some were immersions.

²⁰ James Swanson, “βάπτισμα (*baptisma*), ατος (*atos*), τό (*to*),” *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

²¹ This is the main idea of James Dale, *Classic Baptism: An inquiry into the Meaning of the Word Baptizō* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1867).

Some were sprinklings. This is why many in church history have sprinkled.

But my basic starting point is that when Jesus underwent a rite from the law of Moses, that he was fulfilling it and unless we have [clear reason for it to continue](#), it finds its end in him. I do not equate baptism with circumcision precisely because Jesus was circumcised as an infant per the law. The early church would not force Gentiles to be circumcised (though they did do it from time to time), precisely for this very reason.

[Sprinkling baptisms in the law](#), especially in Leviticus, were usually done with blood (sometimes water) and served the purpose of [purifying](#) something that was unclean. Jesus, in calling his death a baptism, a death that is clearly a sacrifice for sin, is showing that the sprinkling aspect of old covenant baptism has been fulfilled every bit as much as circumcision has.²² Immersion, however, signals something different,

²² **Going Deeper.** It is at this point that I think [Colossians 2:11-12](#), a passage always raised by Paedobaptists, is being used, for circumcision *does* have a connection to this cleansing sprinkling aspect of sacrificial baptisms. “[In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism \[literally “the” baptism\] in which you were also raised with him through faith...](#)” As Meredith Kline has shown, the idea of “cutting” and cutting off (used in the Flood) is related to both rites. Jesus was “cut off” from land of the living at his death (Isa 53:8), a clear reference to his death, that is, his second baptism. This baptism was very clearly not an immersion, save only metaphorically as an immersion into death. But physically, it was a sprinkling, for when the spear entered his side, out came blood and water. This then was the cutting of this new covenant in his blood, the moment the sacrifice was pierced for our transgressions. It was at this moment that sprinkling baptisms ceased to have a continual ongoing function in the life

something that continues into today symbolically through his first baptism into water, for this idea is not about purifying so much as it is ordaining or consecrating, as the priests' ordination into water (**Ex 29:4**) demonstrates.²³

But the real point here is that **Jesus himself is taking his discussion to his own death**, something we just did at the end of the last section. Why? Because he, ultimately, is the one who carries out God's law perfectly, so that when we fail, we might have forgiveness.

His point is that after his baptism into death, which is “**greatly distressing**” him even as he speaks, this is when the **true fires will begin**. Just think of Pentecost and the tongues of fire! Yet, he continues, “**Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division**” (51). This is the fire he was talking about. But who will be divided? “**For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three**” (52). “**They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother**

of the church, for Jesus' second baptism was a sacrifice once-for-all. Clearly, however, his water baptism continued to be viewed as the event that the church practiced in Acts onward. This was also very clearly an immersion (see Ex 29:4), a bath in water. As such, this in my explanation for why we immerse rather than sprinkle under ordinary circumstances.

²³ This is a general argument and has what we might call exceptions, such as the Levites being sprinkled in their ordination ceremony. However, that ceremony is not called an “ordination” but a “cleansing,” even though they were being ordained into their service at that moment. But as Christian baptism is not baptism into mere Levitical duties, but priestly duties, I think this is beside the point.

against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” (53).²⁴

The most important question is, **what are they divided over?** Is this the Political Messiah of the Zealots finally about to raise his head and conquer Rome? No. He tell the same crowds, “**When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens**” (54-55).

What is his point? “**You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?**” (56). He began with **hypocrisy**; he ends with **hypocrisy**. It started with the Pharisees, but now it has gone out to the crowds.

They have Messiah right in front of their eyes, just as you do here now in this place. They are smart enough to read the weather, but too dull to figure out that God has come in their midst, so dull that they even charge him of being of the devil. God has come into our midst too, through the word and sacraments. It is thus Jesus himself who creates great division, even within families. For what is necessary is that **people**

²⁴ Does this have implications for “household baptisms?”

judge the truth, not of an inheritance on earth, but whether the Son of Man is capable of granting a heavenly inheritance before the angels in heaven. Can Jesus save you?

It is into this idea about the weather that Jesus concludes, “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right” (57)? Judge what? This has been hotly debated. Is he talking about doing the right things rather than just talking about the weather? Is he talking about judging yourself rather than others? Is he talking about you judging rather than allowing the scribes and Pharisees to do your thinking for you? Is he saying let your conscience be your guide? Is he saying why not learn to think for yourselves? I don't know why those must be mutually exclusive.

But the real point is that you must judge what Jesus is saying, what he is doing, and who he is. Some of you may have a weakness, letting others think for you. You must think for yourself. Others might want to get out of this by not doing anything with Jesus and just continuing on your merry way in unbelief. Still others might be having troubles with what you've heard about Jesus elsewhere vs. what he says himself. That's why each of the above questions might apply to any one of us. But they must apply to what you do with Jesus.

The Lord finishes with a very serious and sober word about why you want to do this now. “As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny” (58-59). You are being brought to trial right now, and you have an accuser, Satan, who will gladly stand before the court of heaven and tell the world everything you’ve ever done wrong and why you should never be allowed into the kingdom. The Law also accuses you, for in fact you have done much wrong in your life, even the best of you.

But the trial can be stopped now, dead in its tracks, by settling out of court with the Judge himself. This happens when God calls you through his word and you confess Jesus before men and rely upon his merits and sacrifice to settle your debts, cleanse your sins, and free you from the tyranny of the devil. It is faith alone that keeps you from the fires of hell, faith in Christ. It is faith alone that causes you to be ready for the Lord’s coming in judgment. It is faith alone that perceives that God in fact loves you and will judge you on

the perfect merits of Christ's righteousness. And it is therefore faith alone that **obliterates worry of the things of this world** and frees you up to live generously in the kingdom, not for yourself, but for those God has put in your path to test you to whether you will make a right judgment. Hear the word and perceive that Jesus the Judge has gone before you and taken your judgment upon himself in his fiery trial of baptism at the cross, so that you and your worries of life might melt away into true happiness in Christ.

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