

Luke 12:22-34
It Just Comes
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Well, again I want to welcome you and say how good it is to be with you, encountering, worshipping and being shaped by Jesus Christ together. If you are visiting with us today, I want to let you know that we've been in a series of messages for the last 9 months, slowly walking with Jesus through the Gospel of Luke. We've titled it The Tangible Kingdom. Dallas Willard writes Jesus is not as interested in getting you into heaven, as he is in getting heaven into you.

What does that mean? Well the gospels reveal Jesus constantly inviting people into a life of radical compassion, courageous generosity, and indescribable peace. Jesus helps us to see the world through a different lens. To see nations, politics, social orders, resources, and relationships in a radically different way—God's way. The reason Jesus has continued to be such a winsome and compelling figure throughout history is in him we see what this with God life looks like.

Two weeks ago, we looked at a parable Jesus told about a rich man who harvested a bumper crop. Then he thought to himself, what should I do with this new abundance? Instead of sharing it with those who have little, he decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. And what Jesus says of this man is not what a shrewd wise business man he is. He doesn't say: wow you really understand the principles of supply and demand economics. Do you remember what he calls the rich man? Fool. Not because he has resources, but because of how he chooses to use the resources at his disposal.

Jesus says, the place to store his excess is not in barns where moths can eat, and rust destroy, but in the bellies of the poor and hungry. And in doing this he would have stored up treasures in the Kingdom of God. So, for us, the goal of the kingdom of God is not accumulating. more. always. But having the courage and faith to look and see that kingdom breaking in.

This morning's text, which Eric read for us, is a continuation of that parable. There are few things that Jesus speaks more about than the dangers associated with money. But those dangers are merely a symptom. The root of the money issue is a deeper more dangerous one, it's worry and anxiety. We worry because we fear that God won't be who God promises to be. And at its root, anxiety is a faith transformation issue. In the rich man, the roots of faith had not sunk deep enough to withstand the winds of worry and anxiety.

Tony Campolo is a well-known speaker and college professor. He tells of going one night to speak at a church on the opposite side of Philadelphia from where he lives – a place most people avoid at night and only go during the day. Sure enough, Tony had walked only half a block when a dark figure stepped out from an alley. The assailant approached from behind and Tony could feel a weapon in the small of his back. The man demanded Tony's wallet – which of course Tony was more than happy to give him. Tony said he could hear the robber rummaging through it. Suddenly the man became very upset. He said, "Three dollars? All you've got is three lousy dollars? What do you do for a living any- way?" Tony said, "Well I'm a Baptist preacher." Whereupon the robber said, "Really! A Baptist! Me, too."

This is a story with a funny finish, but there's a note of tragedy we ought to pay close attention to. This is a man who had not been transformed by his faith. He might have already had the necessary information, but what he lacked was an experience of transformation (which is different from a transformative experience). If you know that Jesus is God's son and he came here to rescue you from your sins, dying for them with his own substitutionary life, you've got the essentials. If you know the Apostles' Creed, even better, you're A+. But being a Christian is not about knowing the right information, it's about surrendering your life fully and completely to Jesus Christ and letting him be Lord.

Transformation is not a matter of more or better information. So, what is the matter?

The first step is an experience of grace. The Greek word for grace is the word *chara*, it means "surprise gift love." Have you ever received a surprise gift, maybe some flowers, or tickets to a ball game or concert were delivered unexpectedly with a card that says, "Just because." That's a surprise gift.

Jesus uses this little proverb to show us that his surprise grace really is all around us, if we have eyes to see it. "Look at the Ravens," he says. This is an interesting bird to consider. I think if you or I were going to write a proverb about the birds of the air we might choose the eagle, or the falcon. But Jesus goes a different direction, he says: "consider the ravens." OK. Ravens were everywhere in Palestine, there was no shortage of ravens. Ravens are also among unclean creatures according to Leviticus 11. And in antiquity they were considered among the least respected birds in the sky. If Jesus were writing his gospel in our nation today, he might say "Consider the pigeons."

But Jesus drawing our attention to a bird some might consider a nuisance is not that we are as common and overlookable as ravens, but that we would see how abundant and comprehensive God's care for our most insignificant concerns. In looking at Jesus' life we might see a sort of carelessness for material things. Jesus didn't have a bank account or an apartment, he didn't pay much attention to his clothes or shoes. But as we look to the Father, the Creator God, the living God lavishes every wildflower in every distant field with all the beauty of Solomon's Court—thus, this Prodigal God has plenty of time left over for human needs too.

God is not only the creator of basic things; God is also the creator of beautiful things!

Jesus continues, Consider the lillies of the field...or consider the crocuses in your front yard. Once they're planted in your yard you don't have to do anything to make them sprout, every spring they just come. And what I love about these flowers is that they're so low maintenance that it makes them even more splendid to look at. God has already robed them in beautifully arrayed colors—greater than even that of Solomon.

What we wear and what we'll eat are God's way of encapsulating the whole of what most people spend their time worrying about. For those of you who were fans of the sitcom Seinfeld—as I was—it was a show about what? Nothing. It was a show about vanity, wind, nothing much at all. And yet, in nearly every show the plot surrounded in one way or another what? Foot or clothes. They used comedy to communicate that it's all vanity—chasing after wind.

Jesus says don't keep striving after the things that the Father already knows you need and gives them to you without asking. The only thing more ridiculous would be a person who was very anxious

about whether or not there would be air for him to breathe his next breath. Receive the clothes you wear enjoy them, be grateful but don't obsess over jackets. And the food you eat, enjoy it, savor it, be grateful for the sheer gift of God's grace that it is.

By definition, grace is not something we earn or prove or deserve, it's something we only receive. And very often it comes to us by sheer surprise. Grace comes to us.

A guy from New England walks into a Waffle House...because there was not a Dunkin Donuts around. There he orders a waffle with scrambled eggs and bacon. When the waitress brings the order to his table, there was this white mush on his plate that sort of looked like cream of wheat.

"Miss, I didn't order this. And while we're at it, what is it?"

"It's grits, sugar."

"What's a grit?"

"Well honey they don't come by themselves."

"But I didn't order any grits," the man said.

"Oh, Honey," she replied, "you don't order grits, they jus comes!"

That's grace, it just comes. So we might as well just receive it.

So, if the first way to transformation is an experience of grace, the second step in a transformed and rooted life is delighting in the experience. It's for this reason that I think followers of Jesus shouldn't be dour, long-faced, fuddy-duddies. But we ought to be the most joy-filled, freely giving, infectious people there are. We get to wake up every morning, and as long as there is air in our lungs we get to inhabit this amazing world God has given us.

Now does that mean we are dismissive or laissez faire about caring for the world around us. Not at all. I believe that as the caretakers of this creation we every Christian ought to be a conservationist, we ought to be concerned about preserving and tending creation—and that means caring about the environment. It ought to break our hearts that there's a Texas sized island of plastic bottles floating in the pacific. It ought to break our heart when we see preventable destruction of the environment, because this is God's kingdom handiwork, and when Jesus said that the Kingdom is in our midst, I think he meant that God's rule and authority are destined for this place—not pie in the sky, in the sweet by and by.

It ought to also mean that Christians are the creators of and appreciators of great art. As the particular family of faith, descendent from John Calvin, called the Reformed Church, we believe deeply in the absolute sovereignty of God. And that means God's fingerprint on everything. God's glory is literally all around us. And from our life changing experiences of grace touching our lives we ought to overflow with joyful creativity and appreciation.

And, I'm venturing out on a shaky limb here, where I might get some push back. But I'm not categorically opposed to sporting events or ensemble rehearsals on Sundays. Because these are gifts, this is the sweet stuff that God—because He's so full of grace—gives for our enjoyment and to feel God's pleasure. And even though in the movie Chariots of Fire, Eric Liddell chose not to run on the Sabbath, he did say this: "God made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure." When we use the gifts God gives us to our enjoyment and his glory, that is akin to worship.

We were created for so much more than having, and consuming. And though one of the curses of the Fall in Genesis 3 is the pains of labor and work, in a with God life, walking side by side with Jesus, you are given a foretaste of the eternal Kingdom of God as you experience God's pleasure and approval in your life.

Lastly, and most importantly, Jesus says the key to this life of transformation is to keep what is true, what is universally relevant, and essential before us. This is the cross, that act of self-giving, self-emptying, self-sacrificial love which in its simple earthiness is the most revolutionary idea the world has ever known. This is the source of your identity and it is the source of your transformation. Love that offers itself in the place of another, love that offers itself so that another could experience life and hope and flourishing, in a world that is so starved for hope, and so ready for transformation. The cross is the great paradox of the Christian faith, that in dying, Christ defeated death, that a symbol of the ugliness of human capacity is also the symbol of indescribable love. The cross defies the logic of our world, and leaves us breathless and speechless in its purposes for us. It will...change you life.

I want to close with a poem. As I've said, lately, I have found a lot of comfort and wisdom in the poetry and writing of an author named Wendell Berry. This is probably his most famous poem, it's called Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front (how can you not like it with a title like that?) In it he paints a picture of a life that has undergone a transformation of sorts, shedding the garments that get placed upon our shoulders, and invites us to a life of what he might describe otherwise, but what I would call a life marked by a deep knowledge of grace.

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millenium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.
Listen to carrion – put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?

Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is nighest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.