

Introduction

Today, the "Mess" we're talking about is "Messy Future." The future is kind of weird in that it never gets here. It's always tomorrow and by the time it gets here, tomorrow is today. Right? ...And then today becomes yesterday. We never get to tomorrow, it seems like. We are never living in tomorrow. So the future is intriguing... it's mysterious. Sometimes it makes us fearful or anxious. Hopefully, in Christ and after today when we look at what God has in store for our future, we can look to the future with hope and security, but it's just a baffling, enigmatic kind of thing. A friend of mine always liked to point out the sign in Joe's Crab Shack that said, "Free Crabs Tomorrow" ...and they never change the sign. (Laughter) That's the kind of mystery and intrigue that we have wrapped up in the future. God's Word is always greater than a marquee sign. Let's pray and then we'll see what God's Word has to say about it.

"God, thank You for today; thank You for yesterday. And God, by faith, thank You for tomorrow. God, I thank You for the promises that You have given to us, the hope that You have given us, the eternity that You have secured for us in Christ. God, I pray that today, as we look at Your Word, You would show us how Your faithfulness and Your promises of eternity form and shape our today... how we view today and how we view tomorrow, and how even we can look at the past in light of eternity. So I pray, God, that You would open the eyes of our hearts to see Your truth, to hear from Your Word, and God I pray that Your Holy Spirit would just transform us and change us. We ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen."

We're going to be in Luke chapter 12, starting in verse 13. *"Someone in the crowd said to Him..."* ("Him" being Jesus) *"... 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.' But He said to him, 'Man, who made Me a judge or arbitrator over you?' But 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.' And He told them a parable, saying, '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.'"*

"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. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 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! 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? 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. 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! 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. Instead, seek His Kingdom, and these things will be added to you."

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. 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. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Now, if you were here last week, you might think, "Are we about to get another money sermon?" Yes and no. Pastor Steve covered finances and all of that last week in great detail, so if you want an expanded, detailed, better version of point one today, go back and listen to that... revisit that podcast. Jesus does mention possessions and wealth and finances here, but I think what we are looking at is a bigger picture of how do we deal with the things we have today and what does that reveal about our thoughts for the future or eternity or what's important. That's what we're going to look at today... the big picture of tomorrow and what our outlook on tomorrow says about today.

1. Our Outlook Shapes Our Stewardship.

I think what we see here, first of all, is that our outlook shapes our stewardship. Our stewardship is how we manage or handle the things God has entrusted to us, whether it is finances, possessions, time, or resources... whether it's a job or relationships with others. How we treat them, how we manage them, and how we interact and do those things, I think, reveals what we believe about the future and what is important to us. We see here that there was a young man who interrupted Jesus. Jesus was teaching on discipleship and "Acknowledging Jesus before the Father, and the Father will acknowledge you before men," and all that kind of stuff, then somebody blurts out, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." It's very telling what this young man's outlook is. The things that are important to him, he has decided, are about inheritance, possessions, the here-and-now, what I have, what I can get, what I can get my hands on, what I'm owed, what is for me. It seems as though his brother is there in attendance as well, for him to call on Jesus to say, "Hey, tell this guy, my brother, to split this inheritance with me." That's not even what Jesus was talking about. We read in Scripture, *"Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks."* I think this young man's heart is revealed when he says, "Here's my pressing matter; my urgency is about wealth, possessions, and all these things." So Jesus, of course, begins to teach. He doesn't settle the dispute. He points to higher things and says, "I'm not here to do that. That's not My business to settle your family account." But then He goes on to talk about possessions and wealth and what could be had. He tells a story about a very rich man who has an abundance, and He says that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions... here's a story about that. He talks about a man who has so much, his crops are so abundant that he looks at them and says, "I don't have enough store room for all of this. What am I to do?" His first inclination is not to give out of his abundance but to build a bigger barn for what he has. So you can see where his heart is, where his motives lay. It's that he wants to keep everything to himself. In the story, God requires his life of him and says, "Fool! Look now... who gets what you've store up? You have no idea who is going to come in behind you and what they're going to do with what you've earned and what you treasured so highly. How important was that really?" This is a huge, huge point here.

We see this in Ecclesiastes with Solomon... the man who was given more wisdom than any other man and riches beyond any other person who ever walked the earth. He had every resource available to him to pursue whatever he wanted to pursue to find fulfillment, to find lasting joy and contentment, and it wasn't in those things. In Ecclesiastes 5:10, he says, *"He who loves money will not be satisfied with money."* In the next verse, he says, *"When goods increase, they increase who eat them."* That's a translation of "More money, more problems." Right? I don't know if you've seen these really sad stories of people who have won the lottery and then wish to God they had never even bought the ticket because of the problems that come into their life. They don't know how to manage that... they don't know how to deal with that because, again, the treasure that they viewed and prized was not something of eternal significance.

Pastor Steve mentioned last week the saying, "He who dies with the most toys wins." It's that kind of mentality. Yet Jesus points out in this parable that's not what is important. That's not of eternal significance because you can amass for yourself all kinds of things, and then what happens to it? Solomon wrote about that in Ecclesiastes as well. He said, "I've developed all of these things for myself to enjoy now, and yet when I pass on, even if I get to name somebody to inherit all this... even if I get to pick who gets to take all these possessions, there's no guarantee they are going to steward them wisely. Plus, I'm not enjoying them then anyway... they are. So what is the eternal significance of creating all of this good for ourselves?"

I'm going to read part of a quote from John Calvin, and then we're going to hear much more of it later. Here's just a tidbit: He writes in his commentary on the Gospels, "Wherever people imagine their highest good to be, there they are entangled and attached." Wherever people imagine their highest good to be... there they are entangled and attached. So it's not just money, possessions, wealth, and these kinds of resources we think about. But wherever you imagine your highest good to be, whether it's in your identity as a husband or a wife or a mother or a father or a CEO, or a good, honorable name and legacy that you can leave behind, or whether it's in security for your family or it's in pride over your children... whatever your highest good is, that is what your heart is wrapped up in. That's what your heart is entangled in. That's where you will defend the strongest. That's what you will withhold from God, often, if that is your highest good. If it's wrapped up in being fulfilled in that thing, we'll often say, "God, You can have the rest of all this... but this one, this is mine. Don't ask for this... don't ask for this; I can't lay this down." That's probably where our highest good is. If you can pinpoint that in your life, it's the thing we get defensive about, the thing we find our identity in, the thing that we will rearrange our world to protect or defend or keep from being messed with. It shows a lot about what we think about the future, if we think our highest good is wrapped up in something of today. I think that's what Jesus is trying to show us with this parable, especially with those who have an abundance... those who have a lot. You often have the "haves" and the "have nots." Now we'll look at the "have nots" when we talk about worry.

2. The Future Is Not Changed By Worry.

He turns after He tells the parable to His disciples... now the disciples did not have a lot of earthly things. In fact, they had to give up all their earthly things to follow Jesus. So there was a huge lesson just in that; to say, "Come and follow Me," they had to lay down everything and surrender everything. Of course, the temptation would be for those who do that to worry, "I don't have enough." It's different than the one who has a lot, to say, "I can't get enough. This isn't enough; I need more." It's those who don't have anything who say, "I don't have enough; I need more." And worry comes with that. So He says, "Don't be anxious about life, what you will eat, your body, what you will put on, for life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens, consider the lilies... how they don't worry, fret, and store for years and years, and yet God provides for them." He meets their needs. What is truly a need in their life, God will provide. And He says, "How much more valuable are you to God the Father than these animals?" ...meaning much more. So whatever you need in life, God will meet. And if He doesn't meet that need, it either means we don't need it or there's something greater than the significance of that need in our life. Because, you see, if there's a physical need, God will provide it. Trust in Him for that. He often does to show us He is good and He is faithful. But there are times when we say, "I have a physical need on this earth," maybe physical healing, or maybe bills to be paid or just food on the table. Sometimes it doesn't come. I don't think that means "God is not good." It means that He is trying to show us that there's a greater need, a greater significance, and a greater desire to be stirred up within you, for Him and for eternity... not for the here-and-now. It points us, again, to the future.

The future is not changed by worry. He says that when he says, "Don't be anxious. How many of you can add an hour to your life by worrying?" The answer is "no one." So He's saying, "What are you doing by worrying? You're just ruining the present. You're just souring today. You're not changing the outcome that's fixed; it's going to happen... it's going to unfold." You can take steps to prepare. You can be a wise stewards and wise managers of the things that He has given us, and yet worrying only ruins the now. That's why Jesus said, "Today has enough trouble of its own. Don't add tomorrow's troubles because that's just complicating the issue and ruining today. Deal with what is today." Not to say it is not a real problem or something to be discouraged by in any sense, but adding more discouragement and the anxiety and worry of tomorrow just complicates the issue. It doesn't fix anything; it doesn't change anything.

I think there is a little difference here between someone who has concerns and someone who is a worrier. I am a worrier. If I just had concerns, I could say, "Here are my concerns." Someone could say, "Here are the responses to your concerns." And I would say, "Good." That's not how I operate. "Hey I have some concerns." "Here are the responses to your concerns." "Great... I have ten more concerns." (Laughter) I will find something else to worry about and stress about. My wife is not like that, so I think she gets a little frustrated with that. "Why are you worried about that?" I'm thinking, "Worse-case scenario; so many things could unfold here. All kinds of things... terrible things could happen." She would say, "Worrying about them is not going to change anything; it just changes now and it's not fun to be around." That's what we are talking about when we say anxiety and worry... this anxiousness that sometimes is crippling, sometimes debilitating... sometimes makes you feel like, "I can't even go outside... I can't even open the door... I can't even look another person in the face."...worse-case-scenario anxiety and worry. If you talk to somebody who deals with worry like that and you give an answer to their concern, they don't just say, "Okay. Now I feel better." Right? They latch onto something else because it's the worry... it's the heart that is unsettled. It's a heart of disbelief. Worry is really a lack of faith in what God has told us... what He has promised us and who He is. Whether He has given us a promise explicitly or whether He just says, "Trust Me because I'm good and I'm a good Father, and I want what's good for you." If we walk by faith in that, worry and anxiety decrease, and that's what Christ is trying to tell us. Your heavenly Father, who is good and wants your good, will provide for your needs. In Christ, He has promised us that He has met all of our needs. So if it doesn't come in the physical realm, then it must mean the spiritual is greater, and that need is met in Christ. So, we need to trust His plan and have faith in His plan and in His character.

If you recognize worry in your life, what you want to do is trace it back to the lie you are believing. The world has either told you something you are believing, or God has told you something you are not believing. So, if there's anxiety or worry in your life, you want to look at that and say, "What am I believing to be true that's causing this worry, and what has God said about it? What can I trust in His character?"

There was a time... I guess it was about five and a half years ago, I had signed up for my first seminary class. This was a few years after by undergraduate degree, so I was a little hesitant to know what kind of student I would be... hoping to not be the same kind of student I was as an undergrad. So, with a little trepidation, I signed up for seminary because the more opportunities I was given to teach and stand before people and try to impart the truth of God, I realized, "I don't know what I'm talking about... I need to go to school." That was the main motivation for me to go back to school and study and be taught by people who could help me understand the Word of God and communicate the Word of God to others. I knew this was what God wanted for my life... and again, this was my first semester back, and so I said, "I'm going to take it easy and take it slow... just one class." Well, just one class, even then, was a financial burden that I couldn't meet, or I was going to have a really, really hard time meeting it. But I knew God wanted me to go. I knew He wanted me to sign up and go to school. So... I registered. I was prepared to go... still

thinking, "I know they can set up a payment plan, but even then, this is going to be really hard... near impossible. How am I going to pay for this?" I didn't want to incur any debt along with seminary. That's just what I felt God had led me to do. So I'm just going to class; I'm on my way to class with James Roberts. We took some classes together when he was working here, so we were on our way. I'm thinking, "I'm going to go to class; that part is separate from the financial part, but I know they are going to send a bill, and they are going to want some money... that's how things work around here..." ...Not knowing where it was going to come from. On the way to school that day, I got a phone call from our finance office. Don Howard, who works in our finance office, told me, "Your first semester is covered." I just said, "How?" I hadn't applied for any kind of funds; the Farrell Scholarship wasn't available yet. I wasn't aware of the fund that this came from, but Don Howard said, "The Scott Larson Memorial Fund is going to pay for your first semester at seminary." (Clapping) I never in a million years, when I was working as a young student ministry associate here, quoting movies with Scott Larson, arguing with him on the volleyball and basketball court, joking around with him... never in a million years would have thought, "He's going to go to war, lose his life in battle... I'm going to go to seminary, and the memorial fund in his name is going to pay for my first semester." That's not a future I would have drawn up. That's not a future Scott would have drawn up. What does that show us? It shows us that there's a God who knows what He's doing. There's a God who holds our futures in His hands, and that's where we should want our futures to be. Yet, we are tempted to say, "I can plan this out... I know the steps I'm going to take. I don't want you messing with this because I have hopes and dreams and plans, and I'm going to earn it. I'm going to get there; no one is going to hand it to me." God maybe laughs or chuckles and says, "You have no idea the dots I'm going to connect in your life." Rewind twenty years, when I moved here in 1991 as a seventh grader... I never in a million years would think that I would be standing up here today giving the sermon at this church, when I was just running up and down the halls and being awkward and goofy and thinking, "I hope I can make some more friends." Fast-forward to today and I'm on staff, and God has invited me to take part in the ministry of His Kingdom. We have no idea the dots that God wants to connect in our lives. And yet, if we would just trust His Word, that He is good and He wants our good, we would walk without anxiety, without worry, trusting that He is good and He is a good Father, and He wants to give us good things. And if the good things don't come, by our definition of good... we've got to redefine what we're searching for. We need to redefine "good." We need to redefine our priorities. That's what we talked about with that first quote, "What is my highest good? What am I centered on? Where is my heart attached?" Christ is trying to tell us in this passage... "It should be on the Kingdom: the Kingdom that is promised for you; the Kingdom that has been assured you and promised to you because worry does not change the future."

3. The Kingdom Is Not a Consolation prize.

So what does it point to? ...That the Kingdom is not the consolation prize. In verses 30 and 31, the promise here... *"...the nations of the world seek after these (physical) things..."* (these needs that you have) *"...and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek His Kingdom, and these things will be added to you."* In verse 32: *"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."* Do we realize what that means?

Growing up, I was under the impression, whether it was explicitly taught to me or not, that heaven was yes, a lack of pain and sorrow and death, and it was not eternal torment in hell. Those are all good things. Yet it does not sound that exciting when you start to say, "So, I'm floating on a cloud and playing a harp... maybe wearing a toga or something... (Laughter) ...for eternity? ...for forever?" I knew I had at least enough faith to realize, "I know I won't regret it when I'm there, and I will somehow enjoy it because it's the presence of God. But ... I don't know. It's just not that exciting. Right? It's way better than the alternative,

but still... it doesn't sound that great." That's a really horrible attitude to have, but I think it's because a lot of people misunderstand what eternity is going to be like for the believer. It's not wings and harps and clouds. Did you know that God has promised to redeem creation physically and that believers will physically inhabit a physical, redeemed creation? So that makes more sense, right? ...That God would not allow us to taste all the great things and see all the beautiful things in His creation as humans and interact with really fulfilling relationships with others, to take it all away and put us on a cloud to float and play harps for eternity? No way! He is going to redeem creation, restore creation ...the idea of Eden before the fall... man in perfect fellowship with each other, in perfect fellowship with the Father and in a perfect redeemed creation before the fall. He is going to restore all of that. Scripture tells us that creation cries out in futility because it is broken ...crying out for that reconciliation. Then the new earth, we get a physical redeemed earth. So, yes... a lack of pain, lack of suffering, lack of sorrow, lack of death... all those good things ...lack of eternal torment, and the presence and fellowship with God the Father **and** God's good creation for us to enjoy for eternity, to just experience and run and laugh and sing and play and work with purpose and without strife. That's an eternity I can get excited about. (Clapping) I don't want to float on a cloud. I want to go to the Hill Country. I want to hang out in a hammock and tube the river. (Laughter) I want to, maybe not climb mountains, but I guess I'll be in a redeemed body, so I'll climb mountains... (Laughter) ...and I'll exercise or whatever that's what God wants me to do... barbeque... hopefully, I don't know. There's a question mark for me on that one because and the "No Death" thing... so I don't know how that's going to work. I'm trusting God that there will be something as good or better than barbeque... Like Pastor Steve says, right? Brisket-flavored tofu or something... (Laughter) I don't know. I'm trusting the Lord for that.

But why would the most-creative personality in all of the universe... God the Creator Father... give us a glimpse of such amazing creation... just to take it away and say, "Here... here's some clouds to float on." He intends for us to physically inhabit a physical place. That's why Jesus, in physical form, was resurrected physically and still is in a physical body because all that it means to be human is going to be redeemed. And all that it means to be redeemed humanity will inhabit a physical new earth. That gets me fired up. That says, "Okay... Yeah... This world gives me glimpses of that, and the things that are good, I'm not leaving behind. They're coming back... Even better."

I want to finish this quote from John Calvin. It's much longer, this second portion. Remember we started with, "Wherever people imagine their highest good to be, there they are entangled and attached. Thus it follows that those who try to reach happiness in this world, renounce heaven. We know how carefully the philosophers examined the notion of the highest good. Indeed, this was the chief point to them and the one over which they sweated the most and quite rightly... for on this matter, the shaping of our entire lives depends, and all of our senses are focused there. If it is necessary that honor is esteemed the highest good, then ambition will thoroughly occupy human minds. If it is money, then avarice..." (which is extreme greed) "...will immediately seize the Kingdom. If pleasure, it must happen that people will degenerate into thoughtless indulgence. Indeed, by nature, we are all led to strive for the good, and thus it happens that false imaginations carry us off in all directions. But if we would be uprightly and earnestly persuaded that our happiness is in heaven, it would be easy to despise the world and trample on its blessings in order to climb up to heaven. For this reason, Paul, because he wants to lift up the faithful and encourage them in zeal for the heavenly life, offers Christ to them, in Whom alone one is able to seek genuine happiness. It is as if he would say, 'It is absurd and unworthy for those souls, whose treasure is in heaven, to sink down to earth.'" Now, that's kind of long, kind of wordy, and a little heady. Here's the layman's paraphrase, as

famously sung by Tony Bennett: "The best is yet to come, and won't that be fine? You think you've seen the sun, but you ain't seen it shine."

God's given us a glimpse of beautiful creation to enjoy. We have no idea how much better it's going to be... no idea. But we know that we're not leaving behind the good glimpse of this earth. We're building upon it. When Jesus said, "I'm going to make all things new," He didn't say, "I'm going to make all new things... I'm going to make all things new. I will redeem what you know. I will reconcile to Myself what you know to be good so that you can enjoy it forever, in the presence of God, and in fellowship with Him forever." I think to think otherwise, tramples on our hope... tramples on our joy... tramples on where we find fulfillment, and not just that... it hurts our witness. Right? We're trying to convince people that the Gospel is where it's at, and they say, "My life is good; I have good things, and you want me to give them up for an eternal worship service? I don't even go to church now, and you want me to give it up for that?" But, if in light of this reality, if we go to people and say, "Listen... You want to avoid eternal damnation for sure." That's not that hard of a sell. But what you want to really tell them is, "Listen... all the good things in this earth that you have tasted and seen will be enhanced, will be magnified, will be perfected for eternity. That's why Christianity is a better way. Not just because it's not hell but because it's a perfected, eternal creation in fellowship with the Father." That's something to be excited about. That's something to share with others. That's something that might encourage others to say, "Oh... That makes sense that a good Father wouldn't give me these good gifts just to rip them away and say, 'Here... here's your eternity without these good things.'" Our good Father, it's His great pleasure to give us the Kingdom.

So how does that affect our today? We don't just sit around waiting for that eternity to come. He has called us to live as citizens of the Kingdom... now. So we surrender our lives to what He has called us to... to glorify Him, to act as if these possessions... they're His for His purposes. Whatever resources, whatever relationships, whatever honor or significance, whatever awards or recognition I receive... it's open-handed. It's a blank check to God for whatever He wants to do because I trust that He has better plans for me than I have for myself. And I know that He will reward in heaven for eternity in ways that we can't even imagine, so we live in light of that now. Right? God's Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven. It's a prayer and a lifestyle now because the new creation. God's Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven, but we should live as if our lives reflect that truth. We believe that truth; we walk in that truth. That brings hope, contentment, lack of worry, lack of anxiety, and good stewardship with what we have... all shaped by an eternal mindset for the believer. That's what God has called us to. Let's pray.

"God, thank you so much for the truth of Your Word, the promises You have made us. God, You are faithful; we are not. You are sovereign; we are not. You are eternal and we don't grasp that just yet. God, help us to see what you've promised us. Help us to trust your character and your promises for us. God, may our view of eternity shape who we are now. God, may it shape how we treat others... may it shape how we manage our resources. God, I pray that our outlook on eternity, an eternal mindset, would be reflected in how we live with hope and live with joy and live with peace... how we live as citizens of Your Kingdom now, God... to point others to Your good character, Your good gifts, and Your plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. This eternity is for those who have trusted in Christ. That's why believers are called to live with joy and contentment, to fight anxiety, to fight worry, to fight covetousness and greed because we realize it's all from You... it's all for You and back to You. God, I pray if there's anyone here today who is not a believer, who has not trusted in Christ for salvation and maybe part of it was 'Yeah... what's so great about eternity, apart from the good things of this creation?' God, help them to see and to trust by faith that You have a better plan than this earth in its current state. You have a plan to redeem it, to

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reconcile it, to perfect it, and for us to inhabit it, God. May our lives be lives laid down in worship to You.
We ask these things in the Name of Christ. Amen."