

Roots
The Singer

Ben Franklin said that there are two things for which we can be certain in life: death and taxes. I'm pretty sure that we could add one more thing to that: worrying. Worrying is something, as we see in today's text, that has clearly been around for a long time. Some have said that we live in a time of great anxiety, but my guess is that almost every generation is a time of great anxiety. And not only has anxiety been prevalent for a long time it is also something that is prevalent across all generations. A couple weeks ago we talked about this as a staff and someone suggested we do a little research to see if that's true here at ZPC. And so last Sunday we asked several ZPCers and I invite you to hear what they said. (Show video)

Clearly worrying is a remarkably difficult thing that we all wrestle with. While we'd like to heed Jesus' words, the truth is it's just not easy. We know, of course, that it's so much better for us when we are able to stop worrying. Scientists have told us for quite some time that worrying is bad for our health. Most of us are logical enough that we know in our heads that worrying isn't going to change things and yet that doesn't stop us from doing so. And as Christians we can certainly appreciate the fact that worrying reveals in many ways our lack of dependence on God.

But as I thought about worry and my own life this week, I was reminded that there's something else that worrying does which is that it shuts us down. I can think of a few times in my life when I have been paralyzed by worry. Perhaps it was a health scare and so I couldn't think of the future because I figured well, I won't be around anyway so who cares. Or when I was getting close to being in between jobs and I began to worry so much that it turned into assuming that no job was forthcoming and that I'd might as well just take the family and move in with mom. It could, of course, be lots of things. Relationships, money, monsters (!), almost anything can shut us down when we begin to worry over it.

Another way to say that is that worrying keeps us from seeing things in the right manner; it skews our vision. Which is interesting to think about in light of what Jesus says in our passage just before he talks about worrying. Which is that the eye is the lamp of the body and if it's healthy the whole body will be full of light and if it isn't then it will be full of darkness. Worry does not allow us to see things the way that God sees them. It keeps us from seeing possibilities and hope. Of course, Jesus also points out that not just worry, but also focusing on things like money or security hinders our ability to see things in light of heaven. A focus on money, in other words, shuts down our ability to see opportunities that we have to invest in God's kingdom. A focus on worry keeps us from imagining the world as God sees it and wants us to see it. But then, of course, the opposite of that is also true. What I mean is that eyes that live in the light, that are not restricted by worry or concerns,

about money or security, can begin seeing possibilities for kingdom living, for investing in heaven, almost anywhere.

You see, I have a theory that when it comes to talking about what Jesus says about storing up treasures in heaven we have a pretty limited imagination. We tend to restrict it to things like going to worship or studying your Bible or going on a mission trip. To be sure there is nothing wrong with those things, in fact they are quite vital to our faith. So, don't stop coming to worship or reading your Bible or going on mission trips. My point is that we tend to focus on the explicit and the extraordinary, and we don't *see* the possibilities of kingdom work, of celebrating God, of heavenly treasure building, that is all around us each and every day.

And yet this is exactly what we see Jesus doing in this very passage. As he teaches the disciples and others, he knows that like us they are a people who are often consumed by money or worry and what does he do? He looks around and he sees...a bird. An ordinary, run-of-the-mill, nothing special bird. "*Look*" he says with intensity, "at the birds that are around you and remember that if God takes care of them he will take care of you." In other words, look at this absolutely ordinary thing and see what it teaches you about the kingdom of God, about the generosity and care of God. We have no reason to suspect that he's looking at some rare or exotic bird, just a typical bird and yet there's something about the kingdom that Jesus sees in it and that he wants us to see in it.

Or later as he looks around at the people who are surrounding him, he sees a lily and so he quickly says, "*See*" (remember the eyes) the lilies of the field. In other words look around you right now and what do you see that tells you something about how God loves you, about how God loves beauty, about who God is? Again, this isn't "Hey, let's go to the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls and see the beauty of God," no it's look at these absolutely normal things and see even in them, what it has to teach us, to show us, within the context of God's kingdom. Seeing like that takes greater imagination than we are usually willing to have. We're bogged down by our stale imaginations or worries or fears or we're just lazy and so we restrict our eyes to what is doable or explicit or easy or "churchy" rather than allowing the imagination of how God can use things around us, about how God can use *us* to further his kingdom, to invest in heavenly things. And I think that inability to see things imaginatively severely restricts what God can do and what God wants to do in order to store treasure in heaven.

So here's what I mean. Look at the Jeremiah House. It would have been easy for us to have seen this house as a very typical, brown, boring house. But someone (not a pastor or ZPC staffer mind you) looked at that house and began to imagine what else it could be. And so he talked to some other ZPCers about it and before you know it their kingdom imagination began to flourish. Yeah, they thought, we could use this as a way to help further God's kingdom by helping bring healing to those who are wrestling with addiction and to help them move forward in their faith and in their lives. (Not to mention what we at ZPC have to learn from them).

Then we opened it up to others and they started to allow their own Kingdom imagination to grow. If the kingdom of God is one which is hospitable and welcoming and one, to be sure, that thinks beauty is important (remember how Jesus talked about the beauty of the bird God created) well then perhaps we could paint and decorate and clean in order to make this ordinary, brown house into something that was much more than it once was. In other words, they began investing in the kingdom, storing treasure in heaven. Then others began to use their kingdom eyes and said, "Why don't we make quilts for these guys" and then someone offered flooring and paint and eventually a new garage door.

I mean, what happened?! Someone began to see differently and then someone else decided to jump onto that vision and then someone else and someone else until the kingdom of God began to snowball into something greater and greater. We began to invest more and more in heavenly things, if you will. But that wouldn't have happened had we simply not been able to see beyond what was right in front of us. It wouldn't have happened had we decided to just sell the house for money so we could use it on ourselves. It wouldn't have happened had we been worried about everything bad that could happen tomorrow. It certainly doesn't mean that things will always be perfect, by no means. But it does mean that when we allow our eyes to imagine what God might be doing, what God could do, then we begin to invest in the kingdom, in heavenly things, in ways we had never thought of.

And of course, this is not just what happens here. One of the things I have been incredibly impressed by is just how creative and entrepreneurial and energetic this ZPC congregation is. That gives me great excitement about what is possible in this community for Jesus when we catch a kingdom vision. But I also want to be clear that it means that *you*, as individuals, have remarkable opportunities in whatever it is you do, whatever vocation you have, when you begin to see what you do in the context of kingdom living. In other words, when you see that your job is not just a job, but as a calling to further God's kingdom.

When attorneys begin to see what they are doing as trying to bring justice to this world then God's kingdom is furthered and they are investing in heaven. When those of you who are teachers see what you're doing as educating, but also as welcoming the children as Jesus welcomed them, then you are investing in heavenly treasure. When our doctors see themselves as not just fixing people or making them feel better, but as conduits of healing, then you are helping to bring wholeness and shalom to others. You are looking at your patients just as Jesus looked at those who came to him to heal their disease and cure their sick. And what about those of you who specialize in beauty? Do you who are architects or hairdressers or landscapers see yourselves as simply paying the bills or do you see your work as celebrating the beauty of God's creation and the beauty of the Creator. If you do, then you are seeing your call in light of the kingdom context. Or what about our businessmen and women? Can you tell by the way you sell or build or create that you are looking

at people and things like a steward who does not own them but who longs to see them flourish and thrive?

Or what about our moms or dads who stay at home? Several months ago a mom from MOPS asked what it's like to live in the kingdom and invest in heavenly treasure as someone who feels like she's basically just wiping behinds and runny noses. Then this week I ran across a Biblical Scholar who said that while brushing one's children's hair may seem to pale in comparison with doing something monumental for Christ that it may be the one of few opportunities you have that day to simply touch your children, to allow them to physically feel the love that you have for them. As he points out there is something about the kingdom about loving them in this way that invests in something much larger than simply untangled hair.

I don't know what your vocation is, but I promise you that if you are called to it then there are ways in which what you are doing can be investing in heaven, if you have a kingdom imagination. Now hear me, what I'm talking about this morning is not simply how to make yourself feel like everything you do is sanctioned by God, so I'll just keep making money and handling cases and teaching kids, building buildings and brushing hair. I'll just keep doing what I've always been doing and call it good. No, what I'm talking about is beginning to ask yourselves whether, when you are doing these things you are seeing them as ways to be investing in God's kingdom. Because when you do you will begin to see opportunities that you will not have seen before.

Because just imagine what might happen if all of us began doing that at our own places of work? Imagine how the kingdom of God might start popping up all around our community if we started seeing ordinary things and people and events within the context of kingdom work of investing in heaven. I am convinced that if we started seeing that happen then the work of ZPC would explode in ways beyond our imagination, beyond what any particular program we could ever come up with. And just like we stand here today and celebrate how we've seen God work in what's going on in the Jeremiah House we will be able to celebrate the abundant ways in which you all have seen God turned ordinary things into kingdom shaping ways.

And well, if you think about it, all that celebrating of how we've seen God work, well, it might just make it more difficult for us to worry. I mean, it's kind of hard when are seeing how God is using ordinary things like birds and lilies and houses and court cases and building buildings and brushing hair to invest in heaven, well, it's kind of hard to not think that God might just be able to take care of us after all. Surely, a God who can work through us in these kinds of ways is a God who can take care of us no matter what situation we find ourselves in. Perhaps the answer is not to try and just stop worrying, but is simply to start seeing all the kingdom possibilities that around us. That, it seems to me, is a whole lot better use of our time our energy and our imaginations. May it be so. Amen.

