

# 03

## *God the Birdfeeder*

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### **WHAT'S THE SAME | ALL ARE FED**



Jesus gets bold in his bird talk this week.

What's similar between these two passages is that Jesus' entire train of thought follows this pattern:

1. Birds don't sow and reap.
2. Oh, and they don't store up anything either.
3. Yet, they are always fed.
4. And you are worth so much more than birds.

When we read this week's passages in modern day, we take it at face value: God meets our needs. It's sweet and simple. Yes, he does. Amen.

But we may miss the magnitude of his message if we don't wrap it in historical context. At this time in history, the Pharisees—the religious all-stars and social elite—equated wealth with God's blessing.<sup>1</sup> Money was a culturally acceptable way to know if you were doing all the right things or not. A storeroom or a barn would be a monetary monument to how good

God had been to his good kid.

Jesus makes it clear that God gives freely to the unclean trash bird that doesn't have a barn to store stuff in. He blows up their "blessing-is-only-money" theory by painting God as this massive bird feeder.

It would've rattled religion out of their moneybags a bit. God is not just a bird feeder for the pretty, pious, and on-point kids: he is a Birdfeeder for all. This consideration of God's gracious and generous nature would've been unexpected for the original audience who understood wealth and abundance to be the language of God's acceptance.

It would have also been a very odd way for the disciples and the crowds to understand God. Prior to Jesus coming to earth, God wasn't an all-access type of God. He was a God of the temple, which was an enormous and intricate structure that was designed in a very specific way to limit and restrict access to God's presence for only those who were qualified.

Jesus is setting the stage for when he will eventually tear down the temple through his crucifixion and rebuild a "bird feeder" style church when he is resurrected (John 2:19). The raven we are told to notice is a rite of passage. It is a symbol that means you're in and so am I.

**THE RAVEN IS A RITE OF PASSAGE.** But here's how Jesus proves himself trustworthy on this topic—he was the perfect kid. He was without sin and constantly advocating for the sinners.

Jesus wasn't some rebellious teenager who was trying to deconstruct the entire religious system so he could smoke cigarettes on the temple steps or graffiti the Eastern Gate. He wasn't trying to dumb down strict rules so he could get away with doing whatever he wanted. In fact, Jesus loved the law and the temple so much, he felt more at home there than in his own hometown (Luke 2:41-52).

Instead, Jesus came to fulfill the Birdfeeder's blueprint for redeeming the raven.

#### **WHAT'S DIFFERENT | SOW & REAP**

The main difference between our verses this week is that Matthew says "consider the birds of the air" instead of Luke's "consider the ravens".

Luke, as the physician he was, remained diligent about being detail oriented.

He took inventory of the kind of bird Jesus asked us to consider because it represented something extraordinary to him. The raven represented Luke himself.

Luke is quite possibly the only Gentile author in all of the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> All other authors were of Jewish descent. He saw and understood the scandalous grace he had been given as a trash bird who became a child of God. There was no way the raven was going unmentioned in his book. He was playing his part in tearing down the temple, in noticing the unnoticed.

The other difference implied is that we are different than birds. Birds don't sow or reap. Only humans do.

What does it mean to sow and reap?

It would have been typical farming language to the original audience, but not to us. To sow and reap requires intense planning and strict, precise follow-through. It requires immense knowledge of weather patterns and harvesting times. It involves paying attention to the fruit and the soil. It means being present to protect, nourish, and cultivate in order to pull off a well-planned, long-term goal.

In Isaiah 30:23 we read, "He will give you rain for the seed which you will sow in the ground, and bread from the yield of the ground, and it will be rich and plenteous." God calls us to establish, plant, cultivate, and work. But not alone—with the God who gives freely to all.

**GOD CALLS US TO ESTABLISH, PLANT, CULTIVATE, AND WORK.** When Jesus says we aren't like birds, he is pointing out that birds do not have the privilege of partnering with God in the sowing and reaping. They are simply takers. We were made to be co-creators.

#### **WHAT THAT MEANS | AN EMPTY BARN**

Ultimately, Jesus ends this thought by wanting us to know that we are more valuable than birds. Again. He loves using this metaphor; he already used it once with the sparrows.

I'll be honest, it feels a little, well, small.

I wouldn't go up to my husband and say, "Babe, you are worth so much more to me than a bunch of cockatoos." But if Jesus is trying to tell us something about our core value to God, we should be humble enough to put our bird

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prejudices aside and lean in.

Because we aren't actually being compared to birds. Jesus is asking us why we worry about storing up what we cannot keep. He is asking us why we put more value on what we temporarily have, instead of the eternal value God has given us.

In Luke, immediately before our teaching on anxiety, Jesus told the Parable of the Rich Fool. It is a story about a rich farmer and his desire to tear down smaller barns and build bigger ones. He is used as an example of someone who "lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God." And in Matthew, Jesus doesn't tell a prologue parable at all, he just sums it up, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate one or love the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Jesus is pointing out the emptiness there is in filling up barns. We cannot buy off our own spiritual bankruptcy. Wealth is not always a sign of God's blessing. We will not satisfy our spiritual need with a big ol' barn of nothing. We are ravens remember? And we need the massive bird feeder of God's word to stave off scavenging.

**WEALTH IS NOT ALWAYS A SIGN OF GOD'S BLESSING.** In these verses, Jesus demolishes the need for "storehouses" and emphasizes the need for God. He snaps his fingers in front of our faces and says, "you are worried about stuff. And it's not adding any value to your life at all."

The truth is that Jesus is never talking about more religious activity.

Never.

Ever.

Even when Jesus talks about our stuff, our barns, and our money, he's always talking about a more aligned heart attitude with the will of his Father. This is because Jesus wants us to know that his Dad's will, in regards to our stuff, is always for the good of his kids. It isn't the stuff that tells us if we matter, it's the Creator of the matter that says we matter.

The truth is, a lot of us have stuff. We might even need a storeroom. We might even be tearing down smaller barns to build bigger ones. And that's fine, as long as God is doing it with you. As long as you aren't the sole foreman for your future.

Jesus is gifting us with an exchange program essential to our freedom from worry and anxiety. It involves a replacement of security with sowing. It requires an exchange of hoarding for reaping. It asks us to abandon our appetite for bigger barns in reliance on the Birdfeeder.

And yes, it also means you are worth more than many, many cockatoos.



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## DISCUSS

God is painted as a massive bird feeder in this passage. Why do you think his “feeding” nature is essential to our freedom from anxiety and worry?

Do you view being in God’s presence more like a temple that requires specific things of you, or do you come to him freely as the bird feeder Jesus says he is?

What is in your barn? What do you value most and try to store up in your life?

Do you have a one, five, or ten-year plan? Have you asked God what his plan might be as well?



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## READ & REFLECT

Read The Parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:13-21. What did the crowd member ask Jesus in verse 13?

What does that tell you about the heart of the crowds who followed Jesus?

What does Jesus say life does not consist of in verse 15?

What did the rich man want to store in his barns in verse 18? What does he think his “goods and grains” enable his soul to have in verse 19?

What does God say of the soul in verse 20?

What does verse 21 say the trade-off is when we choose to “lay up treasure” for ourselves?

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## PEACE PRACTICE | CONSIDER THE RAVEN

Spend some time this week considering the birds. Sit by a window, go to a park, or watch the wildly underrated film, *The Big Year*. Either way, get some face time with the very thing Jesus is telling us to consider. Have a journal and write down what you notice about their mannerisms and behavior. Come ready to share next week.





# *First Look*

## **Luke 12:25-26**

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?

# *Second Look*

## **Matthew 6:27**

And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?