

Jesus Speaks to Our Fears

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 12 verses 22 to 34 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?

Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? Consider how the wild flowers grow. You do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown in the fire, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith? And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink.

Do not worry about them. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no moth comes near and no moth destroys.

[1 : 32] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. So again, I'm very grateful to Duncan and to Anne for agreeing to help us out.

Now, for a few minutes, perhaps, we can turn our attention to those words that we've heard from both Anne and Duncan, from Jesus in Luke chapter 12, verse 32, to recognise how Jesus speaks to our fears.

Let me read them one more time. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Now, you may or you may not know that do not fear is the most frequent command in the Bible.

But it's really important for us to know how to hear those words. And we understand in conversation that our tone matters and it reveals what lies under our words.

Jesus in chapter 12 is teaching his followers and he knows his followers. He knows their anxieties. He knows their fears. In Luke chapter 12, he knows that they are fearful of death, especially death as martyrs for trusting in Jesus.

[2 : 50] He knows that they are fearful about facing public shame. He knows that they have fears about their physical needs. So when Jesus says, do not fear, what tone is he taking?

This is not Jesus as drill sergeant in an army, shouting, rebuking, saying, Christians, show no weakness. No.

This is like a parent to a young child. I know it's dark. I know it's scary. But I'm here with you.

Don't be afraid. Jesus wants to calm fears by reminding his followers, by reminding us, I am here.

I will help. I will be with you. Fear is natural. For the disciples, it was natural that they would want to preserve their lives and maintain their honour and reputation and to provide for their physical needs.

[4 : 00] For us, it is natural that we would have anxiety about financial security, about our jobs, about physical health and well-being for ourselves and the people that we care about.

It is natural that we would have anxiety to be returned to a place where we can enjoy relationships again, face to face. It's natural that we should have fears.

But Jesus knows that there is a danger, that fear can lead us to doubt. Fear can lead us towards unbelief.

Fear is not sin, but fear can lead us towards sin if we respond in the wrong way. In Luke chapter 12 and verse 32, Jesus is responding to what perhaps might be the greatest of all fears, even for the people of God.

Is God really good? Is God really kind? Can I trust God in the present and with my future?

[5 : 19] Maybe you have asked that question during this crisis or in past experiences. Maybe there is someone among your family or your friends who's wrestling with that question right now.

Well, let's hear Jesus' loving response to his followers as he looks to calm their fears and as he calls us to know and to trust our good and gracious God.

Three things to say about who our God is in the middle of fears. First of all, do not fear.

God is your shepherd. What is the church? According to the words of Jesus, the church is God's little flock. Little, which maybe speaks to us of our feelings small and weak and vulnerable, that we're prone to wander.

We're easily frightened. We feel little. But little also speaks of God's affectionate care. It's a title of affection. Colin Buchanan, who writes children's songs, we've been tuning in to his family worship time.

[6 : 40] He has a song about being strong and courageous because God holds his little ones safe. We are God's little flock. And so Jesus is saying, remember, God is your shepherd.

If you're trusting in Jesus, Psalm 23 is your song. You have in God a shepherd who provides for you all that you need, all that's for your good.

The one who gives rest to your body, to your mind, to your soul. The God who leads. Leads even in the darkness. The God who guides and protects, who walks with us, even through the valley, the shadow of death.

And many of us feel like that's where we are right now. He is the God who causes rejoicing. He is the God who supplies his goodness and love all of our days. Jesus in Luke 12 has been reminding the disciples, look around.

Notice in your fears that God cares for all of creation. To quote another old hymn, his eye is on the sparrow. But Jesus is saying, how much more does God delight to care for you as his little flock?

[7 : 50] And on top of that, remember, follower of Jesus, God has sent Jesus to be your good shepherd.

Remember John chapter 10. Jesus, the one who comes to lay down his life for his flock. The one who knows his sheep. The one who calls them by name and they listen to him.

The one who seeks to call others into his flock. Do not fear. God is your shepherd.

And remember, there are no little people. There are no little sheep. There is nobody who is unimportant to our all-powerful, altogether good shepherd.

So come to him in your fears. And have him provide. Do not fear, secondly, according to Jesus, because God is your father.

[8 : 52] So what is the church then? The church is God's family, God's children. In our community groups, we've started reading in John's Gospel. And in John chapter 1, we discover that Jesus came to call those who would believe in him and give them the right to become children of God.

To have the right to call God our father. And what kind of father is God? Well, Jesus, teaching the crowds and teaching his disciples in chapter 11 and verse 13 of Luke, reminds us that God is the perfectly good, the perfectly generous father.

And he cares for his family. In a family, it should always be the case that the kids have the easiest job.

Because children don't need to make decisions. Not significant decisions, anyway. They don't need to bear the responsibilities of guiding the family. Of trying to navigate a family and a household through a crisis.

Kids are shielded. We have conversations out of their earshot to protect them from carrying on their little shoulders more than they can bear. We say to them, you do not need to worry about this.

[10 : 08] This is something for your parents to deal with. What about in God's family? Think about that image for a moment. In God's family, who is our father? He is the eternal, the unchanging, the all-wise, the perfectly holy God.

And he announces to us in Romans chapter 8 that he is working all things together for the good of those who love him. He has given us Jesus. He will certainly give us all good things that we need.

So we are not invited to know everything. We're not invited to know why these circumstances have come on us. We're not invited to know when the lockdown will lift.

But we are invited to trust. To trust in our good, good father. Last thing to notice from this verse.

Do not fear. God is your king. What is the church? The church are heirs to God's kingdom. God's people, those who are trusting in Jesus, we're a spiritual royalty.

[11 : 19] Notice in this passage what delights God. Your father has been pleased. He is delighted to give his church the kingdom.

Here is God's generous grace on display. He's not selling the kingdom. Here's the price you need to pay in order to get in. He's not rewarding the kingdom. Here is the level of obedience you need to attain before you can be accepted.

No, he gives generously out of his grace to draw us to himself. God is pleased to give.

God has been pleased to give his one and only son to come as our servant king. The one who would live that life of perfect love and obedience that we fail to live.

Jesus, who then gives himself as the sacrifice for the sin of his people to atone for sin, to wash us clean from sin, to secure our forgiveness and eternal life and peace with God and an eternal inheritance that can never be taken from us.

[12 : 38] So when we ask the question, is God good? Is God kind? Can I trust God? We need to ask and answer that at the foot of the cross.

We need to see the love of God in Jesus, in the giving of Jesus, in the salvation that's secured through Jesus. In the future, hope that it's secured through Jesus so that we can say, yes, God is good.

Yes, God is kind. Yes. In the middle of this crisis, in the middle of my fears and my tears, I can trust him. Yes, because God is pleased to give to his little flock his kingdom.

Our shepherd king is always working on our behalf, ruling over all things to bring final salvation, to bring ultimate glory and joy to his people.

Jesus' answer to your fears and mine is to invite us to raise our eyes, to see our God, to trust his character, to trust his promise and to trust in the salvation that Jesus came to bring.

[13 : 56] Amen.