

Luke 12:32 – 34

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 May 2021

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 0 0] Well, I want to welcome you back to our ongoing series on Luke chapter 12. We're spending so much time on this one chapter because thousands of people were listening to Jesus in verse 1, if you remember.

And if that many people were listening, it must be worth all of us hearing. Well, it is because Jesus' teaching here tells us how to flourish with our relationship in God, how to flourish when you are faced with different challenges, false teaching from religious leaders, personal fears, anxieties, social pressures, persecution, losing jobs, and even the temptations of having wealth.

And so a theme that runs all through this chapter is that Jesus is deeply concerned about your heart. Are you close to God in your heart?

Or are you wandering far from him? Has he perhaps become peripheral in your life? Or are you perhaps even ashamed of him?

These are all things that Jesus brings up. And they are key questions as to whether we flourish or not. They are a gift to us because Jesus' words vitalize our faith in him.

[1 : 2 6] They call us to trust God with all of our lives. Trust that he is the giver of all that is good and needful for your body and your mind and your soul.

So throughout Luke 12, we find in Jesus the extravagant, unimaginable generosity of God. And it's because especially this is all part of a journey of Jesus going to Jerusalem to give his life for us and for our salvation.

So that in a world that's filled with fear because of sickness, because of violence, and amid our own personal fears this morning, God is utterly generous.

This is the constant. Jesus reveals that the Christian life of flourishing is all about reflecting that generosity. In all that we say, in all that we do, the vital Christian life is a generous life.

It is a thankful life lived out as we serve and give of yourself because of that great gift of Jesus. He has given you the kingdom.

[2 : 4 2] Now, one of the most successful popular courses in Yale University's 300 plus years of existence is a recent one called the psychology and the good life.

And this is also known as the happiness class. Now, two years ago, it was made public online. And hundreds of thousands of people took that course.

It was a 10-week course. It was titled The Science of Well-Being. It's a course about happiness and flourishing. Now, a year ago, when COVID hit, that popularity skyrocketed.

So in the first year since COVID, enrollment has been over 3 million. And it's because people are wanting to discover how they can flourish in the midst of a pandemic, in the midst of a very anxious time.

Now, there's nothing earth-shattering about this course. It includes getting enough sleep, taking times of quiet to meditate in some way, being aware of what's in your heart, cultivating thankfulness in a gratitude journal, and a giving attitude that you live out in random acts of kindness.

- [4 : 01] You see, it's all about a generous, thankful life. And some have felt that this course has been life-changing for them. The New York Times interview that I read about this, they interviewed a Christian, interestingly.
- And he said, for him, it was not revolutionary to take this course. But it confirmed what he knew to be true as a Christian. Well, that's because the good and generous life, the flourishing life, is found in Luke 12, 32 through 34.
- But Jesus goes much further, of course, than the happiness course at Yale University. Because he goes on to say who we are thankful to.
- Who is the source of our well-being? Whose word do we meditate on for real life? And why we live a life of generosity and kindness?
- It is a deep meaning for us. So it's God's loving generosity and our giving response that makes up the good life in these verses.
- [5 : 10] And they can be remembered in three parts. And they're rhyming. So verse 32 is about God's pleasure in giving us the kingdom. Verse 33 is about our treasure in the kingdom.
- And verse 34 is about heaven's measure of our hearts. How heaven reveals and shapes our hearts. Now, you can blame or thank David Short for two out of those three rhymes.
- But it helps us for going into this passage. Let's start with God's pleasure. Jesus gives the reason for the generous life in verse 32.
- He says this. He says, Fear not, little flock, for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. So here's the foundation of the good life.
- Good pleasure is the same word that God the Father uses when Jesus was baptized. Do you remember what he said? He said, This is my beloved son in whom I take great pleasure, in whom I am well pleased.
- [6 : 18] It's the same word. The same delight that God the Father has in the son is the delight that he has in giving you his kingdom.
- This is precious, deep love for us. It is the gift of all gifts brought about by the death of God's son, Jesus, for us.
- It is the extravagant gift of God who dearly loves us. So what is that kingdom that he is so pleased to give to us?
- What is it? Well, on this Ascension Sunday, we celebrate the giving of that kingdom. You see, Jesus ascended to the right hand of God the Father, which means that God has made him Lord and King over all things.
- And with that authority, he brings you and me into the very presence of God. It is a free gift that is completely yours as you place your trust in Jesus Christ.
- [7 : 24] Now, many of you would have heard David's sermon on Thursday. Jesus' Ascension means that flesh and blood has come into heaven for the first time in Jesus, into God's glorious presence.
- And what Jesus is doing there is he is leading a greater exodus than the one from Egypt, an exodus of people freed from not Egyptians but from sin.
- You and I come into the same glorious presence that Jesus has to experience God's gracious rule. This is what Ascension means.
- Jesus brings us into the throne room of God. This is God's kingdom. It is the good life. It is the place of blessing in Jesus.
- He adopts us forever as his sons and his daughters by the forgiveness of our sins. And he gives us his Holy Spirit to live the joyful new life of serving him and knowing him forever.

[8 : 31] He is our gracious ruler and our king. Now, the hard part of this is trusting God for his gift. That's the challenge.

Jesus knew his disciples very, very well. He knew that they would be filled with fear of every kind. You know, fear because they're a very small group.

Fear because they have many enemies. Fear because they would face real hardships. And fears because they would feel weak and unworthy of carrying Jesus' ministry.

What are your hearts like this morning? Are those fears of the disciples fears that you experience as well? Do you feel the anxiety for your well-being?

Fear that what is bad in the world is winning out. Fear of a sense of unworthiness. Well, I love what Jesus says here. He says, fear not, little flock.

[9 : 33] Isn't that something? He calls them a little flock. It means that, yes, they are insignificant in the world's eyes. Yes, they are vulnerable.

Sincere followers of Jesus are always the small minority. And that's true in our part of the world. But the words little flock are deeply strengthening as well to these disciples.

They mean that Jesus is their shepherd. And he is yours as well. The exalted Jesus ascended into heaven is the shepherd who knows his sheep intimately.

And calls each of them by name. This is what it means to be in God's kingdom. Jesus, the glorious ruler, calls you by name amidst all the fears that you experience.

He is your good shepherd. Jesus says his sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and he leads them out. You see, it gives God a pleasure beyond anything we can imagine to bring us into this kingdom to make Jesus our shepherd.

[10 : 47] This is the depth of his love for us. It is the foundation of the good life, the flourishing life. Now, how are we to respond to God's pleasure in giving us his kingdom?

Well, very simply, verse 33 says, treasure that kingdom. Treasure Jesus and his eternal life so much that your whole life reflects God's generosity to you.

It is a life of thanksgiving. Jesus says something really shocking here in verse 33. He says, sell your possessions. Give to the needy. Provide for yourself money bags that do not grow old with a treasure in the heavens that do not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

You see, he's saying, give up things that you own for the sake of those who have none. Now, what does that mean for us?

We don't want to read this legalistically, nor do we want to water things down and miss the strong call that this verse has on your life. Jesus doesn't say sell all that you have.

[11 : 59] Jesus' friends and disciples had homes that they did not sell. Jesus is not advocating going into poverty so that you become dependent on other people.

In fact, there was only one person in Jesus' ministry that Jesus said, sell everything. Do you remember who he was? Well, I heard somebody say, rich young ruler.

And you're right. Luke 18, the rich young ruler asked Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Well, Jesus said, keep all the commandments.

And this guy, very sincerely, I think, said, I've done all those things since I was a boy. And when Jesus heard this, he said to them, you still lack one thing.

Sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me. Now, when he heard this, he became very sad because he was very wealthy.

[13 : 03] You see, earthly treasure had such a grip on him that he could not grab hold of the treasure in heaven. He was a rich young ruler, but he was unsuccessful in God's eyes.

He could not open his hands to receive the money bags that do not grow old and fall apart. These money bags that Jesus is offering to you and I today.

And that's the force of Jesus teaching for us. There is a danger for God's people who have possessions. There's a danger for us. Do not let the pursuit of possessions and wealth derail you from receiving the kingdom that God gives you in his great pleasure.

Instead, Jesus says, live the generous life, completely thankful to God, that you are precious to him. Be open-handed with your possessions and open-hearted to those who are in need.

Jesus is saying, give to people that cannot give back to you in any way. Why? Because that is the grace reflected that is God's grace to you.

[14 : 21] His extravagant generosity to you being lived out. And I think Jesus is very strong in saying this because it is a sign of a much deeper generosity that he's calling you to.

C.S. Lewis wrote a great book called Mere Christianity. And I know that some of you have read it. It's actually a series of broadcast radio talks on the BBC during the darkest days of World War II in the UK.

Time of great crisis, of course. And if you haven't read it, I highly recommend that you put it on your summer reading list. There's a great chapter right near the end called Is Christianity Hard or Easy?

And he writes there these words. He says, Christ says, give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work.

I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there.

[15 : 30] I want to have the whole tree down. Hand over the natural self. All the desires which you think are innocent, as well as the ones you think wicked.

The whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself. My own will shall become yours.

Isn't that amazing? That is what Jesus is calling us to in verse 33. Here he is showing us treasure beyond value. And as we give Jesus all of ourself, Jesus gives himself.

His will becomes our will. That is the treasure of heaven. There we will see Jesus as he is and we will be like him. That is our treasure.

Heaven will be all about God's goodness and his love constantly washing over us. And it will be the joy of giving ourselves in a life of worship to God.

[16 : 31] Giving ourselves to him, but also to our brothers and sisters who are there. It is a life of rejoicing that we are God's precious, beloved, well-pleased son or daughter.

And we invest in that life now, Jesus says, as we are generous not only to the financially poor, but to the relationally destitute. And to the spiritually poor who do not know the generosity of God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, you know, if you want to be great in the kingdom of God that has been given to you now, become the servant of all. For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

There is our treasure. And the greatness that Jesus is talking about has nothing to do with rising to the top of your profession or becoming wealthy or influential.

The most truly successful people that I know are the people that take opportunities they can to be generous to those in need.

[17 : 47] Simply because they know they have been given the kingdom of God in God's pleasure. They take every opportunity to give for the sake of that kingdom.

But you see, Jesus has revealed God's pleasure to us in giving us gifts. He has called us to seek his treasure with generous lives to be truly successful and flourishing.

And then as we leave these few verses, Jesus measures our hearts in these few words. And I think these are words for you to memorize or put up on your fridge or on your screensaver.

Jesus says this, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. That is a heart check. It's a verse to meditate on.

It's like a spiritual CT scan, taking pictures of your heart to measure its spiritual health. Is your heart alive to Jesus or is it becoming somewhat cold and distant and hard?

[18 : 54] The measure that Jesus uses is that question, what do you treasure in your heart above all things? I remember a bishop back when I was in post-ordination training saying that the holiest book that you have is your checkbook.

Now, obviously, that was a long time ago. I don't think we use those anymore. Maybe our holiest book is our MacBook. But what that does is it reflects what you put great value in.

What is your great motivation? Is it heaven where you will see Jesus? Is your treasure to hear God's praise when you see him face to face? Did you take the opportunity to be generous, to reflect my grace?

As you live for that treasure in your life of giving yourselves to others for the sake of Jesus, your heart will change. It will be shaped by Jesus and his generosity.

That is his promise here. So on this Ascension Day, what Jesus is doing is he is lifting our hearts to heaven where he rules.

[20 : 05] And, you know, we need to help each other with that. In our communion service, every time we meet together, we say to one another, lift up your hearts. And we respond.

We lift them up unto the Lord. We help each other to do that. And Paul helps us as well in Colossians 3. And I'm going to close with this verse.

He says this, Since then you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you have died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. It is God's great pleasure to give you the kingdom.

You are hidden with the ascended Christ in God. May God the Holy Spirit strengthen your heart to reflect Jesus and his generosity as you live the giving life, the good life, the flourishing life to his glory.

[21 : 13] Amen. Amen.