

New Year's Day Sermon

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Date: 01 January 2020

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[0 : 01] Let's turn again just a little to the chapter we read in Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 12. I'm reading at verse 32. Luke 12, verse 32.

Fear not, little flock, for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. On Sunday morning we were looking at this whole section that we read there about where Jesus on the one hand is telling us not to be anxious, and on the other hand he's also telling us that we must be ready and prepared.

The word anxious has the idea of being torn apart, and the word worry comes from the idea of being strangled.

So when you put these two ideas, two concepts together, you can see how debilitating and how difficult a thing, if we're riddled with anxiety, it's something that strangles us and tears us apart.

Of course there's bound to be anxiety at different times in this world. Jesus doesn't say to us never to be anxious about anything at all, but not to be crippled by anxiety and have a wrong anxiety in life.

[1 : 23] Because far too often we can begin to worry about things needlessly, and part of that comes about because of our focus being wrong, that we're not looking to the Lord in the right way.

And very often if the Lord is our focus, it gives us a greater balance, a greater worldview. Now, don't get me wrong, I know that there are some people, and anxiety is a part of their life, and it's a natural thing.

It can often be a medical condition. We're not talking about these sort of things. But we're talking about just in the normal course of life that so often we needlessly worry.

So often we are needlessly anxious over things that we shouldn't be. And Jesus says that sometimes that comes about because of our lack of faith, that we're simply not trusting the Lord in the way that we should.

And I'm sure there are many times as we look back over our own lives, because we've seen times that we're saying, why on earth was I worrying? Why? And if we do an analysis of ourselves, so often we find it is because our faith is suspect.

[2 : 39] And so the Lord tells us that we aren't to be anxious, and He reminds us that He cares far more about us than ever we realize. And that the Lord who enables the ravens, these scavenging birds, to get food, and who clothes the grass that is in the field today, and will be cast into the oven, is He not going to clothe you?

Is He not going to look after you? And so we find that Jesus, in this passage, His arguments, as it were, highlighting God's care for us, comes from the lesser to the greater, and from the greater to the lesser.

And He's showing how God really has an interest in us all the time. And so it's important for us, as we journey through life, and particularly at the beginning of another year, that we say, Lord, please help me to have a correct focus upon you.

Because we do get crowded in by so many things in life, that are liable to distract us, and to concern us, and cause that worry which we said strangles, and tears us apart.

But side by side with that, Jesus also shows that our focus should be on Him, not just simply as an antidote, towards worry and anxiety, but in the light of the fact that He's coming again.

[4 : 03] And that He's going to come unexpectedly, and He's going to come suddenly. We don't know when Jesus is going to come, but He's going to come very soon.

And this is the whole idea that He has this, that He's going to come at a time when we're not looking for Him. In such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man comes.

That's what He has said in several occasions. And so, Jesus shows how important it is that we are like servants who are waiting for the Master to come back from the wedding and be ready to open the door.

Using the illustrations, not original in any way, on Sunday, and kind of maybe in more modern day terms, where a babysitter is looking after a baby, the parents are out, and when the parents come back, what they expect is that the house will be in order and that the baby will be safe and sound.

And that's how we would expect the picture to be. And it would be awful if the babysitters decided, while the parents were out, to throw a party and invite people.

[5 : 18] And so when all of a sudden, the parents come back and there's just this, the place is in upheaval and everything is topsy-turvy. And Jesus is saying, when I return, I'm wanting you to be awake, to be vigilant, to be ready, to be waiting and working, both waiting for me, but also serving me as well.

And it's in this whole idea there, then, that he's showing the importance, that there's one thing that is really central for us to do, and that is to focus upon himself and his kingdom, the kingdom of God.

And he says, see all these things that you worry about. Well, the most important thing of all is to seek first the kingdom of God. And the way that God works, it is this, if you seek his kingdom first, then he will give to you, he will add to you, all these other things.

God will look after these things. But you make it your priority to put the Lord first. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you.

And then Jesus says, goes on to say, fear not little flock, for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Little flock.

[6 : 41] Now, there were a small band that was following Jesus then. Of course, vast crowds were following Jesus, but they were fickle. They were as fickle as the wind.

Because we know that there were huge crowds following, but also huge crowds deserting him as well. To the extent that Jesus at one point turns and he says, even to his own disciples, will you also go away?

And of course, we have the great words of Peter, to whom else can we go? For you are the words of eternal life. But Jesus is addressing his immediate disciples.

He addressed them then. And he's addressing his church today as well. He's addressing his flock. Speaking to you, speaking to me as well, just as he spoke to his flock way back then.

And there are little flock. And he says, fear not, little flock. And when Jesus says, fear not, in all probability, one of the reasons why they are likely to fear is just for that very fact that they are a little flock.

[7 : 54] They're not a great big flock. They're just a little flock. And we can have the exact same fears today. Because as we look around, we can often be aware that we are actually a very small percentage of the nation.

A very small percentage of the world's numbers that are seeking the Lord. If you were to look or to take, I don't know what the statistics today are with regard to church going, but it would appear that year by year there's just this decline.

Which shows that the vast majority of the population of our own country have very little interest in the things of God. They certainly don't say of Psalm 122, I joyed went to the house of God.

Go up, they said to me. And so, it's very easy when we live in this world that has little time for God or the things of God that we can feel isolated, we can feel lonely, we can feel vulnerable.

Maybe for some of you, you're the only Christian in your home. That's difficult. Maybe for some of you, you're the only Christian at work. Maybe you feel day by day, you feel a struggle, you feel it's hard going as a Christian.

[9 : 26] And so, there's this idea, I'm so lonely, I'm just a little flock, I'm part, I'm on my own, but I just feel part of a very little flock.

And so, Jesus is saying, fear not. And you know, sometimes, Satan can take mileage out of that because Satan can sometimes come and start tempting you.

And these thoughts disturb you. Why am I thinking like that? But he might come and say, hold on a second, look at the vast majority of the people. They don't go to God.

They don't go to church. So many people, they don't think as you. You're just this little group. And see, you're so committed and devoted.

Do you mean to say that the vast majority are all wrong? And that you, you're right. Come on.

[10 : 26] Satan will try and make mileage out of that. But then again, when he does that, there's only one way you can counteract him, and that's by bringing the word.

And remember what the word says. The word tells us very clearly where it says, wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and many there be that go thereat.

Straight is the gate and narrow is the way which leads to eternal life and few there be that find it. So when you look out and you see things as they are, the word is actually backing up that very position, sadly.

And so there is this possibility to fear. And as we look at the smallness of our number, when we look at ourselves and our own weaknesses, our own vulnerabilities, how we disappoint ourselves, when we take the whole picture as a whole, it's very easy to fear and say, well, what is going to happen to me?

What is to become of me? But Jesus meets those fears. He says, fear not little flock, for it is your father's good pleasure. Your father. Isn't that lovely?

[11 : 45] It's your father's good pleasure. You and I today have a father in heaven. Back with the Jews, they didn't seem to have a concept of God as the father.

God was this great transcendent God away above. But we have this idea of God as our father. It's intimate. And it's amazing how often, Jesus in the gospels, he speaks about my father, he speaks about your father, and he speaks about our father.

Isn't that amazing? Where Jesus so identifies with us, he talks about our father in heaven. Now, of course, there's a, we're not going into that, there's a distinction between Jesus as son of God and his father in heaven.

But there is one level at which he and us share together because he says he's not ashamed to call us brothers. So there's this amazing sense of our oneness with Jesus.

Now, when Jesus says, your father in heaven, he is reminding us that the moment that we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we enter into a family, and God is the father of this family.

[13 : 12] That is why straight away we're able to cry, Abba, father. One of the first things you do when you become a Christian, you're able to say, father.

You weren't able really to say that before. You used to run away from God before. But now you run to him because he's your father in heaven. And so there's this amazing thing that takes place, this act takes place, the moment that we come to faith in Jesus Christ, as we're told, we're adopted, we're brought into the family of God, and we become, as we're sons and daughters.

And we get all the rights and all the privileges and all these wonderful things. And the great thing is this, that we have a heavenly father who will never disown us, who will never give up on us.

He will never turn his back on us. You know, sometimes, sadly, tragically, things can happen in a family. And sometimes people will say, well, that's it.

I'm ashamed to call him my brother. I'm ashamed to have him as my son. You know, God will never, ever, ever do that.

[14 : 26] Jesus will never be ashamed, ever, of any of his people. He will never be ashamed to call them brother. The father will never give up on any single one of us because of what his son has done for us.

And so this is part of the great security. And no wonder that Jesus is saying to the flock, fear not. And you see, we're termed here as a little flock.

And one of the wonderful things is that the father in heaven has put us as a little flock into the care of the great shepherd, the good shepherd, the chief shepherd of Jesus Christ.

That's part of what Jesus' great role is. He is the shepherd, the tender shepherd. And every day he works as a shepherd with us.

Every day he gives us just what we need. He feeds us, he gives us a portion. As a shepherd he enables us to lie down by the still waters and the green pastures.

[15 : 32] You know that sheep won't lie down if they're hungry or if they're frightened, if sheep are in any way agitated at all, they won't lie down.

If you jump over a fence and there's a flock of sheep and they're in a field and they're all lying down, straight away they're up on their feet. Sheep are very easily frightened.

If they're agitated, they won't lie down. If they're hungry, as we said, they won't lie down. But when they're satisfied and when they feel at peace and contentment, the sheep will lie down.

And that's part of the beautiful picture of Psalm 23, is that the shepherd has fed us and the shepherd is giving us the security and the safety that only he can give.

And so there's this lovely picture of lying down with this picture of contentment and peace and satisfaction. And that's what we get in Jesus Christ.

[16 : 35] And so he feeds us from his word. And he gives us what we need. Isn't it amazing how often you come to God's word? And as you begin to read it for the day, you say to yourself, you know this, that's exactly what I needed.

Isn't that so often happens? That sometimes you might be struggling with something in life. And as you read, it's like the Lord shines a light through his word.

And you say, that's exactly what I need. And that's what the Lord is. He's a light and a lamp. A light to our feet and a lamp to our path.

And so he feeds us and he guides us and he shepherds us and he does so by going in front of us and he does so by coming behind us.

Just like he took Israel through the wilderness, he led them. He also, as the psalm says, he follows us with his goodness and mercy all the days of our life.

[17 : 40] And it's a wonderful, wonderful thought. And with his staff, with the rod and the staff, he protects us. And when we wander away, he uses his rod sometimes to take us back.

When we get hurt, he binds us up. When we stray away, he goes after us all the time. He is the shepherd. But you'll notice what the Father is doing for us.

We're just doing this very, very briefly. Jesus says, Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. And he's saying, yes, you might be a small group in this world.

And maybe you don't have many rights. Maybe you don't have a lot of recognition. Maybe you don't have a lot of what this world has to offer. But you know what you do have?

And what you are getting is a kingdom. And that kind of changes everything. And that's why it's so important to have our outlook focused upon the Lord and what he's saying.

[18 : 47] Because there is this kingdom, there is this kingdom that we already enter into when we come to Christ, the kingdom of grace, which will ultimately give way to the kingdom of glory.

But it is all one in one sense because what is grace but glory begun and what is glory but grace perfected. And so we enter into this kingdom that is given to us by God.

So this is part of the, one of the wonderful things. When we come to faith, we enter in to the kingdom. And it's greater than anything this world could give.

As you look back over your life, you know, some of the most special moments that you've ever had have been spiritual. You think there are moments, there's been a lot of great times in this world and a lot of things that you said, oh, that was brilliant, really enjoyed that.

But there are key moments in your life that kind of transcended other things and these moments were spiritual. And these are like little, little glimpses, little tastes of what the Lord has in store.

[19 : 59] If we could see today the weight of glory that awaits those today who are in his kingdom, who will receive it in all its fullness.

We couldn't cope. The weight of glory in our humanity here in this world would be too great. We couldn't bear it. But that's what the Lord has. That's what our heavenly Father is giving has in store and has already begun to give us here in the realms of grace.

Peter talks about a crown of glory. John in Revelation talks about a throne of power. He talks about unsearchable riches. There are all these things laid up for us in Jesus Christ.

And it's a little wonder at the end of the day that the Lord says, come you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world. What a homecoming that is.

Come, blessed of my Father. That's what the Lord Jesus is saying. So it's little wonder that Jesus says, fear not little flock.

[21 : 07] And it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. See, the Father delights in the whole work of salvation. The whole plan of redemption.

The Father delighted as he looked down on the Son. The Son standing, remember Jesus standing on the banks of the Jordan. The time of the baptism.

And the Father says, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. In other words, in whom I take pleasure. And then we find Jesus in his work.

He's saying to do thy will. He says, I take delight. This was a joy that was set before him. Why he endured the cross? Because this is all part of the great work of salvation, which is a delight and a pleasure to Father and Son.

And it's a Father's delight and pleasure to give. You know, maybe you're here today and say, you know, do you know what scares me? what if I don't last the course?

[22 : 19] What if I fall away? I do love the Lord. But what? Well, remember this. The Father takes no pleasure. In fact, I shouldn't say that.

The Father can't. It goes against all ideas. The Father cannot give the kingdom to any single person and then take it away again. He can't bring the light of the gospel into your life.

He cannot, through the work of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit comes to dwell, remember, to live forever. The Father will never take the Spirit away.

We might grieve the Spirit. We might quench the Spirit. We might not have the influence of the Spirit. We might not have the fruit of the Spirit and evidence in our lives in the way that we should.

The Father will never, ever take away what He's given. That kingdom that He bestows upon you is forever. Because it's His pleasure.

[23 : 22] It's His good pleasure to do that. And may we, as we begin this year, reflect on these things. That although we might feel, and although we are a little flock, that we are at the very center of God's purposes and plans for this world.

So much of the world doesn't care about God. But as we've often said, the history of this world is like the scaffolding around the church. At the end of the day, when a building is complete, all the scaffolding is removed.

And all that is left is a building. And the church, this little flock, is the building that will remain. All the rest will be taken.

And may we be encouraged by that. And may we seek, may we, if there's by any chance, you're here today and you have never yet come into the kingdom.

You're at the borders. You're as close as anybody can be. You're here. And maybe you haven't just come in.

[24 : 30] Well, don't come so close and then be lost. Because you're right here where the great invitation is to enter in.

And the Lord is saying to you today, I'm here. The privilege is here. Please accept me as Lord and Savior. When you do, it's forever.

Let's pray. Lord, we pray to bless us and we give thanks for being able to reflect for a little upon your word. We pray that we might be encouraged by it and to realize just what it is that you have done for us and that you are doing for us and you're still to do.

We pray that you'll be with each and every one of us. Bless all whom we love. Lord, keep us safe and do us good. We pray to bless a cup of tea and coffee in the hall afterwards and we pray that you will take every one of us home safely, that you will do us good.

Part us with your blessing and forgive us our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to conclude singing in Psalm 145 in the Scottish Psalter, the second version of the Psalm, Psalm 145.

[25 : 43] We're going to sing verses 8 to 14. Psalm 145. That's on page 444. From verses 8 to 14, four stanzas.

The Lord our God is gracious, compassionate is he also. In mercy he is plenteous, but unto wrath and anger slow. Good unto all men is the Lord, or all his works as mercy is.

Thy works all praise to thee afford. Thy saints, O Lord, thy name shall bless. The glory of thy kingdom show, shall lay, and of thy power tell.

And so men's sons, his deeds may know, his kingdom's grace that doth excel. Thy kingdom hath none end at all, doth through ages all remain. The Lord upholdeth all that fall.

The cast down, raiseth up again. Verses 8 to 14, Psalm 145. Amen. God glorising hillb derechos, Thou understood,

[27 : 41] The Lord so great to thee afford. Thy saints, O Lord, thy name shall bless.

The glory of thy kingdom show shall they and all thy power tell.

That so men such, this is the Lord. His kingdom's grace has not excelled.

Thy kingdom has not end at all. If thou through ages all remain, thy Lord upholdeth all that fall.

Thou hast no greater love again. Amen. Mr. McEver will go to the main door and I'm going to the side door.

[29 : 07] Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen.