

Luke 12:32-40

Jesus is in the midst of his journey to Jerusalem to fulfil God's ultimate plan of salvation (Luke 9:22, 30–31, 44–45, 51). His disciples have doubts and fears, and he has been comforting them and helping them to keep sight of the ultimate concerns of life. He is reminding them about being rich toward God, in contrast to being rich in the world's terms.

The passage preceding this one is helpful for us to gain perspective on the one we have for today's reading. Jesus says:

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! 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? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you (Luke 12:22-31).

He was challenging his listeners to trust God's provision, and leave off depending on their own resourcefulness; to lift their eyes from the material world and consider the deeper stuff of life; to trust that God's plans were good, and his provision reliable, that he loved and cared for them more than the flowers of the field. They could rest in his care, and put aside their worries, giving their energies to God's plans, his kingdom, his values, looking at the world with their Father's eyes, and with his concerns on their hearts. Seeking first his right-living and right-relating, Jesus disciples will find that everything else falls into place.

Jesus says: 'Do not fear.'

When Jesus speaks of his people as a flock, one of the aspects he suggests is that we are vulnerable. Jesus later tells his disciples they will have trouble in the world, the world will hate them because of their association with him, and while they are safe in his care, they are not immune to the ills and troubles of the world. Neither are we. There are indeed fearful things in the world, dangers and darkness.

Who else does Jesus say these sort of words to? John the Baptist's father Zechariah, Mary, the shepherds, Simon Peter, Jairus whose daughter had died, and the disciples (1:13, 1:30, 2:10, 5:10, 8:50, 12:4,7). They too faced challenges as they followed God in

their life and were reminded to find their security first in him. They are good words for us too.

Jesus reassures his listeners by telling them God has been pleased to allow them to share in the kingdom of his Son. We have been invited to join in a good kingdom, a kingdom of love, peace and righteousness, unlike the kingdoms of this world whose security fluctuates and whose goodness leans toward the influential. On our part, we respond to God's blessings by enacting the values of his kingdom each day. Your kingdom come, your will be done...forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Because God provides well and consistently for his people, we can live with kindness towards others, reflecting the characteristics of the one to whom we belong. We do not need to stress about our own needs, for he makes sure they are met one way or another as he provides for us through our capacities or the generosity of others. And therefore we have no reason to withhold from or fear others.

As we set our hearts towards this giving God, we consider material possessions as useful but temporary and secondary benefits in life. In this way we have ultimate security, for our purses (God's vault) will not wear out, and the contents of our purse (our most valued items: reconciliation with God, cleansing from sin, assurance of a future in a renewed heaven and earth, hope for today, and his Spirit for company each day are some of these things), will never be in danger from theft, moths or fire and will sustain us in ways that earthly possessions can never hope to. We can enjoy the secondary things without clinging to them or being mastered by them, and we can be grateful for them.

When we live like this we travel lighter in life. Not carrying things that are unnecessary. And we are able to resist the desire to stock pile material assets and resources for ourselves. Living with generosity and concern for those in need. We have an eye on long term, eternal returns, not just on the concerns of the moment.

It is not easy to live in unsettling times that raise our fears, but we will be able to live unafraid if our heart is first set on Jesus, the king of the Father's kingdom, when we depend on God's provision and faithfulness above all else, and we seek first his kingdom letting other things follow in their rightful place.

And 'Be dressed and ready for service and keep your lamps burning like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding.'

We are constantly stirred to alertness in our own times, told to be noticing what is going around us, to have our wits about us, to be vigilant in our communities. While the words are similar to what Jesus is saying in this passage, our leaders often stir up our fears and anxieties, describing evils in many forms lurking on our doorsteps. Fears lead us to mistrust, and tend to make us cling to our lives and our possessions and to defend our own concerns against the needs of others.

How different are Jesus words that come with his call for alertness. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Although there are fearful things in the world, Jesus doesn’t stir up anxiety in his people, nor does he counsel defensiveness. Instead, he offers reassurance, comfort and hope. He counsels trust, generosity and obedience. His people need to be watchful and actively serving their master, but they are not to be afraid. They are to follow him and trust him.

Jesus is serious as he speaks waiting for his return, the days we live tomorrow and the one after that. He says we cannot afford to fall asleep on the job, nor to neglect our task. We must be prepared and ready for action, we don’t know when our master will come but we know he IS coming and soon, and like the house servants, we have been called to go about our lives, working faithfully until the moment arrives. While we wait we know what to do, we have instructions and principles to live by. We have been told what pleases God: doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with him (Mic6:8), and loving others as ourselves are just two examples from scripture. So we live and keep one ear to the door, as we go about the day serving and living in a way that honours God.

We have been waiting some time for Jesus’ return. When we wait a long time, we tend to become preoccupied with our own daily needs. It’s easy to get distracted by the things we do in our lives, the busy things, the caring things, the things that keep life going, even the things that serve others and God.

Here Jesus is saying be found obedient in your service, but the focus is the arrival of the master, on receiving him at the door. Let us not be distracted by tasks we do and forget the one for whom we are waiting. Let us serve Jesus as people looking forward to seeing the Good Shepherd face to face. *‘It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready...he will dress himself to serve them at his table.’*

So as we close, some questions. Where does your treasure lie? What is your greatest treasure? The answer we give reveals our heart, it shows where our trust is placed. May we know hope and peace in our lives because our treasures are in safe storage, and be found to be people whose heart’s greatest treasure is God himself.

Second, a reflection. Neither receiving nor sharing is possible when hands are grasped and fingers clenched in fear. When we hear Jesus words, our hands open, and we are released from fear by understanding the generosity of God toward us, then we are able to live lives that are rich toward everyone. This is not about putting money in the offering plate. It’s an orientation where the whole of our life is understood as an abundant gift from a generous God, and our lives become generous in all sorts of ways as a result. We honour God by the first great commandment and display our commitment to it by living his values out through the second great commandment.

Third, a reminder. We must be found ready for Jesus arrival because our master WILL return, the day IS on the horizon. We live with uncertainty, yet clarity in what he expects of us and confidence in his faithfulness and promises, and therefore we need not fear but wait in hope-filled expectancy.