

He Will Come and Serve Them
 Luke 12:29-37 2022

Luke 12:29-37 (New Revised Standard Version)

And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.

At 9 years old, I attended Boy's Brigade Christian Camp that summer.

At evening campfires counselors described the agonies of hell,
 and they focused on the threat of God’s wrath toward sinners...

... of course the strategy was to so upset, frighten and terrify us,
 that we were driven by panic and shame to repent & accept Jesus.

Those campfire lessons made me feel terribly guilty and fearful,
 and so of course I wanted to get my **get-out-of-hell-free card**,
 which the counselors tracked on a scoreboard in the dining hall.

The God I learned about as a young boy at that Christian summer camp
 was a scary, angry God who keeps track of all my failings & mistakes,
 who keeps score, and whose purpose is to catch and punish sinners.

I find it regrettable that so many Christians live and act as if
 God is angry and upset, and hesitant to show mercy & compassion,
 or as if God has to be placated & cajoled into showing us grace.

Now that isn’t to doubt, deny or question the truth of Scripture,
 but as we’re assured according to, **John 3:17** :

God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

So God’s wrath is not a part of living a faithful Christian life.

Instead of a harsh emphasis on **fleeing from** the wrath of God,
 surely it’s better and more biblically faithful to focus on
 rushing **toward** the gracious invitation of the God who loves us,
as an active response to the Lord’s prior and already love and mercy.

For truly, the message of the Gospel is **God’s Good News for sinners**,
 and when we begin to accept and trust that the Good News is true,
 then by faith we also begin to experience for ourselves
 how much God really does love us, even just as we are,

**and that can become the most significant truth of our lives
which redefines and reorients everything about how we live.**

It is not God's intention, purpose or desire for our lives
to be governed by guilt and shame, or by fear and regret,
nor for us, through good works and religious behavior
to try and earn God's love or make-up for past mistakes.
That all comes from **a flawed and deficient understanding of God.**

A dozen or so years ago before much development east of Las Cruces,
one evening about dusk, I was driving along Baylor Canyon Road,
and I noticed a big green lizard by the side of the road
perched with its feet spread out across the top of a bush,
balancing and swaying on a branch as the wind blew ...
... seemingly for the fun and sheer pleasure of it.

As a biologist, it surprised me because I never thought that a lizard,
a creature with only a very primitive reptilian brain function,
**even had the capacity to do something like that
simply for the fun, delight and pleasure of it.**

I checked my animal behavior textbook from college this past week,
and there's no mention of any pleasure-seeking behavior in lizards.

Similarly, but on the infinitely opposite end of the scale,
I've never thought or considered that God might do something
for fun, for the earnest desire and sheer pleasure of it.

I've just never associated pleasure-seeking with an infinite being,
and yet Jesus urges and assures us, according to vs. 32

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. "

"little flock" – that is a term of endearment, promise, and nurture.

Jesus is assuring us that the Lord wants no one to be lost,
and that grace is the fulfillment of God's intention & desire,
according to his plan and purpose for life and Creation...

... which is for us to all live in loving relationship with our God.

"your Father's good pleasure" describes more than just a good feeling,
but refers to God's ultimate end, earnest delight & divine will...

... meaning that the whole point of Creation and humankind
is God's planned purpose and pleasure **to give us the Kingdom.**

Jesus frequently refers to that phrase in his teachings & parables,
but what exactly does he mean by that term, **the Kingdom of God ?**

The kingdom of God actually has several layers of meaning.

In the most simple and literal sense, it is the promise and hope
of eternal life & our dwelling-place with God beyond the grave.

But Jesus also said, several times that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

So Kingdom of God also refers to the reign & sovereign rule of God.

The Kingdom of God is present when led by the Spirit, we obey,
and live out God's grace, the just and merciful ways of God.

When we allow Scripture and the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us,
that is living under God's reign, and that is **kingdom-living**.

e.g. When we choose to forgive, rather than resent or hit back.
or when in forbearance, we don't say hurtful words of attack.
It's when we pause to consider grace & compassion before we respond.

The Kingdom is placing the needs of others, ahead of our own.

It is giving our time & effort to love & serve other people.

The Kingdom is present as the courage and strength we need
to stand for what is right and good, even when others do not.

**It is when our lives are defined, influenced and guided not by
just our own desires, but by God's truth & justice, grace & mercy.**

It's when God's grace increasingly influences the choices we make.

The point is, because it is God's pleasure to give the kingdom,
we don't need to live frantic, fearful and anxious lives,
because we are freed from trying to satisfy
the demands of this world's ways and values,
or trying to placate the wrath of an angry God.

But in order to receive the full abundance that God intends to give,
we must be ABLE to receive and we must be READY to receive
and not bogged down or clinging to this world's distractions.

And sometimes we get distracted, as St. Francis of Assisi explained,
we invest ourselves in picking up crumbs off a compost pile
while God is preparing a wonderful banquet & feast for us.

Although it's not generally much of a concern here in Las Cruces,
August marks the peak of hurricane season along the East coast.

Having lived the terrible destruction of a few hurricanes first hand,
I always marveled at the very expensive furniture and other items
that some people would have in their homes right on the coast...

... priceless antiques, irreplaceable works of art in a beach house?

**You see, that if you build your home on a beach along the ocean,
with coastal storms, it's not a question of if, but when.**

These mortal lives and all the stuff we try to accumulate in life,
all of it we will eventually have to leave behind in the end.
We will surely leave all of it behind on this side of the grave –
so it's not a question of if, but merely a matter of when,

as Jesus warns and directs us, vs. 33-34 Sell your possessions, and give alms. **Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

That isn't a universal command for everyone to sell all that we own, but comes as a warning that our stuff, our possessions and desires, that any of it can get in the way and interfere with us receiving with gratitude the blessings God intends.

And how sad & tragic for someone to be possessed by their possessions. Jesus is saying to keep our focus on what really matters and lasts.

Another insight I gained from when we lived along the Atlantic coast was that at the start of the hurricane season each year, I learned to check and make we had emergency supplies on hand, plywood sheets for the windows, enough food, water & batteries, our important papers and irreplaceable heirlooms accessible and ready to pack-up and leave quickly, if an evacuation.

And so we wouldn't have to GET ready, we made sure ALWAYS to be ready, so that we don't live in fear or panic, but we're always prepared, so that we're free to more fully enjoy living along the coast, **and not have to worry or panic every time a storm was brewing.**

So too, always feeling ready & prepared, and not fearful or panicky, means that we can more fully delight and enjoy our Christian life, which is an important mark of faithful Christian discipleship, which Jesus illustrates with the following parable. vs. 35-37

Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.

The servants have been faithful. They are ready and waiting, and so when the returning Master arrives, **he serves them.**

This parable is a picture of God's amazing and radical grace -- the servants have been faithful, they are ready & waiting, and so the returning Master, comes and serves them, just as by grace, Jesus suffered & died to serve us.

We are created to be the recipients and receptacles of God's love.

We are vessels, whom God has designed for receiving and **reflecting** God's love, grace, kindness & blessings back out to all the world. **This Luke text is about fulfilling that calling and purpose.**

So I want to live in a way that I am always ready and able to receive, and I want to be so captivated by God's gracious love and truth,

that I build my life, not driven by anxiety, fear & guilt,
but on promise and joy that it's God's pleasure to give.

**It is that truth and grace that we celebrate at the Lord's Table,
where we receive & enact signs of his grace, blessing & love
as God's servants, and yet as Christians, served by God.**

We don't come to Communion because we are good, deserving or worthy.

We celebrate Communion because God is good, gracious & merciful.

It has nothing to do with our faithful behavior or good works,

but is entirely God's gift because the Lord chooses to love us.

As Jesus assures and explains,

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. (Luke 12: 32, 34 & 37)