

"Your Father's Good Pleasure"

Luke 12:32

Two Celebrations

In the United States, Mother's Day arrives in the middle of graduation season. We set aside a day to honor women who nurture, protect, and guide children through the challenges to get to graduation. We celebrate those whom God uses to bring life into the world. At the same time, we celebrate the event (graduation) that, symbolically, sends them out into the world. These celebrations combine in a unique way this year for our family. Our oldest daughter gave birth this week to her fourth child, a girl. And our youngest daughter graduates from college next week. Graduation looks back at achievements. Mothers are rightly proud of what their sons and daughters have accomplished. But graduations look forward to new challenges and great uncertainty. That's true whether the graduation is from kindergarten, eighth grade, high school, or college. Mothers harbor deep concern and, often, fear about their child's future. We all wrestle with fear of what's ahead. A keen observer noted, "Many of us crucify ourselves between two thieves - regret for the past and fear of the future." (Fulton Oursler, <http://www.azquotes.com>)

Proverbs 31:10-31 is famous as a celebration of godly womanhood. Many read it and conclude that this describes superwoman. It can feel very intimidating if it is read as a job description instead of a poem. One verse seems particularly unrealistic. Of the ideal woman we read,

Proverbs 31:25, Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

She laughs at the future. No fear. It's hard for mothers to pull that off. It's hard for graduates. It's hard for any of us. Is it even possible to laugh at the future? Jesus says, "Yes." So let's hear him out.

Turn to Luke 12. It begins on p. 871 of the Bible provided in the row for you. We are taking a break from our study of John's Gospel to preach a message for our graduates, and our mothers, but one that we all need. Fear of the future is a major theme in this chapter. Conflict over Jesus is on the rise. People in power grow in their hatred toward him. He has already predicted that they will kill him (9:22, 44-45). He has begun preparing his followers for rejection and persecution. He knows his followers will face fear. Luke 12:4 begins, "I tell you my friends, do not fear those who kill the body." In v. 7 he reassures them again "fear not." In v. 11 he repeats, "do not be anxious."

In vv. 13-21 Jesus tells the story of a covetous man who seemed to laugh at the future. He had all he needed. He was ready to "eat, drink, and be merry" (v. 19). Instead, God called him into judgment. This is not the kind of laughing at the future Jesus has in mind. It's a warning to people who try to laugh at the future by pretending that nothing bad is going to happen. Jesus applies the story by telling his disciples in v. 22, "Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life." He uses a question to emphasize the theme in v. 26, "why are you anxious?" implying that there is no reason to do that. In v. 29 he adds, "don't be worried." But the climax of this theme appears in v. 32 and it is my text for this morning's message.

Luke 12:32, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

I intend these words of Jesus to comfort mothers, to reassure graduates, and to encourage all of us. “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” My goal is that you would turn your eyes on Jesus and find your confidence in him. “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” In this verse, we find a one command, two names, and a three-part promise. The single command is “fear not.” The two names are “little flock” and “your Father.” The three parts of the promise are: God’s good pleasure, God’s grace, and God’s kingdom. Let’s spend a few moments contemplating Jesus’ words and pray to grow in our capacity to laugh at the future.

One Command

Jesus commands, “Fear not.” It is the most frequent command in all the Bible. Many have noted that some form of this command appears 365 times in Scripture. It’s as if God knew that we would need a reminder not to fear every day of the year. It is a command that only makes sense if the future will cause you to face fearful circumstances. But that’s a given. No brainer. Of course the future will confront us with fear-inducing challenges. We have mentioned how Jesus indicates to his disciples that they will face persecution. He tells his immediate disciples that they will be dragged before religious and political authorities (v. 11). That may not happen to us. But we know the fear of rejection. Our brothers and sisters around the world do face persecution. In Nigeria, religious mobs attack Christians, widowing mothers who must raise children in a hostile world without help from a husband. In Iraq, ISIS has displaced many Christian families from their villages. Mothers must do their work in refugee camps. A ministry called “Open Doors” relates how in central Asia officials try to bribe Christians because they know that they receive financial support from churches and fellow Christians in the West. Fear of the unknown future is a fact of life where persecution thrives. But in our own nation, religious persecution and oppression is on the rise. We are tempted to fear as threats grow. We don’t know where this is headed. It is certainly more likely that one of our graduates will face persecution for the faith than it was when I graduated from high school or college. In the face of this fear Jesus commands “Fear not.” Trust God to give you what you will need in that moment.

But the future will also bring the fear of not knowing if we will have enough to survive. There is the fear of insecurity. Jesus insists that his followers not be like the wealthy landowner who tried to guarantee his own security (vv. 16-20). Such a man lives for himself and is not rich toward God (v. 21). Graduates think about and even fear the uncertainties before them. What kind of job will I be able to get? Will I have enough money to pay the bills? Will I be financially able to get married and have children? How will I repay my student loans? What kind of retirement will I be able to afford? In vv. 22-31 Jesus teaches that Christians must trust God to provide what they need each day – food, clothing, and shelter. We simply do not know what needs will arise in the future. We have no guarantee that we will get the care or have the comforts we desire. All these things are in God’s hands. The uncertainty about future security is real. It tempts us to fear. Jesus says, “Fear not.”

Fear of the future also involves fear of death. Jesus says directly in

Luke 12:4, “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do.”

Jesus tells his immediate disciples that they will face death. Those who have the power in this world to take physical lives will threaten those who follow Christ. We may not find ourselves in circumstances in which government authorities or mob aggressors threaten us with death. But we will all die someday. Unless Jesus

returns during our lifetime, we will all either grow old and die or experience death unexpectedly. However it comes, we all sense the uncertainty about aging, death, and what happens after death. Even with all the Bible teaches about our hope after death, there are still so many unknowns. And it drives us to fear. But Jesus commands, "Fear not."

That command only makes sense if you can trust the person who issues the command. In this case, it is Jesus who commands you not to fear. Jesus himself has defeated all the fears that we might face. He has experienced rejection through persecution. He has known the loss of daily provision and security. He has faced suffering and death. He knows personally what it is like to face these fears. He calls those who face fear in his name his friends. He's saying to you, "Trust me. I'm your friend. I will not leave you to face the future by yourself. I have been through worse than what you will face and I have conquered. I will take care of you." We can tell each other, don't be afraid. It can be like the blind leading the blind. But when Jesus says it, there is real comfort in his words. "Trust me. Fear not. Laugh at the future. Fear not"

Two Names

Jesus speaks that single command as a mediator between two parties. The first party consists of his people. He calls them "little flock." When applied to a group of human beings, the word little means insignificant. I love Jesus' honesty. He looks at his followers and he looks at the dangers that the future will bring and he reminds them that they have nothing in themselves to overcome fear. You are insignificant. You are David staring down a giant. You are Moses before Pharaoh. You are the people of Israel on the border of the Promised Land. Compared to what's ahead, you are insignificant. If you look to yourselves you will never laugh at the future.

Graduation speakers often speak of a graduating class as if it were God's gift to the world. Graduation speakers throw out clichés like "You are the future." Jesus is more honest. He knows that we are no match for the uncertainty, insecurity, and mortality of the future. When Jesus refers to his people as a flock, he reminds them that they are sheep. They are vulnerable and helpless. They wander away. They cannot know the future or control it. They are his little flock.

That does not sound flattering or encouraging. But it is far worse not to be in his flock. This name does not apply to everyone in the world. Jesus comes into this world as the Good Shepherd. This is the theme of John 10. Listen to his own words about himself and his people.

John 10:11, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:14–16, I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

John 10:24–30, So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

Those who belong to Christ's flock believe in him. He gives them the gift of faith. They admit their own sin and believe that their Shepherd lovingly gave up his life as a sacrifice for their sin on the cross. Because of what he has done, they will never experience hell. They hear his voice in the Bible through the Holy Spirit and they respond in loving obedience. They follow Christ together as a flock. Christ's sheep enjoy ultimate security, guaranteed by him and his Father. Jesus knows them as intimately as he knows his Father. The only people who can truly laugh at the future are those who belong in Christ's flock.

Do you? Are you following Jesus Christ into the future or merely following your own dreams? Are you listening to his voice or simply tuning in to the messages from the media that bombard you every day? Do you identify with others who follow Christ as part of his flock or does your identity come from your job, your team, or the current trends in culture? Do not assume that you are one of Christ's sheep. Do not take for granted that you are in this flock. You do not belong because your parents do. You do not belong because you come to church and take communion. You do not belong because you know something about the Bible. Those in Christ's flock know him because they trust in him. They have a faith that follows him. And he tells them "Fear not."

The second name in v. 32 belongs to God the Father. But Jesus tells his flock that the Father is "your" Father. You are not simply sheep in a flock, you are children in a family. You are fully loved, adopted, accepted, and protected. Those who have Christ as Shepherd have God as Father. There is a general sense in which all human beings have God as Father. "He is the creator and sustainer of everyone and everything." All human beings are made in his image. But sin corrupted God's image. We have all rebelled against God and denied our relation to him. When he cast our first parents out of the garden of Eden, it was a symbol of the broken relationship between God and his creatures. Now, only those who have been restored to fellowship with God through Jesus Christ can claim call God "our Father." Jesus is the Ultimate Son of God. And he assures those who follow him that his Father is your Father. And because he is your Father, fear not.

Three-Part Promise

The Father stands behind the three-part promise that closes v. 32. Jesus makes the promise on behalf of the Father.

God's Good Pleasure

He begins with the affirmation that fulfilling the promise is your Father's good pleasure. It is his delight. This is the same word that the Father used to describe Jesus as his beloved Son in whom he is well-pleased (Mt. 3:18). In this promise we learn of a God who delights to give his kingdom to those who follow his Son, the King. God is a happy God. It is not just that he will be delighted when he finally figures out how to keep his promise. He is not worried about the future. He is not betting on the future. He controls the future. He is sovereign over all things.

Isaiah 46:9–10, ... I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'

The word for "purpose" in Hebrew also means delight or pleasure. Those who know God as Father can say with the poet of Psalm 115,

Psalm 115:3, Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

Such a God leads us to laugh at the future.

God's Grace

God's delight moves him to give to his people. It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. This is a great reminder that it's all about grace. If you are a Christian, your past is covered in God's grace. Your present is sustained by God's grace. And your future is secured by God's grace. You are saved by grace from beginning to end. Paul asked the Corinthians,

1 Corinthians 4:7, What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

God the Father secures the future for Christ's people so that, throughout eternal ages, he might receive praise for his glorious grace (Ephesians 1:6).

God's Kingdom

And what God gives is his kingdom. This is a theme that could occupy us for several sermons. I simply point out that what God does not promise to give us is a great job, excellent health, professional success, the ideal husband or wife, perfect kids, a cozy retirement, and a hassle-free life. He does not promise the things that most graduates have on their wish list. If a kingdom is on the list, it is not a future kingdom but a right-now kingdom. And it is not God's kingdom but one of their own making. If God were giving the kingdom right now, he would not have to say, "Fear not." Paul's ministry to churches included,

Acts 14:22, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

The promise does not come without pain or great joy to inherit the kingdom of a happy God.

So What? Sell and Give

So what's the point? How do we live the promise of Luke 12:32? The answer is simple but not easy. It is the next command in Luke 12:33. "Sell your possessions and give." Your Father gives to you. Now you give. You don't need anything from this world because you are promised a kingdom that is not of this world. Stop trying to take from this world. Give instead. Go and serve. Give your life for the gospel. As v. 33 says, get treasure in heaven. Mothers, raise children who pursue Christ's kingdom, not some flimsy American dream. Teach them to invest temporary riches for eternal blessings. Show them how to live for the ultimate kingdom instead of popularity or more money. Risk the immediate future for the final future that cannot be lost. Live for the One who says, "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."