

Part 47: Rewards and Readiness

Tyler Velin | Luke 12:32-40

April 9, 2023

On Easter morning, Resurrection Sunday, we celebrate concluding era of Jesus' first coming. But today, as we continue on in the book of Luke, Jesus is going to prepare us for his second coming.

Yes, the events of Easter were the end of our attempts to justify ourselves by our own works, the end of the power of sin and death for all who believe. But it is not the end of the story, it's just the beginning. Having saved us from sin, Jesus now calls us to live for him as we await his second coming.

This period of waiting includes trials, temptations, hardships, all things which Jesus endured while he was on earth. But as this waiting wears on our anxieties and our emotions Jesus has been calling us to the place of greatest comfort. This is where we ended last week: Seek first the Kingdom of God.

This world is not the kingdom. But as we live in this world, laboring for the coming one, Jesus reminds us that we will not be disappointed.

If our hope is in this world, we will exhaust ourselves trying to find what always seems fleeting. But the good news for us this resurrection Sunday morning is that Jesus provides for us the hope of a kingdom where we finally find rest, peace and fulfillment. This future hope shapes how we live now.

Our main point today is going to be this: **The future rewards of the gospel make God's people ready and zealous in the present time.** Jesus is going to show us this today in three ways. First he's going to show us **The Father's Pleasure** and the way it shapes our affections, then he's going to show us **The Son's Service** and how it impacts our attitudes, and lastly he's going to exhort **The Church's Readiness** as he guides our actions.

But first I want to begin by pointing out the wonderful significance of Jesus' opening words here: **Luke 12:32.** "Fear not, little flock."

This is the only place in all of scripture where the expression, "little flock" is used. I would argue that these four words, "fear not, little flock," are four of the most powerful words you can hear in our world today.

Jesus calls his disciples, "little flock." We might think, in our modern times, of cute, pure lambs when we hear this. But in any agrarian culture the reality of sheep is not that of purity, but that of simple helplessness. Lambs are completely dependent upon their shepherd. The flock without a shepherd is a dead flock—exposed to the realities and dangers of the world. But here this little flock has a good shepherd who knows it, who loves it, and who lays down his life for it. And here he speaks to all of us two important truths.

The first is that we are sheep in need. None of us are able to solve our greatest problem. We are sheep, little sheep. But secondly, this good shepherd is trustworthy over us in all our needs and he says to us: "Fear not."

Here is the one who calls us to not fear because he alone is able to deal with our need. So how does Jesus call us to fearlessness? This is the thrust of what follows. He wants us to be free from fear, as faithfully loved sheep, by being aware of the realities of the gospel.

If you're unfamiliar with that phrase, it simply means, "the good news." And the good news of the gospel is this: That Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God. That's it, that's the gospel. That Jesus as our shepherd, did everything that we as helpless sheep were powerless to do in regards to our sin, so that we might be restored in perfect harmony to the Triune God of scripture.

And the relationship we are restored to is the first point of Jesus' message today. The good news of Christianity is not only what we are saved from, but what we are saved to. It is here we see **The Father's Pleasure**. Would you read with me **Luke 12:32-34**?

What leads to sinful fear and anxiety in your life? Is it not often the fear of loss?

What then can better displace the fear of worldly loss than the pleasure of the Father to give to you something unlosable?

Here we see the beautiful outer workings of the Trinity: Jesus the Son is calling us as only he can into intimate fellowship with the Father. How do we get restored to God the Father? Only through faith in God the Son.

And now, though a fearful, little flock, we have the affirmation of God as our Father. Not only are we sheep with a superabundant shepherd, but we are children with a hyper-generous Father.

John Bunyan says this about the idea of God as Father: **I myself have often found, that when I can say but this word 'Father,' it does me more good than when I call [God] by any other Scripture name...For by this one name we are made to understand that all our mercies are the offspring of God, and that we also that are called are children by his adoption."**

I've noticed something with my children. When they are hurt, when they are sad, when they are anxious, they often want their mother. But when they are fearful, they want their dad. While that may not be exclusively true in your experience the Lord has so designed that there is something innately protective about a father. That's why we know, without being taught, abusive and dangerous fathers are bad! We know that because their actions fly in the face of our innate understanding of what a father should be.

Even though stingy and capricious fathers will step in to protect their child out of obligation, God here is a generous and protective father who steps in out of his own delight. God wants to give you the rich benefit of all the kingdom mercies of Jesus Christ.

Now remember what we just read in **Luke 12:29-31**. We are called to seek the kingdom. That is, to live our lives in accord with Jesus' kingdom and values and not this world and its values. We are to do that work. But as we do it, it is in the Father's pleasure to give it. He delights to.

That word translated here "good pleasure," is the same word the Father uses in reference to Jesus the Son in Matthew 3:17 when he says, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

The same eternal pleasure God has in the Son is the same pleasure with which he delights to give you salvation and optimistic zeal as you live for him. When we talk of the gospel we are not talking about scraps which fall from the table of God, we are talking about the very heart of God for all his flock that they might come and believe and be savingly satisfied in his Son.

I want to make this very clear for us: God's pleasure is not up for debate. **Psalm 115:3** says, "Our God is in the heavens and he does all that he pleases."

God is infinite, all-powerful and unfailing. He will be pleased. He will be pleased in the salvation of those who come to him through Jesus, pleased to give them the Kingdom, pleased to call them sons and daughters. No one is saved by anything other than the divine, personal, and profound pleasure of God. But God will also be pleased to judge those who stand opposed to him. He will find pleasure in the weighty but perfect execution of justice toward those who rebel against his right rule as King. We cannot call for justice in our own world while also decrying the flawless justice of God in the cosmos.

God's pleasure is not "to be determined." But our pleasure is. Our pleasure is dependent upon our relationship to this God.

This is where Jesus goes next: **Luke 12:33-34**.

Because we have the pleasure of God in the kingdom we can let go of the pleasures of this world in hopes of building greater treasure with God. We can be generous to others because we cannot out give by monetary value what God has given to us in mercy.

Before the missionary Jim Elliot was martyred in the jungles of Ecuador he emphasized this point saying, "He is no fool to give what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Jesus is arguing for addition by subtraction: "Be generous with all the things of this world so that you might find greater value in the things of heaven." Or to put it another way, "Put all your eggs in the basket of eternity."

Kids, I'm guessing that some of you might go Easter egg hunting later today. Some of you might be given a basket, some of you might be given a sack, and you might find those containers to be of little value. If I told you that I was going to take from you a grocery sack, you probably wouldn't care at all.

But what happens as you slowly fill that basket with eggs? The more valuables we invest into that basket, the more valuable the basket becomes. Why? Because of what is inside of it.

Many of us struggle to find treasure in heaven because we find ourselves hoarding the treasures of earth. Our hearts are actually saying, "There's nothing there for me! I must cling to all this stuff here!" For many of us the call or idea of Christianity is dreadful because there's nothing in your heaven.

But here is where all our joy is safely found. By the end of the month, your candy will be gone. By the time you die your investment accounts will mean little to you.

A few weeks ago residents of California went to Silicon Valley Bank to withdraw the funds they had invested. And did you hear what happened? They weren't able to get them. Why? Because their bank

had failed. Their money was lost. What they thought they were saving for was gone because it was a corruptible bank.

You might think it absolutely foolish to live your life for the Kingdom of God—to value the saving of souls instead of salaries, serving instead of being served, God's glory over yours—but the bank of the world will fail. In the end through moth, through thieves or through death you will find it all for lost. But here is a bank, a treasure which will not fail. Put your eggs here now, even if it means selling the possessions of this world. Loose a stringy heart with generosity!

How do we know it will not fail? Because it's guaranteed by the pleasure of God himself!

How do we know God will give us the Kingdom? Because he already sent the kingdom in part when he sent his son, king of the kingdom, to earth. Jesus' life is proof that God doesn't make empty promises, and this resurrection morning is the proof that not even by death itself will our investment fail.

Why? Because what we stored up for in heaven, what we seek to add to there, is nothing more than the enjoyment of Jesus himself. Charles Spurgeon said this of heaven: **There will be little else we shall want of heaven besides Jesus Christ. He will be our bread, our food, our beauty, and our glorious dress. The atmosphere of heaven will be Christ, everything in heaven will be Christ-like; yes, Christ is the heaven of his people.**

This resurrection Sunday is where the fear of loss is displaced by the delight of the Father because he has given us his Son, unstained by sin, incorruptible in death, risen in perfect righteousness and ascended into eternal, untouchable kingdom glory.

Do you want to avoid fear in this world? A world which is really fearful? Then place your hope, your joy and your faith in the Son who cannot and will not fail. Find your treasure in him even if it means losing your treasure here.

But this Jesus who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven is not gone forever. He's coming back. Even in this, there is more to be gained. This is Jesus's second point: **The Service of the Son.**

Read with me **Luke 12:35-38.**

In the above section Jesus says on account of the Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom, invest all your affections there. Here Jesus says that on account of the son's future return, have an attitude of constant readiness and vigilance to serve.

Don't grow comfortable or apathetic while you wait. As Christians we not only confess that Jesus has come, but we confess that he is coming again. Where Jesus came to declare the kingdom and died to ransom his flock for the kingdom, he will come again to bring the kingdom and establish it here on earth. In light of that, the call is to be ready for it.

Have you ever had someone say, "I'll be over to grab it soon," only to realize that their version of "soon" doesn't really match up with yours? You are left with this burden of maybe trying to sneak in a run to the grocery store, or a workout, before they come back. It really is a difficult stage to manage, and waiting for Jesus' return is difficult even for the Christian.

Our world hates waiting for things. Now, more than ever our mantra is: "If we can't have it now, I'll find something else instead." Waiting is wasting to the modern mind. Since the early 90s the average age of first sexual encounter has decreased almost annually. We don't want to wait for it. Shipping times over the last decade have gone from 10 day shipping, to five day shipping, to two day, and now same-day deliveries. We don't want to wait for it. Colleges are desperately trying to cut down the amount of credits needed to get degrees. Why? We won't wait for it.

So if everything natural to our fallen flesh wages war against waiting, why would Christian's willingly live their lives for a future reward? Jesus already gave us one reason already: it's the only one that won't fail.

But here he gives us another: Because there's no reward more astounding than this one.

Listen again to Jesus' parable here: **Luke 12:36-38**.

Make no mistake, the tone of this parable is that we ought to be ones ready to serve Jesus at all moments. He paints the picture of servants waiting for the Master of the house to come back from a wedding feast, they are to be ready to serve him whenever he arrives.

But what happens when the Master arrives? Did you see what he did? Did you see the wonderful beauty held out for us when our master returns? He changes his clothes and he begins to serve us. There is no greater scandal than this. It's one thing if for the sake of nobility a good man offers up his life to save others. But it's another thing that after such a costly sacrifice he would continue to humble himself and serve those who did nothing to deserve it.

But such is the reward of heaven. See here the heart of Jesus. Jesus calls us to work. Yes, waiting is work, evangelism is work, putting off sin is work, coming to church is work. But why do we work? Because at the end of it Jesus himself is coming to serve us.

There's no comparison in anything in our world to this. Those who are the most able are often the most served. Those who are the least able are often the most serving. But here the most able person becomes the most able servant. He meets our needs, he washes our tears, he rests our bodies. Why? Because it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom and it is the Son's joyful service to care for his flock in glory after they have lived their life for his service.

In a world obsessed with leadership, shouldn't this picture of Christ our leader cause Christian leaders to be of stark contrast to our world? Shouldn't this picture of Christ the conquering King, eternal and endless, submitting himself to his "little flock," shape even how we understand the ideas of submission and service to others?

Jesus calls us to service now. But take note of even our savior's delight! His delight is to serve us! How much more is our readiness to serve now knowing that our reward is more than we can imagine! Service doesn't tarnish Jesus' joy in service of the Father! The Spirit's service of us is not drain on his delight! Our ready service of Jesus will therefore not crush, despair or ruin those who stand today willing to serve even in difficult times.

Rest will come, rest at the hand of him who won it by his blood. Rest from the weight of sin. Rest from the burden of guilt. Rest for the work of readiness.

But now, is not the time of this kind of rest. With the promise of the Father's pleasure and the assurance of the Son's service we now look at our last point: **The Church's Readiness** and how it shapes our actions.

Read with me **Luke 12:39-40**.

Now it's important to note the subject has changed in this text. When he speaks of the "master of the house" he's talking about us. He's speaking to our duty as attendants of what he has left us. To abandon readiness to believe, serve and worship Jesus is to abandon our house to a thief. It's to lose all that we hoped to keep.

We are to be ready at all times. We are to live in constant anticipation which shapes our actions. The world and all her pleasures, the flesh and all its weakness, the devil and all his cunning want nothing more than for you to become apathetic while you wait. To find yourself hoping again in the world, storing up treasure, experiences and comfort which will last but for a moment.

But we are to be ready, faithful and vigilant of our hope. This is Jesus' kind affirmation to his little flock.

But what does this look like? I think there are three postures in this text that we need to apply to our own hearts today.

First, ***Be Dressed for Action***.

That's how Jesus opened this last section: Be dressed for action, and keep your lamps burning.

That is to say we are always ready and never inconvenienced to serve Jesus and love others. Jesus calls us to stay dressed. That's because in this day the servants would wear these long robes but when they stood to serve, they would tuck the robe into their belt so that they could be unencumbered in their service.

If you're a dad, you know something similar--something I call "the dad hike." Perhaps you've seen it. All it takes is a dad to do one little adjustment of the pants, pulling the crotch up a bit by the outside pockets, and nothing is impossible for him.

This is how we are to live. This is the reason for our life right now. Do not be deceived into think it is for any other thing. There's eternity to gain, souls to save, worship to be given. For some of us to be dressed for action in service of God we need to undress ourselves of worldly pleasures. We often don't have time for service because we fill our schedules with sports and leisure. We don't have funds to give to missions because we enjoy the comforts money can buy us here. But ready yourselves by offering all of what you have in ready and able service.

Second, ***Be Eager in Anticipation***.

In **1 Thessalonians 5:2**, Paul says, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." We must be ready because we do not know at what moment Jesus will come back.

My wife often begins to remind our kids that it's almost time for dad to come home from work. She'll send me pictures of the kids all lined up at the window just looking, straining their eyes to see my car

come around the corner. This is the kind of picture Jesus paints of these servants who are so eagerly waiting for the master's return.

We need help, we all need faithful spiritual moms, siblings, and mentors who remind us we should be found ready for what's coming. How do you yourself hold that hope in front of you? What would it look like for you to help others do the same? For consider the stunning hope of **Colossians 3:1-4**.

What a day worth living for.

This is where we see our last application: ***Be Zealous for our reward.***

We cannot be dressed for action, we cannot be eager in anticipation, if we do not see the treasure of the reward we are given in the gospel. Our sin has separated us from everything we hope for, cut us off from God and made all of our fears the only reality of our lives.

But by grace, God sent his King out of his pleasure. He came and lived perfectly where we lived imperfectly. He died sacrificially in our place. He rose victoriously because of our loss. And he will come back as the Son of Man, the one who will return and establish his kingdom forever. One day we will no longer invest in what will come, but we will enjoy eternity by the merit of Jesus and not ourselves.

One day, the Master who calls us today to not fear, to labor a little longer, to stay dressed, will dress himself in service of us. He will bind up our wounds and banish them forever.

When Jesus returns to serve his church, none of us, none of his little flock will respond in the remotest sense in pride. No one will say, "I deserve this." But in that moment we will be more fully aware of our little flock-ness and the surpassing beauty of our Savior's service and glory. With humble wince we shall accept his peace and care and in light of the spectacular scandal of grace say as the old hymn, "And can it be that I should gain, an interest in my Savior's blood, died he for me--who caused his pain, for me--who him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be, that Thou--my God--should die for me?"