

## Fear: My Faithful Companion?

### Luke 12: 22 - 32

Why does the flock of God struggle with fear?

Luke 12 implies clearly that we do, and that we don't need to. It points to at least four things that we are prone to fear.

First, in verse 4 Jesus says, *"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more."* So, this verse implies that we are prone to fear **death**—especially death by persecution.

Second, in verse 11 Jesus says, *"When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."*

So Jesus implies that we are prone to fear **public shame**. We are prone to be anxious about what others will think of us if we don't have the right thing to say.

Third, in verse 22 Jesus says, *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear."*

So he implies that we are prone to worry about whether our **basic physical needs** will be met—food and drink, clothing and shelter.

In every case Jesus' purpose is to give reasons why his "friends" (verse 4) and his "disciples" (verse 22)—his flock—do not need to fear these things. He wants us to be free from fear. So he says . . .

First, death is not the worst thing, hell is. And God will keep us out of hell and care for us with detailed tenderness— even the hairs of our head are all numbered.

Second, he says that the Holy Spirit will teach us what to say in an hour of public testing. We will not be left alone.

And third, he says our Father knows your daily needs and is far more inclined to give us what we need than he is to feed the ravens and clothe the lilies, but look how he takes care of them!

So, Jesus does not want us to fear ...

No fear of death.

No fear of public shame.

No fear of poverty and want.

He wants us to see that He is the kind of God whose people do not need to fear.

But there is another thing we are prone to fear that goes right to the heart of God. It is perhaps the deepest fear of all and the one that may lie behind all the others. Perhaps that's why Jesus keeps it for last. We see it in verse 32: *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."*

What fear is Jesus trying to eliminate here?

Perhaps he is trying to eliminate the fear or belief that God is not the kind of God who really wants to be good to his children.

This is a fear that rises up in the hearts of those of us who are prone to believe that God does not want to be gracious to us, that he does not want to be generous and helpful to us.

Perhaps some of us are prone to think of God as one who is basically irked with us—ill-disposed and angry.

Sometimes even if we believe in our heads that God is good to us, we may feel in our hearts that his goodness is somehow forced or constrained, perhaps like a judge who has been maneuvered into a corner by a clever attorney on some technicality of court proceedings where he must dismiss the charges of the prisoner that he really would rather send to jail.

It wasn't that long ago we celebrated Palm Sunday, and we pictured ourselves welcoming the King into our city and into our hearts as Jesus tries to make his intentions known not by coming in on a great stallion but on a lowly donkey, meek and humble.

But I wonder, how many of us look upon this lowly Servant-King and feel that this is just a thin veneer, and that really beneath this lowly exterior there is a terrible power and authority which is just waiting to burst out against us if we slip up in any way.

I wonder how many feel that it is not really the deepest pleasure of this King's heart to serve his people and meet their needs.

I wonder how many feel that he's riding this donkey of lowliness as a kind of camouflage. And once he gains a foothold, he will throw off his rags, pull out his sword, and storm forth to do what he really loves to do, namely, judge and destroy.

Of course, some will be saved—the few who somehow could please him. But that is not his heart's desire. He is basically angry—always angry. And the best we can do is stay out of his way, and maybe, if we keep the rules well enough, we could sneak by him when he is in one of his temporary good moods. (This may be how some people think.)

But I believe that Jesus takes great pains to help us not feel this way about God. Instead, God uses this one verse, namely, **Luke 12:32** – and every little piece of this verse to help us take away the fear that Jesus knows we often struggle with:

Namely, the fear or belief that God begrudges his benefits - that he is constrained and out of character when he does nice things, that at his root, he is angry and loves to vent his anger.

So, **Luke 12:32** really is a verse about the nature of God.

It's a verse about what kind of heart God has - It's a verse about what makes God glad—not merely about what God will do or what he has to do, but what he *delights* to do, what he loves to do and takes pleasure in doing.

*“Do not be afraid, little flock,  
for your Father has been pleased  
to give you the kingdom.”*

Let's begin with the phrase, “*has been pleased*” or “*good pleasure.*” It is a verb in Greek: “to be a pleasure” or “to be pleased by.”

You could translate it: “it pleased God,” or, “God chose it gladly.” One of the best places to see the meaning of the word is in Philippians where the noun form of the word is put over against its opposite.

In Philippians, you recall, Paul is in prison in Rome. There are professing Christians who do not like Paul and there are Christians who do. Both of them begin to preach the gospel while Paul is in prison. But their motives are very different. In **Philippians 1:15** Paul says, “*It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will*”—or we could say, “from good pleasure.”

The phrase translated as “good will” is the word we are concerned with.

What is he saying?

He is saying: both groups are preaching, but one group is being driven to preach not because they love Paul or because they love the preaching of the gospel, but because they hope to increase Paul's affliction.

But the other group is preaching because they really love to preach the gospel and because they love Paul. They are doing what they really love to do. It is out of "good will." It's out of gladness. It is their good pleasure to preach. Their heart is not divided. Preaching is not a cloak for envy or rivalry. It is a real delight.

Now that is what Jesus means in [Luke 12:32](#) when he says, "*your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*"

In other words, God is not acting in this generous way in order to cloak and hide some malicious motive. The phrase "has been pleased" or "good pleasure" rules that out.

He is not saying inside, "I will have to be generous for a while even though I don't want to be, because what I really want to do is bring judgment on sinners."

The Lord's meaning is inescapable: God is acting here in freedom. He is not under constraint to do what he doesn't really want to do.

At this very point, when he gives his flock the kingdom, he is acting out his deepest delight. This is what the word means: God's joy, his desire, his want and wish and hope and pleasure and gladness and delight is to give the kingdom to his flock.

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to—not his duty, not his necessity, not his obligation, but has been pleased—to give us the kingdom." This is the kind of God he is.

Second, let's look at the phrase "your Father." "*Do not be afraid, little flock, your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*"

Jesus did not say, "It is your employer's good pleasure to give you your salary."

He does not say, "It is your slave-master's good pleasure to give you your lodging."

He does not even say, "It is your King's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

He chooses every word in this sentence to help us get rid of the fear that somehow God is ill-disposed to us—that he is begrudging in his generosity, or constrained in his kindness. So he calls God "your Father".

Now, not all of us have had fathers who patterned their lives after God. And so the word "father" may not be full of peace the way Jesus means it to be. So let me try to fill the word "Father" with some of the meaning Jesus intended it to carry for you this morning.

Two things:

First, if the King is our Father, then we are heirs of his kingdom. There is something natural about our receiving it—it's our inheritance. In **Matthew 25:34** it says that in the last day King Jesus will say, *"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."*

From before the creation of the world God prepared a kingdom for his children. It is theirs by the right of inheritance. And God does not begrudge his children coming into their inheritance. It is his good pleasure to give us the kingdom.

Second, if the King is our Father, then we are free from being taxed. In **Matthew 17:25** Peter wondered if the disciples had to pay the temple tax. Jesus says, *"What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth collect duty and taxes -from their own sons or from others?"*

And when Peter said, *"From others,"* Jesus said to him, *"Then the sons are exempt or free."*

God does not levy taxes against his children. It is those outside the palace who feel the burden of law, not the children within. The children are free! The Fatherhood of God means freedom.

The list of implications of what it means to have God as our Father could go on and on—and all of them would serve to help us overcome the fear that God is begrudging in his kindness to us.

Just the opposite is the case. He is our Father, and if we who are evil know how to give good things to our children, how much more will our Father in heaven give the kingdom to those who ask him.

Third, consider the word "give." *"For your Father has been pleased to GIVE you the kingdom."*

Jesus does not say, sell you the kingdom.

He does not say, trade you the kingdom.

He says, *"your Father has been pleased to **give** you the kingdom."*

We have seen it again and again. How I hope it is sinking in—that God is a mountain spring and not a watering trough. And therefore he delights to overflow—to give, give, give!

He gives the kingdom!

It cannot be bought or bartered for or earned in any way. There is only one way to have it, and it is the easiest way of all—the gospel way—the way of **Luke 18:17**, *"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."*

God is not stingy.

He is not a scrooge.

He is not miserly or tight-fisted.

He is generous, ungrudging and bountiful. It is his good pleasure to GIVE us the kingdom. (See **Luke 8:10**.)

Fourth, consider the word "flock." *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."*

Look how Jesus is piling up the metaphors. God is our Father. And since he gives us a kingdom, he must be a King. And since we are his flock, he must be a Shepherd. Jesus has taken great pains to choose every word he can to make his point clear:

God is not the kind of God who begrudges his blessings.

We are his flock. What does that mean?

It means that we should remember that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Begrudgingly? Under constraint? NO! *"No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again"* (John 10:18).

The Father did not begrudge the gift of his Son and the Son did not begrudge the gift of his life. It's the Shepherd's good pleasure to give the kingdom to his flock.

Fifth, consider the word "little." *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."*

Jesus chooses every word to help us see God the way he really is.

Why does he say "little flock"? I think it has two effects:

First, it's a term of affection and care. If I say to my family when they are in danger, "Don't be afraid, little family," what I mean is: I know you are in danger and that you are small and weak, but I will use all my power to take care of you because you are precious to me. So "little flock" carries the connotation of affection and care.

It also implies that God's goodness to us is not dependent on our greatness. We are a little flock—little in size, little in strength, little in wisdom, little in righteousness, little in love.

If God's goodness to us depended on our greatness, we would be in big trouble. But that's the point. It doesn't. So we aren't. *"Do not be afraid little flock, your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."*

Finally, consider the word "kingdom." There might be one little foothold left for the feeling that God is begrudging and ill-disposed toward us.

Someone might say, "OK, God is our Father and not our slave master;

He enjoys giving instead of selling.

He treats us the way a good shepherd treats his flock.

He has an affection and pity toward us in our littleness.

**But what, after all, does he promise to give?"**

He doesn't promise to give money. In fact, he says, *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"*.

He doesn't promise popularity or fame or admiration. In fact, he says, *"Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man!"*

He doesn't even promise security in this life. In fact, he says, *"You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death; you will be hated by all for my name's sake"*.

What does he promise to give to his little flock—to prove once and for all that it is not only his good pleasure to give, but that it is his good pleasure to give big?

He promises to give them the kingdom of God.

And what does it mean to be given the sovereign reign and rule of God?

It means simply and remarkably that the omnipotent rule and authority of the King of the universe will be **engaged forever and ever** on behalf of the little flock of God.

*“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9)*

And it is the Father's good pleasure to give it to his little flock.

Who can describe what it will be like when that saying comes to pass which Jesus spoke at the Last Supper?

*“And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my father conferred one on me so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom” (22:29).*

Jesus knows that the flock of God struggles with fear.

He knows that one of those fears that we tend to buy into is that God is the kind of God who is basically angry and delights most of all to judge sinners and only does good out of a sense of constraint and duty, not delight.

Therefore the Lord is at pains this morning to free us from this fear by telling us the truth about God. He has chosen every word for our comfort and joy and peace.

*“Do not be afraid little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom!”*