

**ONE OF GOD'S GIFTS – Luke 12:32 - 40**

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A Sermon By

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Luke 12:32-40

*"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. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves*

*"But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."*

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With every gift comes some level of responsibility. Perhaps it is a thank you note, if nothing else. But often it is much more.

When a student receives a new trumpet, with it she assumes the responsibility to practice and grow into her full musical potential.

A young man inherits his grandfather's hunting rifle. With it comes the responsibility for learning to use it carefully, treat it gently, and keep it safely out of innocent hands. A college receives a large bequest and assumes the responsibility of ensuring that scholarship dollars go to the most deserving and the most likely to fulfill academic expectations. Israel was given the gift of being the children of God. With that gift came the call to faithfulness and obedience.

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

**We have been gifted with the Kingdom of God.** When we realize the responsibility attached to such a gift, we might be tempted to say, "No, thanks just same, we'll take a pass on this gift." The moment of birth is one of unspeakable joy. Yet, if parents stopped to count the cost of taking a child home (which, fortunately, they count) they might be tempted to turn the gift down. The cost of baby food and diapers, sleepless nights and worrisome days, braces for the teeth, clothes and school supplies and college tuition, and repairs to the fenders of the family car, heartaches and disappointments, and weddings, and grandchildren; divorces and illnesses it would not be surprising for young parents to say, "No, thanks just the same, we'll take a pass on this gift." What are the responsibilities that come with being given the kingdom of God? Jesus tells us in today's reading and it's not insignificant: give up materialistic ways, share your wealth, and be constantly on guard for the return of Christ.

Add to these the other things we know about being a faithful Christian: like loving one's enemies, turning one's cheek, serving others, perhaps even giving your life for the sake of another; it makes the kingdom a burdensome gift to receive.

"Do not be afraid, little flock," Jesus says.

That sounds like the non-sequitur of the millennium. It might be precisely the gift that should terrify the believer.

Yet, in the face of the tremendous responsibilities that come with the gift of the kingdom of God and whatever fear we might attach to it, there is a word of encouragement and a word of hope for the recipient.

The word of encouragement is in the fact that the kingdom of God is not the burden of any single individual.

We are joined with others doing the faithful work that God calls us to. In the today's passage, Jesus speaks to a group of disciples. The "flock" is not a single sheep. The writer Luke speaks to a church of first-century disciples who are a growing flock of believers. And, when we read this text, we know that we too are individual members of a large flock of faithful disciples who seek to live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

In other words, the work we do is never ours alone to accomplish. We do our part and trust that God will send others who will join us, and take over for us when we are too weary to continue. As the scriptures always remind us, we are not in charge of the entire enterprise. We are, among other workers, prophets of a future not our own.

With the word of encouragement, there is also a message of hope in this word from Jesus.

Yes, there is much to be done; disciples need to be faithful, diligent, and watchful. Yet, no matter the responsibility associated with accepting God's kingdom when it is given, there is something more, something immeasurably more. It is the incomprehensible love of God and every joy that comes with it. Thus, it is the Father's good pleasure to give not just burdens - for that would be unkind in the extreme - but the blessings of the kingdom of God.

When the pain-filled moment of birth is past and before any calculation of the cost of parenthood, there comes the sweet moment of peace when the healthy baby is laid upon the mother's breast. Joy fills one small corner of the world and grows from that place and moment to fill a family's lifetime.

This is like the joy that comes from living in the sunlight of God's grace.

Just count the blessings that come with the kingdom of God.

Joy comes from knowing that our sins are forgiven, that they need not be dragged through life like an ever-increasing load of garbage that cannot be dumped. It comes from the knowledge that, despite what we might think of ourselves or what others might think about us, we are deeply loved by the one who created us.

And joy comes from knowing that the value of our life is not to be measured by our bank account, nor how beautiful we are, nor by our standing in the community, nor by our fear, nor by our willingness to serve, nor even by the amount of good we have done in the kingdom, but simply by this:

God values us so highly as to provide Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins.

And these are but a portion of the treasures given us in the kingdom of heaven. These earthly blessings are merely the beginning. Somehow, in a way

we cannot comprehend, God has it planned for us to spend, not a few paltry days of dedicated service and toil on the face of the earth, but an unending procession of days in that place set aside for the inhabitants of God's realm.

If a baby born this very day were to live 100 years filled with joy and adventure, that person would not live a single day more than any of us who will live for all eternity with a God who loves us so much as to take pleasure in giving us the kingdom.

The hymn writer put it best: "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun."

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

The responsibilities are there to be faithful, watchful, and diligent. It will not be difficult to recount the local ways in which a believer's or a congregation's responsibilities can be fulfilled. But, they are not ours alone to bear. Each, in his or her own way, will do their part to further the great enterprise that is God's reign.

Have no fear, for it is God's good pleasure to give you a love so great and a realm so sweet that it will take you an eternity to understand it and to express your gratitude.