

To God Alone Be The Glory

Rate your life on a scale of one to ten. How good is your life? When you chose your number I hope you were looking at your life from the spiritual viewpoint. And I hope you thought: "My life is a ten. Jesus is my Savior. God gives me everything I need. He even throws in some trouble every so often, because I need trouble to help me remember that this world is not my permanent home." I doubt any of us thinks this way all the time. Even the great prophet Elijah got discouraged about his work. He ran away and got depressed and took issue with God because nothing he did for the Lord seemed to be turning things around for God's people. How does your life rate when you're depressed and things aren't going well? Do you see more problems than blessings? Do you feel inadequate? Do you worry about money, being single or childless, your age, your health, your loved ones, the conversion of our downtown Lakeshore Drive's four lanes to two? So many earthly problems!

In Luke 12 Jesus has been teaching a large crowd how not to cope with their earthly problems, as if worry is not a good coping skill. Worry doesn't change even one thing for the better. Worry can make us tired now and may end our life sooner. But worst of all, worry gets in the way of our relationship with the Lord.

Fear is another bad way to handle our problems. What are you afraid of? Global warming, the trade war, robbery, STIs, drug pushers, gang violence? Are you afraid you won't be able to dig yourself out of debt? Are you afraid of losing your health or losing

a loved one or losing your most prized possession?

There's a much better way than fear and worry. GOD'S SOLUTION TO EARTHLY PROBLEMS is simple. Are you ready for it? Jesus says, ³²"*Don't be afraid, little flock.*" Jesus is saying so much more than Bobby McFerrin's song: "Don't Worry, Be Happy" (1988). God is doing so much more for us than Pharrell's upbeat song, "Because I'm happy: Come along if you feel like a room without a roof. Because I'm happy: Come along if you feel like happiness is the truth" (from *Despicable Me 2*). Great songs! You might even play them on the way home from church today. But you see, Jesus gives us a reason not to be afraid, not to worry, to be happy: ³²"*Don't be afraid, little flock: your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*" Think about that. Jesus calls God, almighty God, "*Your Father.*" What an honor to be God's children through Jesus! We openly admit nearly every Sunday at church: God should count us his enemies, not his children. If that doesn't pluck the twinge string of your heart even a little, let's flip it around. Think of someone who has wounded you deeply, or harmed your loved one. Now imagine that someone standing before you, slapping your face, and grinning about it. It would really help me make this point if you felt anger toward that person, if you wanted justice done to that person... Ah, now you are sensing at least a smidgeon of what God feels when our sins come up before him, even when we don't realize we're sinning. Did you know, for instance, that when you say "I swear," but you don't actually need to swear, that's a sin (Matthew 5:34-37)? To swear (to take an oath) is to ask God to witness that

you are telling the truth and to punish you if you're lying. How often do you really need God to stand by and make sure you're telling the truth? If you always tell the truth, you don't need to swear at all, except on legal documents and for governmental purposes. *As long as we're talking about the mouth, I wonder: does foul language come out of yours when you get upset? If Jesus wouldn't approve, don't you say it.

Yet despite all our sins, and before we could even think about changing our ways, God called us his children. He decided to adopt us into his family. His real Son, Jesus, paid the adoption fees with his life. We have been born, or re-born, into God's family through baptism. God has given us his last name, if you will—made us heirs of his estate. That's what Jesus means when he says God has given you the kingdom. He rules in our hearts by his Word, and we will reign with him in glory. Don't be afraid.

It pleases God to give us the kingdom. It tickles God to give us his kingdom. It's like when you buy someone a surprise, and you leave it where they'll find it. Then you stand back and watch the expression on their face when they see the surprise. That's how God feels about giving us his kingdom, which includes taking us to heaven someday. God's kingdom is his solution to earthly problems.

Because he has given us his kingdom, we now have everything we need. But we still often want more than we need. That's why we feel frustrated when it takes so long to bring our plans to reality. We want more than we need. That's why we use a credit card before we have the cash in hand. We

want more than we need. That's why some of us give in to the temptation to buy a powerball ticket. I'm not saying that all gambling is a sin. I'm asking you to be honest about any greed that may motivate your lottery ticket purchase, because greed is always a sin (Mark 7:21-23). Why did you buy a ticket? Did you want to be independently wealthy? Independent from whom? From God? He promised you daily bread—everything you need for your body and life. And you want more because having “only enough” makes you feel insecure? Do you really need a powerball ticket? No, you need to be a part of God's kingdom because all the winning tickets combined won't buy you a week in heaven, and earth's worst problem is still coming for you: death. But here comes Jesus: *Don't be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom..* You didn't need to buy a ticket for God's kingdom. Everyone who believes in Jesus already won the whole jackpot.

Let's approach this from another angle. What (or who) is your most prized possession? If God took this away from you, how would you react? Would you ask, “Why, God?!” as if it didn't belong to God and he had no right to take it back? Or would you thank the Lord for letting you have the enjoyment of that for a while? Would you thank God for taking it away from you? By these questions I'm trying to help you find out if God is more dear to you than what or whom you prize? If he isn't the most dear, then you have a problem, an earthly problem. And here's Jesus' solution: ^{33a}“*Sell your [prized] possessions and give to the poor.*” Now, if your most prized possession in life is a loved one, you

can't sell him or her. And if you prize your health more than God, you obviously can't sell that either. But Jesus is showing us that God is to have first place in our life. Jesus says, instead of loving this life so much, ^{33b}*provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.* In other words, keep focused on the heavenly home that Jesus is taking us to. If Jesus is our highest treasure, it's so much easier to keep the things of this life in proper perspective. For instance, it's wise to save up for big expenses and retirement. Experts say you should save 15% of your income. But even if you follow this expert advice, your plan guarantees you nothing. Taxes and inflation will eat up part of your treasure like two hungry moths. The stock market could take yet another plunge. A crafty swindler could help you make a bad investment. Our help is not in the name of the buck; our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. Yes, save up for future expenses. But if we trust in our investments more than in God, we would be better off cashing in all our assets and giving the money to the poor. Then it would be easier to see that we have a far better treasure in the heaven that Jesus bought for us at the cost of his life.

Rich or poor, I pray God that you will see what a treasure your Redeemer is. Then you will be ready when Jesus Christ returns. That's what Jesus wants for us on Judgment Day: he wants us to be ready. Now that you have the kingdom as a gift from him, Jesus says: ³⁵*be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning...* What?

Oh, Jesus is launching into a parable to help us understand this teaching better —³⁵*be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning* ³⁶*like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.* Do you like weddings? They were big sha-bangs in Jesus' day too. Back then it could take a week to celebrate a wedding properly. Instead of 70 hours of work and a little food, there was a couch for everyone and lots of feasting and laughter.

Of course, servants were not invited. They had to stay home and wait for the master of the house to return. When he came home he wouldn't want to have to wait outside knocking at the door for a long time. And he wouldn't want to stumble through his dark house to the bedroom. So the servants had to stay awake and alert, with their lamps burning brightly, ready to open the door and receive their master. *You're the servant. Jesus is the master. If he returns for Judgment Day and finds you obeying everything he taught, he'll do something no master in Bible times would have done. He'll cause you, his servant, to sit at the table, and he will serve you dinner. The master wants to reward his servants for remaining watchful, even if he comes back at an inconvenient time like midnight or 3 A.M., or 9 o'clock on Sunday morning. *Can you picture Jesus saying, "May I take your order?" "We have seen that he laid aside the use of his divine majesty and power in order to humble himself to his death on the cross. Is it, then, a hard thing to believe that he will, in his exalted state, gird himself and serve us? Just how he

will do that when we are with him in glory defies our power to conceive and to describe” (?Franzmann) But he will do it.

The only question for you and me is: How long will it be before Jesus returns? It appears that he is delaying his return well into the second or third watch of the night. Are you getting sleepy, very sleepy? Are your earthly problems lulling you into spiritual sleep so that Jesus seems like only a dream instead of the essence of your life?

³⁹*Understand this: If the owner of the house... What? Oh, Jesus is launching into another parable to help us with this teaching—*³⁹*Understand 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. Wouldn't it be great if we got advanced notice when the robbers were planning a visit? We could get rid of our security systems and have the police ready to pounce on the robbers the minute they laid their grubby little hands on the stuff God entrusted to us. But we don't know. And many thieves are successful because the owners do not expect to be robbed.*⁴⁰*You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. The parable teaches: if we do not remain watchful, Jesus' coming, which is intended to bring us blessing, will bring us tragedy. Are you ready for Christ's return?*

This one grandpa was always reading his Bible. When his college-aged grandson asked why he did that, the man replied, “I'm cramming for my finals.” But Grandpa was doing it backwards. There is no test

to take. Jesus already took the finals for us and we got a 100. **We are ready for Jesus's return when he gives us faith to believe he paid for our sins.** The Father has already given us the kingdom through faith.

And that's why we work at showing our readiness for Jesus' return by our outward actions. Attending worship and having daily devotions are opportunities to hear God's Word so that it strengthens us to remain watchful. In fact the more ready you are for Christ's return, the more you will read and study God's Word and worship him and pray. Your readiness will also spill over into Christian service. The more ready we are for Jesus' return, the more willing we are to volunteer our time and abilities, even our wealth, to further God's kingdom and help others get ready for Christ's return.

Once again, rate your life on a scale of one to ten. Without Christ we always come up low on the scale. But in Christ God declares us perfect tens. God's ultimate solution to our earthly problems is to take us away from them. But until it's time for you to go, look at your earthly problems from God's perspective. Then you'll see: they aren't big enough to worry about.

You can trust God to help you work out every earthly problem, but not always the way you want. So keep your focus where Jesus points it: *Don't be afraid, little flock, your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*