

2018 New Year's Message Seek His Kingdom

Seek His Kingdom

January 7, 2018

Luke 12:22-34

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Introduction:

Good morning. I invite you to open your Bibles to Luke 12:22-24; that's on page 871 in the Bibles found in front of you.

Every time we gather on the Lord's Day it is an amazing privilege, but there is something particularly special about worshipping together on the first Sunday of the year.

It's January 7, 2018 – I have a great anticipation for what is ahead of us. I come this morning praying, *“God, You've given us a new year. Here we are in 2018 – we are seeking You. We want Your kingdom to come and your will to be done. What do you have for us Lord? What do You want to teach us?”*

I really like new beginnings. January is a great time for a “do over”. We get to do a re-boot. Like the Etch a Sketch we shake it up and get a brand-new slate to create something new. Perhaps in the past two weeks you were watching shows or reading articles about 2017 in review and perhaps you did your own personal life review of 2017. No doubt all of us desire certain things to be different; we want to **be** different.

Most importantly in this new beginning we have opportunity to prioritize the things that matter most, and what matters most is going deeper in and further on in knowing God and walking with Him in a life of faith and obedience.

In 2018 God will be at work growing his church, transforming lives, building his kingdom, and bringing glory to his name. Do you want to be part of that? I do!

The Bible says,

...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,¹³ **for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.** (Philippians 2:12-13 ESV)

That should get you **excited** – God is at work, and he invites you to be part of what He's doing, as he works in you and through you. In Christ alone we have hope; He leads us, shepherds us into 2018 - He goes before us into this new year.

But honestly, the turn of the page into a new year that can excite us, can also make us anxious. A new year can expose **our worries and fears**. We look at the blank calendar dates ahead of us and see...uncertainty. We wonder ... will this year will be any different? We worry ... how will the challenges we've been dealing with and have brought over with us into 2018 will be dealt with? The old anxieties emerge ... will our prayers be answered? Will our needs be met?

Recall the lyric of the Advent Carol, *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*,

From our **fears and sins release us**, let us find our rest **in Thee**.

Do you want rest from anxiety? Do you want to be released from debilitating worries? Do you want to experience a renewed hope for 2018? Then listen, lasting transformation in 2018 can only be found through being set free by the truth of God's Word. He knows what we need to hear and what we need to do as we gather on this first Sunday of 2018. He is writing a new chapter for his glory and your good in 2018. Do you believe that?

I chose a passage of scripture for this morning's message that speaks to both our **hopes and fears** as we embark on the journey of faith in 2018.

Follow along with me in your Bibles, Luke 12:22-34. Hear now the Word of the Lord,

²² And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!²⁵ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

²⁶ If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?

²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not

arrayed like one of these.

²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!

²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

³² “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Luke 12:22-34)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

This morning we will look at this passage and ask 3 questions:

1. What does it teach us about ourselves?
2. What does it teach us about God?
3. How we should live in 2018?

What Does It Teach Us About Ourselves?

The first thing we learn is this:

1. **Our anxiety is great**

And he said to his **disciples** ... “**Therefore** I tell you do not be anxious about **your life**... (Luke 12:22 ESV)

Notice this as we begin: Jesus is addressing disciples, his followers. Christian, listen up. Pay attention. Jesus is addressing what we think life is all about, where we focus and what consumes us. Jesus addresses that which robs us of the abundant life He intends to give us. Don't be consumed by your possessions (or the lack thereof). We can easily crash into the **ditch of greed**. Jesus warns us about greed, just a few verses earlier, look at verse 15.

...Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” (Luke 12:15 ESV)

Watch out – greed always wants more. Be on guard. An abundant life is **not** about **having an abundance of things**.

On the other side, is the **ditch of worry**.

Do not be anxious about your life. (Luke 12:22 ESV)

Greed can never get enough, worry is afraid it may not have enough - William F. Arndt¹

Greed wants more. Worry fears it won't have any. Jesus addresses these ungodly desires and obsessions, and says to us, "*Don't be anxious about your life.*"

That brings us to the first thing we learn about ourselves: **Our anxiety is great**. We get anxious for many reasons. We are dependent, needy creatures. We are weak and vulnerable. We need food and we need clothing. Four times in this text Jesus addresses the issue of our anxiety.

What are we anxious about? Many things. We are not in control. The future is unpredictable and we can't control it. Somehow, we think if we surround ourselves with enough stuff, we will be ok. If we can control our life, we will be ok.

Jesus exposes a fundamentally wrong attitude about life, that says possessions are all that really matter. If we can just guarantee we will have all the things we need, and control our life and control our future - all will be well. We live like that – like it all depends on us. No wonder we worry and are filled with anxieties. Hear Jesus' command today,

"Therefore I tell you, **do not be anxious about your life**, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. (Luke 12:22 ESV)

Here are 5 things I wrote down about worry:

- Worrying is useless – it doesn't fix anything. It is foolish.
- Worry steals our joy – it's an insidious enemy
- Worry saps our strength – it shuts us down
- It diminishes our faith
- It diminishes our witness

¹ William F. Arndt, Tyndale Commentary Luke

Look with me at verse 29,

²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, **nor be worried.** ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things. (Luke 12:29-30 ESV)

An anxious heart is an indicator that we are not trusting God.

Anxiety is a heart confessing that Christ is not Lord. Scott Oliphint²

It reveals we are focused on the wrong things. In fact, our focus is on things and not the Lord. Jesus says, believer, don't live like that - This is how the nations, those who don't know Me, live. The nations, unbelievers, are obsessed with the material things of life and not with life's ultimate spiritual matters. Everybody's working for the weekend...everybody's racing toward retirement at 55 with a full pension. Don't live like that.

We are so influenced by the world. They don't know God, don't trust God, don't have heaven in their sights. Don't be like that... Don't be preoccupied with the immediate and neglect the important. We are so influenced by the evil one. The devil comes along and whispers in our ear, "*Can you really trust God's Word? Is God really good?*" Don't listen to Satan's lie. Our focus is misplaced because our trust is misplaced. When we are consumed by our fears, we fixate on the temporal and neglect the eternal.

How can we share the goodness and saving power of God when we ourselves aren't trusting in Him? Worry does nothing good for us. It is not a friend on the journey of faith. It is no helpful technique in our toolbox of coping strategies. Worry defeats us and worry dishonours God.

Our anxiety is great. Here's the 2nd thing we learn about ourselves from Jesus: our faith is small.

² Scott Oliphint – Covenantal Apologetics (p. 204)

2. Our Faith is Small

Look with me at verse 28,

²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, **O you of little faith!**

Do you remember in Mark 4 when Jesus is in the boat with his disciples and he is asleep while they encounter a powerful and dangerous storm? The disciples are terrified; they are sure they are going to die. They wake Jesus up from his very deep sleep yelling at him to do something. Then Jesus displays his awesome power and authority - he commands the winds and waves to stop, and the sea becomes calm. After Jesus rebukes the elements, He rebukes their meager faith.

He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? **Have you still no faith?**” (Mark 4:40 ESV)

We are filled with worry, anxieties and fears because we have a faulty vision of God. In our minds and in our hearts, our God is too small. He is not the God of the Bible who created galaxies with his breath; he is not the God who parted seas, destroyed vast armies and stilled violent storms.

Our concept of God is inadequate. To many, God is merely a kind cosmic Santa: nice but inept. We wonder ... “will He actually come through?” Most people, including many Christ-followers have an inadequate concept of God’s goodness, power and majesty. The disciples did.

Life happens. Challenges and problems will continue to be our reality. If our eyes are on our circumstances and not on the Lord - we will panic. We will only see the challenge in front of us and forget the power of God. We will forget that God has proven faithful, and good, always.

Our problem is not that God is weak; it is that our faith is what? Too small. Kent Hughes³ writes,

If we persist in worry, it is because we are “of little faith”—we do not believe God’s Word. It is as simple as that! We do not believe he is in control. We do not believe he is capable of taking care of us. We do not believe what his Word tells us about his love and care for his own.

The scriptures are showing us this morning; our anxiety is great and our faith is small.

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know The Truth*, vol. 1 of Preaching The Word Commentary / Accordance electronic ed. (Wheaton : Crossway 1998).

Friends, isn't life in Christ, as a follower of Jesus about more than food and clothes? Isn't the Christian life about more than surviving day to day? Isn't there a higher purpose that urges us to get our focus in the right place? In 2018 - do you want to quell your anxieties? Do you want to grow your faith? Amen! I'm in too!

Here's what we need this morning; we need to get a greater vision of who God is. That brings us to our second question then,

What Does It Teach Us About God?

Here's the first thing I see in the text,

1. God is a Good King

Our God is the King and He is all powerful. He is sovereign. This means He has perfect control of the entire universe. He governs every element big and small. David writes,

The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord. (Psalm 24:1 HCSB)

He's powerfully involved with all of His creation, and intricately working in all things according to His divine purpose.

He covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth; **he makes grass grow on the hills. He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry.** (Psalm 147:8-9 ESV)

Jesus directs us to reflect on God's care for the earth's vegetation, and living creatures.

Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, **and yet God feeds** them. (Luke 12:24 ESV)

Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (Luke 12:27 ESV)

Ok, Lord we are considering; we are thinking about them, and how you take care of them; You feed the birds and you cloth the grass. What do you need to teach us? Glad you asked...

Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? (Luke 12:24-25 ESV)

²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, **how much more will he clothe you**, O you of little faith!

Note the phrase, “*how much more*” in vss. 24 & 28. Jesus is arguing from the lesser to the **much** greater here. Here’s what we need to see – “If A is true, then how much more is B true”. If the ravens and lilies do not worry, why should we? You matter infinitely more to God than birds. If the ravens and lilies are cared for by God, won’t He take care of us? We his children are not only citizens of earth but of eternity. We are not temporary but eternal. God will certainly see to it that his own are properly clothed. He is perfectly, lovingly caring for the birds and clothing the grass that are here but for a moment, therefore, **how much more** will He in His goodness and sovereignty care for and provide for His children who will live forever?

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven **give good gifts** to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:11).

If God can create and hold together the universe, He will take care of you. So, you don’t need to worry. Turn your life and your concerns over to God and trust Him with them. Bring your big fears and small faith to your sovereign King, your large and in charge God. He will take care of you! God is a **good King**. Jesus teaches us secondly, that God is a **faithful Father**.

2. God is a Faithful Father

Do you ever feel like God is out of touch with your life? Do you wonder if He knows your needs, or hears your prayers? Let’s put that one to rest once and for all. Look at verse 29,

And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, **and your Father knows that you need them.** (Luke 12:29-30 ESV)

God knows. God our Father is completely aware of everything. He is completely aware of your personal, specific needs, the things you prayed for yesterday, that you’ve been praying about for months. Know that He knows, perfectly.

It is not as if God is unwilling to give: it is his good pleasure to give. He is a good and generous God. Look back: Has not God been faithful, always true to His Word?

Not one word of all the **good promises that the LORD had made** to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass. (Joshua 21:45 ESV)

He is the omniscient (all-knowing) God. He knows our frailty, our fears, our small faith, and He knows our needs. God our Father, who knows has promised to faithfully meet our needs. He's not short on supplies. He's not tight for cash this month. He's not hard of hearing. He's not stingy. Our Father cares for what belongs to Him. He guides and provides. He answers our prayers and meets our needs because He loves us. We are His children and we can come to Him in faith knowing He will answer. Our God will supply all of our needs according to His glorious riches in Jesus.

God knows our anxiety is great. He knows our faith is small, and He tells that we don't need to worry. He is our King and He is good. Why foolishly worry when God is a completely trustworthy, faithful Father?

We don't know what's ahead of us in 2018, but we know Who goes before us.
We have uncertainties, but we are not uncertain of the God.

Take your concerns to God. Resist the onslaught of anxiety by trusting in the Lord.
Peace is within reach, not for lack of problems, but because of the presence of a sovereign King.
Provision is ours because we have a faithful Father.

From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee. Israel's strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth Thou art; Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

This brings us to our third question,

How Should We Live in 2018?

In 2018, we want to honour the Lord. We don't want to stress about our needs and concerns. We don't want to worry about tomorrow's problems. We want to deal ruthlessly with the sin of worry. We want a life truly rich toward God ... so we need to ask this question, "How should we respond to what we've seen in this text?"

Let me suggest three ways I see in the text:

1. Seek His Kingdom

This passage has been leading to the climax in this verse...

And **do not seek** what you are to eat and what you are to drink, **nor be worried**. For all the nations of the **world seek** after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. **Instead, seek his kingdom**, and these things will be added to you. (Luke 12:29-31 ESV)

Knowing who God is (our good King and Faithful Father) and knowing He has promised to meet our needs releases us from useless worrying about “things”. It releases us from unhealthy pre-occupation with ourselves and our basic needs. As kingdom seeking believers we need to keep our priorities right. We need to set our aim upon God and His kingdom.

Many are consumed with the things of this life (the nations, those who don't know Christ), and some see beyond this life to eternity as far more important. Seeing that coming eternity is supposed to affect how you live now! Therefore, let YOUR focus and concern be about matters pertaining to the kingdom. You say, “*What does it mean, to seek God's Kingdom?*” Right, the Lord taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come...”. Matthew wrote, *seek first the Kingdom of God*...Leon Morris puts it this way:

To seek the kingdom means trying to “produce in their own lives conduct appropriate to those who have accepted the rule of God.” ... when his followers concentrate on the kingdom, *these things shall be yours as well*. When people truly honour God, God honors their faith. Leon Morris

Jesus taught that true disciples live under the rule of God. They prioritize the seeking of God's Kingdom AND they receive God's material provisions. Being a kingdom seeker means you look at earth from the perspective of heaven, and seek to make God's priorities your own. Making the kingdom of God your priority frees you from worrying about the provision of essentials in life knowing that God is looking out for you.

You see brothers and sisters, there's more to life than a closet full of clothes and a pantry full of food. In fact, most of us have plenty to eat, lots to wear, and plenty to share so let's get on with **seeking His kingdom** and **receive His grace**. That's our second response we find in the text before us.

2. Receive His Grace

I love this verse, listen,

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

God's little sheep, listen, *don't be afraid*. The verb is an imperative. It is a command from Jesus, *don't be afraid*. And, listen to this reassuring word. We are God's flock, He is our Shepherd. God has been pleased to give you His Son and it is His pleasure to give you His kingdom. He gives us daily bread. He gives us mercies new every morning and great is His faithfulness. He has generously given us **everything** we need for life and for godliness.

You don't need to stress and strive and get through life in your own strength. Like a little child, come to Your faithful Father and receive what He wants to give You.

You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. (Psalm 145:16)

Come with open hands and receive his mercies that are new every morning. Come with humility and receive His divine wisdom. Come in your weakness and receive the You power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Come with your needs and receive His all-sufficient grace.

How do we know we will receive when we ask of Him? He cares for us to the point of laying down his life for us,

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32 ESV)

From beginning to end, God has always dealt with us according to the riches of His grace. The Father gave Jesus to us and for us. God's heart of giving is seen most clearly in the generosity of the Gospel.

By grace, we have been saved from a life of sin, and given new life in Jesus. By that same grace, God cares for us, every moment of every day in His steadfast love. Receive His grace as you determine to seek His Kingdom and out of that grace here's the third response, **give generously**.

3. **Give generously**

Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Luke 12:33-34 ESV)

John Piper writes,

If we have a God like ours, we can afford to live simply and generously. John Piper

What is God like? Sovereign King, good and generous Father. What does this mean for fearful, small-faith people? We can trust God to meet our needs and trust Him to give us what we need to give to others. We know life is not about storing up more and more stuff. Life is more than our possessions. Jesus said, freely receive God's grace and be generous in giving to the needy. Scotty Smith comments,

How can we fully enjoy anything without freely sharing it? The more I understand the gospel the more I believe this. The greatest joy is not found in **fearful hoarding**, but in **cheerful giving**.

Don't be afraid to **give** for God's glory and kingdom. Don't be afraid to divest. Be ready to let go of things for the good of others. By your giving you will show you are servant of the good and sovereign King. You will show you are a child trusting in a faithful Father.

Having clarity about what really matters in life will enable you to put 'things' in their proper place. Use what God has given you for His purposes and for the good of others. Give everything to God, especially your most treasured possessions. Put everything at his feet, so he can use it as He desires. Be generous with those around you who have needs. We could generalize this point by saying, *live generously*.

Do so, give to the poor, live generously because the Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. The kingdom of God outweighs everything else in value. The proper attitude towards and use of your earthly possessions will result in the laying up of heavenly riches. The way to become rich toward God and to have treasure in heaven, is to seek His Kingdom and use what He has given you for others.

Anxiety and worry will always distract from what really matters. Put your time, energies, and resources into things that matter by keeping your focus on the Lord and His kingdom. Resources invested in kingdom concerns is a sure sign that you are a child of God and seeking His Kingdom. As you do, you are storing up for yourself great joy in heaven. Giving is the way you lay up treasure in heaven. Generosity is the way to joy.

Conclusion

None but God knows all that 2018 will hold. The year may be filled with hard trials, bring blessing upon blessing, or be mixed with both joys and challenges. Whatever God has in store for the future, choose to start the new year right by anchoring your longings and aspirations for 2018 in God's enduring faithfulness and unbreakable promises.

We are His much-loved children. He is our God and great is His faithfulness. Great is the honour to be kingdom seekers. Great is the promise of God's grace and high is the calling give generously and this is the Word of The Lord.

Let's pray...
