



TIME OF GRACE®

Keep the Faith: GOD Knows

Study Notes

Summary

According to Jesus, we are afraid of the wrong things. We tend to freak out over medical reports, our financial situations, and what other people think of us. However, Jesus taught that, in the grand scheme of things, such events only affect .0000000001% of our lives. Instead, we should stand in awe of the One who can and has changed our eternity.

- **Ecclesiastes 7:14:** When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future.
- **Ecclesiastes 8:7:** Since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come?
- **Ecclesiastes 9:1:** No one knows whether love or hate awaits them.

Truth #1—The future is _____.

- **James 4:13-15:** ¹³ Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

Truth #2—And life is _____.

- **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8:** There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to . . . be born and die, plant and uproot, kill and heal, tear down and build, weep and laugh, mourn and dance, scatter stones and gather them, embrace and refrain from embracing, search and give up, keep and throw away, tear and mend, be silent and speak, love and hate, war and peace.
- **Ecclesiastes 3:11-14:** ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³ That each of them may eat and drink, and find

satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.

Truth #3—But _____ knows.

- **Luke 12:6,7:** ⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. ⁷ Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

He knows _____.

- **Isaiah 43:1:** Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

He knows _____.

Points to Ponder

1. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, have you thought about the future more than before? If so, why do you think that is the case? What fears do you have as a result?
2. What things about the future cause you the most fear? What negative consequences do those fears have on you physically, relationally, and emotionally? Which of the three steps to “keep the faith” do you need to address first? What passage will help you do that in the days ahead? Commit it to memory and share it with your spouse or a friend this week.
3. Meditate on Isaiah 43:1. List three things that this verse declares and that faith knows that help trump your fears of any future unknowns.

Homework for Next Week

Read 1 Peter 5:7-11.

Time of Grace Ministry
Keep the Faith: GOD Knows
Luke 12:4-7
August 9, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

According to Jesus, you and I are afraid of the wrong thing.

In Philippians 4, the apostle Paul says, "Do not be anxious about anything." In 1 Peter 5 the apostle Peter says, "Cast all your anxiety on God." Don't keep any of it in yourself or in your heart. So Jesus and his closest friends would say this to you, to me - that? No. No, don't be afraid of that.

So how can that be? If Jesus is the king of compassion, if he is the God of love, if he is the Savior who cares more about you and me than we will ever know, realize, or fear, how can he just say don't be afraid? In a world where bad stuff happens to God's people all the time - backs give out, marriages break up, the cancer infects and spread and kills - how can he categorically say, "All that? No, no, no, don't be afraid of that."

Well today, we're going to answer that question. Today, Jesus, in just four verses from Luke 12, is going to give us three points that all come back to one big idea that you and I don't have to be afraid. So if you're taking notes at home, I'd love for you to grab a pen and write this down. It's Jesus' first of three points where he said this: "Don't fear that." I'll let Jesus tell you in Luke 12:4: "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more." That would be like Jesus saying to you, "Yeah, you might get cancer. It might be incurable. It might kill you way before your time. But don't be afraid of that." "Yeah, your family might fall apart. Your kids might go down a dark path. Vows might be broken instead of being kept. But don't be afraid of that." "Yeah, Mike, your back might go out, your athletic career might be done. You might lose your voice, lose your ministry, lose your job, lose your hearing, lose your mind, become a vegetable for the last 30 years of your life but don't be afraid of that." But that seems crazy! How could Jesus say that to us?

I thought a lot about that question and I can only come up with one good answer: Math. The reason that God says to you don't be afraid of any of that is because of math. Let me use my journal to explain what I mean. Let's assume the pages in this book are the extent of your life; this is your whole, personal story. I think the reason that you and I so often get afraid is because we're afraid that if something happens, all the pages of our story will be bad. It won't be the story that we wanted for ourselves. I mean, if I live to 80 and my back goes out at 40, that's like half of the pages of this book that will be filled with pain and challenge and hardship; that's why I'm afraid. And if you're in your 20's and you can't find the right person and you're dating and you're trying and you really want that companionship, I mean, if that doesn't work out and these years go by, so much of your story won't be the happily ever after that you wanted. And if you're a teenager or in college and you don't get the grades or the scholarship, if you don't get the school or the internship, if you don't get the offer or the opportunity, like that is so much of your

story that just won't end up like you wanted it to. So many lines, so many sides, so many pages; that's why we're afraid. But here's what Jesus knows: Jesus knows how to do the math. Jesus knows that this life isn't your whole story. You caught that from his words in verse four, right? He said, "Don't be afraid of those who can kill the body and after that," which means there's an after that. Which means there's a life after this life. So if you, like Jesus, believe in an afterlife, an eternity, how much of this life is actually your whole story? Are those 80 years of disappointment half of it compared to eternity? A quarter of it? One-tenth of it? One page of it? One side of it? No, no, no. Here's what Jesus knows; that your life - even if you live to 100 - your life is like one line. That the worst thing that could ever happen to a child of God is one line of a hard life. And after that line is done, for all the rest of the pages - the years, the eternity that goes on forever - none of those things have the authority to touch the rest of your story. That is the explanation of Jesus' teaching; that cancer, bad guys, breakups, bankruptcy, viruses, sicknesses, U-turns, detours, none of it has the authority to mess with your eternity. It can make that one line pretty hard but that one line is so short compared to your whole story. But grab your pen again because here's the second thing Jesus wants to say: But you should fear him.

"But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who after your body has been killed has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him." Jesus says it three times so he must mean it. Here's who you should fear - fear God. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Because God is not just the Lord of a single line; God is the one who has authority over your whole story. God is the one who has authority to throw your eternal soul into hell.

I've actually been to hell. I ran into the depths of it and I somehow escaped out of it and I'm not just trying to get your attention; I did. In fact, I even took a picture. Want to see it? This is hell. This is a picture that I took of the city of Jerusalem and right there on the left side of the picture by that green slope is the hell that Jesus was talking about. Let me explain that. The word used here that's translated "hell" is the Greek word Gehenna, G-e-h-e-n-n-a. And Gehenna is actually a compound word. "Ge" means valley and "henna" comes from a guy's name, Hinnom. Now, I live in Appleton, Wisconsin in the Fox Valley. Well, Gehenna was technically the Hinnom Valley. And that was the place that Jesus referenced whenever he wanted to talk about the suffering that would happen in this life; the place we know as hell. Which begs the question, well, why would Jesus pick that? What was it about that place, that valley south of the city of Jerusalem, that Jesus would compare it to the suffering of hell? Well, here's the story of that valley. In the Old Testament, dark things happened in Gehenna; sinful, evil, blood, death, suffering, wailing, gnashing of teeth because in Gehenna, tragically, children were sacrificed. Some pagan people back in Old Testament times believed that if you wanted the rain to come down from heaven and the grain to sprout from the earth, you had to make Baal, the storm god, and Ashura, the goddess of fertility, happy. And how did you make them happy? You impressed them with your greatest sacrifice. And what was the city's greatest sacrifice? Its children. So the firstborn sons were taken from their mother's arms, brought to the Valley of Gehenna, and while the weeping and wailing and darkness and death happened, it happened right there.

Now when Jesus lived, it doesn't appear that child sacrifice was happening in the Valley of Gehenna but here's another picture. In Jesus' day, armies would roll into the city of Jerusalem and the only way you could be safe was by being inside the city walls. Down in the valley, you

were dead. It didn't matter how hard you tried, how much you fought, how good of a person you were, you simply were not strong enough to stand against the approaching army. It was only inside the walls - walls that the king had built, where the king's soldiers protected on towers and in front of the gates. Inside the walls you were safe; outside the walls was certain death. And so when Jesus wanted to teach about what happens after this life, he talked about Gehenna. A place that is so dark, so evil, so disgusting, so dangerous, it doesn't matter who you are, how strong you are, how good you think you are, when death comes marching in, if you are not behind those walls, you're dead. You don't stand a chance. If the king, the lord of that kingdom, doesn't invite you inside and keep you safe, if he doesn't save you, you're done for. And that's what Jesus said about hell. He said that if God doesn't keep you safe, it will be so bad. In other verses where Jesus uses the word Gehenna, he said it will be so bad that it would literally be better if you chopped off your own hand if this sinful hand was keeping you out of the kingdom. And if your lustful eyes were keeping you away from the Holy King, you should gouge them out, pluck them out, because it would be better to live that one line of life without a hand, with an eye patch, with a limp, than to be whole and strong and spend every line of every page outside of the protection of the King. So if you're going to be afraid, Jesus said don't be afraid of cancer, break up, death, bankruptcy. That's nothing; that's one line. You know who you should be afraid of? God. And here's why: Because that God? He knows.

Look what Jesus says next in Luke 12: "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered," which means that God knows you. He knows all of you. He knows the stuff you put on your resume and the secrets that you keep. God knows me, the stuff I share, being transparent, and the stuff I never will. God knows what you do, what you say, and what you think. God knows every single thought that has passed through my mind during every single sermon when you think I'm so holy preaching the word of God. And God knows every single thought that you've ever thought when you look like you're listening, when it seems like you're worshipping. God knows. God knows every email that you've typed and backspaced because it was just bad. God knows every text that you almost sent until you reread your words and realized that they were wretched. God knows how little you actually think of him even when you're talking to him. He knows. God knows every word that's spoken in every car driving home from every church service. He knows. And God knows how you treat the people under your roof and he doesn't care how much religious art is on the walls. He knows.

The God who has authority to throw you into hell, he knows. He knows that you're not as good as people think. You're not as impressive as the social media feed says. God knows. Every sparrow and every soul. So if you're going to be anxious about something, if you're going to sit up at night worrying about something, don't let it be something so temporary. Worry about God. Or don't! Hard turn - write this down and I'll show you where it comes from. Jesus went on to say this last point: "But don't be afraid." Here's how he says it, if I can get back to Luke 12. Jesus said in the last part of verse 7: "But don't be afraid: You are worth more than many sparrows." Oh man, just when we were going to melt down in fear - God could throw me into hell, he could push me away from his presence, and he knows. Jesus turns around and he says, "But you, friends, don't be afraid because you're worth so much to God. You are worth more than many sparrows."

You know, I googled the word "worthy" the other day and I clicked on that little tab that said "images." And I noticed two things - almost every other picture went back and forth. There were a bunch of the images that said, "You are just worthy because you're you." You know, those fancy, inspirational, Pinterest posts. I am strong, I am brave, I am worthy. That was about half of them but do you know what the word "worthy" actually means? Look it up in a dictionary; it means moral, deserving, good, and blameless. So if God knows, would he say that? But thank God there were other images. They didn't say "you are so worthy." They said, "He is worthy." It's what Jesus' friend, John, said in the book of Revelation: Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive wealth and honor and glory and wisdom and praise. We are worth so much. Not because of ourselves but because of Jesus. Because he is worthy, because he gave up everything, we do not have to be afraid. Because the God who knows everything about us, every regret, every sin, even the things that we've forgotten, he has chosen to remember those things no more. So everyone who is a friend of Jesus, everyone who clings to his cross and trusts in his blood, we don't have to be afraid. You see, Jesus died outside the city walls so that we could live within them. Jesus' soul was plunged into the darkest valley so your soul could be lifted to the highest heaven. Jesus ended up in his own Gehenna so that you would spend forever in glory. Jesus was sacrificed so you and I could be saved, so that God could stoop down like a good father and look us in the eye and say, "Don't be afraid. You are worth so much to me." Wrapped in the perfect life of Jesus, we are so worthy and that's why we don't have to be afraid because our story is all glory. All of these pages, these lifetimes, we won't deal with any of it. We'll just see the face of God and we will be happier than we have ever been before. And even now, even in this little line of life, even when it's hard, God knows. God knows what's going to happen with my back. He knows what's going to happen with your life. God knows. He knows about it, he cares about it, he absolutely controls it for your good. So you don't have to be afraid.

So let me leave you one last reminder today. This week, every time you see a strand of hair, I want you to say "but God knows." Let the knowledge of your Father in heaven who says that you are worth more than many sparrows, let it remind you if one falls out in the sink, don't panic. If you lose a few in the shower, don't freak out. Instead, let it trigger your mind to Jesus' words why you don't have to be afraid because there is a God who knows, a God who cares, a Jesus who saves.

And if you remember that, you might end up like she did. Just over 100 years ago, there was a Christian couple named Mr. and Mrs. Doolittle and they had a pretty painful story. Mrs. Doolittle was bedridden for over 20 years of her life and her husband didn't have it much better. He was stuck in a wheelchair and without a miracle, he would never get out of it. And yet, when people would visit the Doolittle's home, coming with their pity, they would leave surprised. They would walk out of their door inspired by the joy they found in that home. And they would ask each other how's that possible? Will she ever get out of bed? Will he ever recover and leave his wheelchair? They didn't find fear inside their home; they found joy. They found faith.

Well one day in 1905, a songwriter named Civilla Martin walked in with her husband and they had the courage to ask the Doolittle's that question: How do you do it? How is it that you are not afraid? And Mrs. Doolittle, quoting the words of Jesus that we just read, she looked back at her guests and she smiled: "His eye is on the sparrow and I know that he's watching me." Moved by that simple message, Civilla went home and later that year she wrote her now famous

hymn, "His Eye is on the Sparrow." Here's what it says: "I sing because I'm happy. I sing because I am free. God's eye is on the sparrow and I know he's watching me."

I know that God knows so I'm not going to be afraid. I know how this story's going to end and I know who's with me during this one little line that I call life. So brothers and sisters, do not be afraid. Keep the faith. God knows and he knows you.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I can't wrap my brain around your knowledge and your power and your love. I can't imagine how much time that your people will have in your presence; that this short little life is like a labor pain that might last a day but there are so many days coming with this family that you're creating. So I pray today for all of us, God, for incredible faith. Help us to take our eyes off of these temporary situations that we can't control, that we don't know about, and instead fix them on you - the God who is in control, the God who cares, and the God who knows.

Father, it would be such a bright light if we wouldn't live like the world. They're so afraid of things they don't know but we believe in a God who does. So dispel our fear. Help us to live out your Son's words, to follow in the footsteps of Peter and Paul and not be anxious about anything because we've given it to you and we trust that you know and you'll do what's best for us.

God, I can't wait to see your face. I try even now and it makes me sing because I'm happy. But one day, I will actually see - not with faith - but face to face and my joy, our joy, will never end. Keep us strong until that day and we pray in the strong name of your beautiful son, Jesus, amen.