Travel Light – Part Three

The Dedication in Jerusalem

(Luke 12:32-38)

Today we’re continuing in our message series called Travel Light. Looking at the events surrounding the coming of Jesus Christ and considering the stuff that is holding us back and keeping us from experiencing all that God wants for us in this life. My goal in this series is to remind you that this world is not our home, to encourage you to travel light, because as we go through life, we end up accumulating all kinds of baggage. In fact, it’s amazing how much of the wrong stuff we accumulate, stuff that distracts us, stuff that weighs us down and holds us back, keeping us from living the life that God desires for us.

As we read the Scriptures it becomes more and more obvious that God desires for us to live a life of expectation and preparedness. You see, there should be an urgency and anticipation among the people of God as we wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. We may be living in Emmitsburg and the surrounding areas right now, but our citizenship is in heaven, that is our home, that’s why Jesus said,

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. 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. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:32-34).

Now, why would Jesus tell his followers that? Well, it’s because the return of Christ is what’s next on the prophetic calendar. Those first disciples didn’t experience the restoration of the kingdom. Jesus was telling them and subsequent generations how we should live our lives as we’re waiting for his coming.

You see, the fact is that Jesus said, “no one knows the day or the hour of his coming.” But it is coming and it’s going to come suddenly. And so, that’s why he said, “there will be two men working in the field, one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be working in the mill, one will be taken and the other left.” And so, he’s warning us about preparedness, priorities and perspective, and that’s why he said,

“Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come” (Matthew 24:42).

And so, Jesus advises us to travel light, not to allow ourselves to be burdened by things of the world. Because there’s one thing that you and I all have in common, and that is that we have a chance. The one common denominator that equalizes us all is that we’re all given the same opportunity to respond to the invitation of God. And that’s why Jesus said,

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 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. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes” (Luke 12:35-37).

The big question for us today, the big question for the church today, is do we believe? You know, do we really believe this? Do we really believe that Jesus could come back at any moment? And if you do, are you living with anticipation, ready and waiting for his coming?

For many of us, if we’re honest, and this is church, so let’s be honest. Many of us today are distracted. We live in a difficult time, we’re easily distracted, and it’s often the notifications on our phones. You know, you’re sitting here listening to the Word of God and your phone is buzzing in your pocket because you just got another email, another text, or someone liked the cat video you posted this morning.

Or maybe you go home and the kids have to be at basketball, another one at gymnastics, another one has riding lessons, and somewhere, somehow, at some time you’ve got to get some food into them. And so, we’ve got so many places to go, so many things to do, and often the most difficult choices are not just between what is good and bad, but between what is good and what is best.

And so, what do we do when every demon of hell wants to distract us from using our lives to do things that matter, that honor God, and make an eternal difference? What do we do?

Today, we’re gathered here celebrating the plan of a God who loves us so much that a great personal expense he planned to give you and me a chance of going to heaven instead of hell. A chance to enjoy a relationship with him for all time and eternity, because on that first Christmas, the One who was the true light of the world came to a little town called Bethlehem.

The prophet Isaiah described that moment saying,

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (Isaiah 9:2).

And so, there was a lot of anticipation building, preparing for the coming of Christ, the expectation of Christmas. The Scriptures tell us that the Magi followed this great light, but there were also things happening closer to Bethlehem. Luke tells us in his gospel,

“On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived” (Luke 2:21).

Three weeks later,

“When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord” (Luke 2:22).

And so it was, after 40 days, the time prescribed by the law of Moses for a newborn son, Mary and Joseph brought their baby boy to Jerusalem to be dedicated to the Lord. Unknown to them they were fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi,

"Suddenly, the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire will come" (Malachi 3:1).

As Joseph and Mary carried Jesus up the steps of the temple, embracing the sanctity of this moment, singing and celebrating the gift of God, there was a silent hush. There was an air of expectancy in the temple as if the Lord was birthing something new. Luke tells us,

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts” (Luke 2:25-27).

And so, Simeon was there waiting with anticipation when Jesus’ parents brought him into the temple. I love his example of been so focused, so purposeful, refusing to be distracted, listening for the Spirit of God. Simeon was faithful waiting for the appointed time. He reminds me of Jesus’ words 30 years later,

“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning… It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes” (Luke 12:35,37).

Simeon is there waiting and watching when Joseph and Mary bring Jesus in to dedicate him to the Lord. Simeon is there because he knows they’re coming, but when he welcomes them, he doesn’t say the normal things that you say when you greet a new mom with her baby. He didn’t say, “Oh, that’s the cutest baby I’ve ever seen!” Or, “He’s so strong, look how he’s holding his head up, he’s so handsome, so alert!” But Simeon didn’t say the usual things, instead he prayed, praising God saying,

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:28-32).

“The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too” (Luke 2:33-35).

Now, that was awkward, these were such strange words to a new mom, but deep in her heart Mary knew. Simeon spoke prophetically of the great pain that she would experience and she would never forget the shadow of the cross that was looming over the life of her baby boy. It was just as the angel promised,

“He will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Simeon’s words may have seemed strange to a new mom, but his words bring great hope to you and me, because this baby, this Jesus, this Christ, is a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of Israel.

Luke tells us that the welcoming committee wasn’t finished yet, there was someone else waiting for him.

“There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying” (Luke 2:36-37).

“Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38).

Jesus our Savior has come and while the blessedness of Christmastide and all that that means to us is such a blessing. The promise remains, that he is coming again, and that anticipation can be a burden as well as a joy. That’s why Jesus said that his disciples would fast when he was taken away from them. Because there’s a certain feeling of sorrow in the anticipation. It can be exciting and stimulating, but also scary and painful, because we’re waiting for something that is outside of our normative experience.

In other words, we’re waiting on a God thing, we’re waiting for the unknown, and that takes us way out of our comfort zone. And yet, the Bible is very clear that the only way that we can truly serve God is when we seek him first. As the gospel says,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

And that’s why the first thing in the day we seek Jesus. Not Facebook or Instagram, not the newsfeed, but the first thing of the day is Jesus. That’s the example of Joseph, Mary, Simeon, and Anna. And that is the implication of Jesus words,

“It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready” (Luke 12:37-38).

And so, the first of the week, we gather together just like we are today. We worship God giving him our praise, we listen to God’s word, and we’re setting the precedent for our week because we’re seeking God first. And any time God blesses us with increase, maybe a paycheck on Friday or whatever it is, we acknowledge that everything comes from him, we put him first and we worship him with the tithe.

And so, we seek him first,

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).

Because the only way that we can live an effective life, bringing glory to God, is having a fixed purpose with our eyes focused on the prize. It’s not going to happen accidentally, we can’t be distracted by things of this world, we’ve got to fix our minds on things above, focused on what matters most. In other words, it’s got to be intentional, because every demonic force of hell is trying to distract us. And it’s so easy to get freaked out about so many things that really don’t matter that much, but the prophet Isaiah said,

“You will see your teacher with your own eyes. Your own ears will hear him” (Isaiah 30:20-21, NLT).

And so, we want to focus on what’s important, and I love the imagery here, because he says you’ll hear a word behind you. He says,

“Right behind you a voice will say, "This is the way you should go," whether to the right or to the left” (Isaiah 30:21, NLT).

In other words, with your own ears you will hear the Spirit of God whispering, “That is good, you can do that. “Or maybe, wait a minute, you could choose something so much better.” And so, he says, “Let’s walk this way, let’s go that way,

“Then you will destroy all your silver idols and your precious gold images. You will throw them out like filthy rags, saying to them, "Good riddance!" (Isaiah 30:22, NLT).

And so, when you seek God first, you’ll hear him, because he’s a God who speaks. When he created the world he spoke,

“But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Hebrews 1:2).

And if you’ve never heard from God, I want to encourage you to open up his Word today believing that he’s a speaking God, because he will always speak to you through his Word. And he will speak to you through the voice of his Spirit, because he said,

“Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." Then he added, "Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given—and you will receive even more. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them” (Mark 4:23-25, NLT).

And so, if you have ears to hear, you will hear. He may speak to you through his word or through his people, maybe through this message, or through a song or a circumstance. But if you have ears to hear, a voice behind you will say choose this, walk in this way, do this or do that. Simeon, stop what you’re doing, go down to the temple, this is the moment you’ve been waiting on. The Savior has come into the world!

And so, what do you and I do in this culture that is so busy, and just so loud? How can we be faithful to God like Simeon and Anna when every demon of hell wants to distract us from doing what matters for eternity? Well, Jesus said, “Anyone with ears should lean in and listen, paying close attention to what we hear, and taking a moment to make a difference. Because our calling is too great, and our God is too good to be distracted by things that don’t last.”

That is what I want for myself and for you as well, so that we’re able to focus on the things that will help us serve God the best. And so, the first thing I want to work on is distancing myself from distractions. I want to diminish the distractions like the apostle Paul said in first Corinthians chapter 7. I know he was talking about relationships and marriage, but we want to take the principle of the verse and apply it in a different context. Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

“I am saying this for your benefit, not to place restrictions on you. I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible” (1 Corinthians 7:35, NLT).

In other words, he says, “I’m not saying this to be legalistic, but I don’t want you to accept what’s normal in your culture if it distracts you from what really matters the most.”

Today, if you’ve ever wondered why you’re not as productive as you could be, or your relationships are not as intimate as they should be, or you’re not as close to God as you would like to be, just maybe it’s because you’re so distracted. I know that some of us are interrupted every five or 10 minutes by our mobile devices, but I often remind myself that life is too short, my calling is too great, and my God is too good to waste my life distracted by things that don’t matter. I hope you can feel that too, because your life is too valuable, God created you with gifts and passions for a purpose, and he has called you at this time in history so that you could best glorify him.

And so, like Solomon tells us in Proverbs, I want to diminish distractions, treating them just like temptation. He said,

“Keep to a path far from (him or her), do not go near the door of (their) house” (Proverbs 5:8).

In other words, he says stay far from it, don’t go near, don’t get close to that which could destroy you. And so, maybe for some of you, you may have to do what I do with my phone during study time. I distance myself from anything that would distract me, I mute it and put it out of sight, no vibrations, no distractions.

I’m afraid that many of us don’t understand the power of idols, things that are so important to us that we feel like we can’t go without or do without it. And so, some of us need to distance ourselves, silencing it, even deleting an app, because whatever it is you don’t want to waste your life doing things that neutralize your effectiveness in the kingdom of God. In fact, Jesus warned us very strongly about our focus, about what we fix our gaze on, and he said,

"Your eye is a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is good, your whole body is filled with light. But when your eye is bad, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is” (Matthew 6:22-23, NLT).

And so, we want to be thinking about things and doing things that are excellent and praiseworthy. We want to be involved in activities and spend time with people that are sharpening us and helping us to serve Jesus more effectively. The Scripture tells us,

“He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Proverbs 13:20, NKJV).

You cannot live attentively and purposefully when you are surrounded by distractions. Therefore, we want to distance ourselves from anything that is consistently distracting us from God and his purpose. In our culture today it is not easy, but it’s worth the fight, and so I want to do what Solomon advises. In Proverbs chapter 4 he said,

“Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you” (Proverbs 4:25).

And so, I’m going to ask God to give me the ability to focus on what is important, fixing my eyes straight ahead, gazing directly before me with a fixed purpose. As the author of Hebrews said,

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2).

Because wherever he goes, I want to go. Whatever he is doing is what I want to be doing. Because that’s the only way to succeed in the things that matter.

Peter learned this when he was out on the lake in the middle of the night, he and the disciples were caught up in a storm. They were fighting the wind and waves and about 3 o’clock in the morning Jesus came walking toward them on the water. The disciples were terrified, thinking that he was a ghost, but Jesus said,

"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus” (Matthew 14:27-29).

And so, Peter had his gaze fixed on Jesus, he’s focused on Jesus, and step after step he’s walking on the waves. But the moment he allows himself to become distracted, when he looks away, Matthew tells us,

“When he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him" (Matthew 14:30-31).

In other words, it wasn’t until he was distracted and looked away, looking at the wind, that he started to sink.

Some of you today are thinking that you always feel behind, you always feel overwhelmed, you always feel like you could be doing so much more. Why is it that you are sinking all the time? Could it be that you are looking at the wind and the waves, looking at this or that, instead of living with your eyes on Jesus? Would you determine today to distance yourself from distractions becoming more like Simeon and Anna, just watching and waiting? So that as Jesus said,

“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” (Luke 12:36).

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