

Don't Be Afraid: Rethinking Church Economics

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 November 2024

Preacher: Anthony Parrott

[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everybody. My name is Anthony. I get to serve as one of the co-lead pastors here at the table. And we, just last week, started a real brief series called A Future with Hope.

Pastor Tanetta introduced us or reintroduced us to the passage, the chapter Jeremiah 29. And if you want to—well, our tech team is on a break.

Okay, Jeremiah 29 is the passage where we get, I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. Promote the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile.

Pray to the Lord for it because your future depends on its welfare. I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord. They are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope. And there are two extremes that you can go with this passage.

You can either make it hyper-individualized, you can stick it on like a graduation card, and you can make it solely about you and your success. Or you can go to the other extreme of like, well, this just has to do with nothing but ancient Israel in exile in Babylon, and then not do anything with it.

[1 : 0 6] And so, Pastor Tanetta, try to help us reclaim this passage in its appropriate context, reminding us that a church, a church that is faithful to the way of Jesus, a church that is about centering the margins, a church that is about empowering those who have been, had their power stolen, in many ways in America is a church in exile.

And I don't want to confuse us with the idea of like, we're persecuted. We're clearly not persecuted, all right? We're sitting here, we're free, we're able to meet together. And yet there are many of those in this room, online, represented in this congregation, that when you put together their particular marginalized identity and the fact that they're a Christian, for many folks, this does not compute.

And so it's a form of cultural exile. And as cultural exiles who choose to believe that the way of Jesus is worth following, and because of that we want to bring God's kingdom here on earth, then we have some responsibility to work, promote for the welfare of the city where we are living.

A city which is having its own turmoil, having its own people put into positions of power, which, and those people would have many of you suffer.

And so God knows the plans that God has for us, and those plans are for peace, not disaster, a future with hope. Now we're going to continue in the same vein.

[2 : 3 7] We're going to talk about a passage from the words of Jesus, Luke chapter 12. And what we're going to do is I'm going to just give a few comments on the passage.

I'm going to give us an update on our annual fundraiser, and then we're going to do a contemplative or a meditative scriptural exercise together. So before we do that, would you pray with me?

Good and gracious God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Mother of us all, we thank you that you are here and that you are in this place.

And God, we have already named the many fears and anxieties that are rocking us, our families, our friends, those close to us.

And God, we bring those anxieties to you, God, because we know that you care for us. You care about us. God, I pray that as we turn our attention to your scripture today, that you would illuminate it for us, that you would make it come alive, that we would be not only hearers of the word, but doers as well, God, that we would not merely be just here to get a little bit scripturally or theologically smarter, but rather that we would be formed into the character and likeness of Jesus Christ.

[3 : 58] We pray these things in the unity of the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus. Amen. All right, so this is what Luke chapter 12, verses 32 through 34 says, is the words of Jesus.

It says, Don't be afraid, little flock, because your father delights in giving you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to those in need.

Make for yourselves wallets that don't wear out, a treasure in heaven that never runs out. No thief comes near there and no moth destroys.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be too. So like I said, I just want to make a few notes about this passage. And then we'll talk about our fundraiser for a second, and then we'll do some meditation on the words of Jesus.

So first of all, Jesus begins by saying, Do not be afraid. And I want to ask us, sort of rhetorically ask us, how we might imagine how Jesus says, Don't be afraid.

[4 : 59] Or if you go up the chapter a little bit, Jesus says, Be anxious for nothing or do not be worried. And I can imagine that there's a certain posture or a certain way that maybe you've heard words like, Calm down, don't be afraid, don't be anxious, don't worry.

A sort of chiding, don't be afraid. Right? Versus something I have to do as a parent quite often, Picking up my child, holding them close and saying, Don't be afraid.

Even when things are scary, Even when things are enshadowed, Even when things are worth being afraid about, There can be this posture, This act of love that gets close to someone that you care about, And says, I've got you, Don't be afraid.

And you can hear the tone of affection. Don't be afraid, Little flock. If it were, you know, in Spanish, Flockito. You know, This term of endearment.

Jesus, Just recognizing Jesus often compares himself to a shepherd, Where the people that follow him, His congregation, The crowds, As a flock without a shepherd that he is getting close to. And he recognizes this is not a denial of fear.

[6 : 06] It's not a denial of anxiety. It's a recognizing that there are lots of things to be afraid about. And so Jesus says, Little flock, Don't be afraid. Now fear has this interesting quality to it, Like many of our emotions, That the further that we push away from it, The larger it gets.

I have had the honor recently of being along somebody who experienced what's called exposure response prevention therapy. Okay?

So ERP, Exposure response prevention therapy, Helps people who have these large anxieties, Some might call them irrational anxieties, And help them how to live with that anxiety.

And the technique that a therapist is going to use for ERP, Is not to sort of like rationalize, Well let me tell you all the reasons you shouldn't be afraid of that. That doesn't work. It's not to build up a bunch of like defenses of like, Okay, If you're afraid of this, Then do these six things.

Rather, Rather, It's getting really, Really cozy with the fear. So I watched somebody go into a therapy session, They're sort of in a freak out sort of mode, All of these anxieties and fears that they have, Particularly around a fear of death.

[7 : 23] And their hour together in that session, Was just making a list, And talking in explicit detail, About all the ways that they could die. And I'm sitting here being like, That sucks.

But by the end of the session, This person is like, I feel so much better. Now, The Stoic philosophers, A couple thousand years ago, Sort of realized what, You know, Modern psychologists are figuring out today.

They had a tool called, Pre-meditatio malorum. In other words, Pre-contemplating, Pre-thinking, About the worst that can happen. And visualizing it in their brain, What's the worst that can happen?

And get real and honest and explicit about the worst. So that the fear isn't just some nebulous shadow, But rather something you're deeply comfortable with, Intimate with.

So when I think about Jesus' words, Don't be afraid, little flock. I think about the fact that this is not a denial. This is the same Jesus who goes into a garden, And kneels down and prays to God, Would you take this future away from me?

[8 : 31] This is a Jesus who does not deny the hardship, Does not deny the difficulty, But rather gets close to those he cares about, And says, Do not be afraid.

Now, this is attached to a reason. Don't be afraid, little flock. What's the next word? Because. Because your father delights in giving you the kingdom.

Some translations, the NIV, the NASB, They sort of like neuter the power of what's being said here. They just say things like, Is pleased, or has chosen to give you the kingdom.

But this translation, this is the common English Bible, Gets at the word here, the Greek word here. It's delight. It's joy. It's the super abundance of God's generosity.

That God is not stingy. Stingy God does not hold back. And this pairs with what the prophet Jeremiah says. That God has plans to prosper. To give you a future with hope.

[9 : 30] And so this reason to not be afraid, The reason why Jesus embraces and says, I've got you, don't be afraid, Is because the God that we worship Is not a stingy, miserly God, But is a God who delights in giving you the kingdom.

Now, we'll talk about what the kingdom is in just a minute. But Jesus goes on, Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Can you throw up that meme I put in there?

Sell and give in this economy? Now, this of course is like the hardest passage. You can go back to the text. We don't need to stare at the raccoon too long. This is of course like the hardest part of the text To sort of wrap our arms around.

How many of my possessions? All of them? Some of them? Who do I give it to? Everybody in need? Just the people that like make the right checklist? They meet the means test? And like Christians, followers of Jesus Have wrestled with this for 2,000 years.

Do not expect me to give you quick, clean answers today. All right? But there is some sort of relationship of a lack of anxiety Or an embracing of the fear and understanding the fear And how letting that fear sort of release us And being released from it And understanding God's generosity Somehow leads to our own generosity.

[10 : 48] And that's so much of our own personal stinginess. I'll speak for myself. My own personal stinginess and anxiety around money Has to do with what I'm afraid of. And the reason that I can be afraid to just hand it off to somebody To give it away Is because of my own fears.

But if I believe Jesus That Jesus treats me with affection That God is as good as Jesus says God is Then perhaps I will know that I have been released from fear When generosity springs from my own life.

No matter what It's hard to avoid Jesus' message That wealth isn't necessarily a sign of God's blessing. And in fact, wealth could be a sign That you're missing out on God's blessing.

And that it's hard to miss out That hoarding is one of the worst sins of all. One of the quickest way to break shalom And wholeness and relationship between human beings.

Jesus says, make for yourselves wallets That don't wear out. Now, I just want to give a quick note here. Basically, this is like an idiom For like, wherever you're putting your wealth Make sure it's in a place that's semi-permanent.

[12 : 02] Because you didn't have like banking Like you have today. You had purses. You had wallets. You have literal bags. Jesus' disciple Judas says To hold the bag Which is this idiom For managing the finances of Jesus' ministry.

And so make for yourselves wallets That don't wear out Doesn't mean like sell your leather and get vinyl. It just means like Make sure that wherever you're putting your wealth It's in a place that doesn't wear out.

Which goes into the next phrase A treasure in heaven that never wears out. Now, treasure in heaven. Heaven. I've been preaching about the topic of heaven For nearly 15 years.

And I have preached in those 15 years Basically the same fundamental message That when we read the word heaven Kingdom of heaven, kingdom of God Particularly in the New Testament That we should not think Of the place we go where we die Or something that happens in the far off future.

I can tell you the exact book, author, and location I was as a junior in college When I made these connections As a budding theologian and preacher About what heaven is and is not in the New Testament.

[13 : 13] Okay? It is not the place you go where you die It is about what God is doing here on earth now. And it was also Only this week, embarrassingly enough That I realized that Store up your treasures in heaven Is also not a reference to the afterlife Or the new creation It is also a reference To the here and now.

It took 15 years of sort of Deprogramming myself Around how to think about heaven To finally realize That treasures in heaven thing Isn't just about some far off future.

The church The thing that all of us are doing right now Is, according to One biblical scholar and theologian N.T. Wright The church is meant to be A small working model Of the kingdom of God.

All those things that we pray about In the Lord's Prayer That your kingdom come Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven That we have bread That debts are forgiven That no one's going to prison All of that The church is meant to be The small working model of today.

Now all the things that we are hoping for Aspiring for in our society A society that, according to 1 Peter Is meant to be a place where justice Can make its home A society where there is equity and equality And where there is reparation for prior harm Where there is no individual or community or group That is seen as less than or subhuman Compared to someone else.

[14 : 48] All of those things that we wish for If we want to see them happen in society Then we've got to figure it out here first. And this is also true in the ways that we handle Our wealth And our money And our wallets And where we store all that stuff.

Do we store it in The sort of wealth flows up streams Of racial capitalism?

Or do we store it in communities of abundance Where, according to the book of Acts There are no poor among us? Now note, you know, quick addendum here I'm not saying store up your treasures In the organization, the 501c3 of this church We're not also trying to replicate those wealth flows up ways But rather we store up treasures in each other The church is not an organization That's not what Jesus would have understood It's not what Acts The authors or the practitioners of the book of Acts Would have understood The church was the group The assembly The collection of human beings that get together And so when we store up our treasures in heaven We're storing it up in the relationships That we have together So that we are all taken care of In appropriate ways It's what the black social movement Has called cooperative societies Or cooperative economies So we all know the name Rosa Parks Right? Rosa Parks was the woman

Sort of chosen to kickstart The Montgomery bus boycott And just as important Is a woman by the name of Joanne Robinson Because if you're going to boycott a bus system For 371 odd days Guess what?

You're going to need to figure out another way To provide rides for everyone And so Joanne Robinson Herself and a student And another administrator Were the one who handed out 55,000 leaflets across Montgomery To make sure that there were ways That everybody could get to their jobs And have transportation And not use the bus system That's creating this alternative economy In order to challenge the unjust one That had kept Joanne and Rosa and King And so many others down So when you talk about boycotts When you talk about pushing back Against racial capitalism That also has to be paired with the work of And what are we mantling instead?

[17 : 22] What are we building together instead? Sometimes it takes a Joanne Robinson And 55,000 leaflets And a year plus work To organize carpools So that you can push back Against an unjust bus system So we too as the church Are creating our own Miniature cooperative economy We too are putting our treasure In heaven Which is to say our treasure In these relationships Where God dwells In our midst and amongst us We put our treasure there As a way to boycott To push back against The unjust economies Now We have our own Miniature cooperative economy here That's part of what Our year-end fundraiser is about Let me remind you about our fundraiser And give you a quick update You can go ahead and put up That next slide So our fundraiser is called A Future with Hope We have a goal of raising 20,000 extra dollars By year's end Particularly hopefully by

Giving Tuesday The Tuesday after Thanksgiving And having 10 new recurring givers And we're asking for folks To give a gift above and beyond Their regular gift Or the gift that they might Regularly give to the church And to make it the first gift Of the holidays The way that we're going to use This 20,000 dollars Is one to make sure That our income matches Our expenses this year By the end of October We are about \$10,000 off So we had spent About \$10,000 more Than we had brought in We hope to get that Into alignment by year's end Always trying to move closer To an operating reserve Of about three months As an initial target We have about One month savings right now And then we want to fund A benevolence fund Now When I first got here About four and a half years ago In 2020 We were hit by a pandemic Part of the church's response To that pandemic Was providing meals And transportation To get those meals To people Because, you know

People were either Immunocompromised Shed in their homes Unable to travel Unable to get groceries And we raised something like \$60,000 that year In order to provide meals During COVID And then that wound down And since then The church I'll say this honestly Has been in a bit of a scarcity mentality Where we've had like A shoestring budget And it funds Completely honestly It funds 60% of it funds Me and Tanetta's salaries Insurance Benefits Things like that And the other 40% Funds rent Ministries You know Snacks and table kids And first impression stuff And then some amount To our justice And compassion Partnerships So a food pantry A drop-in center Sometimes a soup kitchen That we help Partner with But if somebody And this happens Quite often Multiple times a month If somebody comes to us And says Hey I can't make rent I can't pay this utility bill I can't pay off This parking ticket To get my car back To get to my job Do you have money To help us out

We don't We don't We have to say no And so what A benevolence fund does Is you fund it With some cash You provide a team Or committee Who receives those requests And then can answer Those requests With disbursements Of funds To help people out And what we want to do With this \$20,000 With the first \$4,000 Of it Is to have an initial fund For our benevolence So that when those Requests come in The team can say Yes we can help you Anything that we raise Over the \$20,000 Half of every dollar Is going to our friends At Transmission Ministry Collective Which is a ministry Specifically focused On trans folks Which of course Is more necessary Than ever now Next slide So there's a sort of A graphical representation Of first \$4,000 Goes to benevolence \$16,000 Finishing our year strong And then every Half of every dollar Above \$20,000 Goes to transmission And as of this morning

We are at \$4,500 So 22% Yeah Which means that We can start January 2025 With a benevolence fund Which is good good news Now something I want To point out About these numbers \$4,500 with 16 donations Means something like I looked it up this morning But forgot It's like an average Of \$300 per donation I want to bring that Average way way down It makes much more sense Like our newsletter Goes out to 1,500 people Our Instagram is seen By 1,500 people There are about Three or 400 people Involved in like Classes and groups And things like that Makes much more sense For hundreds of people To give like \$25 or \$30 Than 16 people Giving like \$300 So this is my sort of Like plea to you That if you're thinking My donation is too small No We need everybody To think my donation Is just large enough To help us meet our goals All right Now because I knew I had to give like A finance fundraising update I knew I would feel Sort of icky after that It's not my favorite

[22 : 26] Thing to do So I wanted to Then come back From that With a contemplative Exercise on scripture All right This is something We've done Very rarely In a skill That we sometimes Do in groups But we can do In large group settings And that is the skill Of what's called Lectio Divina Lectio Divina Just a Latin phrase It means divine reading And it's a way Of slowing down And approaching scripture In a much more Intentional Slow way With the idea That scripture Is not always meant To be something That we go out With just like Give me more knowledge Give me more words But rather The way that the church Has seen it Throughout the centuries As a way to encounter The presence of God Now we are Trinitarian Meaning that we believe In Father, Son, and Holy Spirit We are not Trinitarian Meaning Father, Son, and Holy Bible Okay So we do not confuse The Bible with God But the Bible Can be a window At which we can experience

Or glimpse at God And so what Lectio does It invites us through Four sort of movements Of reading First is just The simple act of reading And so what I'm going to do Is I'm going to read This passage slowly Three times And just invite you To pay attention To the words Or phrases Ideas or concepts That might sort of Pop up at you The second time Not yet, not yet The second time The second movement We're going to read The scripture again But this time In a more sort of Meditative place And I might invite you To use your imagination Or the senses Of your imagination Of what would it be like To actually hear Jesus speaking these words What might you taste Smell, feel What might you be hearing What might you be sensing Or emoting inside of you As you heard Jesus The third movement Is to pray these words To use these words As a sort of Launching point For how to speak to God And the fourth movement Is that of contemplation Where we try to move

Out of words But into mere experience With the belief that God is actually In this place And that sometimes With those closest Most intimate Dear friends Or companions You don't need words To feel close So there's going to be Just some like Sort of pad Ethereal music In the background To hopefully cover up And these sort of Stomach gurgles Things like that I'm going to be Reading the scripture In a very intentionally Slow way And just give some Gentle guides or prompts As we make our way Through these four movements So if you want to go ahead And start with the music I invite you to find A posture that is Comfortable for you That might be Both feet on the ground It might be cross-legged If that's comfortable It might be To close your eyes To find a point Of light somewhere But just a way That you can feel Most cities I also want to say If you want to Move your body As you do this That's completely Welcome to During our worship night

I really appreciated The fact that There are people Who are worshiping And just sort of Moving about the room That's how I often Feel most comfortable When I pray Is when I'm moving Or walking So whatever works And I invite you Just to hear And listen to the words Of Jesus From Luke chapter 12 Pay attention To whatever words Phrases or ideas Might pop up at you Might the Holy Spirit Might be asking you To pay attention Don't be afraid Little flock Because your Father Delights in giving you The kingdom Sell your possessions And give to those In need Make for yourselves Wallets that don't Wear out A treasure in heaven That never runs out No thief comes near there

And no moth destroys Where your treasure is There your heart Will be too Thank you.

[27 : 10] I'm going to read the passage again. We're staying just in the movement of reading. So just paying attention to words or phrases. Don't be afraid, little flock, because your Father delights in giving you the kingdom.

Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Make for yourselves wallets that don't wear out, a treasure in heaven that never runs out.

No thief comes near there, and no moth destroys. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be too.

In the name of God IS dallas. Let's pray.

and one more time again stilled in just the movement of reading don't be afraid little flock because your father delights in giving you the kingdom sell your possessions and give to those in need make for yourselves wallets that don't wear out a treasure in heaven that never runs out no thief comes near there and no moth destroys where your treasure is there your heart will be too there's a word or phrase or idea that's speaking to you

[29 : 22] I invite you just to speak it out loud quietly you can shout it so everyone can hear if you're online you can put it in the chat but I don't enjoy this and take■tro in my Wohnues and so once I work with you and I have to spend my time with my museum because I want to work with your mom very soon for like last but I think we'rebreaking Now we're going to move into contemplation.

We're trying to move a little bit beyond just words, but into our emotions, believing that God can speak in our feelings as well. I invite you even to use your imaginations as if you were there, sitting in a grassy field with Jesus, hearing his words.

What might you be sensing or experiencing? What emotions might be coming to the surface? Again, the words of Jesus. Jesus, don't be afraid, little flock, because your father delights in giving you the kingdom.

Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Make for yourselves wallets that don't wear out, a treasure in heaven that never runs out.

No thief comes near there, and no moth destroys. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be too.

[31 : 24] What feelings or senses or emotions are coming forward for you? And again, don't be afraid, little flock, because your father delights in giving you the kingdom.

Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Make for yourselves wallets that don't wear out, a treasure in heaven that never runs out.

No thief comes near there, and no moth destroys. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be too. And now we move into prayer, taking these words and using them as a jumping off point to speak to God.

As scripture says, as face to face, as a friend speaks to a friend. I'm going to adapt to the words of Jesus as an example, and then invite you to pray as well.

Jesus, help me to not be afraid. Help me to see you as a shepherd, and help me to experience God as delighting in giving me the kingdom.

[33 : 33] God, I don't want to sell my possessions. I don't always want to give to those in need. Help me, God. Help me to know what it is to invest in a way that does not wear out.

to invest in a heaven here on earth that never runs out. God, would you protect us from the thief who comes to kill and steal and destroy.

God, help my heart to be where my treasure is and my treasure to be here among your people. and my goodness.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[34 : 42] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. And finally, we move into contemplation to behold a God who delights in you.

And to be held by God who delights in you. Contemplation is a place where words fade to thoughts, thoughts to feelings, feelings to a comfortable silence with the divine.

So we'll spend just a couple minutes here. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

[36 : 56] God, we thank you that you are here and in this place. As we turn our attention from your word, we now turn it to the greatest act of generosity ever known.

Help us to be at peace and to know that we are held by you. Amen.