

Christians in Egypt don't need proof they're a small flock. You've probably seen the news stories. Since the beginning of July many in their country have blamed them for the coup that overthrew the president. Since then Christian churches have been burned, Christians have been captured, and Christian businesses have been looted. Making up only 9% of the population, this little flock can't defend itself.

But it doesn't surprise you that Christians are a small flock. You recognize yourself as being part of a small flock, just look around. Each year our national church body produces shrinking numbers, but so do many other denominations within Christianity. Each day the news makes it seem like the small flock of Christians is only getting smaller. It makes for easy attacks. It allows for encouragements to pull away from Christianity. Go along with the big group. It's easy. Our flock is too weak, too small, and has no protection.

Speaking to the disciples, a small group numbering only twelve, Jesus knows the pain of being a small flock. He comes to us also in the gospel with words of promise. In fact he comes with...

Great promises for a small flock
Watching for what Christ already gave
Waiting for Christ's return

I suppose it hurt Jesus that more people weren't hearing his great promise. At any given time he spoke only to a relatively small group of followers. No stadiums, no arenas, no really large numbers at all. His followers knew how many people weren't hearing and didn't believe. The voices and shouting of so many who were Christian seemed to drown out Christ. With such lopsided numbers it would seem his followers had something to fear. **"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."** Jesus said he was their father. Jesus said he was pleased to give them the kingdom. The kingdom was already theirs. It was a current gift to them. It wasn't limited to those who had died and were already in heaven. It wasn't only the heavenly kingdom. Jesus was talking about the kingdom of grace. Grace is God's undeserved love that he shows towards sinners. The kingdom of grace was already given and they could watch for how it impacted their lives.

Picking teams in high school gym class means the best athletes get picked first. Maybe you were one of those. I was picked somewhere in the middle. That tells you something about my athletic ability. But there were always those picked last. You feel for them. That lonely moment standing there realizing they weren't really wanted. Do you ever feel that alone? A world of people moving around you towards always bigger and better things. They aren't necessarily Christian, yet they seem to have all the fun, better positions at work, and always enough money. As a Christian you seem to be moving in the exact opposite direction, against the flow of the world, and it's hard.

The sinful temptations are easy because we hear about the great things God is supposed to have done for us. But that's hard to believe when the hard stuff is happening to us. It's hard when our loved one is dying. It's hard when an accident strikes our family. It's hard when we face the surgery, or foreclosure, or the inability to even buy new supplies for school. Maybe God forgot to give us the good things or the great promises. What's hard too is we know we center on God's powerful Word. We know we've got a great message people need to hear. Yet we're still small. We seem to make only a small impact on our community. We sinfully figure the promises of God don't apply to us.

Small flock, you have a big God with great promises. Be watching because he's already given you the kingdom of grace. What prompted the giving? It wasn't you or your good deeds. It was entirely the pure grace through Christ and for Christ's sake. You were purchased with the precious blood of Jesus. He entered this world looking the same as you, small and insignificant. Remember his birth in a manger. Remember his teaching laughed at by so many. Remember the trial when so many called for him to be crucified. Jesus made himself small so he could win the victory for you. It's a great promise.

Watch for what Christ already has given. His kingdom of grace is our greatest treasure. **"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."** Earthly treasures are nothing for followers of Jesus. Only heavenly treasures mean anything. **"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."** Christ gave you treasures of grace, watch for them. What are they? Grace gives forgiveness, peace, faith. It brings you into a relationship with the heavenly Father. It allows you to watch grace showing itself in your life. Grace prompts you to give generously of time, energy, and money because your treasure is in heaven. Grace prompts you to give that message of grace away. The more you share, the stronger your faith becomes. The kingdom of grace is yours. It's a great promise for a small flock watching for what Christ already gave.

Servants had one job while the master was away, wait for his return. He could come at anytime and it didn't matter when, they were to be ready. Jesus says servants of the heavenly master are to do the same thing. Jesus, the master, has gone away. He ascended into heaven, as the Nicene Creed we confessed moments ago says. How did it continue? **"He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead."** Jesus is planning to return. When he does his earthly servants must be waiting. No matter what the rest of the world is doing around us, we're to be waiting for Christ's return.

Naturally when the master returned the servants would serve him like always. They would open the door, wash his feet, and prepare some food. Whatever the master wanted, it didn't matter the hour, they served. But Jesus turned the picture upside down. **"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."** We can say it stronger that "it would be good." I'd say it would be a great blessing. That's our great blessing, a great promise for a small flock. We wait for Christ's return when he will continue serving us.

Jesus knows we'd like to know when he's returning. It'd be more convenient, like a homeowner would find it more convenient if the thief would let him know when he planned to rob the house. Police could be in place and the home would be safe, and the homeowner wouldn't have to be waiting all night and day. If we knew when Jesus was coming we could make sure that moments before we were all seated, looking up, waiting for him. But that would breed laziness for all the moments before that one. People would take it to the extreme. They do already. They don't wait anxiously for Jesus to return. The temptation is to concern ourselves with us. We might worry about if we've done enough to earn God's favor. We might deny that God would serve us. It seems backwards. The Bible must be wrong. And any waiting for Jesus realize it's been a long time. Like the homeowner we fall asleep. We drift away to sports, work, kids, crafts, sleep, housework, anything but waiting for Christ.

The great promise is clear. Jesus is returning. When he does, he will bring to conclusion all the remaining promises that await fulfillment. He will raise our bodies in a resurrection. He will glorify us. He will bring all believers with him to heaven. He will bring us to the conclusion of our faith. We hope for something better than this life. The return of Jesus is the guarantee that there is something better for us. Jesus stooped down once for us on the cross where he set aside the glorious majesty he had as God and didn't make full use of it so he could serve us. It shouldn't surprise us that God's promise is that Jesus will serve us once again on the Last Day. We wait for Christ's return. And while we wait we worship and serve. The Word of God gives us the desire to serve. We make people ready. We give them hope like we have. We urge them to hear the great promise for a small flock, to wait for Christ's return with us.

Look at the number of Christians in churches on any given Sunday and it's no wonder we feel like a small flock. Even our own Christian congregation feels it. But this small flock has a great God. We watch for what Christ already gave when he gave us the kingdom of grace and the promise of heaven. We wait for Christ's return when he will bring us to that better place that we hope for and wait for now. For those saved by Christ, these are the great promises for the small flock.