

Life is Not Possessions

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, it'd be great if you could just keep your Bible open at Luke chapter 12. It's lovely to be with you this morning. Great to be back in this part of Edinburgh.
- Nicky and I used to live just about half a mile from here in Marchmont. And every day I used to walk the beautiful walk to work through the meadows.
- Lovely, lovely walk. Sometimes we did come up to this leafy part of town, Bruntsfield. And if we were feeling really upmarket, we would continue on to Morningside. I want to bring greetings as well from Greenview Church in Glasgow.
- It's been good over the years to have links between Greenview and Bruntsfield. And despite the chasm between us, between Glasgow and Edinburgh, it's good to be united in the things of the gospel.
- I want to just read also a verse just before I pray from 2 Corinthians chapter 8. And I'm just going to read this verse that's going to help us think about this passage in Luke as well.
- [1 : 0 3] So let me read and then I'll pray. This is 2 Corinthians 8 and verse 9. It says, Our Father, we pray that as we now open your words, that you will open the eyes of our hearts to see Jesus, to see more of your will for our lives, to grasp more of the purposes of your kingdom, to change our desires towards the things of you, the things of God, the things of Christ.
- And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, according to Jessie J, who I don't listen to very often, but according to Jessie J, it's not about the money, money, money.
- She don't want your money, money, money. She just wants to make the world dance. Forget about the price tag. It ain't about the cha-ching, cha-ching.
- It ain't about the ba-bling, ba-bling. She just wants to make the world dance. And it's not about the price tag. Well, the lyrics sound good, and it certainly sells well.
- But is it detached from the real world that we live in? I think it is. Because we live in a world, don't we, where people are rather obsessed with money.
- [2 : 4 3] They do want the money, money, money. Indeed, Jessie J herself has a reported worth of 17 million pounds. This is the world in which we live.
- It's a world in which the rich are envied. It's a world in which 70% of UK adults play the national lottery regularly.
- It's a world full of scrambles for promotion and higher salaries. It's a world full of endless upgrades to our phones and our homes and our cars.
- If our society has forgotten anything, it is certainly not the price tag. Britain is dancing today to the tune of money.
- But we need to understand that this is not something new. This is not a 21st century or even Western phenomenon. Indeed, one of the surprises, perhaps, as we study Luke chapter 12, is seeing that in Jesus' day, the world was plagued with this problem.

[3 : 54] Jesus, speaking in verse 30 of this chapter, speaks of the pagan world running after material things. The first century world was chasing money like a greyhound chases the rabbit.

You know how that goes, the greyhound chasing the rabbit and never quite catching it. That's our generation, and it was Jesus' generation. The greed of gold is not a new problem.

It is as old as the sinful heart of man. Then and now, we need to hear the challenging words of Jesus Christ. We need to hear these prophetic words that will cut and will challenge us in a materialistic world.

Now, as we come towards Jesus' words, I want you to notice something that is very important. This was very significant. As I was studying this week, this observation that really opened up the passage to myself.

And it's this, that if you look down at verse 13, notice something important. Someone in the crowd said to Jesus.

[5 : 08] And then if you look down at verse 15, then he said to them, that is to the crowd. Now, it's crucial to see that verses 15 to 21 is Jesus speaking to the crowd.

Now, who is the crowd? The crowd are a range of people who aren't yet following Jesus. That's who the crowd is in the Gospels.

Now, there's a great deal of variety in the crowd. People are not all the same in the crowd. There are those who are curious and want to learn more about Jesus. There are others who are indifferent to Jesus and not really listening.

There are others still who are hostile towards Jesus, like the Pharisees. So there's variety within the crowd. But what binds the crowd together is that they are not yet followers of Christ.

In this sense, the crowd are to be distinguished from the disciples. The crowd surrounds Jesus with interest. But the disciples follow Jesus with intensity.

[6 : 24] And there's still that differential today as we think about evangelism. We've just been talking about evangelism together. There's often a crowd. There's often the group of people who surrounds the church and the witness of the church.

But there's that distinction, isn't there, between those who are simply there in the crowd, whether hostile or curious or indifferent, and those who actually begin to follow the Lord Jesus.

You will notice that from verse 22, Jesus then addresses the disciples. So it's important to see that though Jesus is speaking about money in both of these sections, he's speaking to two different groups.

Jesus has something different to say to the crowd, the world, than he does to then say to his followers. For the crowd, he has a serious warning.

And for the followers, he has an encouragement, a word of encouragement to you if you are a follower of Jesus. So let's look at two things this morning in the time remaining.

[7 : 37] First of all, a warning to crowds who never have enough. That's what we see in the first part of the passage. A warning to crowds who never have enough.

Verses 13 to 21. Jesus, as we've been saying, as you've been hearing in recent weeks, is journeying towards Jerusalem. He's made the decisive turn towards his goal, which is the city of Jerusalem, and which is ultimately the cross.

And as Jesus journeys towards Jerusalem, he is traveling and teaching. He is teaching on the way.

His disciples are following him. And as they follow him on this epic and unique journey, Jesus is teaching. Indeed, much of the teaching of Luke's gospel comes in the midst of this decisive journey.

Also, as he stops in various towns, people in the town come out and they crowd around Jesus. And as the crowd comes around Jesus, he's also preaching to them.

[8 : 45] So he's teaching his disciples on the one hand, but he's also preaching. He's evangelizing, you might say, the crowd. And here we see a crowd, that's the context here, is surrounding the Lord Jesus.

And what's happening here is that there's an ad hoc evangelistic sermon. It's interesting how often in the gospels and in Acts, the sermons are ad hoc.

They're not, you know, pre-planned the way that we tend to do them. Very often they happen in a moment. They happen in an instant, as happens here. Jesus doesn't raise the topic of money.

A man in the crowd does. This unnamed man asked Jesus a question. Verse 13, he asked if Jesus will settle a dispute about inheritance.

This man's in some kind of inheritance dispute with his brother. And in these days, often financial disputes would be brought to the Jewish rabbis.

[9 : 53] The Jewish rabbis were considered to be experts in the law of God. And so they would become the judge and jury in these cases. They would decide what money went where. And so Jesus is being treated as a judge and as a rabbi.

And more than that, he is being pressed here to not only sit upon the case, but to make a judgment on the case.

You notice the man's not saying to Jesus, let's just have the case out. Let's just adjudicate. He's pressing Jesus to make a judgment in his favor. Tell my brother to give me my inheritance.

Now, Jesus, as we might expect, has little interest in settling this case. This is partly due to the nature of Jesus' mission.

Jesus didn't come into the world to help us save our pennies. Jesus came into the world to save our souls. So this is outside the orbit of Jesus' mission.

[11 : 02] But I think even more than that, even more deeply here, the reason for Jesus' lack of interest is he sees a deeper problem. He sees a heart problem.

It can hardly be an accident that having refused the request of this man, Jesus launches into a warning about greed. I think reading between the lines, he is reading the heart of this man.

He is seeing something of the greedy motivations of this man. And he is warning the man and the crowd of the dangers of greed.

He says that the people are to be on guard against greed. It's the image of a soldier who is constantly on guard in case an enemy pounces upon him.

Jesus says that greed is like an enemy. It's a threat. It's a danger. It's going to attack you. It's going to overcome you. Be on guard against the danger of greed.

[12 : 12] And the sense here, it's in the continuous tense, which means that we are to go on guarding against greed. Greediness is not something you just deal with on day one of being a disciple.

It's not like you hear a sermon on it the first time and you repent of your greediness and you become generous towards God. And then you never need to hear another sermon on greed.

It doesn't work like that. We are to go on guarding against the danger of greed. And this is not something we tend to hear today, is it?

Greed in general is not condemned when it's on a personal basis. We may condemn the greed of those bankers. But at least in our own personal lives, we don't really censure each other for greed, do we?

You know, if someone buys a lavish car or goes on a very expensive holiday, we don't tend to frown upon it in any way, do we? We indeed encourage indulgence in our culture.

[13 : 20] We see it as a good thing to have as much as possible. Good for you, well done to you, is often the attitude. And yet Jesus reminds us here that life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions.

That's an amazing little phrase, isn't it? I was thinking memory verses, I was thinking it would be a great verse for us to memorize. Imagine if you'd memorize this verse and then you go shopping.

It would be helpful, wouldn't it? You're thinking, will I, won't I? And then the verse comes into your mind. I don't know what the actions would be, but life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

How many purchases would we not make if we had that in mind? But a year ago, we were moving house, Nicky and I. And I was just astonished at how much stuff we have accumulated over just 15 years.

When we started out, we had absolutely nothing. This time when we moved, it took an hour and a half to unpack the van. I was embarrassed by the amount of possessions we had.

[14 : 35] But Jesus warns us that life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions. Life isn't about possessions. Think about the funerals that you attend.

How many funerals have you attended where people have paid tribute to the person's stuff? You ever been to a funeral like that? Where they get up the front and they itemize all the possessions that the individual accumulated?

A hundred things, five hundred things, a thousand things. Is that what we talk about? Isn't the focus upon the person's faith? The person's family?

The person's relationships? What the person did? Nobody cares how much stuff they accumulated. If anything, the more stuff the person has, the more hassle it's going to be for the family, who have to either distribute it or discard it.

This parable is a case study of the folly of living for the accumulation of stuff. It's about a man who not only has a lot of possessions, but a man who thinks life is about having lots of possessions.

[15 : 56] The issue in this parable is not that the man is wealthy. It is not a sin in the Bible to have money. Men like Abraham and Job and David and Solomon, if you read the Bible, were men of significant means.

Some people, by virtue of birth or labor, acquire greater wealth than others. Wealth in itself is not condemned in Scripture.

Indeed, it is part of God's good creation. That's not the issue Jesus is condemning. Notice that the man is already rich at the start of the story.

He is called a certain rich man. He's already relatively wealthy, but one year he enjoys an abundant harvest.

He moves, if you like, from middle income to upper level income. He moves from millionaire to billionaire, perhaps. And the trouble is, his immediate thought is to hoard his wealth for himself.

[17 : 10] His current barns aren't big enough to hold all of the produce. So he plans to tear them down and build some mega barns for his mega bucks.

It never seems to occur to him to do anything else with the bumper harvest than keep it to himself. His first and only thought is to fill his own life with stuff and to fill his own life with comfort.

Notice the repeated use of the word my, which comes four times in this parable, and the use of the word I, which comes eight times in the original language.

The problem with this man is that he is obsessed with his own self-indulgence. He is storing up things for himself, verse 21, and he is not being rich towards God.

And the scary thing is that he's also deluded. He has a baseless confidence that his self-indulgent life will last a long time. Notice his reference to many years in verse 19.

[18 : 28] He wrongly assumes that his life of indulgent luxury will last many years, when in fact it won't even last the night. That very night, God says to him, verse 20, You fool.

Fool used in the Old Testament of the person who lives without reference to God, who lives as if there is no God, who lives without wisdom. You fool. God says this very night, your life will be demanded from you.

And what will happen with all of your possessions? As we think about this, we should be so thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ, shouldn't we?

Jesus Christ, too, is the very opposite of this man. A man full of the fear of the Lord. A man full of wisdom.

A man focused entirely upon the will of God and the kingdom of God. A man who didn't store up treasure for himself, but a man who gave up all of the treasures.

[19 : 45] Who vested himself of the splendor of heaven and the glory of heaven and came down into this world as a man. One who was not selfish, but selfless.

Who became the servant. Who not only gave up all of his stuff, but gave up his very self when he died for our sins.

How wonderful a Savior we have. And what a warning this is to us who are living for the things of this world rather than living for the Savior.

What a challenge to the crowds who are dancing to the tune of materialism. What a warning to those who really do think that life consists in how much stuff you acquire.

A world where people live for luxury and self and for cozy retirement and for the next holiday. A world where people live for the creation rather than the creator.

[20 : 52] That's the world we live in. And this is a great parable to help communicate the gospel to them. This is one of the most effective ways to share the gospel with people today using the stories that Jesus told, the parables.

Communicating a story like this and showing the pointlessness and futility of it all. There's a pastor in America named Mark Dever and he's a very good evangelist and he tells a great illustration.

He says, you need to have the why conversation with your non-Christian friend. Here's how the why conversation goes. You can practice this this week. So it goes like this. Your friend says to you, good news, I've been accepted to university.

You say, that's wonderful. Why do you want to go there? And they say, well, you know, I want to study in business and I want to get my degree. Great. That's wonderful. And why do you want to get your degree?

Well, because once I get my degree at university, I can go into business. Brilliant. And then what's going to happen after that? And they say, well, you know, after I do well in business, hopefully we'll get promoted and get to the top of the company.

[22 : 07] That's great. And then what's going to happen after that? Why do you want to get to the top of the company? Well, once I get to the top of the company, I might try and acquire some other companies and maybe run a number of different businesses and get really wealthy.

Oh, that's great. And why do you want to do that? Well, you know, once I've got all my possessions and stuff, I guess I'll probably want to settle down and get married. Maybe have a few children.

That's brilliant. So what are you going to do once you've got the businesses and the money and the family? You know, what's next? Well, I suppose maybe I'll retire early and, you know, start going on lots of cruises every year.

And brilliant. That's great. And what about after that? And he says every time he's had the conversation, people will say, I don't know.

I guess I'll just die. And some people, this is in all honesty, some people have said to him, when I think about it, my life is pretty pointless. I hadn't thought of that before.

[23 : 05] Jesus exposes and we need to expose actually the pointless lives that most of us are living and that we lived before we knew Christ if we are Christians.

By the way, too, this is also a challenge to Christians. Even though Jesus is directing this at the unbeliever, as we listen in, we need to ask ourselves the question, could this be true of us?

Could this be true of us? Second thing, and more briefly as we finish, a comfort for disciples who fear they will not have enough. So a slight change of direction, a comfort for disciples who fear they will not have enough.

Verse 23, he begins to speak to disciples and Jesus has a different message for them. Notice that the message to disciples doesn't need to be stop living for money.

Jesus assumes that that won't be true of them. Jesus is assuming that a Christian is someone who is living for another treasure. And in the case of these disciples, of course, this was true in a very evident way.

[24 : 20] Because remember, to follow Jesus in the day in which he lived meant that you had to leave everything behind in order to follow him.

you had to physically give up your job. You had to physically move around with the Lord Jesus. And therefore, it brought many of these disciples into a place of desperation, of need, and of poverty.

And in such a scenario, Jesus needs to reassure his followers that God will provide for them the basic things of life. Notice that these are basic things, verse 22.

It's things like food and clothes. It's the worry of not having enough to eat or not having enough to wear. I really don't think that God is that interested if we can't buy that 17th pair of fancy extra shoes that we really want or that we can't get the sky package that we wish we could afford.

I don't think that's really what we're praying for when we say in the Lord's Prayer, Lord, give us our daily bread. God's not necessarily concerned with our wants, but he is concerned about our needs.

[25 : 40] And there may be some here even today and you find yourself in difficult personal circumstances. You're living on a tight budget. Maybe you're in a situation of unemployment.

Maybe you don't know how all the ends are going to meet. And the wisdom of Jesus here is utterly priceless. It boils down to three things.

Three things to do. If you're a disciple, and you tend to be a worry wart. Number one, go for a walk in the park. I'm not joking.

That's what Jesus says, more or less. He says, the worrier is to consider the ravens, the flowers, and the grass. So wherever you can find ravens, flowers, and grass, I think ravens might be more difficult, but certainly you could find some birds and flowers and grass.

If you go down to the park, go to the botanics, God feeds the ravens. He feeds the ravens. It may be significant that it's ravens. Ravens were unclean birds.

[26 : 49] Unclean birds, non-kosher birds. Yet God even feeds the ravens. I think that's the point. And he clothes the flowers with a greater splendor than Solomon.

And he clothes the grass, which is here today and gone tomorrow. And the argument is from lesser to greater. If God feeds the birds, then he's surely going to feed you.

And if God clothes the grass, then he's surely going to feed you, one who is made in his image. So, next time you're feeling worried, seriously, go for a walk in the park and open your eyes and consider God's care for his creation.

Secondly, ask a deep question. Are you ready for a deep question at half twelve on a Sunday afternoon? The question, verse 25, who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

Can you add an hour to your life through your worry? Can you? Worry is pointless. Quite aside from anything else, worry achieves nothing.

[28 : 08] It doesn't even add an hour to your life. If anything, the medical professionals might tell us it takes away hours from our life. So, go for a walk in the woods and ask a deep question.

And the third thing, third practical thing is this. Learn the where there principle. Learn the where there principle.

Look at verse 34. Jesus says, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Do you see the where and the there?

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be. So, let me ask you this question.

Where is your treasure this morning? This is the rubber that hits the road bit. Where is your treasure? If I ask you that question, is your answer, my treasure, is in my bank account?

[29 : 16] Or it's in my investment fund? Or it's in my property? If that's what you consider to be your real treasure, then what Jesus is saying is your heart's going to be drawn towards that.

That means you're going to desire that, you're going to live for that, you're going to focus your thoughts on that. That's going to become your all consuming concern to protect and cultivate the money in your bank account, to protect and cultivate your investments.

That's going to be the focus of your heart. if that's what your treasure is. But what if your treasure is somewhere else? What if your treasure and my treasure is located somewhere else?

What if it's located in Christ? What if it's therefore located in heaven itself where Christ is at the right hand of God? If that's where my treasure is, then you see my heart will be drawn to him and drawn to there.

How can I know if my treasure is in Christ? What would be some of the evidences? Well, if my treasure is in Christ, then I won't spend all of my time worrying about wealth.

[30 : 32] I may sometimes have concerns about money. We all have concerns at times about money. But I won't be plagued with worry about wealth. Second, if my treasure is in Christ, then I won't be running after wealth like a pagan.

There's a difference between working hard and earning a good wage and running after wealth like a pagan. And sometimes we need to know the difference between those two things.

Thirdly, if my treasure is in Christ, I will not be marked by greed, by greediness, by excess. Are there things in my life that I could say, that's excessive?

And here's a big one. Fourthly, if my treasure is in Christ, then my life will be marked, verse 33, by generosity. It talks about giving stuff away.

You see, the only way you can give stuff away is when stuff doesn't really matter to you. That's when you're free to give it away because it's not your real treasure. If my treasure is Christ, then I will invest in the things of the kingdom.

[31 : 51] I won't build bigger barns. I will invest what God has given me in gospel work and in gospel ministry.

I will invest not in building my own barns, but in building the church. I will spend my earthly resources in order to store up treasure in heaven.

May this be true of all of us. May God help us to respond to his word to us today. Amen. Amen. Amen.