

Wisdom For Life's Worries, Riches and Pleasures

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[0 : 00] The reading this morning is from Luke chapter 12 verses 13 to 14, sorry verses 13 to 34,! Which can be found on page 1044 of the Church Bibles. That's Luke chapter 12 verses 13 to 34.

Someone in the crowd said to him, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. Jesus replied, Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you? Then he said to them, Watch out, be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist of an abundance of possessions. And he told them this parable, The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops. Then he said, This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones. And there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink and be merry. But God said to him, You fool, this very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God. Then Jesus said to his disciples,

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens, they do not sow or reap. They have no storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds. Who of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to your life?

Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon, in all his splendour, was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow was thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith? And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink. Do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things. And your father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. 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 yourself that will not wear out. A treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks, Ali. If you could keep your Bibles open at Luke 12, that would be a great help. You can find an outline in the notice sheet as well. Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help. Heavenly Father, we praise you for your wonderful grace and mercy. We praise you for your glorious power as you speak into our lives when we open your word. And we ask that you will open your word to our hearts now. And by your spirit, open our hearts to your word. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the story Jesus told here gets us thinking about what makes you a successful person. If you were going to visualize in your mind a successful person, what do they look like? What is their life like? Jesus tells us about a man that I think everyone would have looked at and thought was a great success. And God looks at his life and says, you've been a fool. It starts with a man who runs up to Jesus and shows how deep our need might be for this story. This is a section of Luke's gospel where Jesus is teaching about discipleship while he himself is on his way to die on the cross. And he's been speaking about eternity and about heaven and about hell. And then just look at verse 13. Someone in the crowd said to him, teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. It seems an extraordinary thing to be asking about. It's as though this man is so preoccupied by a money dispute, he can't take in what Jesus is saying.

[4 : 54] He can't think about anything else. And this is what money can do to us. If you look at verse 15, Jesus not just speaking to that man, but to everyone. Watch out. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. Notice he says, watch out. There are some sins in life that if you've got a problem with them, it would be very obvious to you. It should be obvious to you if you have a problem with adultery or murder or theft. But with greed, it gets in under the radar and Jesus says, watch out lest you have a money sickness. How do you know if you have an unhealthy view of money? Well, you get preoccupied with money, like this man. When you have a moment of quiet in your life, what you find that your mind wanders to is something to do with money. Something like, how are my savings doing? Or my investments? Or is there a flat that I can buy? Or when's payday?

We find our mind wanders too often to money. Another mark we might have a problem with money is when we resent others who have it. I know in this case, the man, there's a particular concern about he wants the inheritance or a division of the inheritance from his brother. But like that man here, if you're someone who, when you hear of someone else making money, how does it make you feel?

Suppose you have a friend and you find that they have inherited some money or they are buying a home or a car or a holiday that makes you realize they've got more money than you realized before.

Does it irk you? Do you feel a bit resentful when other people have money and you don't? Or when it comes to money, are you like the rich fool that Jesus speaks about here, that you, you really, you're rushing off your feet trying to get more money. That's the thing that's driving you, that's taking your energy in life such that you would neglect other things, your spiritual life, relationships, because what you really desire is more money. Well, our first point from Jesus today is don't be a money-minded fool. Look at the rich man's problem in verse 16. The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, what shall I do? I have no place to store my crops. It's a good problem to have, isn't it? In today's terms, he's like the investment banker across the motorway in the financial district of our city at Barclays or JP Morgan or Morgan Stanley, and he's beating the profit targets for his department each year. He lives in Bears Den or Gifnick.

His kids are at Kelvin Side Academy. So, by the way, if you're here today and you do work in a bank and you live in Gifnick or Bears Den, I honestly do not have you in mind as I'm painting this picture.

[8:11] You yourself might be very healthy in your mindset about money. We're just thinking about what this man might look like. So, this man, he drives an electric SUV. He parks it just out here when he's waiting at Eusebius to collect his food, and the markets are being really good to him. So, what does he do? Well, he makes a plan, verse 18. Then he said, this is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain, and I'll say to myself, you have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy. Eat, drink, and be merry. Now, to us, what do we think of that plan? If we didn't know the end of the story, would we not think, that's actually a really good plan? I mean, if he was going to just spend it all, sell the grain now and spend it all on luxury and fine living, we might think, oh, that's thoughtless. But to save it up like this, he's no fool, is he? Until one day, he's got it all. He's got treasure, plenty of grain stored up. He's got leisure. He says, take life easy, and he's got pleasure. Eat, drink, and be merry. If we think of our Glasgow banker again, by the time he's 50, he's made enough to enjoy the rest of his life free from work. So he quits his job. He's bought a holiday house on the Fife coast, just outside St. Andrews, on a golf course. And he says that these days you never quite know with climate change when there'll be good snow. So he's just going to buy a nice chalet in Korshaville so he can go there whenever he wants. And the Herald do a feature article in their magazine about him, and they call it The Man Who Knew When to Stop. And he has a retirement party, and all his clients and his old colleagues travel to Fife for it, and they're full of praise and their speeches. And at the end of it, he stands out on his veranda, overlooking the 18th tee, with a glass of single malt whiskey in his hand. And the applause is still ringing in his ears. And he says to himself, you've done it.

You've done it. And suddenly there's a searing pain in his chest, and he's dead before they can get him to hospital. And they erect a statue of him in the financial district on the River Clyde. And they put an epitaph under the statue, successful Glasgow financier, wealth creator, captain of industry.

And then that night, an angel comes down from heaven and crosses it out and just writes, fool, fool. Verse 20, God said to him, you fool, this very night your life will be demanded from you.

Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? Now what I find so alarming about this story is that the world tells you, aim for this man's life. That's what I was told growing up. I remember doing well in some exams, and my friend's mum said to me, well done, Martin. You'll be worth a lot of money someday. That's what it was all for. Be like this man. Aim for that life. And the word fool here is literally without thought. Of course, the man thought very carefully about a lot of things, didn't he? But he thought about the wrong things. So as far as God's concerned, he didn't think.

He was successful at things that don't actually matter. Isn't that hard to grasp? That it's a failure to be successful at things the world thinks matter, and God says they don't matter.

[12:00] He was a fool about control. He thought that he was in control of his life, and money does that to people. I don't know if you've noticed that. If you've got money, you think that you're in control, but you're not in control. Things can happen in your life. People around you get sick, and you have to look after them. You get sick. You have to face bereavement, relational breakdown, all sorts of things.

We're not in control. He was a fool about time. So he spent his life planning for the years he'd have in retirement before he died, and he gave apparently no thought to what life would be like after he dies.

And Jesus says that's really foolish. Last week, we looked at this, didn't we? Verse 5 of chapter 12, that Jesus says that there is an appropriate way that we should be frightened about what God would do to us if we're on the wrong side of him after we die. But this man, after all that time thinking about and all that energy planning for worldly retirement, he plunges into eternity unprepared.

He's a fool about God as well. Essentially, the man forgot about God, didn't he? All those eyes, my barns, my crops. And God says, verse 21, this is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves, but is not rich towards God. It's like a binary choice of like just being rich towards yourself or rich towards God. And if you're not rich towards God, this is how it will be, he says.

And the man was a fool about life as well, that he seems to have lived as though what makes for the good life is more material things. But Jesus says we were made for something else. Verse 23, a bit further down, he says life is more than food and the body more than clothes. In other words, true life, the life we were made for, the life that will fulfill us and give us lasting joy comes from knowing God in all his glory and grandeur, living your life in the light of the truth about him and enjoying the heat, the radiance of his love towards you. So Jesus says, watch out, don't be a money-minded fool. And then what Jesus does in the rest of our passage is he sends us on a path of wisdom, a path that can unlock our hearts to be willing to be generous with our money. Our second point is trust in a father who cares. Jesus turns to something else that would drive us to want more money. In verse 22, Jesus said to his disciples, therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. So notice here that we can have an unhealthy view of money because we are rich, or you can have an unhealthy view of money because you are poor, because you've got too much grain in your barns, or because you've got too little food in your fridge.

[15:32] You can't necessarily tell who's got a money issue by how much they've got. And Jesus is saying here, don't worry, which is striking because he told this parable of the soils that we saw some months ago now, earlier in Luke's gospel, and talked about how to be a fruitful person, have a fruitful life, by being an obedient doer of the words you hear from Jesus. And when he talked about what might stop us from being the good soil, he said that life's worries, and life's riches, and life's pleasures, can come into your life and choke the fruitfulness. And here he's trying to liberate us from that, from worry, and riches, and pleasure. But we live now in a generation that's probably worried more than any other before, do we not? Matt Hague wrote a book eight years ago now, Notes on a Nervous Planet.

He himself had had a breakdown, and he talks in the book about how to survive in a modern world where technology is driving us to anxiety, because the world is so fast-paced now, and we are just overwhelmed by information. Some of it's very trivial, but it's trying to grab our attention and scatter it.

Some of it's very worrying from all around the world, the global news. We can hear of stories of tragedy all around, and it's things that are beyond what we can do anything about, but it leaves us anxious.

And then Jonathan Haidt has written his book, The Anxious Generation, about what it's like to grow up and be a teenager in our world now. That the way tech works on us is actually rewiring our brains towards being anxious. And that general anxiety can then make us worry in a way that makes us think, I'm going to need more money. You know, what if AI means I can't get a job? What if geopolitical events mean that things are increasingly unsafe, and I'm going to need more treasure, more worldly treasure?

What if NATO collapses? What if the NHS collapses? I'm going to need more money. And so Jesus speaks pastorally into that, and he asks us a really helpful question, verse 25. Have a look at verse 25.

[18:02] Who of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? So worrying doesn't actually resolve anything, does it? And this is so true, isn't it? I don't know about you, I'm someone who sometimes wakes in the night worrying, and I cannot think of a single time that doing that has actually changed the situation. It's always been a waste of time. Jesus had sleepless nights praying, but why pray when you can worry, as people say. So that doesn't do any good at all, worrying. And then the alternative is in verse 29. Jesus says, do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink. Do not worry about it, for the pagan world runs after all such things, and your father knows that you need them. Now that's really helpful, isn't it? Because we might think, I can't stop worrying Jesus, because I've got things to worry about.

There are things I really need. And Jesus says, God knows that. God knows there are things you need, and he's your heavenly father. And don't worry if you see other people around you. Don't be concerned if they're worrying about getting those things with money, because if they're not Christians, they don't have a heavenly father. But you've got one, so you can trust him. And that's what these two pictures give us then of the ravens and the wildflowers. Now ravens, I don't know what you think of ravens. I don't like ravens. I think they are filthy. And they're scavengers, aren't they?

But I was thinking a lot about ravens this week, because Jesus commands us to think about ravens here. And I was thinking, does he choose ravens because they're scavengers? And the thing about ravens is, because they're not hunters, they're more scavengers, and they tend to live off carrion, off what other people, other creatures have left behind. Does that not show us that there is more than enough to go around? That there are creatures that can even live off the leftovers?

So we're not to think, but my heavenly father won't be able to provide for me. Of course he can. And then when we take a close look at wildflowers, and we think carefully about wildflowers, rather than just walk past them, they are ridiculously, unnecessarily beautiful, aren't they?

So what do they reveal to us about God? Well, they teach us that God is a God of super abundant generosity. He delights clearly in stunning displays of creative beauty and provision, when we just look at how unnecessarily beautiful he's made flowers. And so says Jesus, remember, you are much more valuable to God than birds, and you are much more valuable to God than flowers.

[21:14] He's not saying don't work for things. He's not saying don't work for these things. But he is saying don't worry about these things. And that makes such a difference. One of the things that I've, one of the most potentially worrying things that I've ever done was I flew a plane, and I don't know how to fly a plane, but it was one of these experiences that you get given. It was a gift for me. And I went to an airport, and there was a man there who was a qualified pilot and instructor, and we got in his little plane, and we set off, and he was in charge as we took off. And when we were cruising, he gave me control next to him of the plane, and he told me what to do step by step. And I was flying the plane.

But at no point on the flight was I worried at all, because I knew he had it covered. If anything went wrong, he would just take control, and we'd be fine. And there's just some, I mean, it's not a perfect picture, but there's something of that in what Jesus is saying here about how a Christian can go through life, putting in our best efforts with hopes and dreams, sure, but knowing that he's got it covered. He's in control. We don't need to worry.

And it means we can be radical in our obedience of Jesus, because we have a heavenly Father who cares for us. But as well as worry or fear that might want us to hold on to money because we fear we might need it, there's another reason we might get preoccupied with money, and it's desire, that we really want the things that money can buy. And in our age, there are just so many things, aren't there, that money could buy. Things that we might feel that, I really desire that. So in our third point today, Jesus wants to redirect our desires. He says, seek the true treasure that lasts, or set your heart on true treasure that lasts. In verse 29, he has said, do not set your heart on what you'll eat and drink.

And then it's the same word in verse 31 that he uses that we have as seek. It's set your heart, but seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Set your heart on taking hold of what you already have from Jesus by being a member of his kingdom. We get that idea in verse 32.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. So instead of yearning for the things that you don't have, that you think money could buy, rather enjoy what God the Father has given you by his grace. Forgiveness of sins, freedom from the penalty of sin, the Holy Spirit, freedom from the power of sin, a guaranteed future inheritance.

[24:10] Your Father has been pleased to give you these things. It struck me as well, thinking about the ravens and the wildflowers, that they speak to us about two different things we might really want that we think we can get from money. Do the ravens make us think about how we want security? Because he was talking about the ravens getting food, which is an essential.

And we might think, well, I want money because I want security. And people who want money for security, when they get money, what they do is they save it up. They store it up into a bigger and bigger storehouse of investment for the rainy day when they think they might need it.

But the wildflowers, when he talks about Solomon being a raid, and even Solomon wasn't a raid like the wildflowers, it's speaking about how sometimes we might think, well, I want money because I desire beauty. And if you're someone who wants money for beauty, then when you have money, you spend it.

You spend it freely on clothes, home improvements, holidays, a lifestyle that communicates beauty in your life. And it would do us good to, I mean, it's worth remembering that both those kinds of people, by the way, they look down on the other and think they've got a money problem. So people who save up all their money, they look at people who spend it and say, look at all that unnecessary, lavish spending. But people who spend their money and don't hold on to it, look at savers and say, look at all that unnecessary, miserly hoarding. And Jesus gives us a different way to think about security and beauty. He says, seek God's kingdom. For in Christ, God gives you security, true security, that you can be assured that God's fatherly care rests on you. And you have a family of Christians to look after you. And you have a future inheritance that can never spoil. And in Christ, God gives you true beauty as well. He gives you his spirit transforming your character. And he takes delight in you.

He rejoices over you. And so these things liberate us not to seek them from money. Look at verse 33. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out.

[26:35] A treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. Be generous, he says. Be generous with your money, your possessions, your investments. And he tells us two great personal benefits of that. The first is treasure that lasts. If we use our money to buy material things in our lives now, we will probably, if we've chosen well, enjoy them a lot. And then they wear out. Or even before that, our satisfaction in them wears out. I got a bike 10 years ago. And it's still going, my bike. But when I first got it, I loved my bike when I first bought it. I used to go in the shed and I used to just look at it. And it had this really nice new bike smell from the tires.

And the tires still had all those bobbly bits on them before you've gone anywhere on your bike. And within a few months, I didn't think about it at all. I just, the bike was the thing I used to cycle around. The joy of it just faded very quickly. And so what we then think is, in a worldly way, we think, oh, well, I just need the next thing. I need another new thing that I can just stare at and enjoy.

Oh, I need the money to buy it. Well, Jesus is assuring us what we really need. The treasure that really lasts is knowing God. Knowing God. It will never be taken from you. And we'll spend forever enjoying him. And so look to build up that treasure in heaven. Elsewhere, Jesus urges us in his teaching about money to use your worldly wealth for other people to hear the gospel, to hear about Jesus, that they would respond to him and be saved. And then they can welcome you in eternity.

Imagine those kind of conversations in the new creation with people who heard about Jesus because you were generous towards the gospel being made known.

That kind of joy is never going to wear out. It's going to be wonderful. The second benefit is in verse 34 of being generous with our money. Verse 34, Jesus says, where your treasure is, there your heart will be.

[29:06] So we might have expected Jesus to say, well, set your heart on treasure in heaven and then give towards it. But he says it the other way around. He says, if you give towards God's priorities, rather than spending your money on worldly things, then your heart will be set right on heaven.

It redirects your heart. And I see that. You know, if you've got lots of treasure on earth, in your lifestyle, your home, your comfort, your holidays, it can distract you from focusing on eternity.

And it keeps your heart kind of anchored in this age where you've got lots to enjoy. And what Jesus is showing us here is that when we give our money away and live more simply, it kind of cuts the ropes that tether our hearts to things of this age and redirects our heart and our gaze towards what we'll have in heaven when we yearn for it more. And that's really good for us.

Now, for some of us today, my hope would be that what we're hearing from Jesus is really affirming. It may be that you're someone who has given. And you can think of times that you've given sacrificially, significantly for gospel purposes and to help the poor or to spread the gospel.

And if you've been like that, Jesus teaching here affirms that and says that was a good thing to do. Don't regret that. Be encouraged. And if you then see another Christian and as you get to know them, you realize they're making lifestyle choices that seem to be less generous for the gospel. Don't be disheartened and think, oh, well, maybe I did the wrong thing. Maybe I should be more like them.

[31:02] Rather, pray for them that God will graciously work, that they would have a deeper trust in God's fatherly care for them so that they would be more generous and that they would have a deeper sense in their heart of the desire not to miss out on heavenly treasure. It would be really good for them not to miss out on that. So pray for them in that. And going forward, how we live out this teaching from Jesus so that we have a right view of money, it's going to look very different for each one of us, depending on our means and our dependencies and seasons of life. A couple of examples.

I mentioned before here a friend who came to me very excited because he got a pay rise. But when he talked to me about it, the reason he was excited was that he'd worked out the previous year how much money he needed to live on. And he pledged that everything above that he would just give away. And so he was excited about the pay rise because it meant he could give more. And the particular thing going on was that his church was doing some outreach to the Japanese community in the city where he lived. And what was exciting him was that he was able to give more money to help with that. Completely different mindset. Another friend is a minister. He was planting a church. His church was planting a church. And a business owner in his congregation had made a very significant pledge towards the church plant. He'd said, for the first three years of the plant, I'll give £30,000 a year.

And because of that pledge, they'd made decisions to go ahead with the plant. And then the business owner came to see him one day and said, I'm so sorry about this, but I've had a major problem in my business. And I'm not going to be able to give the money. And my friend was kind of slumped on the sofa thinking, what am I going to do? And a staff member came in, a guy on staff at the church and said, what's wrong? And he explained, he said, if we're going to plant this church, we need to find £30,000 a year. We've got this hole. And the guy said, let me talk to my wife. And he went out and he made a phone call and he came back in and he said, we'll cover that. We'll pay that so that the plant can happen. Now, of course, lots of us will not be in the position to do that kind of thing.

But it's the heart that matters. A heart that's willing to say, though the world would look at my financial decisions and see them as bonkers, I've learned the lesson of the rich fool. I trust that my father cares for me and I really want the treasure that lasts. So I'm going to invest in that. Let's pray together. Our father, we thank you that you are our good father. We thank you that you are a father who gives us wisdom, that you are the generous giver to us, pleased to give us the kingdom.

We thank you that you reminded us today that you value us, that we're worth so much to you, that you're in control of our lives. And we ask that your spirit will encourage us in these truths and that that would be reflected in our lives in a generosity because we want your kingdom to advance and you have set our heart on the treasure you will give us that can never fade.

[34:42] We ask these things for our good and your glory. Amen.