

Possessions - use them or lose them?

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our scripture reading this morning, which you'll find in Luke's Gospel, chapter 12. And if you have one of our visitor's Bibles, I think that is page 871.

Luke's Gospel, chapter 12, and reading at verse 13. And this famous story that Jesus told of the rich fool.

So Jesus is in the middle of a very stern discourse about eternity, about heaven and hell. You read that in the first 12 verses of this chapter.

Matters of great moment and weight. And as he's in the middle of speaking about these great things, verse 13.

Someone in the crowd said to him, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. But he said to him, Man, who made me a judge or arbiter over you?

[1 : 09] And he said to them, Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness. For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

And he told him a parable, saying, The land of a rich man produced plentifully. And he thought to himself, What shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops. And he said, I'll do this.

I'll tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I'll store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry.

But God said to him, Fool, this night your soul is required of you. And the things you've prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.

And he said to his disciples, Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you'll eat, nor about your body, what you'll put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

[2 : 15] Consider the ravens. They neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?

And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do a smaller thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow.

They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith?

And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink. No, be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added unto you.

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

[3 : 35] For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Amen. Amen. May God bless to us this his word.

Let's pray together. Our Father, as we come to your word, we pray that you will help us to seek first your kingdom, and to trust in your faithfulness that everything else will be added to us.

So Lord, we ask you to increase our faith through the hearing of your word. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, sometimes in life, people fail to make the right investment.

Alexander Graham Bell, from Edinburgh, invented the telephone, and he approached the Western Union Telegraph Company in the United States, and he said to them, I will sell you the patent rights to my invention for a reasonably small sum.

And they wrote him a letter saying, Mr. Bell, after careful consideration of your invention, while it is a very interesting novelty, we have come to the conclusion that it has no commercial possibilities.

[4 : 49] What use could this company make of an electrical toy? And they didn't give him any money. So he set up his own company, and in time, he bought Western Union as well. Sometimes people fail to make the right investments.

And in our passage today, we meet such a man, a rich man, but a man who makes a very poor investment in eternity. We find ourselves in Luke's Gospel, and from chapter 9 onwards, Jesus is traveling towards Jerusalem.

And as he goes, he begins to teach, chapter 10, verse 38, on the correct priorities in life. And beginning at chapter 12, we have this teaching on eternity.

And as Jesus is teaching, he is interrupted. Verse 13, somebody in the crowd says to him, Rabbi, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

Now, that was quite a normal thing to happen. It was the custom that if a father died, the inheritance would be divided between the sons. And it was often the rabbis that made those decisions.

[5 : 59] So what the man is asking is culturally quite normal. But Jesus sees in his question there is something deeper going on. He sees beyond the question and into the man's heart.

And the man isn't simply concerned for justice within the family. The man is quite obviously greedy. He's coveting. Verse 15, Jesus says, take care and be on your guard against all covetousness. For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Jesus warns this man against covetousness, against greed, against wanting an excess of things beyond what we actually need, wanting more than we need.

Take care, he says, and be on your guard against it. And we then have two units. One is a parable about a rich man.

And this parable teaches us of the danger of storing up treasures on earth. And there then follows a section where Jesus teaches his disciples and exhorts them to store up treasure in heaven.

[7 : 09] Verse 13 to 21, we consider storing up treasure on earth. And 22 to 34, storing up treasure in heaven.

So the first thing we want to consider is this poor investment by a rich man. Jesus tells a parable beginning in verse 16. And it seems like quite a happy story, doesn't it? We have this rich man and he's got these fields and they have a plentiful crop.

And then in verse 17 he says, what shall I do with the sudden windfall? What shall I do with my crops? And he makes what seems to be rather a wise choice. Verse 18, I will tear down my barns and build larger ones and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

He decides to save. Seems like quite a wise thing to do, doesn't it? Especially in the current climate. To save things for the future. And he seems like a very fortunate man.

Verse 19, I will say to my soul, soul you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry.

[8 : 16] He takes early retirement and he looks forward to enjoying himself. The best restaurants, the best bars, the best entertainment. And you've probably met people like that.

I was on a catamaran in the Indian Ocean and I met a family just like that. The man had made a fortune, just retired, just spent his time traveling around the world. Eating, drinking, and being merry.

And in our society, we would say, well, what a wise man, saving for the future. And what a fortunate man, not having to work, just being able to enjoy himself, to fulfill all his appetites.

Surely this man is wise and he is blessed. What does God say to him? Verse 20, fool. fool. This night, your soul is required of you and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?

Not a very wise man, a fool. Not a rich man, one who makes poor decisions in the sight of God. Why does he say that?

[9 : 19] Well, because this man was utterly obsessed, not with God, but with his goods. Verse 15, Jesus warned against our life not consisting in the abundance of our possessions.

In verse 18, he built a big barn for his crops and his goods. In verse 19, he said to his soul, I have ample goods. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry.

This man was utterly obsessed with his goods. He looked to them for his identity, for his joy, for his delight, for his satisfaction, for his security, and his future hope in this life.

The man's goods were everything to him. He didn't own them, they owned him. And with that addiction to his goods, there was a deep selfishness.

Look at the words, my crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, my soul, eleven times. He says, these are my things, things that I have earned for myself.

[10:27] And he's preoccupied with his own material needs. I will say to my soul, verse 19, you have ample goods laid up. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry.

Merely interested in satisfying his bodily appetites and desires, living for material things, and enjoying material pleasures. Obsessed with goods, obsessed with himself, obsessed with enjoying them.

Sounds very much like a 21st century man, not a 1st century man. Sounds very much like the wisdom of this age, but in God's sight, he is a fool. And in the Bible, a fool doesn't mean someone who isn't clever, who isn't educated, not at all.

But it means someone who orders their whole life without any thought or reference to God and without any forethought to eternity. The fool says in his heart, there is no God.

And this man lived as a fool, forgetting the words of Ecclesiastes, that naked we come into the world and we shall take nothing for our toil that we can carry away in our hands.

[11:36] So he lived for his possessions and the tragedy was he lost everything. He lost his life and he lost his possessions.

Whose will they be, verse 20, God says to him. The things you spent all your life looking forward to and loving, who will have them? He lost everything. His treasure on earth disappointed him and it proved to be a very poor investment.

So it is a danger, isn't it? Verse 15, Jesus says, be on your guard against covetousness. It is so easy to be covetous.

I get the train into town every day and you'll notice on Wednesday and Thursday you have people giving out these free magazines. And the magazines are quite interesting, they're quite amusing. But one of them has a subtitle for men who have more than one thing on their mind.

And it seems that the people who write the magazine think men actually have only five things on their mind. Clothes, technology, cars, films, all these sort of things. It's a magazine about things.

[12:44] It says you want a full life, get yourself and enjoy lots of things. Covetousness, wanting things we don't need. How important are our possessions to us?

Do we own them or do they own us? Are they our servants to be used in the service of God and his kingdom or are they our masters whom we serve?

You see, material possessions we're told in Scripture will always let us down. They'll either fade away or break. The clothes will wear out, the cars will rust, the CD player will collapse, the computer will crash, the silver will tarnish.

They'll either wear out and be parted from us or we will die and be parted from them like this rich fool. Earthly possessions do not satisfy and they impoverish us in the sight of God.

But what then is the secret to not being covetous? Well, Timothy received a letter from Paul and he addressed this question and he said to Timothy, be satisfied with what you have.

[13:53] Chapter 6, verse 6, Godliness with contentment is great gain for we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing with these we will be content.

For those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. Godliness with contentment is great gain.

Be on your guard against covetousness. But that leaves a question, doesn't it? Well, Jesus, what are we to invest in? And how are we to live?

The simple fact is we need to eat and drink. We need to buy clothing. How are we to survive in this cruel world if not by trusting in our wealth and in our possessions? And from verse 22 to 31, Jesus says to them, trust in God, not in goods.

When Helen and I took a holiday to Applecross, we went to this little church gathering in a community hall and we met some wonderful older saints there.

[15:05] And there was one man who was quite old and quite unfurmed but we asked him about life in the Highlands. And he told us that when he was growing up they didn't really have much money and occasionally they would completely run out of food.

And when that happened he said his mother would just very quietly leave the room and she would go into the kitchen and she would kneel by the table and she would just pray to God to feed her family.

And on many occasions there came a knock at the door and somebody had a sack of potatoes or a turnip or something. One of these wonderful stories of the Lord's provision. This woman didn't trust in goods for she had very few but she trusted in God.

And Jesus says to his disciples, trust in God. Verse 22, why are you anxious about your life, about your soul or about your body? Life is more than food and the body is more than clothing.

There is more to life than your physical needs. Verse 22, don't be anxious about what you will eat and drink. Verse 29, do not seek after what you will eat and drink.

[16:11] What a difference to the rich fool. He was utterly obsessed with eating and drinking. It's all he thought about. How can I satisfy my body? And Jesus says, there is more to life than just feeding and clothing your body.

Do not be anxious. Do not seek after these things. And the word anxious is interesting. It's the word which is used to mean being preoccupied with, being overly concerned with, being taken up with these things.

So in chapter 10, when Jesus went to the house of Mary and Martha, Mary was sitting, listening to his voice, to his teaching, and Martha was running around, cleaning the dishes, scrubbing the floor. And Jesus said to her, Martha, you are anxious about many things, but one thing is necessary. She was preoccupied about temporal things and had no time to listen to the words of the Lord.

Oh, the parable of the sower, Luke chapter 8, and we're told of the seed that falls among thorns, which grows a little bit, then it gets choked. And Jesus says, well, this seed, these are those who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares, by the anxieties and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

[17:32] So caught up with and preoccupied with the worries and the distractions and the busyness of day-to-day life, the dripping tack, the flat tire, that they have no time to listen to the master's voice and to think about the fruit which he wants to bring forth in their life.

So what Jesus is saying is this, he's saying, don't be so preoccupied with material, temporal things that you have no time to think of or work for eternal things. And to make his point, he gives us two illustrations from nature.

He talks verse 24 of the ravens and then in verse 27 of the lilies. Now I quite enjoy watching nature documentaries.

We watched one a few weeks ago about whales and these whales that swim three miles below the surface of the sea and it was very interesting. And the whale song and all this sort of stuff.

It's fascinating, isn't it? These documentaries because they show us just how wonderful life is. The sheer number and the variety and the colour of life in this planet. Forests, oceans, ice caps, all sorts of different creatures.

[18:48] And I was interested to read a book which accompanied one of these series. I think it was Planet Earth or something. It began, the very first paragraph said, Earth is the lucky planet.

When the cosmic dice were rolled, Earth got a double six and that's why life appeared on it. It's all chance, all this colour, all this variety, it's all chance, you know, nothing more.

But scripture doesn't say it's chance. The Bible is very clear that the Earth looks to be designed because it is designed. That there is a God who created it and who invested it with all the colour and the variety and the interest that we see in it.

Psalms 104, God set the earth on its foundations so that it should never be moved. You covered it with the deep as with the garment. The waters stood above the mountains.

God created the world. He created life and more than that, he continues to sustain it. The psalm continues, You make springs gush forth in the valleys.

[19:54] They flow between the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field. The wild donkeys quench their thirst. They all look to you to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up.

When you open your hand, they are filled with good things. God made the world and God sustains the world which he has made. And he cares about the ravens.

Now, I don't know if anyone's ever made a documentary about the ravens, but I don't think they have. They're not very pretty or black. They're not very clean.

They scavenge, they eat rotting meat. It's not something I would keep as a pet. And to a Jewish person, of course, the ravens were unclean. They were an unclean animal.

They couldn't eat them. And yet, what does Jesus say? Verse 24, They have neither storehouse nor barn. Unlike the rich man, they don't have barns. And yet, God feeds them.

[20 : 55] God provides even for this ugly, undesirable, unclean little animal. In verse 24, Of how much more value are you than the birds?

He cares for a raven? Do you not think he cares for you? A man or a woman or a boy or a girl made in his image? Created to exercise dominion over the earth.

Somebody who can know him and love him and worship him. Does not God care for you who he has made and who he has redeemed at the cost of the life of his son?

What about the flowers? Verse 27, Consider the lilies. Until a few years ago, I didn't really have many flowers in my house. Then I met Helen and I got to know the florists a bit better and we have a few more flowers in the house now.

But again, there's such wonder in color and variety, isn't there? Consider the lilies, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

[22 : 01] So beautiful, the flowers of the field, the flowers in the park, the flowers in the vase, and yet so short-lived. Verse 28, if God clothes the grass which is alive in the field today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you?

A flower, seven days, maybe ten days, and yet God clothes it in such color and such beauty. And you, into whose heart he has served eternity, whom he invites to share in eternal life, in an eternal kingdom with him, will he not care for you?

Which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life? The rich man was very anxious, concerned with material things, didn't help him, his life came to a very abrupt end.

If you are not able to do this, why are you anxious about the rest? Do not worry, says Jesus. God cares for his creation, and in verse 30, he cares for his children.

Your father knows that you need them. What kind of father would it be who didn't give his children food when they were hungry? What kind of father seeing his children unclothed would not clothe them?

[23 : 26] If God has already given to us eternal life, can we not trust him to provide us with all that is required for our earthly life? So we don't need to seek after these things, verse 30.

Instead, verse 31, we are to seek his kingdom. And this is really the key point of the argument. Don't seek after these temporal things which fade away. Seek after something eternal which will never fade away.

A few years ago, I was sitting in Hyde Park one afternoon by myself, and I was feeling a bit discouraged as a Christian because in London you have all these tremendous buildings and these wonderful institutions and these famous people, and it all seems so very great, doesn't it?

And God seems small and the Christian faith seems so weak and so foolish. But as I sat in Hyde Park, a verse came into my mind, the words of Christ, that I will build my kingdom and the gates of hell shall never overcome it.

And immediately I thought of God's kingdom which we're told in the book of Daniel is an everlasting kingdom which will endure from generation to generation, a kingdom which will never be destroyed and never be left to another person.

[24 : 49] And I looked around the buildings and I thought, you know, all these buildings, all these institutions, all these famous people, one day they will all be gone and yet the kingdom of God will continue to grow until it fills the earth and endures forever.

Seek first God's kingdoms something eternal, something lasting, something infinite. Don't be so preoccupied with your life that you cannot dwell on the eternal life God is pleased to give.

Don't be so tied up worrying about your homes that you have no time to think of the eternal dwellings and the mansion Christ is preparing for you. Don't be so caught up with earthly pleasures that you have no time to anticipate the eternal pleasures at God's right hand which the psalmist promises to us.

Don't seek after these things. Seek after God's kingdom and the rest will be given to you. C.S. Lewis says if we aim at heaven we get our throne in.

If we aim at earth we get neither. Seek first God's kingdom and the rest will be added. Well what does that mean? Well finally and briefly it means that we can fearlessly give in faith.

[26 : 06] I like to read Christian biography and I like to read a biography of people who have given fearlessly in faith. There's lots of examples in the 20th century.

There was Joseph Rank of Rank Hovis Bakers very rich man invested most of his money in the kingdom. And this week I learned about John Lang who was a builder and during the war he built runways for aircraft and he became very proficient at using concrete.

And after the war when the motorways were being built they approached John Lang and said we'd like you to build the motorways in the UK and they did and he became even richer. These were men who had tremendous treasure on earth but actually they weren't very interested in it and they chose instead to invest it in heaven.

Both men I believe worked out what they needed to sustain their families. They took that amount every year and the rest of their earnings they just invested into the kingdom.

Hugely successful in this world and yet far more interested in the next. Verse 32 fear not for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

[27 : 22] God is a giver. He will give the kingdom to his children. He will give them eternal life. Salvation is a gift. And verse 30 therefore his people are to be givers.

Sell your possessions and give to the needy. The rich man didn't touch his possessions did he? He kept them all in a big barn. Never used them never mobilized them for any purpose.

But Jesus says don't do the same. Sell them. Use them. Free up the capital. Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Give to the poor. The physical needy of course.

Whom God cares for. The God who raises the poor from the dust and lifts from the ash sheep. The poor among you the brothers and sisters in this country and in different parts of the world in great material need.

Or the poor spiritually. Those who have not yet heard the gospel of Christ and who are so preoccupied with this world because they know nothing of the next. Sell your possessions and give to the needy.

[28 : 28] And one reason Jesus says is because it's not so much giving away and as an investment provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old. With a treasure in the heavens that does not fail.

where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. In giving away your earthly money you are investing in heavenly riches. Money bags that do not grow old.

Treasure that does not fail. Something that cannot be stolen. Something that cannot be corroded.

A.W. Tozer said this as base a thing as money is it yet can be transmuted into everlasting treasure.

It can be converted into food for the hungry and clothing for the poor. It can keep a missionary actively winning lost men to the light of the gospel and thus transmute itself into heavenly values.

Any temporal possession can be turned into everlasting wealth. Such a contrast isn't it? The rich man he had all this earthly treasure but when he died that was it it was gone.

[29 : 34] The believer when they die it is then that they inherit the treasure stored up for them in heaven. Peter says in his letter thanks Peter God he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance imperishable undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for you.

The man in the crowd was interested in his inheritance but he had lost sight of the far greater inheritance God had prepared for his people an unfading imperishable undefiled inheritance kept in heaven not in a barn but in heaven.

So the rich man invested he missed the best investment of his life didn't he? But Jesus says don't be the same send your money way ahead use it now for the work of the kingdom because verse 34 where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

It is a funny thing that the things we invest in are the things which occupy us. It's almost magnetic isn't it money? Our attention our interest our prayers go toward those things.

So for example I decide tomorrow that I want to have a gigantic tropical fish tank in my kitchen and I go out and I buy it and I buy all these different tropical fish it's likely that I'll spend a lot of time thinking about them feeding them being concerned with them nothing wrong of course with tropical fish but if I invest my money in the work of the kingdom then that's what I'll be thinking about and praying about and interested in.

[31 : 20] Think of a relationship with the Daily Bible Institute so we knew of it we'd met Isaac Shaw we'd prayed for it and after giving a tithe we continued to pray for it now some people are going

over there to visit.

Recently we had a photo display of Eric's visit and he showed us the people we know by name he showed us a field they intend to build a church on he showed us the buildings they intend to use to train gospel workers because our money has been put into it our hearts have turned towards it and we know people's names we ask how's the project going how's Ramraj how's the development what about the churches any new churches started anyone come to faith where your treasure is there your heart will be also and personally one of the things that keeps me going during times of disappointment is thinking verse 33 of that day of seeing what the Lord has done with the things we have given to him with her material possessions how he will use them for his glory throughout all eternity it's quite a thought isn't it when we get to heaven and we'll be looking around and we'll maybe meet somebody and they'll say well you know

I came into the church and opened doors day and you gave me a very warm welcome and I got a tract which you'd bought and I read it and I came to know Christ or we'll meet somebody and they'll say you know I went to an SU camp and I got converted and I want to thank you for investing in that and your harvest offering can't wait to see can we what the Lord is going to do with the things we have put into his hands and what return we will have on our investment where your treasure is there will your heart be also Jesus warns us against greed against wanting more for ourselves than we need storing up treasure on earth instead he tells us not to trust in our goods but to trust in God who cares for his creation and who cares for his children don't be so preoccupied with the temple he says that you lose sight of the eternal instead seek

God's kingdom invest your time invest your resources in that that's where your heart will be and that's where your treasure will be on the last day Paul to Timothy as for the rich in this present age charge them not to be haughty nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but on God who richly provides us with everything to enjoy they are to do good to be rich in good works to be generous and ready to share thus storing up a treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of that which is truly life let's pray together let's pray together father we thank you that you do care for us that you feed us that you clothe us we thank you lord that you are the god who provides everything richly for our enjoyment and we ask this week that we might trust you when we face trials and temptations of many kinds that we might trust in your father like care of each one of us and we might be willing to live in the light of eternity not so concerned with our treasures on earth that we forsake our treasures in heaven help us lord not to trust in our goods but to trust in you and to be fearless and faithful in our giving in the work of the kingdom and we ask this lord in jesus name amen