

Luke's Gospel 12:22-40

Further instructions to His disciples

Last week's talk covered Luke 12:1-21, where the Lord Jesus deliberately focussed His attention on instructing His disciples. Despite the trampling going on in the crowds around Him, He urged His followers to beware of religious hypocrisy and the fear of men (vv.1-12). However, He was interrupted by someone in the vast crowd. He turned to address that man directly and those people surrounding Him (v.13-14). *Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions*, He said (v.15). He illustrated this admonition with 'The Parable of the Rich Fool' (vv.16-21). In that parable, God called the self-sufficient, pleasure-loving farmer a fool because he didn't make any preparations for eternity. The Lord concluded, *So is the [person] who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God* (v.21).

Then the Lord Jesus turned away from preaching to the crowd to instruct His disciples again. He wanted them to live in such a way that they stored up for themselves treasure in heaven; to live with eternal, lasting values in mind rather than the fleeting ideas of our present life upon earth. So, my talk today is about what the Christian disciple's attitude – what it should be to living in a fallen world, where people give priority to money, pleasure and leisure. Like the rich fool, the world's motto is: *Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die* (1 Corinthians 15:32). But what about after-life in eternity and resurrection to judgement? What then are believers to do? How should we live? Well, the Lord spelled it out very clearly in Luke 12:22-40 in simple and straightforward terms. We won't have any difficulty with the concepts He presented; our problem is practising them!

But first, let me read vv.22-28: *And he said to his disciples, Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on for life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 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 as small a 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!*

Don't worry!

To sum up the Lord's teaching in these verses: He said, 'Don't worry!' Having advised the crowds (in v.15) that there's more to life than riches, He explained to His disciples that the Christian way of life doesn't major on food and clothing. It's about faith in God. He realised that this would shock His followers because their fellow countrymen made much of material possessions. The prevailing wisdom of their day was that these were indicators of God's blessing. Such an attitude was actually a misrepresentation of their Scriptures!

However, the Lord had, on a previous occasion, been upfront with anyone who committed to being His disciple. *If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and*

follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? (9:23-25). Such a total surrender to Christ is only possible by trust in God.

Consider

Therefore, the Lord asked the disciples to consider the providence of the Creator. The ravens are fed by God (v.24) and the gorgeous lilies are sustained by Him (v.27). All of the animal and plant creation depend upon His provision: *O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great. ...These 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. ...You satisfy the desire of every living thing* (Psalm 104:24-25 & 27-28 with Psalm 145:16).

The Lord Jesus wants us to come to this same conclusion: that our Creator provides for the necessities of life. An easy statement to make but one that's difficult to accept when natural disasters, such as the recent cyclone that struck East Africa, occur. But Psalm 104:29-30 cover such issues: *When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the [earth].* We must look at such happenings by faith in the One who *'sits as sovereign on the throne and ruleth all things well'* (William Cowper, 1731 – 1800).

Faith

We certainly live in an uncertain world! Here in the UK, uncertainty is being played out at a national level; and in government itself. For unbelievers, this naturally causes all kinds of anxiety and worry. (Not to mention the problems that fake news adds to these!) But, although Christian believers have an altogether different outlook on life, they too, might worry. For example, an old Christian lady told me recently that media reports about the political instability in the world constantly upset her. However, the Lord stated in v.28 that at the root of our anxiety is a lack of faith! He'd already said that trusting in riches is the wrong way to live life; and that Christian discipleship is about living in a way which makes you 'rich towards God'. Trust in God is key to this. Not only true faith in the living and true God for salvation, but also the amount of genuine faith that we have in Him for everyday living. Listen again to v.28: *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!* Therefore, we must take onboard what He taught His disciples that day:

1. there's more to life than just food and clothing;
2. we cannot even add one hour to the length of our allotted life span (and, for us, that's despite all modern-day advances in medicine!)
3. the extreme brevity of life on earth – here today, gone tomorrow - just like the grass in the land of Israel.

What then should be the believer's correct attitude to life? This perhaps is best expressed by the apostle Paul: *But 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* (1 Timothy 6:6-8)

Anxiety

Is it wrong then for Christians to worry? In one way, no, not really. It's only natural for humans to do so because sin has introduced all kinds of difficulties into our world. However, in the Parable of the Sower, the Lord identified the anxieties of life as an issue which chokes the effectiveness of

the word of God and stifles spiritual life. Other issues He identified are the deceitfulness of riches, pleasures and lusts, which means desires for the things of the world. All these things come under the umbrella of *laying up treasures* for oneself that the Lord warned about in verse 21.

Our true faith in God as Creator gives us to understand that He'll always provide for us, whatever happens. In 1 Timothy 4:10, He's called the Preserver of all people, especially of believers. But vv.3-5 of that chapter give us the practical application of such faith in God: all provisions are to be received with thanksgiving. Then they will be sanctified, that is, made to serve their God-given purpose for us, by the word of God and prayer.

The Lord continued in v.29: *And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried.* The worry He referred to in that verse is that mental torment which, on the one hand, finds it humanly difficult to cope with the present situations of difficulty and distress; whilst on the other hand, trusts in God for eternal life.

Matthew 6:25-35, part of the 'Sermon on the Mount', almost parallels Luke 12. There, in v.34, the Lord gave an additional reason as to why we shouldn't worry: *Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.* In other words, tomorrow's difficulties are tomorrow's, not today's. There are enough problems to deal with today by God's all-sufficient grace and we *do not know what tomorrow will bring* (James 4:14).

Seek

Let me now read Luke 12:30-32: *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 to you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.* We know only too well that the world goes in for bodily appetite, fashion and the like. However, believers must peruse the things of God as the first priority in their lives. And we can be confident that, if we do, our heavenly Father will grant us everything else. Notice the emphasis in Matthew 6:33: *Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* Paul explained it in this way: *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men* (Romans 14:17-18). What do these verses teach us today? Most certainly, that we should accept God's rule over our lives now, here upon earth, as those who belong to the kingdom of heaven. This is a spiritual kingdom, formed by the preaching of the Gospel, during the Church age. But His actual, physical kingdom upon earth will not come until the close of this age. We recognise this fact when we pray: *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:10). God has decreed that His Christ will rule in perfection over this world (see Matthew 13:37-43, 47-50; 25:31-46 & Revelation 11:15).

Fear not

Isn't it good that everything is in God's hands and that we need not fear? Despite the outward show, and the hype, that things will get better as technology, etc. advances, uncertainty lurks in the heart of unbelievers. That breeds fear. Fear of what tomorrow will bring accompanied by anxiety over how they will cope. And, as the world rapidly approaches the end of the age, people are, *fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken* (Luke 21:26). Over and above these fears, down in their consciences there's the dread of death and of coming judgement. How sad they don't realise that Christ came and died so, *that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery* (Hebrews 2:14-15). But how comforting and reassuring are the Lord's words to us, His disciples: Fear not, little flock!

Avoiding anxiety

If it's only natural to worry, is there a way that Christians can relieve themselves of stress and anxiety? The answer is a resounding 'Yes!' Philippians 4:6-9 also advises believers not to worry and includes help as to how to overcome it. *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.* So then cast all your anxieties on God, because He cares for you (see 1 Peter 5:7).

Legitimate anxiety

There are things in believers lives about which it is right for them to be anxious. These can be found in two other New Testament scriptures where the word 'anxious' is used but with the sense or meaning of 'concern':

First, Paul used it to express Timothy's true feelings for the spiritual well-being of the Philippians: *For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare* (Philippians 2:20). Both Paul and Timothy were *seeking first the kingdom of God*, their own interests were subservient to those of Jesus Christ (v.21).

Second, in the latter part of 1 Corinthians 7, Paul repeated what the Lord had taught in Luke 12. In vv.25-40, he identified worries as being part of the lot of fallen mankind. His consuming desire for *the things of the Lord* (v.34) caused him to wish that believers be free of worldly troubles, especially as the form of the present age is so transient and time here on earth is short (v.29). However, he recognised that some of these concerns are unavoidable, such as:

- The proper concern that a Christian husband has for his wife (and their family) that causes him to interact with the world in which he lives (v.33). This results in him being 'anxious about worldly things' and his loyalties being divided between family and the Lord (vv.33-34).
- There's also the equally proper concern that a Christian wife has for her husband (and children), with similar results (v.34). But a Christian woman, who is single, can be concerned about pleasing the Lord - how to be holy in body and in spirit (v.34).

Again, Paul was *seeking first the kingdom of God*, aiming to secure believers' undivided devotion to the Lord rather than placing any unnatural restraints upon them (v.35).

Heavenly deposits

I'll now read Luke 12:33-34: *Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* These verses follow on from the Lord's exhortation to seek first the kingdom of God. They take us back to what He said in v.21 about not accumulating treasures for ourselves upon earth. I think that we'd all admit that we find it difficult to shake off the ways of the world and its influences over us, especially its ideas of charitable giving. Verse 34 is key. It's what God wants with respect to the money and possessions He's given us. That necessitates our giving ourselves first to the Lord and then acting according to His direction as we appreciate the wonders of His bountiful grace (see 2 Corinthians 8:5 & 9).

Ready to serve

In verse 35, the Lord instructed His disciples: *Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning.* As Jews, they would be familiar with these two figures of speech. The first more correctly translates into, *Let your loins be girded;* and describes how people in those parts of the world tucked-in their long, flowing robes to enable them to walk swiftly and without any hindrances. It was how the children of Israel were dressed as they celebrated the first Passover; they were prepared for the journey out of Egypt (see Exodus 12:11). Therefore, we need to be spiritually dressed, that is, adjust and control our thinking as we seek to serve the Lord in a world which has rejected Him (see 1 Peter 1:13-16). And we must keep our lamps burning, that is, our lives must be consistent with the testimony we give to the Lord: *That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world* (Philippians 2:15).

Waiting, watching and working

Finally, we come to vv.36-40: *Be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

These two parables illustrate the practical way Christian believers live because they hope in the Lord's second coming. As H. G. Spafford's (1828-1888) hymn puts it: 'O Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming, we wait, the sky not the grave, is our goal'. Not only waiting, but also watching, or staying awake. That is, not losing the reality that Jesus is coming again for us (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). And the Lord warned that it's possible for our hearts to be weighed down with self-indulgence and even drunkenness or with anxieties of everyday life such that His coming is an unexpected event (see Luke 21:34). How sad, but how solemn that would be! But we must not only be waiting and watching, but (to borrow from next week's talk) we must be working. *Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes* (v.43). To be 'doing' is to be actively using the resources He's given us in order to be engaged in His business, until He comes (see 19:13-27).

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on these challenging words of the Lord Jesus to His disciples in Luke 12:22-40. Talk number T1104 in our series on Luke's Gospel.

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