

The Parable of the Guy Who 'Made It'

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Date: 19 May 2019

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[0 : 0 0] For many people in life today, throughout Edinburgh, throughout Scotland, really throughout I think the whole Western world, there's a huge pressure to make it.

So right now, over the past month or so, it's been exam time I think for a lot of people here, people in high school, people in uni, and there you're working hard, you're trying to consolidate all that you've learned, you're sitting in exam because you want to get the grades you need, and if you do that you can go on to the next step of life, maybe that'll be more study, maybe it'll be into a job. Once you get a job, you can earn money, you can maybe step onto the property ladder, buy a house, you can work and buy a car, pay it off, you can maybe try and earn a wee bit more, maybe you can get some nice holidays, if it goes well you will get promoted, that'll increase your income, you can then maybe move to a better area, you can get the mortgage paid off, you can go for even nicer holidays, longer holidays, you can get an even nicer car and you have financial security. Eventually, if you can work your way all the way through these steps, you reach the point where you've got it all. And for many that's the dream, that's what life is about and that's what we need to pour our energy into. For some people, making it takes a long time, so you go through this long process of school, university, job, promotion, house, mortgage, paid off, wealth, and then you've got security. For others it's much quicker, so some people might have a very successful new business that just booms, some people might get promoted up the ladder very, very quickly, or even better somebody might become a successful YouTuber and earn a fortune. Apparently my nephew told me that that was what most people in this class wanted to be, a successful YouTuber.

Change days, when I was wee it was just a footballer, but that's the dream. But however old you are, however young you are, however it happens, if you reach that point where you're successful in your career, where you're financially secure and comfortable, then in the world's eyes you've made it. In Luke chapter 12, Jesus tells us a parable about a guy who made it. Let's read it again. Jesus 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 them 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 will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will 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, be merry. But God said to him, fool, this night your soul is required of you, and the things that you've prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. Now this is a very relevant and very challenging parable for us. If you were to go out into the center of Edinburgh just now and have a look around, you would see hundreds of shops where you can get more goods like this guy had. And you'll also find hundreds of bars and restaurants where you can eat, drink, and be merry, just like this guy wanted to be. So if the guy in this parable could step onto the royal mile right now, he'd be thinking, this is my kind of place, and we would look at him and we'd say he's made it. And that's why this parable, if anything, is even more relevant today than ever. And I want us just to think about it together for a wee while, and I want us to focus just on three things. This parable challenges us and forces us to think. It forces us to think about our perspective, it forces us to think about our priorities, and it also forces us to think about how we relax. And I want us just to think a wee bit about the three of these things together. So first of all, at a kind of general broad level, this parable is making us think about our perspective on life. And in many ways, it's presenting us with this image of climbing up to a point of success. So we've got this man who's a rich landowner and his crops do well. So he's successful, but his barns aren't big enough. So he needs to kind of climb up to the next step of the ladder to get onto the next stage of wealth and capital. So his plan is, I'm going to knock these down, I'm going to build a bigger one, then I'll have even more, I'll be able to store it up. His success is increasing, he's on the up, everything looks good. And that I think is a picture, a very clear picture of the perspective that pervades life today for many of us. The idea that we are climbing our way up towards greater levels of success and that that is ultimately what life is all about. People are working their way up to that level. So I couldn't resist a diagram for all of this. So start off in school, you need to work your way up to school, then university, work your way up through university, then you get a job, work your way up through that job, then

get a promotion, even higher, then you've got security, and then once you're there, relax. Because you've made it. Now that's just one way it can happen, it doesn't necessarily happen through university, some people leave school, they'll maybe do a trade engineer or electrician or something like that, they'll start a business, they can zoom up the ladder even faster that way, it just depends.

There's different ways of doing it, but the general, you get the general gist, that's the idea. If you can reach that point, then you've made it. You're on a plateau of success and satisfaction. So many ways, it's like that, it's like a climb and then a plateau, and that's what we're all aiming for. Now at one level, there's nothing wrong with that. It's good to work hard and it's great if we can do well, and if it does happen, we should be so thankful. But we should always remember that part of that will always be out of our hands. And it's interesting, that truth is reflected in this parable, because you have this rich man, he's got lots of land, but he benefits from the fact that the land did well. There's a sense in which it was out of his hands and he benefited from that and that helped him on his way. That's true in every part of life. We can work our way through that. For some people, it doesn't work out, but for some, the breaks do come. Sometimes it's out of our hands. But the point is that the parable is not saying that being well off is wrong. That's not what it's talking about. So what is it saying? Well, I think one of the things Jesus wants to teach us is that this parable is emphasizing the need for a bigger perspective on life.

[7 : 57] We stand and we look at that and we think, yeah, that's a great summary of what we want life to be. We're looking up that slope, we're trying to get to the top and if we get there, we've made it. Jesus is saying, you need to look further than that, because the truth is, at the top of that climb, there isn't a plateau. At the top of that climb is a cliff. And that cliff, the end of our lives when we die, that's stripping away, instantly stripping away everything that we've gathered for ourselves on that climb. This guy in the parable had gathered a whole pile of resources, so much so that he didn't even have room for it all. Yet no matter how much he had made it, he was absolutely powerless to stop death bringing it all to an end. He thought he had a survival plan. He thought, I've got ample goods, it's gonna last me for many years and yet we're being reminded of the shortness and fragility of life. He couldn't stop. It all been stripped away.

As he came off that cliff. And exactly the same as true for everyone, exactly the same as true for us. Different people make it to different heights of success, so that path of arrows going up might be really steep for some people. They might really make it and if you look around Edinburgh, there's some people who have really made it in that sense. Other people, they might not get anywhere near that level and it might be a struggle. Some people make it way higher than others. But the key point is that no matter where you are in terms of height, no one, no one can avoid the cliff. No one can escape leaving it all behind.

And this is where we see just how absolutely brilliant the gospel is.

Because if we use this image to describe life, if we say that life is a climb and then a cliff, we work our way up and then it comes to an end. We can often think that Christianity is about changing the climb. So we think, you know, Christianity is about making your life easier. And so if you go to church, if you have a faith, it's going to make the climb easier. It's going to change it and it'll make it better. And often people can think that that being a Christian will make you a better person and it might even bring better things into your life. Now that may be true for some, but for many people it's not true. Often being a Christian is really tough. Often life is hard and often Christians most definitely don't make it in the world's eyes in the sense of being successful in the workplace or being financially secure. People think that Christianity is about improving the climb, but that's not what Christianity is all about. And that's why Christianity is amazing, because Christianity is not about changing the climb, it's about changing the cliff. Jesus hasn't come to give us an easy life for a while. He's come to give us eternal life forever. He's come to change the cliff. And so instead of grafting through your life, trying to make it and then falling off a cliff where you lose it all, the gospel is saying that you can go through life knowing that wherever you reach in terms of the climb and no matter what stage in life you reach the cliff, Jesus is already holding you and he will carry you home to be with him forever. And if you're not yet a Christian, you need to look at that at the two big arrows at the end and just ask yourself which one's better?

Which one do you want? The parable is really challenging our perspective. It's also challenging our priorities and in many ways this parable arose out of the context of misplaced priorities. Luke chapter 12 comes in kind of a wee bit into a big chunk of Luke which runs from chapter 9 through to chapter 19. Much of which is unique to Luke's gospel. And in this big chunk from 9 to 19 in Luke, Jesus is making his way towards Jerusalem. He's nearing the end of his ministry and he's traveling around. It's not a kind of direct path to Jerusalem but the general trajectory of his journeying is towards Jerusalem in terms of coming to the end of his ministry and moving towards the cross. So this is quite far on in terms of Jesus' life. This is probably the period when he was at his most well known in terms of the area of Judea and the surrounding region.

[13 : 30] And so he comes to this place and a man in the crowd gets a chance to speak to him. And so just imagine being this man in the crowd. Here is your one chance to speak to this rabbi who's kind of turning the world upside down that people are hearing about. He's teaching all these things, performing miracles. He's coming to this place. You get a chance to see him. You get into the crowd. You get a chance to speak to him. This is his one opportunity and the guy comes to Jesus and he wants him to sort out a family feud about money. He says, teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. This is his one chance to talk to Jesus. And this is what he wants to talk about. Now we don't know the details of this claim. It could be a legitimate claim. It might be that his brother is treating him unfairly or it could be a selfish claim. It may be that this man is wanting his share now in a sense that's not appropriate or not customary.

We don't actually know whether this guy is being treated badly or whether he's being selfish, not sure. You can decide for yourselves what do you think? I don't know. I lean towards the second idea that his claim is not legitimate because certainly what Jesus says in response certainly seems to be towards a rebuke or a warning implying that this man's motivation is in terms of covetousness and greed. But whatever the circumstance is, the one thing that's clear, material possessions are a priority for this man who comes to speak to Jesus. And in response, Jesus refuses point-blank to get involved in the family dispute and instead he gives us all a warning about our priorities. Verse 15, he says, take care, be on your guard against all covetousness for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Now this is one of the many great statements that Jesus made and it's one of the statements that we would all agree with. Even people who have no interest in the Gospel, I'm pretty sure that if you went out onto the Royal Mile and started asking people, do you agree with this statement? They would all say yes. And yet at the same time, a huge amount of people in Scotland live just like the guy in the parable. And as we look through the parable, we can see three key patterns of behavior in this rich man. First of all, you see individualism. Notice how much he speaks about me, my, I. What shall I do? I've got nowhere to store my crops, I'll tear down my barns and then I'll store my grain, my goods, I'll say to my soul. It's all very, very much me, me, my, my, my. There's no word of any sense of responsibility or generosity to others. It's very individualistic. It's also very materialistic. The guy basically says, I've got loads of stuff, I've got loads of goods, I'm sorted. And his satisfaction and security was in his material possessions. It was materialistic. And it's also hedonistic in the sense he wants to just eat, drink and be merry. He just wants to pursue pleasure.

In other words, he's got it all. He's made it. He just wants to party. These three behavior patterns are clear in the passage. Individualism, materialism, hedonism and they are all around us today. Because if Scotland in 2019 is anything, it's individualistic, it's materialistic, it's hedonistic. Look after number one, get more stuff and have a blast. And all of this raises the question about the priorities in our lives. Am I the priority in my life? Is it all about me? In other words, am I more important than anybody else? Is stuff the priority in my life? In other words, will goods bring me fulfillment and happiness? Is partying the priority in my life? In other words, is that the dream to be able to just go out and just have a massive laugh? Is that the reward? Is that the legacy you want to leave? Imagine your gravestone. It says she put herself first, she had loads of stuff and she went to loads of parties.

Now this is not a question of whether that stuff is wrong. Jesus is not saying that we shouldn't have possessions. You only need to read the rest of this chapter to see that that's not the case. And he's not saying that we shouldn't have fun. Jesus himself celebrated with friends at weddings and things like that.

The question is not about whether these things are right or wrong. The question is about priorities. Are these the most important things in your life? And I am sure that every single person here would say no. And yet at the very same time, whenever we see someone who's made it, we think to ourselves, I wish I was that guy.

[19:19] And that's why Jesus says to be on guard, because covetousness and greed can sneak up on us and it can spring up in our hearts so easily. And that's why the key question is not do you know the truth that life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions? It's not do you know it. The question is do you live by it? And the best way to think about whether we live by it or the best way to know it and live by it is to go back to our first point, to have the right perspective. Thinking about the whole of life and the whole of eternity. What's more important? Individualism or community? What's more important? Materialism or generosity? What's more important? Hedonistic merriness or genuine meaning and purpose and relationship in life? And that's why Jesus is asking us do we prioritize what's rich before the world or what is rich towards God? Do we prioritize what we have now which will leave behind or do we prioritize what's what we have in eternity? In other words what's more important? The climb or the cliff. The gospel challenges us to think about what really matters and if this parable has any effect on you at all God grant that it makes us all stop and think. So Jesus is challenging our perspective, Jesus is challenging our priorities but last of all in this parable Jesus also I think wants us to consider how we relax. In verse 19 we read that the man said I'll say to my soul soul you have ample goods laid up for many years relax, eat, drink and be merriant and in many ways to me that word relax stands out a lot because if you think in terms of making it of getting to that point you think that's the moment when I really can relax. So for some some of you that might be when you get your degree maybe some of you are about to get your degree you think oh if I just get it I can relax. For others it might be when they get the job they've always wanted so you think oh if I can just get that job just get that permanent contract oh then I can relax. For some it might be when you finally get your own house you think I've always wanted my own house if I could just get that then I can relax. For other people it might be retirement if I could just retire then I would relax. And we have all these points in their lives and we think if I reach that point then then I can relax. That's what this guy thought and reading this parable and thinking about relaxing there's two mistakes that we can make. The first one is that we can think that getting to the top is the key to an easy life. So we think to ourselves if I can just get that job that gives me that bit more money then I'll be able to relax. But so often the top is a far from relaxing place at all. We can think to ourselves that getting up there means more money more freedom more relaxation in reality it often means more pressure more stress more isolation more worry. For many people who are adventurers the dream would be to climb Mount Everest and you look at photos and

or footage of people who are at the summit of Mount Everest have you ever ever ever seen anyone relax at the top of Mount Everest. It's probably the harshest most dangerous most isolated place on the planet. And for the bosses in here you're probably thinking then that's my job. Getting to the top is not relaxing but the world makes you think that it is. So that's one mistake that we can make. But secondly and even more importantly it's easy to read this parable and think that God is against this whole idea of relaxing. So you have got this guy who finally makes it he says soul you can relax and then God jumps in and says fool. And our impression can be that God is against this whole idea of relaxing he doesn't want us to relax and some people definitely have that impression of Christianity that Christianity means giving up any hope of relaxation or happiness in your life. There's this idea that God is kind of harsh and cold and doesn't really like the idea of people relaxing.

And we have to ask the question is that true? Is God against relaxing? Well it's not true. In fact it's the complete opposite of the truth because the truth is the gospel of Jesus Christ gives you the best relaxation of all. If you put your trust in Jesus if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian then for many many reasons you can relax. And this chapter actually highlights several of them and I'll just give you three or four examples. So think about life and what makes you tense, what gives you stress, what makes you angry, what frustrates you, what slips away your relaxation. There's various things often in life we are stressed because things seem unfair and so you look at things that are happening in the world you look at things that are happening to us and you think that's so unfair it's so frustrating and it all just seems so wrong. The gospel says you can relax. Why? Because justice will come. This parable arose from an aggrieved individual. He felt this is not fair what my brother is doing to me and so much tension comes into our lives because we feel that things are unfair but the gospel tells us that ultimately God will sort everything out. Jesus makes that very clear at the beginning of the parable. He says beware the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Nothing is covered that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known. And that's telling us that all injustice will ultimately be dealt with by God. So instead of us trying to take revenge, instead of us trying to take matters in our own hands, often we can think that if I can just sort that person out then I can relax. God says no relax now I'll deal with it. Gospel tells us that we can relax in terms of injustice. Often in life we can feel stressed about everything that's going on. So busy, so much pressure and even just the little things in our lives can seem chaotic and we feel like all these things we're trying to juggle, we're trying to keep on top of them and we can't handle it. The gospel says you can relax because God cares about every detail of your life. Verses 6 to 7 emphasize the care that God has towards us. He says are not five sparrows sold for two pennies and not one of them is forgotten before God. Why even the hairs of your head are all numbered? Fear not. God's care towards you goes to the most minute details of your life. So whether it's your bank balance, your email inbox, your health, your family, your finances, your work, your schedule, your exams, your university application, whatever it is God knows every detail and you can relax. You really can relax because God will take care of it. Often in life we can be scared of opposition and for many Christians this is very real and I think it will become more and more real for us in the decades to come. We

are scared of people opposing us, people challenging us and for the fact that our faith might bring us into conflict with others. The gospel actually says you can relax because when they bring you before synagogues and rulers and authorities don't be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say and no matter who stands against you, Jesus, the Son of Man, the one who has all authority, will stand up for you. The Son of Man will acknowledge you before the angels of God. Often in life we're worried about what we have or what we don't have. Again the gospel says you can relax because God is more than ready and willing to provide for you. That's what the section from verse 22 to verse 31 speaks about, just the fact that you look at the birds, you look at the flowers, God provides for them, God will also provide for you and then in verse 32 it tells us something amazing. It tells us it's actually a pleasure for God to bless you and to provide for you. Often in life we can be stressed or nervous about protecting our assets so we think, I mean to protect my job, my house, my money, we want to protect and preserve it all. The gospel says, relax because the riches you have in Jesus will never fade. The next verse says that, sell your possessions, 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, no moth destroys. You don't need to set a burglar alarm on your eternal treasure, it's safe. You can relax. And this is again with the gospel so brilliantly different. Every single earthly investment involves risk, every single one. But our heavenly investment in Jesus carries no risk at all. All it requires is patience.

Often in life we put huge amounts of effort into gaining wealth. The gospel says, relax. You don't need that treasure, in fact you are the treasure because you are so precious to God. And above all else, in life we are nervous about death. But even then the gospel says, relax. Because in Jesus you're safe for eternity. And when the day comes when your life is required of you, you are utterly safe in the hands of Jesus. And this is one of the many, many reasons why being a Christian is amazing because the world says you need to reach the top and then relaxation begins. The gospel says, relaxation of the very best kind begins now. And if you think about it, the whole of the gospel is shaped around the call to trust in Jesus. That's what we are asked to do.

[32 : 35] That's just another way of saying relax in Jesus. Just lean on Him, rely on Him, depend on Him, rest in Him. Now when I say relax, I don't mean in the sense of being lazy. Relaxation is not laziness. It's in the sense of resting and just leaning on Him. That's all the gospel asks us to do. To trust in Jesus. To relax in confidence that Jesus has done everything that we need. So this is the parable of the guy who made it but ultimately lost it all. But the key point I want to emphasize is that the warning that Jesus gives is not because He doesn't want you to make it. It's because He doesn't want you to lose it.

And instead He wants to pour out eternal blessings upon you. And here's where we see the irony of the world in contrast to the gospel. The world says you need to make it. That's what you need to do. And then if you actually make it, do you know what will happen? The world will resent you and be envious of you. And you'll find yourself isolated. And ultimately you'll lose it all. The gospel is the complete opposite. God doesn't expect you to make it. He knows you can't. He just wants to give it to you and pour out eternal blessings upon you that will last forever. That's when you will really make it. And if you do, if you do that, if you reach that point where God can look at you and you've got these eternal blessings of life with God forever as part of God's people, God won't look at you and resent you. God will look at you and be so, so delighted. And I think that's where we can all really relax. Let's pray. God our Father, we want to acknowledge that you are so good and so kind and so generous. And we just praise you for that so much. We also want to acknowledge that we are so foolish and so often we think that stuff will make us happy and that that's what life is about. Help us Lord to have the right perspective. Help us to have the right priorities and help us always to just relax in you. Amen.