

# The Danger of Materialism - Part 2

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our scripture reading tonight, the passage that David's really very shortly going to come and preach from is Luke chapter 12 verses 22 to 34. The passage is in the bulletin if you got one on the way in. It'll be on the screens. There's also some Bibles at the back if you'd like to have a Bible to look at while David works through it with us in a little moment.

This is Luke 12, 22 verses 22 to 34. And he said to his disciples, For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Amen. This is God's holy word. Well, we come to Luke chapter 12 and the verses 22 through 34 that Chris read for us just a little while ago. This I think is our 12th sermon on our call to discipleship series. It was the 1994 animated film, The Lion King, that made famous the phrase Hakuna Matata.

Swahili, I believe, for no worries. Hakuna Matata. That was the problem-free philosophy of Timon, the wise-cracking meerkat, and his sidekick Pumbaa, the warthog.

[ 2 : 45 ] Hakuna Matata. What a wonderful phrase. You'll be glad I'm not going to sing this. Hakuna Matata ain't no passing craze. It means no worries for the rest of your days.

It's our problem-free philosophy, Hakuna Matata. Well, in this next section of Luke's gospel, Jesus is introducing us, I suppose, to his own kind of problem-free philosophy.

Because in these verses, you'll notice Jesus is speaking very directly about fear, anxiety, and worry. And specifically, he's addressing the whole idea of worrying over material things.

The verses here follow on directly from the parable that has gone on before the story of the rich fool that we looked at briefly last week. He begins his teaching here with the words, therefore.

Links back to what he's been speaking about. And that story itself was a warning about the dangers of greed, the way in which money and wealth and material things can blind us to what is really important in life.

[ 3 : 59 ] Take care, he says in verse 15, The way of Christian discipleship is not a path where we prioritize accumulating wealth for ourselves.

Instead, it means traveling a road where our focus instead is on being rich towards God. Rich towards God rather than being rich towards ourselves.

Jesus wants us to understand that human life is ultimately about having our treasure in heaven, not on earth. One of the great dangers of materialistic outlook is not just in the way that it blinds us to eternal realities, but also the way in which it can propel our hearts into a storm of anxiety and worry. Worries attach themselves to the things that we value most. And so the way in which we view our money and possessions reveals often something important about where our heart loyalties really lie.

Of course, in Jesus' day, many people were not rich. Life was often a very hand-to-mouth kind of existence, as it is for many people in different parts of the world today.

[ 5 : 33 ] Make no mistake, worries over food and clothing were not unusual. But materialism is not a condition that affects only the super wealthy.

The way of a Christian disciple is not the way of a materialist. And so what happens here in these verses is Jesus kind of outlines a different set of priorities for Christian disciples.

And in these verses, I want to suggest that Jesus encourages us to do three things. Three things that will help us be set free, really, from worry and anxiety.

And the first of them is this in verses 22 through 28. The Christian disciple, says Jesus, must trust God's care above all else.

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.

[ 6 : 40 ] Jesus here underscores this point, that life is more than food, the body more than clothing. There's more to life than meets the eye. Yes, of course, as human beings, we need food, and we need clothing.

They are basic requirements for life in this world. But, says Jesus, we should realize that our Heavenly Father knows well what we need to survive and live in this world. Our attitude to food and clothing should therefore be different to those around us. Why? Because we don't have to pursue such things as others do. Because we know that we have a Father in heaven who cares for us and will provide for us. Because of that, we will look at these things differently.

Consider the ravens. They neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouse nor barn. Yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?

[ 7 : 43 ] And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to a span of life? If then you are not able to do a smallest thing of that, why are you anxious about the rest?

So, Jesus says, look at the birds. Look at the ravens. Unlike the rich farmer in his story, they don't sow. They don't reap. They don't have storehouses. They don't have barns.

And yet, they are fed every day. God cares for them. God feeds them. Now, I don't think Jesus is suggesting that we abolish farming. The point he's making is simply this.

You're much more valuable to God than the ravens. So, what is your worrying? What does your anxiety achieve? It's not as if it's going to add to your life.

It's not going to extend your lifespan. And then there's a second illustration, again drawn from nature. This time from flowers rather than birds. Consider the lilies, how they grow.

[ 8 : 42 ] They neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothes as a grass, alive in the field today, tomorrow, thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Those flowers, they don't toil or spin, work for a living. They simply do what they are created to do. Their beauty is unsurpassed. Even Solomon of old, with all his wealth, was not clothed like one. Even the grass of the field, which lives but for a short time and then is thrown into the fire, is cared for and clothed by God. The grass is ephemeral.

It's transitory. Here today is gone tomorrow. And if God cares for the flowers of the field and clothes them with much beauty, how much more will he care for his own people? There's words of an old hymn by Sarah Betts Rhodes.

I remember singing in Sunday school. God who made the earth, the air, the sky, the sea, who gave the light its birth, careth for me.

[ 9 : 53 ] God who made the grass, the flower, the fruit, the tree, the day and night to pass, careth for me. So, Jesus says, don't be anxious about clothing and food because your Father in heaven knows that you need these things.

Don't be controlled by anxiety. Instead, put your trust and confidence in your heavenly Father. Trust God's care above all else.

No point spending our lives worrying about what might happen. Remember, your life is in God's hands and he is in charge.

There's a famous little poem called *Overheard in an Orchard*, written by Elizabeth Cheney in 1859. It goes like this. Said the robin to the sparrow, I should really like to know why these anxious human beings rush about and worry so.

Said the sparrow to the robin, Friend, I think that it must be that they have no heavenly Father such as cares for you and me.

[ 11 : 01 ] Of course, at times, we all have worries and anxieties, many of them legitimate. But we are not to allow those to paralyze us.

We live, it strikes me today, the writer Jonathan Haidt has termed the anxious generation. In past times, it was, I think it still is, common for people to become more anxious as they age.

Certainly, that would be my own experience. But in this modern world, what we're discovering is that many young people are more often than not plagued with huge anxieties, impact of social media, rise of use of smartphones, the very systems designed to provide us with information and in connection, are instead fueling fear and division, emotional instability.

And some people live their whole lives fearful and anxious, fearful of the disease they dread most, fearful of losing someone they love, fearful of what others think about them, fearful of something

going wrong.

Friend, if you're a believer this evening, take courage that God knows you and loves you and cares for you. Rest in Him. Remember Peter saying to his readers, cast all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you.

[12:35] The psalmist, cast your burden on the Lord and He will sustain you. The world's algorithms thrive on creating fear and anxiety.

But the call of Jesus Christ is very different. His call is one to exercise faith and trust in God as our Heavenly Father. Faith focuses and thinks about God.

Thinks about what He's like. Thinks about those many evidences of His care and His faithfulness and so is not paralyzed by anxiety.

There's a story from Spain. I may have told this before. I can't remember actually. But it's an architect and a builder who created an archway in the king's palace.

And this archway was unusually long. Indeed, the archway was so long that it looked as if it was going to collapse. And when the king inspected it, this was his conclusion.

[13:41] So he ordered a pillar to be built underneath the archway to help support it. The architect objected, saying that this pillar was unnecessary, but the king being the king, his wish prevailed.

But when the architect had the pillar constructed, he deliberately made it just a quarter of an inch short. The pillar stood, but it supported nothing.

Now, I don't know where this is. I can't verify it. So apparently, you can still see the pillar today. Tour guides will arrange for a piece of card to be passed between the end of the pillar and the archway.

And sometimes we spend so much of our time creating, constructing, useless pillars of anxiety that hold up nothing, utterly pointless. We need to trust our Father in heaven.

We need to trust His faithfulness. He will bear us up. He will support us. He will care for us. He will not let us go. The Christian disciple must trust God's care above all else.

[14:57] That brings me to the second thing here. The Christian disciple must seek God's kingdom above all else. Do not seek, verse 29, what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor 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 to you. Fear not, little flock, for it's your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

To go back to another 1990s film, the film was a film called City Slickers. And in the film, there's a scene, I won't try and describe the film, but there's a scene in which the character, played by Billy Crystal, Mitch, he's alone with an old, gnarled cowboy as they're on this cattle drive.

He's called Curly. He was like, Jack Palant. Jack Palant. Oops. Are we disappearing? Am I disappearing? I'm okay? Yeah, okay.

You get worried if they're going to switch you off. You know, things are going bad. It's happened once or twice, but anyway, we'll press on. Anyway, there's this scene, and in the scene, Curly gives Mitch some life advice.

[16:22] Curly asks Mitch, do you know what the secret of life is? And he holds up one finger like that. This. Mitch says, your finger? Curly says, one thing, just one thing.

Stick to that. The rest don't mean squat. Mitch says, but what is the one thing? And Curly says, that's what you have to find out. Well, here Jesus is spelling it out for us, just what that one thing is. And in a word, it's the king. In a word, it's God himself. We're not to pursue the things of life as others do. Instead, we are to seek first the kingdom of God.

This is to be the disciples' great priority. We're not to pursue the gifts. We are to pursue the giver of the gifts. We are to seek the rule of Christ, the king in our lives.

We are to put his kingdom first. That's to be our number one concern. To seek first the kingdom means making the things of God our supreme business.

[17:25] Not as a hobby, you know, alongside our real interests, but as the great priority of life. Not as an add-on when the pressures of life permit, but as a kind of controlling passion and focus of the heart.

The world around us pursues all manner of things. Food, drink, clothing, power, position, status, pleasure, distraction, entertainment.

And so often it's these things that come first in people's lives. These things have first call upon finances and time and energies and resources.

But as Christian disciples, you see, we're to be different. We're not to retreat from the world. We're to be Christ's agents of change in the world.

We're to be distinctive. We're to be different from those around us because we live with a different set of priorities. Our concern must be to put Jesus Christ, the King, first in all things.

[ 18 : 30 ] That's what it means to seek God's kingdom. It's Jesus first in our homes, our families, our marriages. Jesus first in our work, in our finances, in our use of time, first in the church.

Because this is the way of blessing in the life of discipleship. It's by putting Him first and seeking the kingdom of God that we experience God's gracious provision for our needs.

We are to actively pursue the reign and rule of Christ in our lives, something we need to do each day. And the point Jesus highlights here is one of trust.

Because the world around us lives by calculation and worry. It has no Father in heaven. But we who have been brought near through the blood of Christ, we know a very different reality.

To seek first the kingdom is to refuse to let tomorrow's troubles tyrannize today. It's to reject the idolatry of self-provision. It's to believe that the God who gave His Son for us will not withhold any good thing from those who are His children.

[ 19 : 40 ] Unfortunately, we all too often reverse the order. Seek first the job. Seek first the house.

Seek first the security. Seek first the reputation. And then if there's time and energy left, we'll give what's left to the kingdom. And Jesus turns that upside down.

Seek first the kingdom. And the necessities of life shall be added to you. Not as a reward for your spirituality. Not as some prosperity gospel bargain.

But as the overflow of a life ordered under the gracious rule of the one who is the King of Kings. We face a daily decision to seek God's kingdom or ours.

Submit to His lordship or not. Live for His glory or for our own. This is a very critical issue in discovering God's will and purpose for our lives.

[ 20 : 41 ] Oftentimes, people get, Christians get in a real caundry about what they should do. What does God want me to do? Where is God leading? Where does He want me to go? It's not the big question.

The big question is this. Are you actively seeking God's kingdom? Are you pursuing Jesus Christ? Are you putting Him first? The Christian disciple must trust God's care above all else.

The Christian disciple must seek God's kingdom above all else. And then thirdly here, the Christian disciple must invest in heavenly treasure above all else.

Verses 33 and 34. Sell your possessions. Give to the needy. Provide yourself with money bags that do not grow old, but that treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches, no moth destroys.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Christian disciples says, Jesus are called to be generous to others, especially those in need.

[ 21 : 43 ] We're to be givers rather than takers, because our possessions are only on temporary loan from God. And you'll notice how in these verses, I think, three occasions, Jesus speaks about treasure.

He does in verse 21, but also here in verse 33 and 34. Either we value, as most important, the things of this passing world, or we value God.

The great problem with setting our hearts on the things of this earth is that these treasures do not last. Clothes, fashion can be eaten by moths, metal and material things destroyed by corrosion, eaten away by mice, homes and possessions susceptible to thieves and robbers.

All earthbound treasures are destined to fail us. They do not provide lasting security or happiness. It was the Masters Golf, I think, last week.

And I recall watching an interview with Bernard Langer, the famous German golfer. And in the conversation that he was having with the interviewer, he explained how he became a Christian way back in 1985.

[ 23 : 01 ] And it was just after he'd won the Masters. He won the Masters that year. He was young. He was recently married. He was wealthy. He was successful. He seemed as if he had everything.

And yet, strangely, at that moment, he says he felt absolutely empty inside. He should have been feeling on top of the world. Instead, he felt unfulfilled.

He sensed there was something missing. He felt there had to be more to life. As it turned out, he was invited to a Bible study. He and his wife went along.

Within three months, they'd given their lives to Jesus Christ. He said to the interviewer, it was the best decision I ever made. And what he came to see was that the things of this world can never truly satisfy.

Because we were made not to be satisfied with the things of this world. Anything less than a relationship with the living God will leave us impoverished and restless. I've quoted the writer David Foster Wallace before.

[ 24 : 09 ] This is what he says. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, you will never have enough. Worship your own body and beauty, a sexual allure, you will always feel ugly.

Worship power, you will end up feeling weak. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you'll end up feeling stupid. A fraud, always on the verge of being found out.

Jesus here calls us to live for the new heaven. Not for this earth. For God, not for the things of this world. And in order to do that, we need to see the value, the sheer beauty and preciousness of the gospel of God.

What is it that really claims your heart and your affections? What is your treasure? What's really important in your life? What makes you tick?

What occupies your mind and heart? Is it God? Is it Jesus Christ? Is it the kingdom? You see, you cannot be a Christian. You can't really be a disciple of Jesus.

[ 25 : 20 ] You can't enter the kingdom of God until you have seen its value. Until you've seen how important it is. Unless you've seen Christ as your treasure.

That's why in the New Testament, becoming a Christian is often likened to having one's eyes opened. Opened by the Holy Spirit to see the value of the gospel, to see the beauty of Jesus Christ. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Well, who or what is your treasure? What is it in life you've just got to have? In some of his writings, Jonathan Edwards has a phrase, he talks about Christ's divine loveliness.

And the fact that this sense of divine beauty, he says, is the first thing in the actual change made in the soul in true conversion. It's the foundation of everything else belonging to that change.

That's a very perceptive comment. Do you have any sense of the beauty and loveliness of Jesus Christ? Do you consider him precious tonight?

[ 26 : 34 ] Do you delight in him? Do you desire him? This is, of course, what creates a sense of detachment from the world. Jesus speaks here about setting light to our possessions, our wealth, our money.

He says, you know, talks about being prepared to give it away to help those in need. Now, that kind of attitude is only possible when we have the things of this world in proper perspective.

Christian disciples should be generous givers because our God is a generous giver and we've been blessed to receive all that we have from him as a gift. It's not ours, it's only on loan.

One day we'll leave it all behind. If we do not think on the glories of the renewed heavens and earth, and on the passing and fleeting nature of this world, we will become duped.

There's so many voices that make this world appear to us so real and tangible and the world to come so distant. We view this world as being big.

[ 27 : 42 ] The world to come is small. Actually, in the scriptures, the very reverse is true. It is this world that is small. It is this world that is passing. It is the world to come that is great, that is substantial, that is eternal.

Of course, let me qualify this. I do not mean to imply a low view of the wonder and glory and richness that life in this world can and does have.

We are not to deny the material world. It is God-given. The passing nature of this world does not mean we are to retreat from it, but it does mean that we will not wholly invest our lives in it.

we will look at this world only in the light of that which is to come. So here is Jesus' problem-free philosophy.

It is all about putting our faith and trust in God, not in ourselves. Our worries and anxieties fade when we learn to trust God's care, to seek God's kingdom, to invest in heavenly treasure.

[ 28 : 59 ] We need to know and trust God as our Father in heaven and we come to know this God only through Jesus himself. It is in and through Jesus that we come to know and experience God's love and care.

How can we know, how can we be certain that God cares for us? How can we be really sure that he loves us? Is it when things are going well in our lives and when we are feeling good?

When we are rich and wealthy? No. No. What about when things are not so good? What about times of ill health? Times of poverty?

Times of emotional distress? Times when we have lost a job? When someone we love dies? What about when we are struggling and we are all at sea? How do we know God's care and love then? And friends, it has absolutely nothing to do with our circumstances, good or bad. And it's everything to do with Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. Because that is how we know that he cares.

[ 30 : 05 ] He sent his son to die for us. And that's what we have to hold on to in difficult times. God loves us and cares for us.

The cross is unshakable evidence really of that reality. His love and care are spelled out for us in the rich red human blood of the cross.

Look to Jesus Christ and him crucified. Has he not given you every reason to trust him? Remember how Paul put it?

If God is for us, who then can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

And this table with bread and wine speaks to us, proclaims to us God's love and care in an indifferent world.

[ 31 : 16 ] trust him with your life this evening and look to the future without fear and worry. It is the cross, it's the blood of Jesus that reminds us that our lives are now in our Father's hands.

Let's pray together. Amen. God our Father you know us, you know our hearts and our minds, you know the way that we think, the way that we act, you know the things that bother us, that concern us, that trouble us.

Lord help us to look away from our troubles and anxieties to you the living God to find our rest in you, to trust your love for us, proved and placarded indeed for all the world to see in a crucified and risen Saviour.

Lord as we turn this evening to the Lord's table Lord we pray that you would meet with us and speak to us and deal with our hearts and help us to be a people who seek first your kingdom and indeed your righteousness.

Lord bless us and encourage us and meet with us now as we pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.