

Life According to Orange County

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Preacher: Dave Fuller

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 5th of June 2005.

The preacher is Dave Fuller. His sermon is entitled Life According to Orange County and is based on Luke chapter 12 verses 13 to 21.

Well it's good to be back again after my visit last Sunday night. For those who weren't here, just a brief introduction.

My name's David Fuller. Just in terms of what I do with myself, I work three days a week at Ridley College seeking to encourage people to be good youth ministers, children's workers and schools chaplains.

And then a couple of days of the week, I also work as a schools chaplain in a government high school in the western suburbs. And one of the reasons I chose this topic is that I listen to what the young people in my office tell me.

[1 : 07] And the OC is one of their favourite shows. They actually help me stay in touch because I don't watch it actually. But for the last three Tuesday nights at 8.30 I have videotaped it.

And this afternoon I watched three in a row to try and get a feel for the OC. I'm also in God Squad, which you don't earn a living out of.

But God Squad's something I've just really been a part of for 18 years. And in some ways it's a ministry, in other ways it's part of my outlet. A bit of a sort of passion to ride with other guys.

And I was coming back from Bacchus Marsh last night. My voice was a bit croaky because I went to the footy yesterday afternoon with my son and spent the first half bagging the umpire in the second half trying to get my team across the line.

Both failed in the end. Then I went out to Bacchus Marsh and was riding back at about 11 o'clock last night. It was a bit cold. But riding with three or four other guys, it was a bus.

[2 : 06] And it's just something that I really enjoy doing. I love the camaraderie of it. Well, Life According to the OC. Soap operas are not new.

Let's begin with that. Family dramas have been a part of the Australian TV scene for many, many years. Whether it be Neighbours, Home and Away, McLeod's Daughters or Love My Way.

And in fact, I remember when I was in year seven or year eight, which is a long time ago now, badgering my mum and dad to watch number 96 or The Box.

Now, I was not permitted to and was heartily sent off to my room and to bed. And I never got to see those particular adult relationship dramas.

But of late, we've had The Secret Life of Us, which was incredibly popular, I can tell you, amongst university-age students, because at Ridley College, which is also a university college to Melbourne University, that was what they were addicted to week after week after week.

[3 : 09] And of course, soon, I have been informed by the Herald Sun this week that we're also going to have Last Man Standing starting on Channel 7. And of course, the formula is there.

Spunky-looking bloke. Cute girl. And there'll be a fair bit of, I don't know what, if you watch Last Man Standing that starts at 9.40 this whatever night it is on Channel 7.

Well, the United States has also given us many soap operas over the years. If you need a life, then you watch Days of Our Lives. If you're bored and really do need to do something with yourself, then The Bold and the Beautiful is also an offer.

And of course, we've had hospital dramas coming in and out of our ears for about the last 30 years. And when you watch shows like The O.C., when you start getting old like me, you start to think, boy, this is like Melrose Place.

Very similar to Beverly Hills 90210. Remarkably similar to Baywatch in so many, many ways.

[4 : 21] Let me tell you about Baywatch. I was doing some ministry in New Zealand and flew across to Auckland and then I had to go down to the South Island the next day. I couldn't get a direct flight and so I had to stay in this motel room.

And anyway, I went out and had a meal and the young lady who served me, who would have been probably early 20s, invited me back to the bar for a drink later on, which I thought maybe that's a pick-up.

So I went back and stayed in my room and thought, just stay here tonight and finish off your Bible studies. Well, I thought I'll flick the TV on, so I flicked the TV on and Baywatch comes on.

Well, two minutes of that was enough. I think I don't really need that and flicked that off and thought I'd better keep doing my Bible studies. But the other thing about these shows that I find intriguing is the advertising that goes with it because the advertisers know who's watching.

During this afternoon, I saw many, many ads for Carefree and Stayfree. They always look so happy. Seems a contradiction from what others have told me about those particular things.

[5 : 26] Cars, the Honda, the power of dreams. Multitudinous mobile phone ads. Of course, the Nivea cream for the nice skin.

And then chocolate with it as well, which I think doesn't actually help nice skin, but it's there as well. Some helpful anti-marijuana ads, I thought. And many promotional ads for Big Brother, that tedious show that we see also on our screens late at night.

Well, let me say something about the OCs in terms of what you see from even that promotional before. Blue skies, big blue ocean, gorgeous surf beaches, massive houses that have got everything that opens and shuts.

Young people who are drop-dead gorgeous. Guys who are spunky. And even mum's pretty gorgeous as well. And in fact, mum's so done up that you sort of get confused that maybe she's the daughter.

It's sort of hard to tell. There's Cal and Julie. There's Marissa. There's Alex. I'll tell you what, this Marissa is an amazing woman.

[6 : 36] Look what she's gone through in the last couple of weeks. She's suffered a drug overdose. She's tried binge drinking. She's behaved promiscuously. Gee, we've never seen that before in a soap opera.

And she's also experimenting with her sexuality. Boy, my life's so boring. My parents are so boring. Heck, my mum's never been in jail.

She's never been in an 80s porn video. She just spent her life raising four really healthy children who have now got their own children, who have really got their act together.

And my dad's boring as well. He's actually been faithful to mum for 50 years. Oh, I'm such a boring person myself. Faithful to my wife. Oh, it's such a terrible life.

Why do we watch this stuff, is my question. And as I look at it, it looks like a spoof, rather than something serious. Do we watch it because it's escapism?

[7 : 34] Yeah, I come home from work, I'm tired, and yeah, sometimes you want a TV, put the TV on and watch it. But it follows the classic formula. Sexual tension, this time between Seth and Marissa, reminds me of the X-Files between a one Scully and a one Mulder.

Backstabbing, flawed characters, and of course, being an American show, there is always redemption and forgiveness at the end of the one-hour episode. Everything is better.

Everyone forgives each other, and we all move on. Well, do these shows have any influence in the end? I want to suggest that their influence is potent and pervasive.

And I'll tell you why. There was a book written many years ago called The Day America Told the Truth. It was a massive volume that studied American culture in enormous depth and detail.

And in Chapter 1, the average American was asked the question, what are your dreams and hopes and aspirations? And the top two, in terms of the survey, in terms of desire and aspiration, was one, I want to be rich, and the second one is, I want to be thin.

[8 : 55] I want to be rich, and I want to be thin. And when you watch these soap operas, that is the pervasive value system coming through.

Whatever is the storyline, whatever is going on, look at the backdrop, take the values on board, and see what is going on. Wall Street is much the same.

That brilliant movie that was released in the late 1980s, early 90s, where the message is, greed is good. And then the young apprentice, the Gordon Gekko, begins to question it.

How much is enough? How much is enough? In The Age last Sunday, an article entitled Body and Soul was a book review of Clive Hamilton and Richard Dennis' latest book, titled Affluenza. And even though these guys are secular guys, they do not claim to be Christians, they do not claim to have any religious commitment whatsoever, they believe that affluence is the pervasive illness of Australian society.

[10:09] That our affluence and our greed is killing us at so many levels. And then in the same newspaper, on the other page, was an article about a young 30-year-old woman whose name is Marie MacArthur, brightens up her day.

She's a gorgeous-looking woman, about 30 years of age, and she's got this massive shoe collection. The Imelda Marcos of Melbourne. Here we are. Shoes and boots with a price tag of about \$2,500.

Her standard pair in a wardrobe averages \$1,000. And on and on it goes as she shops in those nice shops of Collins Street in our own city.

That street that symbolises so much about the dollar, with the stock exchange up one end and all the financial houses and banks either in it or near it.

When we come to Wall Street, I recall being on a mission when I first saw that film. I was on the Gold Coast for three weeks doing a schools tour.

[11:13] It was about 1989, 1990. And the Gold Coast itself is symbolic of this film. Interesting place to see it. But there's a scene not long after the one we saw when the challenge begins to occur.

And here we are with young Bud Fox. He's at the top of his game. He's got everything that opens and shuts. Beautiful clothes. Penthouse in Manhattan. Gorgeous girlfriend.

Lovely car. By the world's standards, he's got it all. And then at one stage, while he's there in his apartment, he walks out onto the balcony, looks down into the city and sees the lights of New York City.

Looks up into the stars and then he says these words, I don't know who I am. And as soon as he uttered them in that picture theatre that time on the Gold Coast, I heard the words of Jesus come straight into my head.

What does it profit a man or a woman if you gain the whole world but lose your soul or your identity? What does it profit a man or a woman if you gain the whole world but lose your identity, your very soul?

[12:32] When it comes to the issue of money and wealth, Jesus warns us, both as the disciples of Jesus Christ and for those of us who may not have made that particular step, he warns us concerning this issue so many times, so many places.

The Gospel highlights two big dangers for the disciple in terms of a distraction from the main game which is serving and following him and responding to his commands.

The first is family or filial ties which in that ancient Middle Eastern culture could be a real restriction to responding to God and Jesus at one point says that we're to love him more than our natural loves of wife, of family or even children.

That in one sense that love is to be so strong that it almost makes those normal natural loves almost look like a pale shadow in comparison. But the other major warning that comes through particularly in Luke's account of the life of Jesus so powerfully time and time again is this issue of wealth and the issue of money.

As Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount you can't worship God and money. Both require your allegiance. Both require energy.

[14:02] Both require your thought and your commitment. And in the end something gives in the process I believe. And I believe that if there's any area of captivity to the culture that most of us have got to watch like a hawk it's this one.

And I want to suggest that many of us are compromised powerfully at many many levels including myself. Let me put it this way. The great danger we face in our culture particularly in terms of Christianity is the middle class dream.

Let me tell you what it is. The middle class dream goes like this. You go to a good school to get a good education. You go to get a good education so you can get a good job.

And then you get a good job because it pays well. And then that enables you to buy into the lifestyle that a good job can give you. That's the middle class dream.

It's not the gospel and it's not a kingdom perspective. If you earn good money well fantastic. If you're well educated that's fine. But who are you serving is always the question.

[15 : 13] Where is the energy really focused? What is ultimately the things that we are committed to? It's not hard to do well in Australia.

We are an affluent culture. You work hard in this country. You apply yourself. You're an honest man or an honest woman. And particularly if you're a Christian where you're not gambling and you're not generally not smoking tobacco and if you do drink well you're pretty modest in the process and you're an honest person in your business dealings.

You gain a reputation of trust and people are prepared to work with you. Then you get what Wesley calls is the upward lift and you begin to do well financially. But beware says Jesus.

And he says that in verse 15 of this particular passage concerning the rich fool. Someone in the crowd says teacher tell my brother to divide the inheritance. Oh gee that's a place of conflict in a lot of families the issue of inheritance.

We could spend a lot of time on that one but I won't go there tonight. Jesus in the end ducks it anyway and says man who appointed me to judge or be an arbiter between you but then he said to him and it got to really what was another the issue on this account watch out be on your guard against all sorts of greed a man's life or a woman's life does not consist in the abundance of his or her possessions.

[16 : 30] If there's the word of the Lord for Australia that's it. Our life does not consist in the abundance of what we own and yet so much of our culture is defined by that so much of the motivation of our culture is after that and then Jesus turns around and tells them this parable the ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop in the time of Jesus and in terms of ancient Israel that should have been interpreted as what?

The blessing of God it is God who gives those things but is God the focus of this particular man? No he does well financially and as a consequence gets a bumper crop builds bigger barns to sustain it and hold it all and then he says in verse 19 you have plenty of good things laid up for many years take life easy eat drink and be merry self-centered orientation if God has prospered you financially the question always I believe is for the disciple of Jesus is to whom much has been given much is required if we have been blessed financially if we have been blessed in terms of intellectual capacity if we have been blessed with energy and drive health the question is always to whom much has been given much is required in other words there is a responsibility to use those things not for self-indulgence not for narcissistic pleasure but for the advance of the gospel for the work of the kingdom for the building up of the church for the support of missionary endeavour

I just think how much could be given which is not given most of the endeavours I've been a part of in the Christian world have suffered from one major issue and it's lack of resources and it burns out Christian workers and it frustrates you no end when you are a part of it and you know there's more out there but it ain't coming I used to joke that I'm the Christian crumb winner for many many years when I worked for a para-church agency working amongst poor people in the inner city and if it wasn't for my wife working we wouldn't own a house or me have a nice Harley Davidson but you see in the end that Harley I could sell it tomorrow if I had to if it wasn't in God's squad I couldn't justify having it in the garage in the end in the end it belongs to God and it's the best 20,000 bucks that I have ever spent on evangelism I've had so many kids sitting on it so many teenagers sitting on it everybody remembers when we've been somewhere and God has used it as an instrument in so many so many ways but in the end it's only a piece of metal nice piece of metal it's only a piece of metal we have the man sitting back he's got it all and he's going to relax but he forgets one thing life is very tenuous indeed and most of us know that can be taken away in an instant

I know that I ride motorbikes bang it can go like that one mistake by you one mistake by somebody in front of you bang it's gone so many have been involved with four funerals already this year for motorcyclists I know how tenuous life can be and this guy had forgotten that and in verse 20 God says to him you fool this very night your life will be demanded from you then who will get what you've prepared for yourself as Paul would later say you come into the world with nothing and you go out nothing you come in naked and you go out the same way you come in with no possessions and that's the way you leave and then in verse 21 Jesus leaves us with these challenging words that I want to leave you with tonight this is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself or for herself but is not rich towards God as I close tonight sisters and brothers

I ask you this question where is your wealth are you rich toward God is God and the gospel the primary drive in your heart and life and that everything else follows in behind that or are you distracted compromised perhaps compromised profoundly and deeply to those of you here who are young tonight I say this do not buy the middle class gospel buy the radical gospel of Jesus Christ do not sell out to the culture around us but set a radical alternative to it for people to watch how do you become rich towards God you do it firstly through repentance by turning your life around and turning it towards

[22 : 27] Jesus Christ repentance is a radical reorientation we are inclined to be self centred because of our sinful nature and Jesus calls us to repentance and to another focus when I first became a Christian I read the story of Zacchaeus not long afterwards where you've got a guy who's been cheating the system and when he meets Jesus and encounters Jesus he repents and pays it back and then agrees to give more so to the poor when I was just before I became a Christian I was working as a surveyor for the public works department in New South Wales doing beach erosion studies up and down the northern New South Wales coast great job when you're a young bloke I was 18 19 long hair the beard motorbikes surfboards all that sort of stuff girls theodolites boats but we'd been ripping off the New South Wales government for years we used to get this allowance for accommodation up to \$70 a week and what we would all do four or five of us all working together would stay in some dive of a flat somewhere up the north coast you can't find them anymore because it's so gentrified but I'm talking a fair way back and we'd all get in together pay 20 bucks each but claim 70 bucks off the government we'd been doing that for years and when

I read the story of Zacchaeus and heard it explained to me I said to God I've no idea how much I've stolen how much I've defrauded the government and I felt a voice come in my head saying I'll tell you how much and it was a substantial three figure number and I wrote out a check and got a Presbyterian minister mate of mine to take it in to the public works department office in Lismore in northern New South Wales with a note on saying sorry I was a thief for so many years you see that's what restitution is you see if you pinch your car you don't just say sorry you return the car how are we to be rich towards God it begins as I said earlier with repentance it is followed by saying sorry to God that we're trusted in wealth and possessions for our identity and not in God who not only provides for us but ought be the source of who we are and our security so we don't need to find it in clothes anymore and we don't need to find it in what the world offers to sell to our insecurities at so many levels to you ladies tonight it's alright to dress up when my wife dresses up she looks great and we're going out tomorrow night to the mustard dinner and she'll dress up and I'll be proud to be with her and I'll even dress up and make an effort too which is a bit unusual for me it's okay to look good but don't let it become an obsession and it's okay to look after your body and feed it well and rest and get exercise but let us not be obsessed with this body shape

I want to be thin some of you don't have the makeup to be thin that's just not the way you are look at your mum and dad some of you are just not genetically going to be like that and we just absolutely self-flagellate ourselves over those issues when we should be finding our identity and sense of self-worth both in the love of God and the mutual support of the Christian community who affirm us for who we are and not some ideal body image so I give you a warning tonight as the people of God that Jesus warns us with these words watch out and be on your guard against all sorts of greed for a man or a woman's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions but I do want to make this offer tonight to those of you who perhaps have not responded yet to Jesus Christ have not become a follower of Jesus Christ have not yet become part of his family the church soon there'll be an opportunity to fill out a little yellow slip that you got when you came in and I would want to seriously challenge you to at least tick that if you haven't made that response

I would like to become a Christian if you haven't done that I invite you to tick that and you'll be followed up by the ministers and servants of this church who are in the leadership role maybe not involved with the church let me say this about church there are too many free floating Christians at the moment commit yourself somewhere and work with a place nowhere is perfect no Christian community will ever be perfect but there are too many people just shopping around out there like the culture get committed get involved with God's people you don't like the way it is well get involved and start to change it be a positive influence for its future but do not hang loose too much longer I challenge you to make a choice and become part of the people of God become part of the community of faith and play your part in it and finally you may tick I'm interested in doing the introducing God course well I want to recommend that as well because perhaps you're not ready

yet to commit your life to God and you need to search it out and check it out and that's fine as well I spent many years searching before God finally got me and changed me and turned me around but let me close at least in a prayer tonight the first time commitment to Jesus Christ if you've never prayed that prayer I want to pray one very very soon and if you do pray that prayer please fill this out so the leadership of the church or Lisa as the youth minister here can follow you up and talk to you privately and really deal with the issues at that particular level let's have a moment of reflection and then I'll pray a prayer of commitment if you want to pray this prayer I invite you to follow after me dear God I thank you for your love I thank you that you came into this world to save sinners I'm one of them and I need saving I turn to you tonight in repentance and ask you now to shape my priorities and my commitments

[29 : 05] I ask that you might forgive me by virtue of Jesus' death on the cross for me and his mighty resurrection from the dead please help me to find my place in your family the church fill me with your Holy Spirit lead me to people who can help me grow in this new found Christian life help me to trust in you now instead of the things of this world help me to be your follower I pray this in Jesus name Amen God this in him this in

Jesus cashing P Thank you.

Thank you.