

Trusting in God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 April 2019

Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Well, we continue in our passage in Luke today, and just before Easter, in the passage before today's, we heard from Jesus' parable of the rich fool, which he told in response to someone squabbling about his inheritance with his brother.

Now, in that parable, if you are not here, Jesus told us about the rich fool who trusted in his own wealth, and therefore consumed by his greed and possessions.

Now, if you were there a few weeks ago, or maybe now, even sitting here, you may be thinking that, that's simply not me. I'm no rich fool, but just a simple soul trying to get by in life.

In fact, you may be worried you don't have enough, feeling like you're just getting by, that all it might take is one mishap, one maybe loss of a job, and you know, you wouldn't be able to keep up with your mortgage, and before you know it, you might be out on the streets.

Or you may be afraid that you don't have enough to retire. What if you're struck down by a major illness, and you're left with huge out-of-pocket expenses? Or maybe your worries are not financial at all.

[1 : 16] Maybe it's health, or family relationships that are falling apart. Well, if that's you, then today's passage is for you. For here, in verse 22, Jesus now turns to his disciples from this other man and says, Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear.

For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. I've often wondered about the word therefore in this passage, because the question is, how is worrying about life connected with the parable before, of that of the rich fool?

Why does Jesus teach the disciples now about worry, straight after the squabble about wealth? Well, if you look at verse 21, I think that's the reason why.

For there, Jesus said that the rich fool is focused on storing up things on earth, but isn't rich toward God. And that's a very similar thing with worrying.

Worry hinders us from being rich toward God. And as I said a few weeks ago, to be rich toward God is to be rich in faith. And worrying is the opposite of trusting God.

[2 : 36] That's why at the end of this passage, in verse 34, Jesus has the same conclusion. He encourages us to store treasures in heaven. Another way of saying, be rich toward God.

Now, as you can see from the outline, Jesus gives two reasons why we should stop worrying. So first, stop worrying because your life is valuable to God, and worry is futile anyway.

So Jesus continues in verse 24, Now, it's good to be clear here what Jesus means by worry.

I don't think he means that initial shock or reaction or panic you experience when something first goes wrong. We all experience that, don't we? We hear some bad news about us or about our family, and immediately we have that gut reaction.

I don't think that's what Jesus is talking about here. Instead, the worry that Jesus is talking about is what happens afterwards. How do we respond? What choices do we make as a result of what's just happened?

[3 : 55] What Jesus calls worry is us dwelling on what might be the worst case scenario. And then when we do that, start thinking that God maybe has abandoned us.

We worry when we assume the worst will happen to us, and then instead of trusting God, we act upon those fears. We worry when we ask ourselves, and then we ask ourselves, and then we ask ourselves, and then we ask ourselves, But that is not actually an actual event yet, is it?

It's still a contingent one. Because you may lose your job, but that doesn't mean that you'll be homeless, even though there might be a fear that you are. Of course, sometimes we're so fearful that we worry even when the actual event has not even occurred.

So, for instance, we may still have the job, but yet we worry about losing it. And then that drives us to make choices out of fear. So, we work extra hours to earn extra money, just in case.

Or we do whatever the boss says, even though it's unethical, just in case he thinks about or she thinks about firing us. Or we get bypassed for a promotion, which means we miss out on money that we would otherwise have to be more secure.

[5 : 35] But Jesus says, don't worry. Don't do these things, because we're valuable in God's sight. So, he points to the birds who don't sow or reap, or store up for a rainy day.

And he says, yet God feeds them. Jesus says, we're more valuable than them. Much, much more. And if God feeds them, then we're to trust that God will do the same for us and more.

Now, it may not be exactly how we want it, but God will care for us to the extent that we need it. Friends, it's very easy to worry, isn't it?

Very human to worry. Is there anyone here who never has a worry? Please put up your hands. Nope. I do know of one group that never worries. They're little babies and toddlers.

Without a care in the world. It's rather ironic, isn't it? The most helpless people in the world are the ones with the least worries. And partly that's because the more responsibilities we have, the more we worry, don't we?

[6 : 43] So now that I'm a father, I don't just worry about myself. I worry for my children as well. Will they have enough friends at school? Will they get into the chosen course which I would like them to, I mean, which they would like to do?

But if you think about it, is that really the root cause of worry? Is it the fact that we have responsibilities? Well, I actually don't think so. Rather, I think the root cause of worry is our desire to be in control.

We worry because we want things to go a certain way. Our desires have been set, our visions have been set for a certain way, and we want that to go as we plan. And yet, as Jesus tells us in verse 25, worry is not only unnecessary, it's futile.

Worrying does not add a single hour to our life, because the truth is, we're not ultimately in control of our lives. So for you young guys out there, you can go to the gym as much as you like.

You can eat healthy as much as you like. Pop those vitamin pills. But it wouldn't add a single hour to your life. Now again, it doesn't mean that, oh, it doesn't matter anyway, so we just live carelessly, you know, drive as fast as we can, you know, eat as much KFC, because after all, what does it matter?

[8 : 08] No, that's not what Jesus is saying. Our responsibilities are God-given, and our actions have consequences. It's just that even with this measure of responsibility, God is ultimately the one in control.

He will determine exactly how long we live, and how we do live as long as we are on this earth. And when we worry, we actually forget this truth.

It's the same mistake that the rich fool made. He thought that because of his wealth, he had control of his life, when actually it was God who did. And when we worry, we're likewise thinking it's our lack of wealth, or lack of health, or whatever, that is causing us to lose control of our life, when in reality, we never had control anyway, because God had it, and God still has it.

And to me, that's actually a good and comforting thing, isn't it? Because as Jesus now goes on to say, the second reason why we shouldn't worry is because the one who is in control, God, he cares for us.

In fact, all the verses that we've read up to now implies that, but now Jesus makes it explicit. Not only are we valuable, we are valuable in God's sight.

[9 : 29] So in verse 27, Jesus continues in the same vein. Earlier it was the birds, and it was about food. Now it's wildflowers, and it's about clothing. So consider how the wildflowers grow.

They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith?

Now much of what Jesus says here is a repeat. He's basically saying that if seemingly insignificant things in creation are cared for by God, then why wouldn't God care for us, who are more significant and valuable?

What's more, as we've read in the psalm today, God not only cares for us, but he does so 24-7. In verse 3 of the psalm, which I've got on the slide, he says he doesn't fall asleep.

He who watches over us will not slumber. He neither slumbers nor sleep. It's just another way of saying that he's in control. But the thing I think is to realize is that God is in control, not just with the big events of history, like who's going to be the next prime minister of Australia.

[10:45] No, he is in control even of our own histories. Little old me, God is actually interested in. He cares for each of us.

That's how personal our Creator is. And he knows each of our needs. But then Jesus, in that very last phrase, also adds that if we worry, it actually betrays a lack of faith in God.

When we worry, we're actually saying that God is not up to the task of looking after us. Now, we may not think like that, but that's the crux, isn't it? When we don't trust God, we're just saying that God is not good enough for this.

Now, compared to those who don't know God, Jesus now says that our response as disciples ought to be very different.

Verse 29. And so, do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink. Do not worry about it. For the pagan world, people who don't know God, runs after all such things.

[11:52] But your Father knows that you need them. You see, Jesus says the pagan world runs after these things because they have no true knowledge of God.

No concept of His grace or love. Now, in those days, they probably did believe in some God, but possibly they think that it's a God that only rewards them when they're good.

And so, they worry that if they don't live up to their God's standard, they wouldn't be looked after. It's basically karma. Or what parents tell their kids at Christmas, right?

Whether they'll get a gift from Santa or not, if they've been naughty or nice. Which is why I think as Christians, that's not what we should say to our kids because we don't want them to grow up thinking that's what God is like.

Now, nowadays, it's also common for people to not believe in a God at all. In which case, I would say there's even more reason for them to worry, isn't it? Because if there's no God, then, well, they'll have to fend for themselves, wouldn't they?

[12:58] But as Christians, we know that God isn't like this. We know that He cares not only for our physical needs, but actually, also for our spiritual and eternal needs.

And He showed us that He loves not just good people, but sinners like you and me. Because He sent His Son to die for us and to give us eternal life.

And so, if God has already looked after our eternal destiny, that's the more important and more difficult thing, then how much more will He look after our life, this very short little span of history, on this earth?

For as Paul says in Romans 8, verse 32, He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?

You see, as our Creator, God knows exactly what we need. And in His Son, Jesus, God also knows exactly what we're going through. If you're hungry or naked, in pain or suffering, well, His Son, Jesus, has experienced all that.

[14:14] I don't know about you, but I'm often surprised by how much time in my day is taken up thinking about food. So, each night, or each evening, before the shops close, I have to check that there's enough milk or bread for breakfast the next day.

If it's a school day, then I have to make sure the girls have enough to pack their lunch. And then I go to bed, and then when I wake up in the morning, just after I've had breakfast, thankfully there was milk and bread, I need to then start thinking about what's going to happen for lunch and dinner.

Particularly dinner, if you know, who's coming back at what time, do I have to leave at a certain time for a meeting or whatever. I have to start cooking, planning, whatever, so that when we all get to the end of the day, there's actually food on the table.

I reckon the two doors that get open most in our house is the pantry door and the fridge door. I don't know whether that's the same with you.

Now, even as a church, it's amazing how often, whenever we think of an activity for church, we have to think about food as well, don't we? Last Sunday, for example, with our Easter service, there was a mild panic when we couldn't find the rice cooker.

[15:28] And we were calling people to bring rice cookers. Each Wednesday at Young Adults, the leaders have to keep asking, is my group on duty this week to cook dinner? And of course, it's not just food, is it?

But it seems that so much of our lives is taken up just trying to look after our physical needs, making sure we have clothes to wear, the laundry's been done, you know, it's been dried, and, you know, we've cut our hair, and all that kind of stuff.

And Jesus isn't saying, you know, I know some of us don't have much to cut, but Jesus isn't saying that we shouldn't look after these things. Rather, He's just urging us not to do this at the expense of seeking God's kingdom.

Instead, in verse 31, He says, seek His kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Let God worry about these things, because He knows what you need.

And then Jesus goes on to reveal something truly amazing. He says, seek God's kingdom, because it's God's desire for you. He wants you to have His kingdom.

[16:34] It's not like we're seeking His kingdom, and then maybe we will get it. No. Seek His kingdom, because that's exactly what God has planned for you. And so, Jesus says in verse 32, and He's very tender as He says this, do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you this kingdom.

Here His disciples may be feeling small and insignificant, like sheep without a shepherd even, but this little flock is being given the kingdom of God.

And we are part of this little flock as well. We're being given the biggest treasure there is in life, God's kingdom. And so, if that's what God wants to give us, Jesus says, don't sweat the small stuff, like food and clothing, like that big mansion in Doncaster, or that fancy car, or that million-dollar share portfolio.

These are small things that the pagans run after. God has something far better for us. I don't know whether you've ever tried to buy a car from a car dealer.

And I don't know what it is, but they never ever include the floor mats, do they? You know, GPS set nav, standard nowadays. Reverse mirror parking, yep, included.

[17:57] Electric mirrors, air conditioning, CD player, yep, yep, yep. But something as basic as floor mats, they always say, oh, no, no, no, that's an extra hundred bucks. Now, I know why.

It's a negotiation tactic, right? You've haggled down to that very last dollar, and then they want to make you feel good about it, so they reluctantly say, oh, you know, I'll throw in that floor mat for free, you know, just to make us feel like we've really got a bargain.

Well, what Jesus is saying here is, don't worry about the floor mats, because you are being given the whole car for free. You know, the top of the range Mercedes or whatever you want, you're getting that for free, so why sweat the floor mats?

Or take another example, it's like preparing for an exam. Jesus says, don't spend all your time sharpening your pencils and forget to study for the exam.

Yep, sharp pencils, you need that, right, to write for your exam, but don't do that at the expense of studying for the exam. Likewise, food and shelter are necessary.

[19:06] God knows you need them, but don't run after them at the expense of God's kingdom. God's kingdom is far more important than food. Seek that and leave God to deal with the rest, to look after you.

Now here you may wonder, okay, how does this all work in practice? You say it's okay to, you know, do some of this stuff and yet seek the kingdom. How do I know that I'm doing it right?

Well, I think the first thing is to say that, is to check ourselves and ask ourselves whether we're worried about these things or not. Going back to the very first verse in the passage.

Are we constantly worrying about these things? And are these things driving our decisions and priorities? Or, as Jesus now says in verse 33 and 34, are we focused on storing up treasure in heaven instead?

So Jesus says, sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out. A treasure in heaven that will never fail. Where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

[20:15] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Now, Jesus is not saying that selling our possessions and giving is the only way to seek the kingdom.

I think he's simply showing them the one way of doing it in light of what's just happened in the previous passage. But having said that, being generous, that's the principle actually, being generous is a very important way of learning to fight worry about these things.

Because when we're generous, we deliberately make ourselves depend on God for these things. We cultivate trust in God rather than in our possessions.

But the real purpose for doing this is actually in the last two sentences. That is, we're generous so that we can store up treasure in heaven. And that treasure is our faith.

which Peter, in chapter 1 of his letter, verse 7, which I've got on the slide, Peter says that your faith is of greater worth than gold. And that is the stuff that we should be trying to nurture and cultivate in our lives.

[21 : 26] And so the way to know that we're seeking in God's kingdom is to see whether we're growing in our faith in Him or not. It's not just a matter of becoming a Christian, you know, having your sins forgiven, and then that's it.

No, we want to put our trust in Jesus initially as a newborn Christian and then continue to grow in faith and store up treasures as we are growing. So is our faith in God more important than food and shelter?

It should be. Because when we come to the end of it, when life is done, you know, all the things about food and shelter, they'll all disappear.

And what's left will be our relationship with God, that's the thing that would endure. That's the treasure that we will take into heaven. All this other stuff, we're not going to ever take to where God's kingdom is.

But I want to add that I think there are other ways of growing in faith besides being generous. And so I want to share a few things like that to challenge us, to stop us running after these things.

[22 : 33] So for example, how do we pray for things like food and clothing or jobs or whatever? Because sometimes there's a tendency when we think, oh, we need this or that, to then just keep praying about that as though we're pestering God.

And that's, in one sense, that's actually worry, isn't it? That we're just going to keep asking God for this until He answers us the way we want Him to. But I think actually a better way is, yes, we pray earnestly and then what do we do?

We actually, you know, maybe turn our attention to pray for other people. Pray for God's kingdom and His mission instead. And then in one sense, stop worrying about those things and let God answer those things in His time.

As in another example, how do we prioritize our time and energy in life? Are we caught up in running after these things? So much so that we don't spend time nurturing our faith or nurturing the faith of others.

So let me give you some, it might seem like tiny examples, but I think it's indicative. So one example is budgeting. Some of us are good at budgeting, some not so good. But budgeting can be a good thing, isn't it?

[23 : 48] But again, that can be a sign of worry, can't we? When we so focus on budgeting to the point of every cent being accounted for, that we're watching our bank balance each and every hour, watching the stock market to see how our investments are going up or down, that becomes running after these things, isn't it?

For those of us who may be homeowners, another example is keeping our home well maintained and tidy. Now again, that's a good thing, but we can push it too far again, can't we?

And become obsessed with being house proud. Like as if somehow we'll get into the pages of Better Homes and Gardens or something. Now again, I'm not having a go in anyone who's tidy. I keep getting told that I need to tidy the house and that's a good thing. But again, if we pour so much energy into the house, into our mansion, that we don't cultivate faith in God or give time for ministry, then we're running after these things as well.

Some of us are parents and I think as parents our greatest danger I think is running after our children. It's easy to fall into helicopter parenting or being a tiger dad.

[25 : 05] And trust me, I know the dangers of all that. You know, we're so concerned about school grades and piano lessons and whatever else that actually we neglect our children's faith. Now again, I'm not opposed to children doing well at school.

You can ask my daughters that. But, do we have the same concern for their faith? Do we encourage them to pray and read the Bible? To go along to youth group?

To commit to following Jesus? Because, that is actually more important responsibly as parents, isn't it? Because if we believe that the treasures are in heaven, then we want to cultivate them early on

building treasures in heaven instead of focusing on treasures on earth.

Some of you are at work and there's jobs that you're in. One other way is, for example, being so worried about having to keep up with the colleague next to you.

You know, it used to be that you used to have a uni degree and that you're set for life. Now you have to get the grad tip and even that's not enough. You need to get the masters and that's not enough. You need to get the PhD. Again, I'm not saying you can't do a PhD but are we running after these things so that we can somehow keep ahead in the job?

[26 : 21] You know, always having to go for networking lunches and all that, this conference, that conference in order to be able to maintain, I don't know, our position in the company. God is saying, you know, don't worry about such stuff.

Focus instead on seeking God's kingdom. And I think as we grow in our faith, as we grow older, then our heart's desire should be growing in our desire for these heavenly treasures.

And the things of this world, this possession, status, achievements, whatever it is, they should become less and less important to us because our eyes are fixed firmly on that great prize.

our great treasure of being in God's kingdom and seeing Jesus face to face. So, brothers and sisters, I know how easy it is to slip into a life of worry, but Jesus assures us that God's kingdom is much better.

So, as Jesus says, let's be generous. Let's also seek to grow our faith in God, store up treasures in heaven. And I tell you what, even if we leave this world with not a single penny to our name, if that's how it is, that should be fine for us, shouldn't it?

[27 : 44] Because God has given us his kingdom. We're truly rich. We truly are. Do we believe that? And do we live like that? Let's pray.

Father, for anyone who is weighed down by worries at the present time, please strengthen their faith so that they may not fear the future. help them to know that you will care for them, that you know what they need, that they should put their trust in you instead.

Help us to be generous, even when we feel like, oh no, we can't afford this. No, help us to be generous, help us to let go of chasing after these things, and change our lives, Lord, so that we are not wasting it and running after things like the pagans.

but instead, to make for ourselves purses which will never wear out, that thieves and mobs cannot destroy. Help us to grow in faith and to be rich toward you.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.