

Life Assurance: Willing To Follow - 9th October 2022

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Preacher: Dave Moss

[0 : 00] Good morning. We're carrying on with our Sunday series, Life Assurance, and it's already been said we're in tough times here, and I have lots of questions for you this morning. And the first one is, are we still willing to follow Jesus despite all that's going on?

Are we still willing to follow Jesus? So how are you today? How are you today? It's a familiar greeting with the standard answer. Fine, thanks. And we're often encouraged to give more honest answers, aren't we? But oh boy, how we find that difficult. And I think sometimes when we ask the question, we're not really wanting a more detailed answer, are we? And as Ian has already said last week, Matt gave us a more than honest answer to that question. And I would strongly urge you, if you haven't heard it already, to catch up online and to listen to what he said last week. Because here we are today. And how are we, really? What is it that life is throwing at us at present? What is coming our way? What can we expect to face in the week ahead?

Will we make it through? These are some of the questions I find coming my way. And therefore, it's often quite difficult to say how I am. As with all of us, and particularly over these past few years, life has become very unpredictable. I don't know if you can see that, but I will read it out.

Life's expectations. I don't know how you identify with this, but this is sort of the underlying narrative for life in our society. So grow up in a nice family, go to a good school and pass exams, do more training, possibly that's university, and get a well-paid job, make friends and marry someone, keep fit and healthy, have a nice house and garden, go on holidays abroad, have a nice car, buy lots of nice things, then retire, travel the world and have fun. That's sort of, you know, how it's supposed to work, yeah? And it's supposed to be the key to happiness and the key to life well-lived and the key to show that your life is at success. If one of these things goes wrong, then it is your ability to get round it that counts. If several of them don't work out, well, I'm sorry, you really haven't made it. Okay? When you consider it closely, you realize that this is the preserve of a privileged few, yeah? They enjoy making it known that they have somehow made it. The education process, which I've been involved with all my working life, is largely based on this thinking. And I could talk to you about that for hours, but I'm not going to at the moment, so don't worry about that. But that's sort of what is fed out in school. Not consciously, but subconsciously. And this kind of thinking bothers me. I mean, it really bothers me. And a number of those things have gone wrong for me in my life, and I don't fit that narrative. I really don't fit that narrative. So one example would be in my working life. It's been hampered by some bullying. I've been made redundant. And particularly during the pandemic years, lots of anxiety came through as all my work virtually fizzled out to nothing.

[4 : 04] So that doesn't fit in there, if you look at that, because I'm supposed to have a fantastic career all the way through without that. And that little graphic on the right is supposed to how it's be.

You know, one upward way of working. That's how your Christian life's supposed to be. But the reality is a bit more like the second scribble, isn't it? And that's what life looks like for most of us. We're sort of led to believe that life is this one gradual path of progress and improvement. You know, just up, up, up, up, up, and then you suddenly arrive in heaven. But in reality, it's more like a roller coaster. It's this gradual steady slope going upwards, you know, going, oh, oh, it's a nice view up here, isn't it? Yeah, oh, right. Oh, I can see the top. Yeah, hi.

Great. This is going to be great, isn't it? And then suddenly, and you're out of breath and screams and shout, help, help, help. Nobody helps you, by the way.

Twist, turns, you're done. And that's sort of really like how life is. It's this roller coaster of you're not quite sure where you're going. But when you're done, hopefully you can say, what a ride. What a ride.

I've never thought so many things would be an issue for me during the pandemic. And I have quite a list. And some of which perhaps I was certainly not prepared to admit to or even prepared for.

[5 : 39] You would think I've learned by now that life is never quite turns out the way you expect it to. But still, we expect it to. We still expect it to be that smooth ride, don't we?

What do we think of this? This is what's going on. One in 10 families, equivalent to 3.2 million households are facing financial crisis this winter. We like to think we're immune from this.

We like to think it's not going to happen to us. We like to think we won't be affected by it at all. We like to think that everybody will be all right in the end and somehow they'll get the help they need.

And that thinking, kind of thinking, bothers me, really bothers me because it doesn't hold water. We live in one of the richest countries in the world, a G7 country, and yet the gap between the rich and the poor is next to the largest out of 37 European countries.

Only Bulgaria has a larger gap between rich and poor. How can this be? And again, it really bothers me. In February 2021, there were more than 2,200 food banks in the UK.

[7 : 04] That's according to research by Parliament. Well, there were approximately 1,300 McDonald's restaurants in Britain, according to the international chain. How can this be?

And what is worse, the number of people asking for help from these food banks is going up and up and up as the cost of living bites harder. And then on top of that, the donations to food banks is decreasing because people are finding it harder and therefore are not able to give as much as they once did.

Universal credit was cut by £20 a week last year and there doesn't seem to be much progress in making any improvement on that. There's much more money via tax cuts for the rich, yet there's only the minimum of support for the poorest.

How can this be in a rich country? The current thinking goes, the rich work hard and deserve their pay, yet those on simply less just need to work harder.

Such is the belief of many, particularly those in power in our country. And again, that really, really bothers me. This is a recent report in the past month from the Children's Society.

[8 : 20] And it says, As expected, the current cost of living crisis is having significant effect on families, with 85% of parents and carers surveyed, saying they are concerned about how it will affect their families in the next year.

Especially as over a third of parents and carers report they are already struggling with costs of school trips and uniform over the last year. And on school, more children aged 10 to 17 are unhappy with the school than with other aspects of life they were asked about.

We found that happiness with school and schoolwork declines significantly with age and it is far lower among children in lower income households. So the statistics is, one in eight children were unhappy with school, and one in nine have low well-being.

And it's urging the government to act on this. And this shocks me. It shocks me to the core.

Unfortunately, through all my contacts with many schools, I know it to be true.

And I could give you example after example of how that's impacting our young people. So, can our young people really thrive in the society that we currently have?

[9 : 30] What can they expect? And the answer seems to be, well, very little. When we're faced with all of this, this sharp dose of reality, we can't help but be challenged.

It's natural to feel helpless. Our society is acutely challenging at present. And as I keep saying, it bothers me. It bothers me greatly.

I feel helpless, if I'm honest, in many ways, not knowing what to do for the best. I worry about the future for young people. And I worry about the present for young people.

How can they make any kind of progress in this sort of society? I've got two sons in their early 20s. They've had virtually none of the opportunities I had at their age.

They'll be lucky if they get work and earn enough just to live off. Is the best we can hope for survival mode? Our whole self-worth is being challenged here.

[10 : 35] So what is it we hold on to? What is it that will help us survive? I've got two clips here with Jesus talking about things in the society of his time.

The first clip is in English. The second clip is in Cantonese. And then I'll do a summary in English of the Cantonese one. Just then, a man came up to Jesus and asked, Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?

Why do you ask me about what is good? Jesus replied, There is only one who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.

Which ones? he inquired. Jesus replied, You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony.

Honor your father and mother and love your neighbor as yourself. All these I have kept, the young man said. What do I still lack? Jesus answered, If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.

[11 : 56] Then come, follow me. When the young man heard this, he went away sad because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, Truly, I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. Let's pray.

Jesus said to them, He said to them, He said, Why do we not to be a male? He is in me in a way of being shit. By the time there is a aim, God has given you on you.

You will as well have me. Jesus said to me, He as a king has given me in this BEGIS. I will tell you, in the day, no matter what place you have given, you must be able to celebrate the woman's life.

While Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

[13 : 44] When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. Why this waste? they asked. This perfume could have been sold at a high price, and the money given to the poor.

Aware of this, Jesus said to them, Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.

When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for my burial. Truly, I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.

So the first story is of the rich young ruler. And Matthew's gospel, where this is taken from, includes this story to cause astonishment to the Jews around him, to the Jewish society.

Because Jewish society, in Jesus' time, had the same problem as we have today. Riches were seen as God's blessing.

[14 : 57] The, I am rich because I deserve it, kind of mentality. Hence the ruler's question, Hey Jesus, look at me. I've done everything right.

Just tell me what the next step is. Jesus draws his attention to the law, which he holds dearly, emphasizing the ones that focus on others.

And the challenge for this rich ruler, notice he doesn't get a name here, so it could apply to anybody who's rich, really. The challenge was to prove his love for his neighbor, through his pocket, and through his wholehearted commitment to Jesus.

And that was the rub, the two things together. It's deeply troubling for this young ruler, because it brought everything into question.

He suddenly realizes that he's attached to the narrative of his society. That riches equal blessing equal God's approval.

[16 : 02] Riches equal blessing equal God's approval. He'd hoped to impress Jesus with his piety and devotion. He had a clean moral record.

He's confident, well organized, and determined. And he looks at the one he calls good, Jesus, but turns away sad.

It's not the riches that are the issue here, but the man's attitude toward them, and the holes they actually have over him. The idea of giving his wealth away was so shocking that the second request, which was to follow Jesus, he didn't even hear that.

Jesus comments to his disciples that it's harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

The camel would have been the largest animal that people were familiar with at that time, and the needle eye would have been the smallest thing. In other words, this kind of thing makes it impossible to enter God's kingdom.

[17 : 11] God's kingdom. And we can easily make the mistake that it means that rich people won't get to heaven. But it's about the work of God's kingdom here that is what we should be

concentrating on.

Okay? Because for the young ruler, and indeed for so many of us, this emphasis on being rich is getting in the way of God's kingdom. That narrative of these are the key expectations in life, that's what's getting in the way of our work for God's kingdom.

Okay? And now to the other story. The other Gospels tell us that it's Mary, as in Martha and Mary, who brought the perfume here.

And boy, does she get in trouble for this. What waste and extravagance! How can this be right? And to be honest, the point is a fair one.

It would be good for the poor, but at the time, it was the custom before Passover, which is when this takes place, to give gifts to the poor so this perfume would have been a good gift.

[18:19] So the point's a good one. But the motive behind the question is flawed. And the answer, misunderstood. Because it's not about following a custom. And we can often do this, oh, we must help the poor, and we feel better for doing it.

What Jesus is saying, look, we care about the poor always. That's what his whole ministry demonstrates throughout his whole life. What he's commending Mary for here is her act of devotion. Devotion to the person of Jesus and the fact that she does that. And often, I think, if we look at it, if we look through history, that's what's produced the greatest benefits to the poor.

People's devotion to Jesus. And so on. And the fact that most food banks are actually hosted by churches, for example, would be an example of that. They see it as part of their devotion to God.

And so Mary's act was really very simple. She took something, the perfume, and this was very precious to her. That was what was really precious to her, and she gave it to Jesus.

[19:32] And as Jesus says, she didn't fully realize what she was doing as she was preparing him for his burial. So she took something and just wanted to do a simple thing with it, but she didn't realize.

And he said, she'll be remembered this forever, and indeed she has been. Surely this is our call too, to take what we have and use it through our devotion to God in the way that God calls us.

And if you think about it, that's quite different to that list I mentioned earlier. The problem for us is, like the rich young ruler, we often have so much that we don't really know what to focus on first.

But that's what we're called to do. Again, I'll read this to you if it's a bit small, but hopefully you can follow it. This is a Celtic parable, false glory and false friends. Does wealthy mean wise and friendly?

And that's quite different to that list I mentioned earlier. And that's quite different to that list I mentioned earlier. The problem for us is, like the rich young ruler, we often have so much that we don't really know what to focus on first. But that's what we're called to do. Again, I'll read this to you if it's a bit small, but hopefully you can follow it.

[20:41] This is a Celtic parable, false glory and false friends. Does wealthy mean wise and free? Does poor mean foolish and enslaved?

That is what the world imagines. It thinks wealth brings glory, honour and cheer. It thinks wealth brings friends flocking to the door.

But is such glory truly glorious? Are such friends truly friendly? Does wealthy mean foolish and enslaved?

Does poor mean wise and free? That is what the Gospel teaches. So, this is the challenge for us. What is it that we've got that we can give to God, especially at this very difficult time? What is it that we can do for God at this difficult time?

[21:50] How best can we serve family, friends, our community, our country at this very difficult time?

These are frightening times because we see so much that we're not going to be able to do for the people that we're going to do for the people that we thought were safe and secure, just unravelling before our eyes. We grip tightly to that roller coaster, and it seems to take all our energy just to hang on.

But hang on we must. Or are we to be like the Richland ruler, who's still conforming to the expectations of his day, and actually believing that security lies in the material riches we find?

If we do this, we truly block out God and his kingdom. It's all too easy to equate money with hope.

And I confess I'm guilty of this. If I've got money, I'll be fine. I'll be fine. Our society teaches that, certainly. And all we need is to grow our economy, and life's going to be fine.

[23 : 06] If we're not careful, we can be a slave to this view of life all too easily, if that's what we actually believe. OK, all this at present is not what we expected from life.

This is not what we bargained for, and certainly not what we need. We all might be still in survival mode at present. But I think that raises two issues.

Firstly, are we to be slaves to this way of thinking? Just accepting the status quo, or do we put our trust in God like Mary, hanging on to that roller coaster ride no matter what?

Do we say that no matter what, Jesus is the one we follow? Jesus is the one we trust. Jesus is the one we know is with us, no matter what.

We are his children. He has set us free from all this, surely. We are not here to establish our own merit, but to understand the gift of God's grace.

[24 : 12] God's grace our whole lives through. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We're called to belong to a community.

That is what we strive to be here at St. John's. We could just roll over and say, well, we trust God, and everything will be fine. But is there not a time when we say, enough is enough?

We don't like what's happening at the moment. This doesn't fit what God's kingdom's meant to be like. Enough is enough. Is it time to act and to make our voice heard?

Jesus did not shy away from challenging the prevailing Jewish view that to be rich is to be blessed. In fact, he rather mangled it up. What is it we should be challenging?

Yes, we can do our best to help those in need, and let's face it, we're all discovering, are we not, that we're all in need somehow, and at different times. So you might be not in need this week, but you might be next week.

[25 : 22] And that might be not just financially, but emotionally. I think we recognize that. And socially, we're all in need in different times. So we've got to broaden that out in a way.

But should we be challenging the society we live in? Should we be showing that living in God's kingdom is quite a different thing to do? Despite everything that's thrown at us, are we still willing to follow Jesus and where he takes us?

Are we still willing to listen to his voice? To work out what that means in today's society? And if I'm honest, that's where I'm struggling. I'm still trying to work out what God wants me to do at this particular time.

So, are we willing to listen to his voice? To work out what that means? Or are we still to be slaves to the prevailing thoughts of the day?

Are we still to be slaves to the prevailing thoughts of the day? Many of you will know this worship song, but perhaps not this version.

[26 : 34] It's called the international version. It's put together by the French cousin of my wife, Jan, and her sister, Chris. And you will see him in the second shot, I think it is, playing the guitar sitting on a garden seat.

So, that's how we come across this. But what it does, it shows us through this very familiar song, that the world over, no matter what our circumstances, we can rejoice in being loved as children by God.

That no matter what our circumstances, we can rejoice in being loved as children by God. But perhaps we'll let us know that me now could be like a chicken with a goodenth, of deliverance from my enemies till all my fears are gone call a melody as a symphony you omringt me met a lied cancion de proteccion sobre todo mal temores ya no hay abna hu pey kakulam kodakki hume sentan abna hu pey kakulam kodakki hume sentan do r■■■■■■■■■■ tu esbrah miña s'lepo yuni miadal tu m'as adopté je suis de ta famille ton sang coule dans mes veines je suis n'a plus un slave de vie je suis un childe de God je suis un slave de peur je suis un enfant de God je suis un fils de Dieu je suis un esclavo de peur je suis un enfant de Dieu je suis un fils de Dieu je suis un fils de Dieu je suis un fils de Dieu je suis un fils de Dieu carcelona je suis un fils de Dieu je suis un fils de Dieu je suis un fils de Dieu je suis un fils de Dieu and God His love the Choir to the I'll be right back.

Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah Ah, ah, ah, ah Ah, ah, ah, ah Abre los mares, hoy puedo cruzarlos My fears will drown in perfect love I beg It's A intuition Prowing You Then I Don't Please Say I I can sing and today I can sing I am a king's fault

[33 : 00] You split the sea so I could walk right through it You're a king's fault You're a king's fault You're a king's fault I want you to be like a king's fault You're a king's fault Lay on the elegance that

I get I can sing and imagine That I am, my children I'm no longer a slave to fear I am a child of God