

LEARNING TO TRUST LUKE 12:13-34

What is the key to life? This is one of these big, almost unanswerable questions that we ask from time to time. It is unanswerable in some ways, but in other ways there are lots of answers; people come up with their own answers, but then they're not sure they have the right answer! The advertising industry has a key to life: 'things' are the key to life and the ad men will make all of these things look attractive and you need to have the latest thing; a new house, the right kitchen, a new car with all the newest gadgets, a sound system, the latest i-pod, or computer, or phone; a whole industry is built around persuading us that things are the key to life being happy and fulfilled.

Money is the key to life. Why do so many people play the National Lottery? Why was £4-5bn spent on lottery tickets last year? Because people have the dream that money will solve their problems and all their worries will be over. In the early days, one lottery millionaire said it was the worst thing that had ever happened to him. Forbes Magazine in the United States ran an article last year called 'What worries the rich?' and there was a whole list of worries: being cheated by an unscrupulous financial adviser, being a victim of fraud, having their identity stolen, or violence against them and families. So while it may seem attractive, money doesn't get rid of worry, it merely replaces one set of worries with another.

All kinds of things worry us: we worry about passing an exam perhaps, or about getting a place at university, or getting a job and finding right job; we worry about relationships and how we get them right and the mistakes we make when they go wrong; we worry about money and having enough or dealing with too much; we worry about our health and keeping healthy, or when we become ill, how we can become healthy again; we worry about other people and their well-being; we worry about all kinds of things. Some people then say to us 'Don't worry it may never happen!' – while that is true, it is not always the most sympathetic advice, especially when we're caught up in the middle of some deep anxiety.

Chapter 12 marks a bit of a turning point in Luke's gospel. Till now, it has been a bit of an action story, seeing Jesus in action. We have watched Him heal people, perform other miracles and signs and later we have watched Him go through the Easter story. Now we're going back in time from Easter, perhaps by about a year, to see what lies in between. Chapters 12-19 change the focus; we listen to Jesus the teacher; we see Jesus deal with individual people and through these encounters He teaches us all about life and faith. He speaks plainly at times; at other times He speaks in stories and pictures, some of these pictures and stories are famous and powerful. Over the next few weeks, we're going to finish the story of Luke and listen to Jesus the teacher and learn from Him about life and how to live it, about faith and what that means and we will see how His teaching challenges and changes people. There are lots of forces that are trying to shape our attitudes to life and faith; for Christians, one of these key forces needs to be the teaching of Jesus Himself. Our attitudes and the way we think, our faith and what we believe, our behaviour and the way we live – all of these should be shaped by Jesus and His teaching. "*Seek His...*" (12:31) Jesus is all about giving us a sense of values and priorities that are God's values and priorities and all so that we can live our lives well. We need to learn to listen to Him.

First of all, Jesus tells a story, a parable. Parables are stories that have a meaning to them. These are not just nice stories that are meant to catch the imagination; they do catch the imagination and are amongst the most memorable pieces of Jesus'

teaching, but they are told for a reason. This is a story about a farmer and what this farmer sets out to do seems quite reasonable. He has barns for his crops, but these barns are too small: “*What shall...*” (12:17) He decides to build new, bigger barns to accommodate his new crop; there is nothing wrong with that, people do it all time. But it’s what he then says to himself that causes the problem: “*And I’ll...*” (12:19) Being rich and well-off made him think that he had life sorted, that he had found the key to life. Huge crops made him a successful farmer, and wealthy; new barns were to be built to take the fruit of his success. But...

“*This is...*” (12:21) This is a strange phrase ‘rich towards God’. What does Jesus mean? At the very least, He means that not everything valuable can be bought with money. There are important, valuable things in life that don’t come from the bank! In this case, Jesus is talking about deeper qualities, such as faith, hope, peace, forgiveness, being loved and accepted – these are fruits of faith, these are the gifts that God gives to us through faith and these are the qualities that the man in the parable lacked. He sat back, complacent about his life; life was all about eating and drinking and taking life easy, but there was no place for God in his thinking, there was no place for faith. His life was all about his money and his barns and his success. It was lacking something important.

This parable rings so many bells with me as I look at the culture in which many of us live in 21st century Scotland. How many of us are locked into a way of life that depends on work, success and money? Many people in our community (& some of us) spend much of our time working, simply either to pay the bills or to make sure we accumulate enough to pay the bills in the future. People are locked into mortgages that are based on two salaries and so two people work hard to keep paying it off. It inevitably means that other things get pushed to one side: where is the time to build relationships? – even family relationships are left neglected at times. Where is the time to nurture faith and be part of Church? – that too is so often neglected; I meet more people who will tell me that they just don’t have time for Church than I do who have any kind of antagonism towards Christian faith.

So here’s the challenge of Jesus’ words: “*Seek His...*” (12:31) The kingdom of God is not a place; perhaps the better word is ‘kingship’ which is all about a set of values and standards. The challenge in Jesus’ teaching is that His disciples should live by the values and standards that are in place when God is King. What shapes your view of world and of life? Our view of the world is shaped by all kinds of things: by the people we know: parents, husband or wife, peer group; by our upbringing – school we went to, groups we were part of; by what we read, books, comics, by what we see on TV, films, DVDs; by the people we work beside, colleagues, boss; by our political views and opinions; by the religion we were brought up in and by our personal experience of a particular church. All of these factors (& others) shape our view of the world. We’re not always aware of this happening, but this is happening to us all time; our view of the world and life is being shaped by these forces at work in the world. We are a product of all of this.

Jesus’ challenge in the midst of all of these others, is to let our view of the world be shaped by God’s kingship. God’s values and standards are set out for us in the Bible and the challenge we face as Christians is to take that seriously and let God’s values and standards shape our view of the world and life, more than, or as well as, all of these others. In this case, we learn to trust God. I don’t watch *The Apprentice* but I did read this about one of the contestants: “Were it left to me, I would always succeed” – he was fired on week 1; but it seems to me that this has become the cry of a generation; ‘leave it to me; I can sort it for myself!’ Where then is the place for trust? Can we sort it on our own and succeed?

We read part of the story of Abraham: he learned to trust God. God called Abraham to leave home and go somewhere new. Abraham said 'yes' to God. He must have had all sorts of questions: where are we going? What will I do when I get there? Why is this important, Lord? He went. He trusted God for his whole future, trusting God, believing that God would only do something that was for Abraham's good, trusting God to know what He was about. It became the greatest adventure of Abraham's life and it would take him his whole life. He took the first step, trusting God.

"Do not worry..." (12:22) That is easier said than done; but worry and learning to trust God don't sit easily together. Here's a long quote from John Stott, part of it is on the screen, the whole of it is in the Discovery Group questions: "people worry that they may not pass an exam, or find a job, or get married, or retain their health... many worries, perhaps most, never materialise. So then worry is a waste – a waste of time, thought and nervous energy... if our fear does not materialise, we have worried once for nothing; if it does materialise we have worried twice instead of once. In both cases, it is foolish: worry doubles trouble." Would we all agree with that? We've all had times when we've worried about something and that has never happened. Jesus' challenge to us is to learn to trust God and not to worry about anything.

It is learning to trust God in this way that allows us to be free from worry and fear for the future. We still go to work, we still do all the daily tasks of life, we still make provision for the future, but we learn to do that in an attitude of trust in God rather than a 'leave it to me!' attitude. We still apply for jobs, but we do so trusting God for doors that open or close. It is learning to trust that allows us the freedom to give to others; congregations learn to trust God when, as we do, we give money away, for example the £3000 per annum that we give to Scripture Union for the Es-team project, or to give to the poor in other parts of the world, trusting that God will continue to provide for our needs.

We learn to trust God. This is the attitude that says to God 'my times are in your hands' and learns not to worry about the things that life throws at us; this is the attitude that learns over and over again that we have a father who knows what we need and who is able to provide for us. Birds don't work a 60-hour week, but they have enough to eat; flowers don't worry which designer label to wear today, but they are more glorious than Solomon. God provides for our needs; our challenge is to learn to trust Him with all of life. What is the key to life? What is the answer to the big question? We learn to trust God. He is able to do for us all that we need; He knows us better than we know ourselves; He has promised to be with us always and everywhere. In everything, the big decisions, the daily questions – let us learn to trust God! It is well worth it!