Luke 12:13-24

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[0:00] An American writer named Scott Stolzel, who is an editor of the Atlantic Monthly, I'm not sure! if that magazine is popular here, but I occasionally read this magazine, an article titled Surviving! An article titled Surviving Anxiety, which was published a few years ago, and he wrote a compelling and at times uncomfortable expose of his own struggle with anxiety. In this pretty lengthy article, he admitted that no therapy or drug was permanently effective in overcoming even the most basic fears and worries that often prevented him from leading normal, regular life. This is what he wrote, I am buffeted by worry about my health and my family members' health, about finances, about work, about a rattle in my car and the dripping in my basement, about the encroachment of an old age and the inevitability of death, about everything and nothing.

Sometimes this worry gets transmuted into low-grade physical discomfort, stomach aches, headaches, dizziness, my arms and my legs, or a general malaise, as though I have a mononucleosis or the flu.
At various times, I have developed anxiety-induced difficulties breathing, breathing, swallowing, even walking. These difficulties then become obsessions, consuming all my thinking.
Next, in this article, he lists 19 therapies, 28 drugs, not to mention beer, wine, gin, bourbon, vodka and scotch, only to conclude with the sovereign statement.
Here is what's worth nothing. Now, the passage of scripture, which I selected for our study today and Pastor Paul read before, addresses the issue of anxiety and interestingly links it to greed, something that the editor of the magazine, Stossel, didn't really do in his article.
[2:55] It links it to greed. And I think that link could provide some answers to lifelong anxiety issues that we all face in everyday life.

So let us look at the text again, if you hope still, open your Bibles on Luke chapter 12 and look at verse 13.
What happens here is that Jesus is averting the discussion or dispute between brothers about an inheritance. Very, very normal, everyday issue that we can all face. Disputing about material goods with family members.
Jesus doesn't want to resolve the conflict between these two brothers who are arguing about the inheritance. But instead, he redirects his audience's attention by telling a story.
This story came to be known as the parable of the rich fool. The story goes like this. Some guy unexpectedly made a fortune and he decided to use it all to ensure for himself a comfortable future.
[4:19] We see this in verse 19 when he says, And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, be merry.

However, as Jesus continues and tells us this story, The comfort of happy life, he envisioned, could not be secured with his newly acquired crops and possessions he could get for these crops.
Because that very night, that rich man leaves all his wealth to someone else. He drops dead.
Using this parable, Jesus shows the utmost foolishness, and let's just face it, stupidity, Of someone who thinks that material possession could provide him with a relaxing, comfortable, and happy life.
But you could say, wait, wait, what's going on here? Why was the rich man so foolish? Why was he thinking that he could use all that money to buy himself happiness?
[5:38] Why was he thinking that the crops could buy him happy life? Well, this was just a story so we can only speculate what was really going through his mind.

But, as it is often the case, he and we make foolish decisions when we are blinded by sin. In this case, next to foolishness, there was also a sin of greed, which the man had committed.
I realize that the text never mentions the word greed. Never mention it by name. However, I would argue that Jesus would make this point implicitly.

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Especially when we consider what's coming up next. When we consider the whole context in which this parable is placed here by Dr. Luke.
So we need to ask ourselves, well, if greed is here, what is greed? Well, one way to define greed is to say that it's an uncontrollable or inordinate desire to have things which are not ours.
[6:52] This can be money, but there could be other things. It could be power. It could be knowledge. Knowledge of knowing what will happen to me in the future. It could be a desire to have control over my life, over life of my children, over life of my husband or wife.

In many ways, our anxiety can be fueled by greed. By that inordinate or uncontrollable desire to have things that are not ours.
This happens when we inordinately desire to know what will happen to us. How we will support ourselves. How will I be perceived by this group of people?
Will I pass this test or will I fail this test? Will I be accepted or will I be rejected? Will my kids be accepted in this school?
Will my kids succeed in life or not? What makes those desires inordinate and sinful is that answers to these questions are unobtainable.
[8:00] They belong to God and are not for us. They are not for sale. Also desiring so deeply to know answer to these questions.

Are often fueled by self-centered and narcissistic reasons. Motivated by personal comfort and not love of God and love of neighbor.
This uncontrollable longing for money, luxury, power, material goods, good reputation, recognition, knowledge, stability, and many, many other things which I'm sure we could go on and on listing.
Is nothing else but a greed in disguise. And in our popular culture, greed has often unfortunately been nicely redressed as a simple justifiable desire to, well, retire early.
To have enough as not to depend on anyone else in my family or any of my friends or not be a burden to a church.
[9:15] To do anything we want at any time we want. To simply travel, eat, drink, and be merry.
However, Jesus confronts this way of thinking.

And he was not the only one to argue or to say that greed was foolish. That the whole idea that money cannot buy happiness was already known in the ancient world.
And even today many non-Christian and sometimes people who by no means are considered moral leaders or moral people could say the same thing based on their own experience.
Money cannot buy as happiness. Well, back in the ancient time, an author named Seneca, a great Stoic philosopher wrote, Why do you pile riches on riches?
You really should remember how small your bodies are. What folly that's to think that is the amount of money and not the state of mind that matters.
[10:25] There are many other authors that said similar models or statements. Many throughout the ages offered moralistic lessons.

But none could provide an effective, lasting cure until Christ and after him as well.
The uniqueness of Jesus' teaching here is that he offered not only a moralistic lesson about the fact that money doesn't buy happiness, but he offered a worthwhile solution.
A way out of the cycle of greed and anxiety. A way out in which our greed could be redeemed and our anxiety could be healed.
What was his solution? What was his solution? What was the cure to greed and anxious thought offered to us by Jesus?
[11:24] Well, it was and still is today an investment in the Kingdom of God. It was an investment in the Kingdom of God of which he came to proclaim.

The Kingdom which still is mostly spiritual, partially spiritual, we say already but not yet.
Spiritual, in a sense invisible. But someday will be also physical and will last whole eternity. When Christ comes back again to complete his Kingdom and to institute his rule.
Jesus taught that investment in his Kingdom is safer than any other investment because God himself guarantees it. He protects it and makes sure that this investment will be successful.
No crash of spiritual market is ever to happen. It cannot be stolen or destroyed because it is protected by God himself. Finally, investing in the Kingdom of God is not selfish or self-centered because it requires a special element.

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[12:48] It requires love. It requires self-denial. And it requires faith. Well, let me illustrate this point by bringing image from my childhood.

As you already heard, I grew up in Poland. And in my childhood, Poland was occupied by, well, the Soviets who imposed communism on Poland. Poland didn't choose to be communist.
We were made to be communists. The communist, utopian and demonic ideology in the name of equality forbade private ownership and imposed governments control over the whole market and private property.
The country, as well as the whole Eastern European bloc, sank into dreadful poverty. As a child, I remembered that buying a fresh loaf of bread bordered on a miracle.
Toilet paper, believe it or not, was a luxury. Ask any of your older Polish friends, well older, my age, 40 and up, how difficult it was to find toilet paper.
[14:00] And tropical fruits like oranges, bananas or lemons were a treat that I think for the first time I saw when some American missionaries came and brought us bananas.

In order to help the crisis and overcome this dreadful poverty in which we were growing up and food was being rationed, our government decided to print more money.
When they were printing more money, that led to hyperinflation. What is hyperinflation? Well, hyperinflation basically meant that the money which you had was losing its value on monthly, sometimes even daily basis.
Now imagine, and these are actual numbers. In January of 1990, one American dollar was worth 9,500 Polish Zlotys.
Sorry, I didn't know how to transfer that to English pounds, but the info I found was with American dollars. So, in 1990, one dollar was worth 9,500 Zlotys.
[15:16] While at the end of August of 1992, the same one American dollar was now worth 19,600 Zlotys.

So that only in a year and a half, the value of money dropped by over 10,000 Polish Zlotys. Polish money became almost completely worthless.
Wise people like my father kept their savings in foreign currency, which was, well, illegal, but it was stable.
And at that time, American dollar was that currency. It took some risk. It took some risk. So my father had to hide that money. It took some challenges to do it.
We lived in a small apartment, small flat, in a communist block on the 12th floor. Not many places to hide anything. But I still remember rolled up dollar bills in a plastic bag, carefully placed by the little hands of my younger brother, under the bathtub in our tiny little apartment.
[16:35] These were the money that allowed my family to survive through this very difficult period. And only my brother, with his little tiny hand, could reach that real roll of green dollars there stored.

Well, the point of my illustration is this. You would be a complete idiot. You would be a complete fool if you kept, if you could exchange your money to a different currency, and yet decide to keep it in Polish Lotties at that time.
Because this money would simply disappear in front of your eyes. People who did keep their money in Polish Lotties for whatever reason became angry, distressed and anxious.
Just imagine one day having enough money to buy a weird looking communist car. As we used to have those little post fiat types or other that sometimes you can see now as more as a joke.
But imagine that you had enough money to buy a Trabant or whatever. Volga or Lada. If you were to buy from another communist country, one of their great products that would fall apart in a few years.
[17:47] But imagine you could. And then, a few months later, the same money would not be enough to do a decent grocery shopping.

No wonder why Jesus joined other voices in calling fools those who try to secure their own destiny in material possessions. But as we already said, Jesus does not stop here.
He offers more than moralistic lessons. He proposes what I would like to call here a spiritual currency exchange.
We live in Europe, still for a while here in the European Union, I guess. But we do a lot of currency exchanges. Poland is not on Euro.
We exchange our money. This is pretty much every, if not every day, for some, every other month, a procedure that lots of us do who travel around the world or around Europe.

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[18:51] Just like my father, who would take Polish lotties that were about to become worthless and exchange them for dollars. I think in a similar way, Christ invites us today to take our resources and invest in his kingdom.

Well, you can say, how can I invest in his kingdom? Well, first by trusting him for the forgiveness of your sins. That is the best investment that you can make.
That is where you have to begin. If you haven't trusted Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, no other investment will make any sense in God's kingdom unless you turn to Christ and you ask him to forgive your sins.
And then when you do that, you have a safe place where for the rest of your life you can invest everything else you have.
Serving him with all that you have. This spiritual currency exchange is a place where you can trade in your earthly goods. You can trade in money, education, your reputation, your stability, your time, your talents, your gifts, for something that is much more permanent.
[20:05] For something that is safe, eternal. And guess what? It is anxious free investment. I think the essence of what I call the spiritual currency exchange is very well expressed in verses 28 and 34.

And I will read them again. Because I think they really capture what we are trying to express here.
But if God so clothes the grass which is alive in the field today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you?
Oh, you of little faith. And do not seek 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 is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.
Sell all your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.
[21:20] For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Reading these words, let us not make the mistake of using them as an excuse for some kind of quasi-communist principle against owning private property.

Or a license for very careless living and not working hard. Or for, again, as the Roman Catholic Church sometimes would argue, a necessary vow of poverty to show your, how extremely spiritual and dedicated you are.
This is not what these verses are talking about. Avoiding success will not prevent us from being greedy, anxious or foolish.
Also, let us not think that we must be rich, smart, powerful or good-looking to deal with the issues brought in the passage we just read.
Whoever we are, we are commanded to come before God and to trust Him with our future. Also, the resources, the talents the Lord gave us need careful evaluation.
[22:37] We need to ask ourselves, do we invest in the Kingdom of God? Or do we invest in something else? In what do we trust?

What is the source of our temporary peace, stability and comfort? Is it God? Is it His Kingdom?
Is it His Church? Christ's death on the cross atoned for our sin. And was also an example of how we are to live our lives.
We as Christians, we call ourselves those who follow Christ. We don't only take His atonement and that's it. We take His atonement that took place on the cross for us.
But we also pattern our lives after our Master. Jesus, by sacrificing His life, showed us how to be ready to invest all, all including life itself, for the sake of God's glory.
[23:50] This example has been followed by early Christian martyrs who died gladly for the sake of the Gospel. May we not miss the opportunity to seek first the Kingdom of God and to seek it today.

May the Spirit of God give us strength to come to Christ, accepting His sacrifice for our sin and following His faithful example in our daily Christian lives.
That's not an easy challenge. But that's the challenge that we all as Christians must consider. May I conclude this study of the passage that was in front of us with the words of comfort that come from Heidelberg Catechism.

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One of the catechism, one of the catechisms that we use in reform tradition coming from the Netherlands. And part of it, which was actually also inspired and taken from some of the things that the Polish reformer Jan Waski, who was pastoring churches in Emden, in Friesland, but also pastored strangers' churches in London.
And as I said, during the Sunday school, back then these were called strangers' churches. I think if Jan Waski was here today, he would probably call them international or maybe refugee churches.
[25:33] But these churches were very, very much open and consisting of all sorts of people who came from all over Europe, where evangelical Christians and Protestant Christians were being persecuted.

And he gave them a refuge here in London. But the Heidelberg Catechism, question one, question and answer two, gives us comforting words that are challenging, but also giving us comfort, telling us that if we take refuge in Christ, not only with our sins, but also with our future, He will give us rest.
Let me read this. Some of you might know it. But here is what this confessional document teaches us. The question is, what is your comfort in life and in death?
And the answer is, that I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.
He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven.
[26:56] In fact, all things must work together for my salvation, because I belong to Him. Christ, by His Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready, from now on, to live for Him.

Amen.

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