

Luke 12:13-21

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[0:00] Well, thank you so much for coming this morning. This service is particularly aimed at people who are inquiring about the Christian faith.! So maybe the Christian faith isn't a reality for you or not central.

If that's the case, we are thrilled you're here. Thank you for coming. If you can just flick back to the reading we had at the start, that would be a great help to me. So Luke chapter 12. So this is part. Luke's gospel is a doctor who wrote a biography of Jesus.

He investigated very carefully. And in fact, we've got a little course, Hope Explored, coming up, which enables you to look further at Luke and bring any question you've got.

And unashamedly in that course, we're going to look at where we find hope, where we find peace, where we find purpose. All the seas are going on at the moment. Covid, conflict in Europe, numerous things, economic crisis, all these things that cause people to be, I think, thinking through what life's about, as I did at 16 when my godfather was killed.

So do please, if you've got any questions, come back on that course, see us afterwards. We'd love you to think that through. And we'd be an absolute privilege to have you join us on those evenings. So that is in end of June, 19th, 26th of June, 3rd of July, Wednesday nights, free supper here, and then ask any question you like.

[1:17] Let me pray as we begin. Oh, Father God, thank you very much for the Bible. Thank you that it speaks to us. We dare to pray now that you would speak to us in the very depths of our being.

We pray that we would learn things now we'd never forget through our lives from this passage. And we ask that those things would take us into eternity. Amen. I don't know what's wrong with me, but I find myself constantly reading the most inane, ridiculous material.

I think that's why I got a third at university. So I do hope your reading material is better than mine. When I got my third, I said to my tutor, was I close to a 2-2? He said, no, Rico, it was a very solid third. So I knew then that ordination into the Church of England was the only career option available, so that's what I did.

But anyway, I do hope you spend your reading time more profitably than me. And here was something I read recently. I don't know if you've read it. It's a list of lost property that was handed in on British Rail depots during last year.

And at the top of the list, to my astonishment, was a human brain that had been left by a medical student on an away day. I don't know what you'd call that. I think it's the ultimate in absent-mindedness. I'm not sure. But other things on the list included a pair of stuffed gerbils, a glass eye, a motorcycle and a wooden leg.

[2:26] And the mind boggles as to whether the same person left them all on the drain. Anyway, by contrast this morning, thank you for coming. I'd love you to do a small exercise with me. Henry Ford said, thinking is probably the hardest work there is, which is the probable reason why so few of us engage in it.

But could you put your mind to this question this morning? Here's the question. Do you think you're a successful person? Do you think you're successful? Now, not so much have you been in the past or do you think you will be in the future, but right now would you call yourself successful?

And I think as we think about that, we'd have people across the scale. Some would be fairly certain modestly they are successful. Others have been put down so often that their confidence is rock bottom.

Most of us are bumping around the middle. My brother was always head boy at school. He was always captain of the sports. I nearly put on my UCAS form when I applied for university. I was his

brother. But the question is, of course, what would constitute success as far as you're concerned? What do you make of success? And there comes before us in this fascinating part of the Bible, in Luke's Gospel here, in this parable of Jesus. So that's a story with a spiritual cutting edge. A man who, from every point of view, would have been considered successful.

[3 : 41] And yet, ladies and gentlemen, God's verdict on him, the creator's verdict, was that he was a dismal failure. A dismal failure. Can we have a look down and see that in the passage?

Do we see verse 20? But God said to him, fool. God calls him a fool. This is the funeral card of my best friend from university. I took his funeral in 2005.

He died very suddenly of a pulmonary embolism. I was crying as I took the funeral. And about a year and a half later, I went to his graveside with his dad. And his dad was in floods of tears.

And he pointed at his son's tombstone. And he said, what epitaph shall I put on my boy's grave, Rico? It's a dreadful moment. Well, God writes the epitaph for this man, fool.

Now, look, I only know two Greek words. One is kebab and the other one is this word. But this word literally means without thought. So it's not that this guy didn't make plans. He thought and he thought and he thought.

[4 : 40] But he didn't think about the right things. He didn't think about the really important things in life. That's the issue here. So I wonder if we can do that this morning. Thank you for coming on this summer's day. Can we think about in this passage what constitutes success and failure?

Now, it's a striking story because in Luke chapter 12, the chapter we're in here, as we go through it, Jesus has been talking about eternity. Maybe COVID did that to you.

My godfather's death did that. The Bible says God has put eternity into our minds, into our hearts.

So suddenly you're thinking about, well, this life's so short. And Jesus is talking about it.

So he says, verse 5, fear him who after the killing of the body has power to throw you into hell. Well, that's striking. Verse 3, there's nothing concealed that won't be disclosed. It's like gladiator. What we do in life echoes in eternity.

Verse 8, he warns us, eternity belongs to this figure, the Son of Man. And then suddenly, bang, there's a massive interruption. And a guy in the crowd says, will you shut up about that spiritual stuff?

[5 : 40] That's not real. That's not relevant. That doesn't put bread on the table. And he says, can we see as we look down, let's have a look at it together. It's verse 13. Someone in the crowd said to him, teacher, tell my wretched brother to divide the inheritance with me.

By the way, it doesn't say wretched. I just put that in. But that's what's going on, isn't it? So here are two brothers falling out about the will. You know what they say, don't you? Where there's a will, there's a family.

Well, that's what's going on here. Here are two brothers and they're falling out over who's going to get grandma's clock and sideboard. When I was an Anglican clergyman, I had a friend called John. And he took a funeral. And during the funeral, during it, one of the members of the family removed from the parental home what they wanted. So they got a removal van. They literally removed the dining room table.

And when they got back afterwards, it wasn't there. Can I recommend you don't do that? Puts a bit of a shadow over Christmas. That's what I'd say. So Jesus, as he responds, can we have a look down?

[6 : 39] He says, verse 15, he says to them, take care. Now the original is watch out. The original there is jump out the way of a truck. Watch out. Do we see as we look down?

What does he say? And be on your guard against all types of covetousness. One's life doesn't consist in the abundance of possessions. And then he arrests us with this parable, which actually is to stop a brother who's got a writ in his pocket to go to court to start a law case against his own brother.

So to make him stop and think. So it's a striking story. It had to be. The family's in crisis. What's he going to do? And let's have a look down and see what happens together.

Can we see? And verse 16, here is Jesus. And he told them this parable, this story with a spiritual cutting edge. The land of a rich man produced plentifully.

The word is euphorically. So this guy knows exactly how to work the government subsidies. I guess in city terms, he'd be working on Bond Street in one of the hedge funds.

[7 : 44] He'd have a house in Mayfair. He'd have another house on the Wentworth Estate. His wife would shop at Harrods and Harvey Nicks. He drives an Aston Martin. Where would the kids be? Eaten and down house, I guess.

So that's where he is. I tell you what, if you saw him commuting and you'd nudge your friend, you'd say, look at that guy. He made a fortune, you know. He made money 2007, 2008. Even when there was economic crisis, he still made money.

Take his advice. He's no fool. And let's have a look down and see what he does. Can we see as we look down? Verse 17. And he thought to himself, what shall I do? I've nowhere to store my crops. Then he said, this is what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. And there I'll store all my grain and my goods. So what happens? He gets a better harvest than he expected one year. But there's no waste. There's no panic. He's not going to flood the market. He gets out his calculator. He does his sums. And he realises it's definitely worth paying for a massive grain storage mountain.

[8 : 42] Waste not want not. That's what his mum taught him. And so there's a bigger profit this year. He's not going to let Rishi Sunat get hold of it. So he calls in his accountant. And he works out how to invest it.

And then having planned and worked and thought and planned and worked and thought. It's fantastic because he at last arrives at verse 19.

Can we see it together? Verse 19. As we look down. And I'll say to my soul. Soul. You've ample goods laid up for many years.

Relax. Eat, drink and be merry. And he retires early at 47. And do you know ever since he was at Christ the Saviour Primary School. When he was 11 he thought.

I'm going to make all my money. And retire in my late 40s. And he's done it. He's retired. And doubtless the Sunday Colour Supplement magazine would have an article on him entitled The Man Who Knew When to Stop.

[9 : 44] And everyone sitting in their front rooms would read it and go very wise. So wise. And we read now that he's a member of two golf clubs. He's a member of the Wentworth near where he lives.

But also Royal St George's. And his aim is to get down to single figures on both golf clubs. So you see the retirement party's come and gone. He's got a massive house down in Sandwich. Huge house overlooking the bay. And there's his yacht in the bay. And everyone's come down. And they've all had to head back up to London. They've got to go back to work Monday morning. And their congratulations are ringing in his ears.

And he's standing there with, what do you think, a long cool glass of what? Orange juice in his hand? I don't know. And he looks down.

And on the side table, there are chalets. He doesn't know whether to get one in Verbier or Valdezere. He doesn't know. But he's going to buy one so that he can go when the snow's good. And then there are safaris.

[10 : 43] And he looks back at his house. And he looks down onto the bay. And there is his yacht. And he says to himself, you've done it. You've done it.

You've plenty laid up for years and years and years. Take life easy. Eat, drink. And suddenly, there is a searing pain in his chest. And he's dead before they get him to hospital in Canterbury.

Can we see, ladies and gentlemen, let's see it together. Do we see it's there? Verse 20. Well, they hold a memorial service for him in the city.

St. Helens, Bishop's Gate. That's a good place for a funeral. So he goes there. And the chairman would say, well, a loyal servant of the company he was. The trade journal would say, well, an example he was to his profession. And ladies and gentlemen, God will say, you fool.

What a fool you've been. I've taken funerals of people like this, of men like this. Actually, agonizingly, I once took a funeral of a young woman called Kathy. And she'd been killed in a car crash.

[11 : 45] It was a dreadful day. And afterwards at the reception, an old lady came up to me. And she said, do you know what failure is? And I said, sorry.

She said, what's failure? I said, I don't really understand what you mean. She said, failure is being successful at the things that don't matter. That was the definition. Well, the money, where did all the money go?

Well, the lawyers tidied up most of it. Some went to a son who was, well, delightful chap. But all he did was windsurf. So he spent it over 25 years windsurfing around the world, broke his mother's heart.

And the eternal world, all was lost. And I don't know what you make of that little parable, ladies and gentlemen. Do you think it would have stopped the brother with the writ in his pocket, go to court? Do you think it might have made him stop and go, well, actually, what do I think? And I want to say, as we look at this passage from the Lord Jesus, and we think about what constitutes success in life, that, well, I've never met anyone who wants to fail.

[12 : 45] We all want to be successful. So what were this man's two fatal mistakes? And his first mistake was this. Ladies and gentlemen, he lived as though God was not there. That was his first mistake.

Now, we don't know much about this guy. We don't know if he was a good husband or a philanderer. We don't know if he was a good father or neglected his children. And what we do know, can we see, is the end of the passage, what we're told is he was not rich towards God.

Now, I don't doubt for a single moment that if you said to him, do you believe in God, down in Sandwich, where he had that marvellous house, and you look out on the coast, and you'd have sort of got a little vox pop and said, do you believe in God?

He'd have said, well, of course I do. I mean, look at this. How do you explain all this? But he lived as though God wasn't there. And actually, he's absolutely self-centred on it.

Do you know, we'd have said he's not so much C.O.V., Church of England, but C. Andy, Christmas and Easter. That's what it would have been, isn't it? And do you see, it's very interesting. Do you see the words, I, me, or my, come 11 times in verse 17?

[13 : 46] He's absolutely focused in. Have a look, see if you can count them as we go through. Verse 17. What shall I do? I've nowhere to store my crops. Then he said, I will do this.

I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones. There I'll store all my grain and my goods, and I'll say to my soul, soul, you have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry.

All the arrows are focused in. Can we see that? So he's got leisure, take life easy, pleasure, eat, drink, and be merry, treasure, plenty of good things, ample good things.

But he's forgotten God, the giver of it all. And the Bible says, if you have wealth, that's a wonderful thing. But be generous. But he's totally focused on himself.

And selfish people are such a pain, aren't they? Self-centered people. It was Samuel Butler who wrote about two very self-centered people called Mr. and Mrs. Carlisle. And he wrote this. How good of God to cause Carlisle and Mrs. Carlisle to marry one another and so make two people miserable instead of four?

[14 : 47] Well, that's what's going on here. All the arrows are focused in. And religion? Well, this is sexist, ladies and gentlemen. Please forgive me. It's sexist.

But with religion, he'd have said, religion is for the wife and kids. I mean, it's a handrail for the women and children. But it's not for me. He'd have said, I'm an alpha male.

I like to be on the golf course Sunday morning. I don't need to bother with it, but I like it for them.

And God says to him, what a fool you are. What a fool, because God has shown himself to us.

So he lives as though God wasn't there. And God has revealed himself. Oh, years ago now, I was on my day off. And I went back home on a Saturday.

And my brother and sister-in-law and my parents had to go to a wedding. So I was told I had to babysit the three kids. So there was Dalton was eight, Patrick was six, and Lena was three.

[15 : 45] And it was an exhausting day. We played rugby. We played cricket. We played football. Someone should have told me at bath time. It's helpful if you mostly take your own clothes off. I got soaked at bath time. Anyway, about four in the afternoon, while her brothers were having a sleep, Lena, the three-year-old, said she wanted to play a game.

I said, Lena, what game do you want to play? She said, hide and seek. I said, Lena, how do you play? Have you noticed that? If you are playing a game with little ones, you need to get the rules clear at the start.

Because otherwise, if there is a ruling in the middle of the game, it tends to go against you. So I said, Lena, how do you play? She said, it's easy. She said, you shut your eyes. You count to ten. I go and hide behind the dining room door.

You come and find me. I said, Lena, have I got that clear? I shut my eyes, count to ten. You hide behind the dining room door. I come and find you. She said, yes. I shut my eyes. I counted to ten. I said, are you ready? She shouted from behind the dining room door, ready?

I said, is Lena underneath the kitchen table? How's of laughter from behind the dining room door? Is she behind the kitchen door? How's of laughter from behind the dining room door? I said, is she behind the dining room door?

[16:47] She shot out as though she was spring loaded. I said, what are we doing now? She said, you shut your eyes. You count to ten. I'm going to go and hide underneath mummy and daddy's bed. You have to come and find me. Now, what was going on there?

Well, she knows her husband's such a thick idiot that unless she gives instructions, she'll be called out as a skeleton from underneath mummy and daddy's bed. But actually, the fun in hide and seek is not hiding.

It's in being found. And it's in speaking. And ladies and gentlemen, I want to say to you this morning, just categorically, ladies and gentlemen, God has spoken to us.

That's the great theme. That's what we believed in our very core. We think God has spoken. So when we open the Bible, Christians believe God speaks.

And more than that, ladies and gentlemen, he's spoken to us about his son. He's saying, what do you make of Jesus? So there was a dead girl and he raised her from the dead.

[17:47] There was a storm and he flattened the storm. And then when he went to die, the Lord Jesus, what do you make of this? He says in the Sermon on the Mount, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.

And then as he's being murdered, he cries out for the people killing him, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. So God has spoken to us and he's spoken about his son.

And he says, now it gets even more remarkable than that. He says, ladies and gentlemen, I'd like you to be in friendship with my son. I'd like you to be friends with Jesus.

I've sent him so that he can meet you. And so just as we ponder that, I'm thinking how to illustrate that. It's like this. Are we ready? Ball coming?

Oh. And back. Chance to shine. Oh. Oh. Oh. And back.

[18:52] Are we ready? Oh. Oh. Get a South African to pick it up. Very good. Okay. Let's do it without the ball. And back.

Thanks, John T. Ready? And back. Can I say, ladies and gentlemen, if there's no ball, the game loses its focus. It loses its meaning. And God says, my son is to be as central to your life as a ball is to a game.

Now, there are people here and you're here and you're thinking, actually, I think the Bible's the rules. Well, the rules are great. I mean, he says don't lie because he's a God of truth. He says don't commit adultery because he's faithful.

He says don't steal because he's giving. The rules reflect his character. We love the rules. But, actually, it's about a relationship. Can you imagine a game of rugby starting off beginning of the Six Nations or the game up in Scotland and there's no ball?

Actually, it might have been better that day. But what I'm saying is that he wants you to be in friendship with his son and he wants to be as central to your life as a ball is to a game.

[19:55] Now, what do you make of that? And furthermore, it goes on. He says, not only did I send my son to be in friendship with you and that success in life. Ladies and gentlemen, he says, I sent him to die so that friendship could happen.

He says, when Jesus dies on the cross, it's not just a Galilean carpenter dying. He's saying he's died to bring you from hell through the cross to heaven.

So there's only one way to get to hell. If you want to go to hell, you have to trample over the cross of Jesus. He blocks the way and he says, I'm playing in death and blood so you can be forgiven and you can have me right at the centre of your relationship.

What do you make of that? You know, years ago, I was playing rugby in Bristol against a club side called Dings Crusaders. And I arrived at the rugby ground and I saw my opposite number. He was enormous.

He was built like an outside toilet. Honestly, you look at a bloke like that and you think, what does his mother look like? I mean, the bloke was vast. And I looked around a bit and he wasn't warming up.

[21 : 09] Had a number three on his back. I knew he was opposite me. I looked quite a long way around and I saw why he wasn't warming up. He had a tiny baby boy in his arms. And I thought, well, maybe he's not playing.

Maybe he's babysitting. Maybe his mother's playing. I didn't know. Just before kickoff, he handed this baby onto the field. He walked onto the field. Handed his baby off. He walked onto the field. He came on.

He scrummaged opposite me. And ladies and gentlemen, he ripped me limb from limb. Halftime, went straight back to the baby boy. Second half, came back on. Threw me around like straw in the wind. As the final whistle went and I stuttered off, that little baby boy was back in the man's arms. There was no question who the father was. There was no question who the son was. I'd like to have seen anyone lay a finger on that little boy. It would have been amusing to behold the result. Now, ladies and gentlemen, do you think God loved his son, Jesus Christ, any less than that man loved his little boy, yet he sent him to die so that you can be in relationship with him?

And yet, healing is full of people who say, well, I've lived a decent life and so God will accept me. Well, if you've lived a decent life, why did he send his son to die if your goodness was good enough?

[22 : 17] So this man lives as though there's no God and God says, what a fool you are. And secondly, just as we close now, he also lived as though there's no judgment. Let's have a look at that.

Can we see that together as we look down? It's striking in the passage. But God said to him, fool, this night your soul is required of you.

So this man's second message was that very night his life would be demanded from you. Now, can I tell you, as I say that, I'm holding my best mate from university's funeral card who went like that. And, you know, there is a time, I just want to say this, say to the gentlemen, when the giver of life demands our life from us. And this man thought he had a long time, but he didn't.

So verse 19, he made preparations for a long time. I'll say to myself, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. But he didn't have many years. He was out of time. I've buried nine of my school friends.

[23 : 14] Nine. I mean, it goes so fast. You know the definition of middle age, don't you? You bend down to do up your shoelaces and ask, what else can I do while I'm down here?

And old age, my father used to say this about old age, he used to say, to my dentures I'm accustomed, to my deafness I'm resigned. I can cope with my bifocals, but oh, I miss my mind. Life is so fast. And God says there'll be a day when I'll ask you two questions. Question one, did you know me?

You were meant to have me as central to life as a ball is to a game. I sent my son so that you could know him. Did you know me? And secondly, did you have your sin forgiven? Those are the two questions we'll be asked.

And actually, you'll see on the Hope Explored course that on that course, we'll talk about actually, well, where do we engage and how do we engage with eternity? But I want to say this.

[24 : 10] I make no excuse in telling you there's a judgment to come. And that it's a wonderful thing there's a judgment to come. Ladies and gentlemen, can I persuade you of this? Judgment's great.

Because it means how you treat me and how I treat you and how we treat the world matters to God. And sometimes, and for some here, there would have been appalling things that had happened.

And there's never been any recompense. There's never been justice. I'm so sorry to hear that. But I want to say there is a day of judgment. I don't know if you know this book, Slumdog Millionaire.

There's a film of it too. In this book, a little Indian boy who's a beggar and an orphan gets his eyes burned out so that he'll earn more money begging. And I saw that. And I remember seeing it on the film and saying out loud, there's a judgment to come.

There is a judgment to come. And the resurrection of Jesus proves it. And it's a wonderful thing. But Jesus says, I'm going to die to save you from it. So let's close.

[25 : 15] But I want to say, is your life successful by these standards? By how you've related to God's son and to the fact that he sent his son to die? What have you done with the Bible when he says, I want to know you and Jesus will walk off the pages?

I mean, wouldn't it be a dreadful thing? Can you imagine? The letter comes in as we close to the wife of this rich man. And it's addressed the mansion Wentworth Estates.

And it's from God. So God writes a letter. There are lots of Cone Golic's letters. But God writes one. And the woman, the wife, grieving, opens it up.

And all she gets is, what a fool. What a fool. God hates to say that about our lives. He longs for us to have successful lives.

But he says at the center of it is what you do with Jesus. Is your life successful by God's standards? And what do you make of that line? Failures being successful at the things that don't matter.

[26 : 18] So much to talk about. Well, I wonder if you can pick up the service order here and turn just to where we've had the sermon. We're going to sing again now.

But can you see there's a little prayer after the preach. And for some here, I think they'd be saying, do you know, I need to get right with God.

I'm not right with him and I need to do that. Others will say, well, I mean, wherever you're at, I'd need to come and ask questions at Hope Explored. I'll be doing that. But one or two will say, actually, I think this is true.

And I need to get right with God today. I think he did send his son to die for me. I've lived as though there's no God and no judgment. And that needs to stop. And can I say metaphorically, I'm on my knees pleading with you to echo this prayer and to come to faith.

Jesus has done all the work. And if that's the case, then perhaps you would say it with me now. I'm going to say it slowly. Read it through so you know what's coming. And then a second time, I'll say it phrase by phrase.

[27 : 21] And if it's right for you to become a Christian today, can I plead with you to do so? It's a lovely church family. Come and join us here. But can I plead with you to do that?

And can I tell you that if these things in this parable are true, then this is the most important moment in your life. What you do with Jesus, if this is true.

It's the most important moment in your life. So here we are. Let me pray it phrase by phrase. So I'll read it through and then I'll do it phrase by phrase a second time. Let's go through it.

Heavenly Father, I'm so sorry that I've lived as though there's no God and no judgment. I now turn away from that light, from that life. Thank you that Jesus died so that I could be forgiven.

Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit and help me to live with Jesus as my friend and master. So if that's right for you, if everyone else could bear with me, I'm going to say it slowly.

[28 : 17] And if you just want to pray it phrase by phrase, then why not do that? And then we'll have our final song and Chris will close us. So here it is. Do echo it in your own heart if it's right for you.

Heavenly Father, I'm so sorry that I've lived as though there's no God and no judgment. I now turn away from that life.

Thank you that Jesus died so that I could be forgiven. Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit and help me to live with Jesus as my master and friend.

Amen.