

What Relevance Does Faith Have to My Life?

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church. The scripture reading this morning comes from Luke chapter 12, beginning at verse 13. Please follow along on the screen or in your bulletin.

Someone in the crowd said to him, teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. But he said to him, man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?

And he said to them, take care and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

And he told them a parable saying, the land of a rich man produced plentifully. And he thought to himself, what shall I do?

For I have nowhere to store my crops. And he said, I will do this. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones. And there I will store all my grain and my goods.

[1 : 09] And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, be merry.

But God said to him, fool, this night your soul is required of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?

So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. And he said to his disciples, therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.

For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens, they neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouses nor barn, and yet God feeds them.

Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life?

[2 : 22] If then you are not able to do a smaller thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow.

They neither toil nor spin. Yet, I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

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. Fear not, little flock.

For it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the needy.

[3 : 40] 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.

For where your treasure is, there your heart be also. Amen. Thank you, Angeline.

Just bring this up. Great welcome again, everybody. Excuse me. My name is Chris, if you don't know me.

And it's not quite as tall as Kevin. And it's just really exciting. We're coming to the end of our series, looking at why Christianity this morning.

And we're going to look at how relevant faith is to life. But before we do that, I just want to pray for us that we wouldn't just kind of go through the motions in hearing someone talk for a little while, but actually God would speak to us and our hearts would be open to him.

[4 : 51] So just bow your heads with me now and let's pray. Father, I thank you that you're not a God who is absent.

You're not a God who is silent. You're not a God who is distant. But you're a God who comes close to us right today, wants to speak to us today, and wants to give us life and hope and a joy in you today.

And I pray, Lord, as I speak and as your word comes, Lord, I pray that it wouldn't just be words. I pray that your spirit would come in your power and open our hearts. You'd challenge us. You'd encourage us. You'd change us. And that we would see you. And we would never be the same again. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay. Okay. Okay. If you can't hear me, just kind of throw something in my general direction. So I was in Wong Tai Sin Temple.

[5 : 55] And I was being shown around by this 17-year-old kid. And he showed me around all the different gods and everything that was going on in the temple. And at the end of the tour, me and my friend, my friend asked this guy, Oh, okay, that's really interesting, everything you shared with us.

Tell me, do you have any faith or any belief? And he said to us something that I think many people in Hong Kong said. He said, I don't have time to think about that kind of thing.

I'm just too busy. He's 17 years old. But you see, for many people, life is divided between kind of a sacred and secular world.

A practical world where, you know, the real stuff of life happens. You know, you need jobs and relationships and the things you really care about. And then there's kind of spiritual stuff, which is maybe, is interesting if you have the time.

But it's not really practically connected to the real stuff of life. And so what we realize with this is actually many people say, I'll put off thinking about faith and things until maybe I've got a bit more free time and I've got a little bit of interest.

[7 : 12] But the problem with that is life isn't divided into neat compartments. You see, your work, your relationships, in fact, everything you do is driven and shaped through a lens of a story you believe, of something of where you find your value, of where you find your sense of freedom, of the story of where you find satisfaction and rest in life.

Everything you do is shaped through a lens. And that story, that lens you believe, can either enslave you or it can free you.

It can either give you something meaningful and purposeful to live for or it can crush you or lead you to crushing other people. And so what I want to talk about today is just three things that I think Christianity and the gospel gives us as believers and why it's relevant in life.

So we're going to talk about how it gives value for people who are status-seeking. We're going to talk about how it gives freedom for those of us who are enslaved. And we're going to talk about how it brings rest for the restless.

Okay? So let's go with the first one. Value that the Christianity gives us, the gospel gives us. You know, historically, people have found their identity in a couple of different ways.

[8 : 40] One way is by looking outward into what other people around you think about you. So in traditional Chinese society, your identity and your values found in fulfilling your duties towards your family and towards the greater nation even.

And in the context of that kind of story of where your identity is found and in the context of this story that we heard read, there's a traditional structure for even inheritance where the older brother is somebody.

He's the one, because he's the older brother, he gets the inheritance. And in traditional culture, what happens is you keep your position by controlling other people.

And so you see in this story, the sense of the person, the brother who is crying out, he says, hey, like, intervene, Jesus, in this issue that I have with my brother.

And why is he even talking to Jesus? Because he feels the way that social expectations are restricting him. To have value, you do what your family or what your peers value.

[9 : 54] Be a lawyer, be a doctor, be a banker, even if you're a gifted ballet dancer. That doesn't matter, because it's what everyone else thinks valuable is what you should do. And that can be suffocating.

And so this younger brother, and commentators will tell us it is a younger brother, he will reject that idea, and he shouts out to Jesus, because he sees the whole unfairness of the traditional system. And he wants the freedom to make his own choices, pursue his own dreams, because that's where he will find his value. You see, if he has got money, and he's got the freedom to do what he wants with it, then he can be somebody.

But what he found is his value is not found in looking outwards to others, it's found in looking inward into what his own desires are.

And the problem is that his brother is standing in the way. And so he looks to Jesus. He says, Jesus, come tell my brother to divide the inheritance.

[11:01] He looks to an outside authority to try and validate him. Because you see, if you actually look inward to try and be somebody to your own desires, you'll always end up needing someone else or something else to validate you.

You know, we try in our culture, we're probably more, we've got a mix of both of those sense of identities in Hong Kong, right? Some of us lean more to one, some of us lean more to the other. But for people who follow their own dreams and desires, what you find is, you've got to find your identity in something outside of yourself.

So you look to things like your brands, what you wear, where you shop, the car you drive, or even to your work, to give you a sense of value.

You know, I spoke to one guy who got his dream job in a top company. And he had a couple of friends with him at the same time who managed to get the same job. And about a month after he got this job, he came complaining to me, saying his friends had got all the interesting, career-relevant work in their team, and he was stuck in a dead-end project, just crunching numbers.

[12:16] And he was beginning to despair and actually resent his friends and try and think of ways out. He's like, hey, should I go to another job? Because he thought he wasn't being valued.

Because he thought others didn't appreciate him. Because he thought that something was stopping him from being somebody. He'd been there a month. You know, the atheist philosopher, Alan de Botton, he says this, he says, a work-based identity, which is a real story in our culture, is by its nature extremely unstable.

We're a sacking, a profit downgrade, or a retirement away from losing an established sense of self, of who we think we are. And because of competition in a market economy, our status depends on victories over others.

We end up wanting others to sink because every time they do, our own prestige will be enhanced. That doesn't describe anywhere in Hong Kong, does it? You see, in traditional society, your value comes outwardly.

In individual society, it comes from your own desires and inwardly. But you've always got to be validated by others. But Jesus comes along and he says, don't look outward, don't look inward. Don't even look religiously to me.

[13:30] He says, what you need to do is you need to look upward to find your own ultimate identity. What he says is this. He says, do you know who your father is?

He says, God feeds. He says, consider the ravens. God feeds even these little birds. How much more value are you than them, than these birds?

And he goes on to say, listen, all this other stuff you're worried about, your father knows what you need. You see, what he's saying is, in the stories of our culture, you don't have to try and be somebody, or make yourself someone, or maintain your position, through some kind of performance, or some way of crushing other people.

He says, I give you an identity. For those who trust me, you go from being orphans, you've got to fight it out to try and be the top dog, to actually becoming adopted sons and daughters, of the king of the whole universe.

You have a rich, heavenly father. And he loves us. Isn't that amazing? He loves us. And he sent Jesus, not just for some kind of theoretical idea, which is detached from your life.

[14:57] He sent Jesus, to release you, and to lift you, out of the rat race, of having to try and prove yourself to be someone, from seeking value from everybody else, in your performance, so you find worth and value in his love for you.

You know, if one of Lee Ka-Shing's sons, or granddaughters, came to do an apprenticeship in a company, but none of the colleagues, none of the bosses, knew who she was.

Now, she may get shouted at. She may make mistakes. She's got to work hard, and do her best in the job. But at the end of the day, whether she's been shouted at, or whether she's been praised, she can walk out, and in and out of that office, with confidence, because she knows, she's the granddaughter of Lee Ka-Shing.

Right? She's secure, if her identity is not in that. But Christianity says, the God of the whole universe, through Jesus, has given you status, apart from your performance, how much more secure should we be?

So that means, the domestic helper, who is devalued in our society, is honored in Jesus, and is free to do her job well, without being crushed by inferiority.

[16:18] That means, the CEO, who is honored by society, doesn't need to crush people, or maintain his own kind of superiority, to maintain his position, because he has a heavenly father, who gives him value, apart from his social status.

You see, faith in Christ, sets you free, from running on the treadmill, of seeking to be somebody, because Christ has already made us somebody. That's the first thing.

It gives us value, for the status seeking. Second thing, that the gospel gives us, it gives us freedom, for the enslaved. You know, some people, live for the weekends.

Okay? It's Monday morning, and they're already thinking about Friday night. That's none of you in here, I'm sure. We live for our comfort, right?

Other of us, you know, Monday morning, we're thinking, what can I accomplish this week? You know, the A types, you're kind of driven, you thrive off development, achievement, accomplishment, improvement, we're very different kinds of people.

[17:27] But whether you're living for comfort, or whether you're living for success, or anything else like this, Bob Dylan, that great theologian, said this, the singer, he said, you've got to serve somebody.

We're all serving something. And the question is, what master in your life, brings life, and love, and freedom, and which master will enslave you, or leave you trapped, in regret, fear, or insecurity, if you don't get what you want.

Jesus comes to this man, and he says to him, he actually completely avoids the question, the request the man has said, and he says, take care, and be on your guard, against all covetousness, that means greed, for one's life, doesn't consist, in the abundance, of one's possessions.

What he's saying is, he's saying, don't live, for the wrong treasure, in your life. Because when you look back, on your life, you'll find you've actually, wasted your life, and you're living in regret.

And what he does, he then tells this story, of a rich farmer, a successful farmer. And he says, this farmer, his success wasn't enough, he was like, oh, I've got all of this, now let me build bigger barns, so I can store more, I mean, and so he's investing, bigger warehouses, he's seeking financial security, so he works hard now, so he can retire early, he can relax, eat, drink, and be merry.

[19:06] He wants to play golf, he wants to go to good restaurants, and have holidays, in the Maldives. That's his treasure in life. He's chasing the Hong Kong dream. Right?

Doesn't everyone want that? That's the kind of system, that he, that's the story, that he's playing out. But Jesus says, there's a couple of things, that are wrong in this. The first thing is, your treasure can be taken away from you.

He says, fool. That's pretty strong. He says, you fool. And Jesus says to everyone, following the Hong Kong dream, you fool.

Invest in a ship, that's got holes in it, and you will see your investment sinking, before your very eyes. He says, tonight, the whole of what you've lived for, will be gone.

And who's going to pick up everything that you have? You see, what he's saying is, make your kids' education your treasure, and see how insecure and fearful you are, when it comes to trying to find schools for them.

[20:14] Make financial security your treasure, and see how insecure and fearful you become, when the stock market crashes. You see, anything that can be taken away from you, is not a treasure that is stable enough to hold you.

And the next thing he said, that comes out of this is, if something can be taken away from you, but this man cannot see it. Because you see, if you live for another treasure, which is not Jesus, it will blind you, and enslave you, to reality.

I know someone, again, whose treasure was his career. He was doing really well in his career, but he had a boss, who he could never say no to, who was just unreasonable, who was exploitative, and who really was just, just really enslaving him in his job.

But he would never say no, because he was afraid, of being fired, or afraid of losing his promotion opportunity. And he'd be out for a birthday meal with his wife, and his boss would call, and demand

something to be done right there, which actually didn't need to be done at all, for the next few days. And despite his wife's protestations, he would just get up and do it. Until the day, when his wife sat him down, gave him an ultimatum, and said, you can either draw healthy boundaries, around your boss, or I'm leaving you.

[21 : 36] And suddenly, he saw how his self-centered desires, had blinded him, to the destructive choices that he'd made. It had enslaved him, and actually the very things that he loved, he was actually destroying.

That's all of us. With any treasure that you put before Christ. Because any treasure that can be taken away, will leave you insecure, it will leave you a slave, and it will blind you.

But Jesus says this, where do you get freedom? He says, make God your treasure. He says, seek first God's kingdom. Worship God before anything else.

And then he says, fear not, little flock, it's your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, give to the needy, provide yourselves with money bags that don't grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that doesn't fail, where no thief approaches, and no moth destroys, for where your treasure is there, is your heart.

You see, what is he saying? He's saying, actually, when you place your treasure in Christ, and worshipping him above everything else, it can't be taken away from you.

[22 : 50] You see, when God is your treasure, the economy can be collapsing, your kids may be failing in all their exams, the people you're trying to help, and you live for helping people, may be refusing to listen to you, but there is still, your life is not collapsed, because you still have an unshakable anchor.

There is someone who nothing can take away, the place of joy that you can have, peace, security, because he says, there's no thief that can take away God from you.

You see, that's why research actually shows people who have faith have far higher levels of emotional, mental, and physical well-being than those without. I didn't know that. They're more storm-resistant.

It also says, he says, give to the needy, sell your possessions. Do you know what research also shows? That people of faith who really have God as their center are far more generous with their time, money, and talents, especially when it's hard times, because they've got a security that means they don't have to hold on.

So if you are a believer, or if you're not, how are you doing with generosity in the times we live in right now? Because that will actually give you a window on where your treasure is. But it's not that Jesus says it just can't be taken away from you.

[24 : 16] When God is your treasure, it also sets you free. Because you have a master, a king of his kingdom, who is not there to enslave you, but he's there to free you from the slavery from your own desires.

For that man, it was his greed that drove him and blinded him. But what God says is, I want to bring you into freedom.

And freedom only works if you live according to your design. Do you know that? If you're a fish, and you think, hey, I'd just love to spend a little bit of time on the land. Now, you might want to do that, but let me tell you, you're going to die.

You see, fish were made to flourish in water. We were made to flourish in relationship and worshipping God as the center. And so when God calls us to do things, there are commands in scripture, right?

And often what we think, even if we've been Christians for a long time, deep in our hearts, we often think God's commands are restrictive to us. They're trying to hold us back from freedom.

[25 : 23] But actually, his commands are there to free you from yourself. Just think about forgiveness. You know, all the research, again, shows that forgiveness is actually both good for you and it's good for relationships and it's good for society.

I mean, it's a win, okay? I talked to one lady. She'd been badly treated by a colleague. And she was bitter and angry and miserable.

Every time she went to work, it was just like hell. for her. And we talked about the forgiveness that God calls us to. And she said, I don't want to forgive. Anyone ever felt like that?

Right? I don't want to forgive. And I said, don't you realize that the longer you hold on to bitterness and anger, the greater the control is that that other person has over you.

You realize you're a slave? Your own desires for what you think you want actually leave you to slavery. slavery. But Jesus says he died both to forgive you but also to call you to forgive others. [26 : 28] Not just because he's trying to make life difficult for you. He wants to lead you into a freedom of life. And that goes for every command he ever gives.

Even the ones that you are resisting right now in your life. He wants your freedom. freedom. So when you follow Christ as the center of your life, nothing, it cannot be, your treasure cannot be taken away from you.

And it sets you free. He gives you value for status-seeking people. And thirdly, and finally, it gives you rest for the restless.

You know, Jesus, at least three or four times in this passage, he says to his disciples, don't be anxious about your life. He says, which of you by being anxious can add anything more onto your life?

He says, why are you anxious about your life? Like he goes, why are you worried about everything? What is he assuming? That people are anxious and restless and worried.

[27 : 31] Right? And this was 2,000 years ago before Twitter, email, Facebook, any other social media. You see, what they were anxious about was that they and their families were always two harvests away from death by starvation.

That's fairly, like, reasonable, right? I mean, what we get anxious about is we get anxious about our kids don't get into the right schools, we feel like we're falling behind everybody else at work, we don't have that amazing relationship we wanted, we feel that people will reject us.

Now, put that in perspective of starvation, and it's not quite in the same category. Right? But if I was to say to you, as Jesus kind of says, he says, hey, stop worrying, it's stupid.

I mean, he kind of says, hey, it's not going to add anything to your life. Like, he goes for a logical argument, he doesn't leave it there, but he starts with a logical argument. But if I say to you, stop worrying, does that help you to stop worrying?

No, if I say, worrying is stupid, you go, I know, but I can't help it. You see, why do we keep staying awake at night worrying?

[28 : 54] Why are we still on this treadmill in life? It's because deep inside, we're desperately insecure. All of us. And if you don't think you are, you're probably more insecure than you realize.

You see, we're insecure, we want to be loved, we want to feel safe, we want to belong, we want to flourish, and those we love too. And so we want to control our world so that we can be like at the center, we can get those things.

But hasn't COVID showed us we're not in control of our world? If you thought you were in 2019, you have been very severely disillusioned.

The world is not, is uncertain place. People are not always safe. And the reason we hurry, the reason we strive to prove ourselves, the reason we feel like we've never done enough to really earn, to really be able to rest well, is because deep down we know that we're not totally acceptable. If you're honest. Because if others really knew what was inside of you, even if your loved ones knew everything that you actually really thought, that would be a scary prospect.

[30 : 11] And so what we want to do, we want to do anything we can to cover up, to prove and to show that we're worthy of love, we're worthy of respect, we're worthy of being noticed. That's why we're so busy all the time. And you know, what some people do with that is then they try and find their worth in religion.

Religion tells you, you've messed up, you've sinned, but now just do some really good spiritual things. And that will kind of, that will get you in the right place.

You know, read your Bible, go to church, give some money, give money in the offering, give even more, because then you might get a bit more kind of a sense of peace in your heart. Be a good person, help the granny across the road.

Even if she doesn't want to cross, just help her anyway. Anyway. But then the next time that you screw up and shame and guilt come upon you, what have you got to do? You've just got to keep on that treadmill.

It's never ending. But we've quoted this before, but I think this is really pertinent. The fourth century theologian, Augustine, said, because you have made us for yourself, our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.

[31 : 29] You see what he's saying? He's saying there's only one place where you can be fully known and fully loved. And that's through Jesus Christ. You see what Jesus says in this passage?

He says, it's your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Now what's he talking about? The kingdom is the place where we are living in right, satisfying relationship under his rule.

It's where we belong. It's where we are loved. It's where we flourish in him and he gets all the glory. He's at the center. What he's saying is this.

The man whose greed led him to strive ceaselessly to find life in his bank balance and then for the future, he says, God has already got an abundance of life for us.

He's not stingy. He wants, no, not just he wants, he actually gets pleasure from giving the kingdom to us. Do you see that?

[32 : 31] It brings a smile to his face. He's not going, oh, well, I guess I better be generous to them. That's my job as God. No, it gives him this overwhelming pleasure for us to find satisfaction in him.

You see, Jesus is saying to those who are trying to control our worry, our world through worry, through restless striving. He says, come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Anyone feel restless? You see, how does he give us rest? Well, the God of the whole universe, the one who sustains us, the one who's got the past, the present, and the future all in his hands right now, the one who's actually in control of your circumstances, whatever you're going through right now, the one who has all of that, he has the world on his shoulders, so you don't have to take the weight of the world on your shoulders.

But more than that, more than even just trusting him with your circumstances, he says to insecure people like you and me, unacceptable people, that he's made in exchange, that he says, I take your life and I give you mine.

Because on the cross, he's taking all the heap of our restless worries and our guilt and our shame, and he says, I took that on myself. He was weighed down with the burden of your sin, your guilt, your striving, that you could rest in him.

[34 : 12] And that rest doesn't mean you're just sitting on the sofa, it means heart rest. It means you can go to work and be busy, but actually you don't have to prove yourself. It means he is the sacrifice for you, so you do not need to make yourself worthy.

It means the God who rules the world came down in Jesus and it was his pleasure to crush Jesus. That's what Isaiah 53 says. Jesus is the one person who knows the depths that your heart can sink to.

Do you know why he knows? Because he's experienced it on the cross. He's experienced the weight of your anger, the weight of your frustration, the weight of everything that you go through. He has felt that and taken it, and yet with the full knowledge of how bad you and I can be, yet he doesn't reject us, he doesn't turn away from us, he doesn't do all the things that we fear from everybody else around us.

Instead, he runs towards us and his death brings forgiveness to us, cleanses us, and he says, it's my good pleasure to give you the kingdom. I want that for you. I've done that so you can come and be set free from worshipping everything else, being slaves to everything else so that you can find freedom in me.

And that's the place of rest. And he calls us to follow him on that way of freedom and flourishing. The place where you're fully known and fully loved.

[35 : 43] You know, I often meet either some older people going up the steps in the MTR and they're carrying these really heavy loads. And I often stop and say, hey, do you want a hand?

Can I give you a hand? And many of them say no. And what I see them doing is they're kind of like puffing and panting, they're exhausted, they're kind of swearing under their breath, they're complaining about everything, and they're getting up here and I'm like, are you sure you don't want a hand?

And they're going, no. And I look at them and go, you know, it was really simple, I could have just given you a hand up. Why don't they?

Well, it's because of our pride. It's because we want to feel like we've done it. It's because we want to go, there we go, I managed it by myself.

I might have destroyed everyone else in the process, but I managed it. You see, what keeps us restless when rest is available for us in our everyday lives is our pride.

[36 : 46] It's because we often prefer a religion or a non-religion of performance to a place of rest. But the good news of Christianity is for anyone who's willing to lay down your pride, for anyone who's willing to say, I don't have to be in control of my life.

I don't have to prove myself. Jesus has done everything to say, there's a gift for you today of rest. It's not grudging kind of acceptance.

There's a gift. And if you are not a Christian today, my challenge is, will you take the offer and receive the gift of his rest to you?

Or do you want to just carry on your life on that treadmill? Because Christ has done everything for us. If you are a Christian, you know, there's someone I know who their relationship with their dad was really strained.

Growing up, he'd been really critical, controlling. Nothing they did was ever good enough. They could never say no to him. They were constantly compared with other people, with their siblings or others, and they never felt they were good enough.

[38 : 12] And no matter how successful they were, and they tried really hard to be successful and to please, they always felt like a failure. And they lived with this resentment inside of them.

And they often tried to avoid their dad because he always made them feel like a failure. Until the penny dropped for them, that Jesus didn't just die to send you to heaven.

Jesus died to take their shame, to take their guilt, to even take that sense of failure. God was pleased through what Christ has done, not through their performance, but totally independent of their dad's approval.

They had a status. They had a place of freedom. They had a place where they were worthy. They were no longer slaves to his expectations. And that set them free.

I think many of us still live in places where maybe from our past, maybe from things that people have said to us, we're in bondage.

[39 : 25] And the gospel kind of stays up here in our heads, but it's not sunk down into our hearts in these areas. And what it did for this person, it set them free to draw healthy boundaries and to actually say no to their dad when they had to.

It set them free to apologize to their dad for resentment. It set them free to pity him and to seek how to love him rather than how to avoid him. And every time when there used to be constant stress before he rang and they're going, what does he want now?

Then they had this peaceful rest because they knew my heavenly father, my heavenly father, his opinion counts most. You see, make God your treasure and he gives you value.

You find a place of freedom. You find a place of rest. Look anywhere else, anywhere else, and you will find yourself enslaved, constantly chasing, neglecting the people who really matter.

Christ came to set us free. That's not just a one-off thing in the past. That's for us today, every day.