

July 3, 2022
Pastor Aaron Johnson

Alright, if you guys have not noticed yet, this morning we are a little bit off of the map. Pastor John called me yesterday and let me know that he and Jeannine both tested positive for COVID. And he said, "You're up tomorrow! You are preaching!" Then he gave me his notes. And I'm grateful for his notes, because I feel like a young pastor learning under a great master and now I get to see how he organizes his thoughts. He'd been kind of holding that back from me! But I also simultaneously felt a little bit like David when he went to fight Goliath and Saul gave him his sword. And when he lifted it up, he was like, "Nah, this is a little bit too big for me." So, we are going to set those notes aside and Pastor John will either preach them next Sunday or I will have a week to prepare them and I will preach them next Sunday.

What we're going to look at this morning, we're going to be in Luke, chapter 12, verse 22. So, pull out your Bibles. We're going to take a look at that passage. Now, one of the things I love about Pastor John's stories, when he starts a sermon, he starts usually along the lines of, "So, this one time when I was preaching in this other congregation..." Do you guys realize that in my development, you're that congregation? Twenty years from now, I'm going to start a sermon, "So, there I was at Central Church..." But it is the Fourth of July weekend and so I'm going to tell a couple of army stories because that's what I know right now. Would you guys stand with me as we read from God's word, if you can, please. Luke, chapter 12, verse 22.

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 storehouse 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? If then you are not able to do as small a 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, O 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 your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags 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 will your hearts be also.

This is the word of the Lord and we are grateful for it. Please be seated. Now, in December, I retired from the National Guard. And it's been several months since I retired and yet, still, my service in the National Guard is the one thing that I have done the longest in my life. I enlisted in the army before I married my wife and I just recently retired. And yet, still, my service in the military was longer than I was married to my wife. Now I am retired and so I'm looking forward to the day when I will no longer be able to say that it was the longest thing that I've ever done. But right now it's still the longest thing that I've ever done. And I am so grateful for that experience, and for the men and the women that I served with, and the mentors that I had, and the lessons that I learned that brought me here today. So, there I was. It amazes me, the Fourth of July of all

holidays, how often I found myself training on that weekend. I spent 27 years preparing for war. And so there we were, getting ready to do another exercise and the battalion had to move in a “movement to contact.” Now, a movement to contact is you have the enemy over here and you have the friendly forces over there and they are both moving together. They don't yet know where one another are and they're going to come into contact and then they're going to sort out who's going to win the battle. It's the worst of all ways to do it because it's a one to one ratio. You have a fifty-fifty chance of winning that battle. Fortunately, I was working for a guy named Kevin and Kevin had this uncanny ability to say, “That place on the map, right there. That is where we've got to get to and that is where this battle is going to be determined.” My job was to tell him what I thought the enemy was going to do. And so, I briefed him, “This is what the enemy is going to do.” And in complete Kevin character, he said, “Right there, Aaron, right there. That's where we've got to get to. We're going to get there first. We're going to set up a defensive position. When the enemy comes, we're going to show him what we're made of.” And so we did. We started our exercise and off we went and it turns out that in that particular exercise, the enemy was moving slower than they normally did, and we got to that spot with plenty of time. And so we built our trap: three companies lined up, set up our kill zone, established our coordination of fire, incorporated our artillery and our air support. And now all we had to do was wait. And the enemy came. Now in the defensive position, they need a ratio of three to one. So if we have a battalion and a defense, they need to show up with three battalions just to have a fifty-fifty chance at winning that battle. That's the advantage that that defensive position gives you. To be sure of winning that battle, you've got to have a seven to one ratio. And so, we knew we were in a good spot. And the enemy moved into our kill zone, hundreds and hundreds of tanks, armored personnel vehicles, and infantry. Now granted, this is all a giant video game, so please don't stress out about it. We're just learning how to do this so that if the country ever called us up, we would be ready. And then tragedy struck. Charlie Company, for whatever reason, picked up out of their defensive position and attacked into the kill zone. They gave up that three to one or seven to one advantage in exchange for a one to one advantage. And my mentor, Kevin, I looked over to where he was sitting in the command center and his head was in his hands as his plan was falling apart. Charlie Company was wiped out like that, which meant we were now at 66% combat power, which meant we could no longer go on the offense. And, if we survived that attack, we were out of the battle. Now, I don't remember who it was, but I do distinctly remember that the Charlie Company commander, at that time, was not a skilled officer. And I remember turning to Kevin and saying, “Sir, don't worry about it. We all know whose fault this was.” And he looked up at me and he said, “Aaron, sometimes it's not about whose fault it is. Sometimes, the only real question is: Now what?” And I remember in that moment thinking, “What we do on the battlefield is defined by reality. We don't get the battlefield that we want or the reality that we want. We only get what we've got for real.”

In the passage that we were reading this morning, I think there are three realities that Jesus is sharing with the disciples. And these three realities, if we're not careful, we are going to miss them. And if we miss them, we are going to find ourselves committing our hearts to the wrong things. So, let's look at those three realities. The first one: life is more than food and clothing. Today's passage is part of the follow-up for a discussion that began with an inheritance dispute. A man came to Jesus and said, “Hey, make my brother split my inheritance with me.” And Jesus said, “Who made me the judge of you?” And he told a parable and in that parable was a man who produced a whole bunch of grain, so much so that he had to tear down his old barns and build new barns

so that he could store all of the grain that he had produced. And he said, "Now what are we going to do?" And Jesus said, "You fool, at this moment your soul is being required of you." And that man had to go before the Judge of all eternity. Who got what had been stored in his barns? It wasn't him.

I remember I was asked to be a guest speaker to a Junior ROTC program in Yakima. And I remember I was thinking, "What am I going to tell these kids? I don't relate to kids anymore. I just don't." I know! I've got one and I'm not looking forward to the day when she asks me questions where I'm just going to roll my eyes and go, "You know, I don't get why that's a problem." But I don't relate to kids anymore. And so, I get invited to talk to juniors and seniors in a Junior ROTC program. And I was driving home from work and I was thinking, what am I going to tell these kids? How am I going to inspire them? And I remembered hearing on the radio a news story about a little old lady whose husband had passed away and she had found his army uniform, and she was just so grateful that he could be buried in his uniform. And I remember thinking to myself, "What does that get him? What good is that? When I report to the hereafter, will I get to lay out my medals? Will I get to pull up my bank account?" And so, I went to the backyard. And I had a big backyard at the time and I was throwing a tennis ball for my golden retriever. Do you know how difficult it is to be unhappy when you are throwing a tennis ball for a golden retriever? And so there I was just tossing the ball and she was bringing it back and I was thinking, "What am I going to tell these kids? What am I going to tell these kids?" And then I had an epiphany: the voice in my head. (I see a lot of you out there with gray hair. You know what I mean!) The voice in my head is the same voice as when I was a junior or senior in high school. When I hear my own thoughts, I hear the voice of that young man. That has not changed. And when I get to the hereafter, the only thing I get to report with is: "Who is that voice?"

Alexander the Great, we were told, being upon his deathbed, commanded that when he was carried forth to the grave, his hands should not be wrapped as was usual in grave-clothes, but should be left outside the bier so that all men might see them and might see that they were empty, that there was nothing in them. He was born to one empire and the conqueror of another, the possessor, while he lived, of two worlds; of the east and the west and of the treasures of both. Yet now, when he was dead, could retain not even the smallest portion of those treasures. The poorest beggar and he were at length upon equal terms. Timothy writes, "For we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world." The first reality that should influence our priorities is that you take none of your possessions with you when you leave this world and life is about more than food and clothing.

So, consider the ravens and the lilies. I'm going to be the first to admit that I am often anxious about the future. I remember when I first got married, the moment before the whole wedding service started, I had a small panic attack. I had never been responsible for anybody other than myself up to that point, and I was barely doing a good job at that. And yet, now I am responsible for the most beautiful woman in the entire world. She's mine. I've got to make sure that she can eat and have something to wear. And add my daughter on top of that. I'm often, in the back of my head, hearing thoughts of, "What are we going to do? What are we going to do? How are we going to pay the bills? How are we going to pay the bills?" I've never gone hungry and yet I'm constantly worrying about these things. And I know you guys share those same worries. It would be unnatural for us not to. And yet, life is about more than that. The ravens don't worry about it. The lilies don't worry about it. And yet, we are more valuable than they. We are more valuable than they. How do you know? Is it because God has given us enough to

eat? Is it because God has given us enough to wear? No, it's because God has given us His very Kingdom. He did not do that for the ravens. He did not do that for the lilies. He did not even do that for the angels that fell. During the inter-testamental period, there evolved the expectation that the kingdom would become a reality; when, at the outset of the final age, God's intervention would deliver his people, the Hebrew nation, from oppression. The majority of the people in Jesus' day expected the kingdom of God to deal with the political situation. They expected the kingdom of God to be ushered in by the throwing off of the Romans. National deliverance would bring freedom from Rome and the restoration of political power and prestige of the Hebrew nation. Natural productivity would be greatly increased, prosperity would be greatly increased, peace would be established between people, justice would prevail, God's purposes in history would be realized. And yet, this all still sounds like a people who were worried about what they were going to eat and what they were going to wear. Was that all that the kingdom of God was going to be? I prefer how Adam Clarke describes God's kingdom. Commenting on verse 32 of this passage, he says, "Our Lord intimates, God has already given you that kingdom which consists in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, and has undertaken to protect and save you to the uttermost. Therefore, fear not, for Omnipotence itself has undertaken your cause." While God was feeding the ravens and clothing the lilies, He was preparing to give you the Kingdom. Imagine, the King of the universe, and we are worried about what we're going to eat and what we're going to wear! When I consider what He has done to give us His kingdom, it becomes harder and harder to be anxious about anything. And get this, Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall not thirst. But I say to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of Him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." This is what life is all about. If we say that life is not about food and life is not about clothing, we've got to ask the question, "What is it about?" It's about the King of the universe. This is the second reality that we exist in: that kingdom is already yours. What are you anxious about? What would you ask God for? A steak? Or a mansion? Would you have dared to ask Him for His kingdom so that you can live with Him for eternity? And yet, He has given it to you.

Now, Jesus reverts to the comparison of saying, "Sell all of your possessions and give to the needy." And yet, there isn't a Christian in this room who is possession-less. I have not sold all of my possessions. I don't believe for a second that Jesus is saying that we need to sell all of our possessions in order to gain eternity. But what he is saying is that our priorities need to line up with reality. Our success is not determined by how much we have or what we eat. Our success is determined by true treasures. So, what are those? The writer of Hebrews, after listing the great cloud of witnesses, encouraged his readers by reminding them to: "Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and then was seated at the right hand of the throne of God." What was the joy that was set before Jesus that allowed him to endure the cross? Look around, Christian, it's you and I. The joy that was set before Jesus was the knowledge that because of what he did, you could join him in eternity. He was thinking of you. He prayed specifically for that. "Father, I desire that they also whom You have given me, may be with me where I am to see my glory that You have given me, because You loved me before the foundation of

the world. O Righteous Father, even though the world does not know You, I know You, and these know that You have sent me. I made known to them Your name and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and that I myself may be in them." You and I are the joy that was set before Jesus. Now, the moment you accepted Him as your King, the moment you accepted His offer of salvation, it stopped being about you. We are now to share in the joy that was set before Jesus. How many people in our community are lost and waiting to hear that Jesus has given them the Kingdom, too? We are to take our possessions and to trade them for real wealth. And that wealth is sitting right here and that wealth is waiting out there in a world that is lost and dying. And so, when I said at the beginning of this sermon that the only thing I will be able to report to in the hereafter is the voice in my head, that is not entirely true, because we will all report together. I will look to my left and I will see you and I will look to my right and I will see my other friends and family who have also accepted Jesus. And we will rejoice because that is the moment when we will know what true treasure really is. When we encourage one another to persevere, when we deliver the message of hope to a lost and dying world and the Holy Spirit gets ahold of them and they say, "I, too, want to be saved," we are building real treasure that cannot be taken, stolen, rusted away. The third reality that should influence our priorities is that each of us represents a crown or a jewel in heaven and every lost soul is also a potential crown or jewel. Are we pursuing that well? Our mission here at Central Church is to make disciples. How are we doing?

So, I'm going to leave you with those three realities. We have to make sure that our focus is in the right place and on the right things, starting with the recognition that our lives are about more than food and clothing. Our Father in heaven has already given His kingdom to us. And we; you, me, and those lost souls outside our doors, are the only treasure that will remain and retain an eternal value. So, I'm going to leave you with two final thoughts. First, Jesus knew that his disciples were anxious about their lives. Jesus was speaking to His disciples. When he charged them with being of little faith, he was charging them with not believing these three realities. What would our lives look like if we knew they were about more than food and clothing? What would our lives look like if we knew that our Father had already given us His kingdom? And what would our lives look like if we knew that the lost souls outside our doors or the Christian inside our doors, who was about to give up, were the real treasures? And then, why don't our lives look that way? And, second, where's your heart this morning? Are you anxious about the things of this world or have you given yourself to the reality that is provided for us by God Himself? Have your possessions captured your hearts or do your hearts beat for the joy of God? What would you be willing to give in order to reach one of God's lost children?

Martha Nicholson, bedridden and suffering from four incurable diseases, wrote a beautiful poem.

Let me hold lightly things of this earth.
Transient treasures, what are they worth?
Moths can corrupt them, rust can decay;
All their bright beauty fades in a day.
Let me hold lightly temporal things,
I who am deathless, I who wear wings!
Let me hold fast, Lord, things of the skies.
Quicken my vision, open my eyes!
Show me Thy riches, glory and grace,

Boundless as time is, endless as space!
Let me hold lightly things that are mine,
Lord, Thou hast given me all that is Thine!

Let's make sure that our hearts are pursuing the treasures of eternity.