

Sermon: Are You Rich?

Text: Luke 12:13-21

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Introduction: The Scriptures tell us we are to love God and our neighbors, not money. Some people love money to the exclusion of God and others. They choose Money over all other relationships. Jesus insists that is a thoughtless choice. Greed is one of the deadly sins for a reason. Even two millennia later - greed, avarice, covetousness, whatever you call it, still alienates us from God, family and our fellow man.

Fred Craddock tells the story: “When I was still in Oklahoma, I was asked by one of the people in the development office if I would talk to a man who had lots of money and was interested in improving the quality of the preaching in the church. He did not belong to my church, but he had money and you kind of forget...You become ecumenical when you’re after the money, you see. He had a lot of money, and he was growling around about the church needing to improve the teaching and preaching and all.

Development said, ‘Would you go talk to him?’

I said, ‘Yeah, make the appointment,’ and they made the appointment.

I arrived to find him rushing out the door and saying, ‘I’ve got to make a trip. Why don’t you just go with me?’

I said, ‘Where are you going?’

He said, ‘I have to go out to one of my ranches.’

So I said, ‘All right.’ I thought it was down the road. We went out to a little airstrip, a pilot and plane were waiting. We got on the plane and zoom. We landed at another airstrip in about forty-five minutes, where there was a car and somebody waiting. I thought, *My land, I’m in the tall cotton here. This is big stuff.* We started out early, it was the early morning, in the spring, late March, early April, and it was damp and cool. We started driving down through these fields, fields of green. Winter wheat was coming up, and the cattle were on it. Black angus cattle as far as you could see, and he was saying, ‘This is mine, and this is mine, and this is mine, and this is mine.’ I didn’t mind because I wanted to go home saying, ‘This is mine.’

We drove up to this rural farmhouse, a fairly large old house, and I said, ‘It’s almost lunchtime, I don’t like to go to someone’s house at lunch.’ He said, ‘That’s all right; we’ll eat with them. That’s where my manager lives.’

We got there, and a man named Clyde something came out. I shook his hand, they talked, we went inside. As we went inside the house, I saw to the left what was the den or living room with a huge stone fireplace. Someone, a woman, had just put on the largest -- I guess three-foot-long -- piece of wood on the fire. Clyde said, 'Just go in and warm yourself.' I went in, backed up to the fire, and they talked cattle. They talked cattle for quite awhile. After a while I heard a door creak just a little bit, then Clyde said to me, 'Well, lunch is ready, let's go eat.'

We went into what was really the kitchen, the eating area, and just as we did I saw the back of a woman move out of the room. The three of us ate, lots of good country food and milk and apple pie -- very good. Clyde said, 'Well, might as well go back to the fire.' As we turned to go back to the fire, I saw the back of a woman putting another log on the fire and then disappearing down another way. I don't know who she was. I warmed myself awhile, and then I thought, I'm going to go see who that is. I went to the door, into where we had been eating, and there she sat with her back to me. Little gray clump of hair, and she was eating by herself. I wanted to go in and say, 'Can I have another cup of coffee?' and just sit with her, I mean she's eating by herself. But I knew if I walked in there and said, 'Can I have another cup of coffee?' she'd had gotten up with her plate and said, 'Sure, I was through anyway.'

I knew what she would do. I didn't know what to do. I just didn't do anything. They got through talking cattle, then he said, 'Time to go.' I said, 'Okay, but I'd like to thank the lady for the excellent lunch.'

'I'll tell her,' Clyde said.

I said, 'Well, I would like to thank her.'

'I'll tell her you liked it.'

I said, 'All right.' We started out to the car, and I said to my host, 'I would like to have thanked the lady for the fine meal.'

'Clyde'll tell her.'

I said, 'Well, it really was a good meal.'

He said, 'Yeah, she's a good cook.'

I said, 'Who is she?'

He said, 'That's Clyde's wife.'

I said, 'What's her name?'

And he said, 'Uh, uh, uh, I think her name is Ruth.' Clyde's been managing his place seventeen years, and he thinks her name is Ruth?

The parable we have in Luke's gospel is unique and only found here. And God, Himself, appears personally in the story - not someone representing Him.

Firstly, let's look at what precedes Jesus' teaching.

I. Pretext and Problem (vv. 13-14)

Luke 12:13-14 (NIV) ¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." ¹⁴Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"

A. The man did not care about Jesus.

Jesus is in the middle of important teaching about how disciples are to act in the Kingdom. Jesus is interrupted mid-sentence by a rude member of the large crowd around him. Jesus had just finished talking about hypocrisy and blasphemy and the courage and faith it takes to follow. And just like a clueless toddler asks Jesus if cats go to heaven.

In all fairness, the man was trying to use Jesus' new-found prestige and position as a rabbi to side with him in a legal fight against his family. But he could have cared less about Jesus' agenda.

It is like the businessman that selects a church based on what the members might add to his bottom line rather than what he might add to the life of the Christian community. Pictures of fish and crosses on business cards are not always what they appear to be.

Not only did the man not care about Jesus;

B. The man did not care about his brother.

We have all seen it: the ugly disputes over estates, family members rifling through drawers as grandma is dying in I.C.U., the arguments that occur over the smallest of items.

In our story apparently a younger brother is trying to coerce his older brother into a division of property. There were laws to cover this, and authorities who could decide for him - but he could not wait to get his inheritance. So, he interrupts Jesus. "The clear implication is that the petitioner will not have his problem solved if his brother does grant him his portion of the inheritance." - **Hendrickx, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 100.** For a person who is covetous and greedy, nothing is ever enough. There can be no satisfaction no matter what is gained (even the whole world).

Jesus sees through this plea for justice for what it really is and offers a:

II. Proposal and Proverb (v. 15)

Luke 12:15 (NIV) ¹⁵Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

The *them*, here, is possibly the two brothers, but also most certainly the large crowd of listeners. Luke also knew in telling this story that greed was a problem in the church.

I Timothy 6:10 (NIV) ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Jesus tells his audience:

A. Be on guard (v. 15a).

It is something we must do to avoid the folly of riches. Someone has said, “We sell what nobody needs, but the problem with the human heart is we need what nobody sells.”

Only God can satisfy the deep desires of the heart: to be loved not for what we do or don’t do, but because of who Jesus is. We are “good” people not because of what we own, but whom we know.

“We face a constant onslaught of advertisements enticing us to believe the lie of greed: from 1980-2004, the amount spent on children’s advertising in America rose from \$100 million dollars a year to \$15 billion a year.” *-Affluenza: The Disease of Greed by Joshua Harris*. I wonder if the church has kept pace and also spent 150 times as much in any important area.

In our text the verb translated “be on guard” is a present imperative, in other words, we are under constant threat of succumbing to this seduction of greed. We are commanded to be ever vigilant. Like a good gardener we need to watch what is growing up in our lives.

Mark 4:19 (NIV) ¹⁹but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

B. Be wise about life (v. 15b).

Here Jesus answers what everyone has asked out loud: “What is the meaning of life?” Jesus intentionally uses a Greek word for life (*zoe*) that means so much more than biological life. Greed can produce confusion as to questions of ownership. Jesus was dealing with far more important issues than belongings or real estate holdings.

Jesus is not saying wealth is wrong, but when it becomes more important than God and his will, it degenerates into idolatry.

King Solomon “threw such lavish parties that one day’s food supply included butchering 30 head of cattle, 100 sheep, deer, chickens and 500 bushels of flour and meal. His palace was so impressive it took a construction crew of 150,000 over 13 years to build. He earned 25 tons of gold a year. ‘It’s all meaningless,’ He said. I turned my head to see another human wisp of smoke working into the night, driven by greed for more stuff, never bothering to ask, ‘Why am I working like a dog never having any fun.’ Solomon was the smartest guy who ever lived. He collected more stuff than we could ever dream. If he said it was a waste, why go down that road? It ruined Solomon.” - *Ortberg, John, It All Goes Back in the Box, Zondervan, 2007, p. 192*

III. Parable (vv. 16-20)

Luke 12:16-20 (NIV) ¹⁶And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ ¹⁸“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ ²⁰“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

A. Presupposition (vv. 16-19)

1. Some people wrongly think that wealth is meant to be kept for oneself.

Wealth is meant to be shared, and as a Christian, we especially need to help others with what God has blessed us. As Americans, even the poorest among us, are rich.

The handling of wealth is a moral/ethical decision as well as a spiritual one. The question that must be asked is: does our wealth enhance our service to God or only self? Paul goes so far as to say “contributing to the needs of others” is a spiritual gift of God to the church (**Romans 12:8**).

Compared to the average Haitian we are stinking rich. Some of the hardest moral/ethical questions we will face are something like: “How much do I really need, and how much is too much?” What we earn is meant to be shared (**Eph. 4:28**).

Look at this section of our text: I, I, I, my, my, my, mine, mine, mine. When you are the only important person you know, you have crashes like what happened in Olympic short-track speed skating. Maybe you saw it where two South Koreans were racing ahead of Apolo Ohno and J.R. Celski in the 1500 meter event when one of the Korean racers cut off the other. Trying to be first they lost everything.

2. Some people believe tomorrow will always be available to them.

There are people out there who do not believe in God. They have deluded themselves into believing they have all the time they want to do whatever their heart desires. Time has a way of getting away. I am reminded of that every time I look in the mirror or when I see friends from my childhood and see how old *they* look.

Some people never see retirement, others never live long enough to enjoy it. No one is guaranteed tomorrow. As Christians we need to make the most of whatever time we have for his glory.

Not some character representing God, but God himself offers:

B. Presentencing (v. 20)

Like a demand-note at the bank, his loan was being called in. Our lives are on loan from God, and we need to live wisely. For what are you preparing: the here and now, the future, or eternity? Death will separate us from what we think are *our* things. The rich man’s “formula for the good life is sheer stupidity.” - **Hendrickx, p. 103**. He has been tricked as if he had invested everything with Bernard Madoff.

The person who does not allow for God in his life is called a fool by God. It is reckless and inconsiderate to not think of what happens after this life.

Everyone will experience judgment. And for this kind of person, here is the:
IV. Prognosis (v. 21)

Luke 12:21 (NIV) ²¹“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

The first part of this verse is about a perceived outcome and:

A. Prophecy (v. 21a)

This is fair warning to all who can hear and understand these principles. If we only think about ourselves we will be doomed. We need to determine what is enough for us and share what is left. Another caution is found in Scripture:

Proverbs 30:8-9 (NIV) ⁸Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. ⁹Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

There is more than one kind of:

B. Poverty (v. 21b)

Poverty in material things is a hardship, but poverty in spiritual issues is a needless shame. It will seal your eternal fate. That is why Paul, one of Luke’s mentors, gives another caution to Timothy.

I Timothy 6:17-19 (NIV) ¹⁷Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

“Richness towards God means responding to life and blessings in a way that he desires, in a way that honors him - through service and compassion.” - Bock, *Luke*, pp. 344-345

Conclusion: Parables are known for their surprise heroes or villains. Many times there are great reversals of fortunes: a beggar is found in the bosom of Abraham and a rich man is in torture (**Luke 16**) after they both die.

It seems to me that whether we are rich or poor, greed can be a problem in our relationships. Yet the Bible is clear. We need to be rich towards God. We need to be trustworthy stewards of what we have been given. This life is either the beginning or the end of our relationship with God. How we define wealth and its value will provide for the life to come.

Leo Tolstoy once wrote a story about a successful peasant farmer who was not satisfied with his lot. He wanted more of everything. One day he received a novel offer. For 1000 rubles, he could buy all the land he could walk around in a day. The only catch in the deal was that he had to be back at his starting point by sundown. Early the next morning he started out walking at a fast pace. By midday he was very tired, but he kept going, covering more and more ground. Well into the afternoon he realized that his greed had taken him far from the starting point. He quickened his pace and as the sun began to sink low in the sky, he began to run, knowing that if he did not make it back by sundown the opportunity to become an even bigger landholder would be lost. As the sun began to sink below the horizon he came within sight of the finish line. Gasping for breath, his heart pounding, he called upon every bit of strength left in his body and staggered across the line just before the sun disappeared. He immediately collapsed, blood streaming from his mouth. In a few minutes he was dead. Afterwards, his servants dug a grave. It was not much over six feet long and three feet wide. The title of Tolstoy's story was: *How Much Land Does a Man Need?* *Bits & Pieces*, November, 1991.

***Are You Rich* in the only way that matters? Don't run after worldly riches, run to God. He alone can satisfy. He will make you rich!**