

Caution Ahead: *Storage Wars*
Luke 12:13-21

"...for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Introduction: There are aspects of our life with Christ that we can easily take for granted by failing to examine what they are really for. For instance, when I think life is about me, prayer becomes an endless ask for ease, comfort, or the things I want, rather than reflecting back to God His endless worth and making requests that reflect our desire to be continually dependent on Him. Another area that we take for granted from a perspective of purpose and intention is in the area of finances. We live in a time and place of unprecedented and historic wealth, and it should cause us to ask questions that instead often go by the wayside: *what is money for? How do I glorify God with my money, possessions, spending, etc? What does God require? What would I do in life if I did not need to worry about money anymore? What would life look like tomorrow if I did not **have** to work tomorrow?*

When we don't ask these type of questions and fail to answer them Biblically, we run the risk of wasting a gracious gift from God and acting like those who not only do not know God, but are not seeking to glorify Him. Here is a video of commentary made by a leading observer of our culture as they try to unpack the thinking behind our spending habits (note: this does not come from a Christian perspective): *show video*.

We come to a passage of caution from Jesus that moves from being aware of the fears we have to being aware of our propensity of covetousness, having a wrong view and desire for money. This will be a test of how we view our life, possessions, and desires in this world, with the hope that we have a clear, Biblical understanding of these areas so that we are operating knowledge, not forced ignorance.

A Principle of Riches (12:13-15)

Luke 12:13-15 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14 But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 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 one's possessions.**

In the middle of his discourse to the disciples, he was interrupted by a man who wanted Jesus to settle a civil suit. Actually, settle would be the wrong word. This man did not want Jesus to arbitrate but to execute judgment by telling his brother to divide up the inheritance. We are not given much context to the motive, fairness, or terms of the request, but simply that this man went to Jesus as a Rabbi, who had pull, to get what he wanted, or at least what he felt he deserved.

There are two quick observations at this point:

- 1) This is too often the case in counseling, where the request is not how one party can be more gracious, giving, or loving, but the request is to levy who is wrong (the "other" party) and who needs to change (the "other" party)
- 2) If you want to see what people really believe or how strong a family truly is, have an inheritance to divide up without clear lines of communication or with a disproportionate amount given to each. Far too often the focus becomes on what each individual thinks they are entitled to, how much they received compared to the others, or how much they felt slighted. You want to see a family brawl and fall apart, get money involved.

With this question Jesus answered with another question (as He often did). Who made Him an arbiter or judge over these issues? Not only was His mission and ministry not about these things, but He entrusted

these issue to the ruling laws of the land of the day. Much like His teaching on giving taxes to Caesar (Mark 12:13-17), we are to submit to the law of the land in civil issues such as contracts, leases, and taxes. This was not the time or place to settle these disputes.

What this seemingly inappropriate interruption DID do was gave a transition in Jesus' teaching. Seizing the opportunity, Jesus switched gears to speak to our storage of riches and heart behind what we do with those same riches. There are a few preliminary questions to answer before unpacking the main principle He taught.

- **Who are the rich**

Sometimes when we read a passage about those who are rich, we let our minds drift toward those rich people He's referring to. But if we are objective about the subject, we understand that WE are the rich, or at least should consider ourselves rich since we have more than we need in any given day. According to globalissues.org, 80% of the world's population lives on less than \$10 a day. This means that options are limited, choice is limited, access to medical care and nutrition is limited, and having something to give someone else is limited.¹ Now whether that stat is exactly accurate, our observations and experience in other countries bear this out. The fact that we have more than we need, can decide *what* to eat and wear, and have excess at the end of the day, by definition, makes us rich. All that means is that this passage is not about those who live in Malibu, but those who live in Simi Valley (and even Moorpark, and especially Camarillo.)

- **Why is coveting such big deal**

Now the issue Jesus addresses is NOT being rich, but the issue of **covetousness**. Though riches and covetousness can go hand in hand, they are not inseparable. The Bible does not condemn riches, but warns against our hearts view of money, the desire for it, and the misuse of it. Coveting has to do with our lack of contentment, desiring more than we have, or desiring what someone else has. Coveting is common to every person and is a result of a discontentment with God Himself. The love of riches comes with clear warnings in Scripture:

Money cannot, by nature, satisfy, so the love of money is vanity –

Ecclesiastes 5:10 He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.

Coveting money can cause us to trust it, forgetting our dependency on God (Deut. 8:11-14)

"Take care lest you **FORGET the LORD your God** by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I commanded you today, lest **when you have eaten and are full and have built houses and lives in them**, and whne your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, **then your heart be lifted up and you FORGET the LORD your God...**

Money is unstable and fleeting (like a mirage), so wisdom is needed (Prov. 24:4-5)

"Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven."

A love of money causes all kinds of sin –

1 Timothy 6:6-10 Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment,⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.⁹ **But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation**, into a snare, into many

¹ <http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats>

senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.¹⁰ **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.** It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

- **What our view of money reveals**

An improper and sinful focus on money reveals our heart, and reveals something that needs to change. There are two things that coveting money reveals:

Identity – Notice how Jesus frames this principle of covetousness: *for one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions.* This is a statement of identity, how we find our value or worth in what we own. There are several ways this plays out with us.

- 1) We find identity in our career or job, which carries varying degrees of prestige in our culture (NOTE: What's the second question men usually ask each other)
- 2) We find identity in what we own, like a certain car or a house that we own. We can get caught in thinking that success in life is linked to these kinds of possessions.
- 3) This is revealed as our identity particularly when these are withheld or taken away. We see life as a failure if we cannot secure those things that our heart and culture touts as having high value.

Idolatry –

Colossians 3:5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and **covetousness, which is idolatry.**

Idolatry is a result of making good things ultimate things, or putting good things in the place that only God can be. Covetousness means that we value something greater than God, and seek after that with a heart that is supposed to love God completely. Covetousness as idolatry is seen:

- 1) When we neglect the greater things, lasting things, to make MORE money – Whenever making money is substituted for leadership in the home, service in the Body, or a personal relationship with the Lord, we are living an idolatrous life
- 2) When we begin to COMPARE our life and possessions with that of others, we begin to grow in discontentment with God and all He's given.
- 3) Again, idolatry is revealed when things are taken away, withheld, or we are willing to violate clear commands of God to get what we want.

A Parable of Riches (12:16-20)

Luke 12:16-20 And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully,¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'¹⁸ 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.'¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'

- **What the rich man was NOT condemned for**

As we look at the story Jesus told, we must make sure we remember a few things. One, He told a story that was grounded in the culture so everyone would understand exactly what He was talking about. Telling a story of a wealthy farmer would have been understood by everyone. The story would have been clear, and for the disciples, the meaning should have been as well. Two, we must see the story for

the single point Jesus was making and not draw any conclusions that Jesus did not intend. In this story, the rich man was called into question for being a fool, since he made foolish decisions. However, there were things he did which were just fine. He was not condemned for: 1) Being Rich - riches are given by God 2) Having Extra 3) Storing crops or saving his money.

Working, earning money, saving money, and spending money are not inherently sinful, wrong, or contrary to God's will. However, it was this man's **heart, desire, and action** with His money that took a tragic misstep.

- **What the problem truly was for the rich man**

There were two clear downfalls for this rich man:

1) Notice in verse 16-19 the overuse of the personal pronouns "I" and "my". There are 11 references to himself in a short amount of time. It was clear he believed his mass wealth was produced, managed, maintained, and produced for himself. There was no thought of acknowledging God for the fruit of the labor, which as any farmer knows, they are the most dependent on weather, timing, and climate conditions for their crops. All that was produced was *for* him, not to be shared with others, to the aid of others, or a thought of how to use all of this to make much of God. **Covetousness** turns our focus on ourselves, leading to selfishness, pride, and indulgence. Covetousness and contentment cannot go together, and it is equally opposed to generosity. Covetousness believes that all of life is about me, and money's goal is to make my life better. This is what the rich farmer bought into.

2) The main issue of this farmer was not his amassing of wealth, but what he did with it. He declared to himself: "Soul, you have so much, why don't we simply relax, eat, drink, and be merry the rest of life." God called Him a **fool** for such thinking (which is a deafening accusation), since his life could/would end that very night, and what would happen to all his plans and wealth then!?!?

There are some important principles that this type of covetous reveals about our heart and belief:

- **A desire to stop working reveals that we misunderstand the nature of work** - God created us to work (Genesis 2:15), and has never called us to simply stop in this life. We may be freed up at some point in life from having to make more money, but we are never told to stop working
- **A desire to stop working and self-indulge misunderstands the nature of the resurrection** - "*If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.*" (1 Cor. 15:32). We are deceived into thinking that we have paid our dues, now we deserve some personal enjoyment, pleasure, and entertainment. the problem with this thinking is that we are trying to **bring heaven down to earth**, instead of viewing our lives as aliens and strangers here, fixing our eyes on the things above.
- **A desire to stop working and self-indulge misunderstands the nature of the gospel** - The gospel frees us to worship God and bring Him glory (we all worship, the real issue is the object of that worship). The gospel tells us that our life is no longer our own (Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 6:19-20), our time is not our own (Eph. 5:15-16) and our possessions are not our own. Our life in this world is a vapor, and we need to treat it as such. We are not trying to store things here where thief can steal and moth can destroy, and we are not ever called to stop pursuing or loving God above all else. A cessation of work to self-indulge is like me saying that after 40 years of marriage I want to stop pursuing my wife and enjoy myself for the last 20 years. If I said that to anyone, I would expect you to utter the same word God did to this man: **YOU FOOL!**

Now, here is where we must think hard in our culture. The pull around us is to think unbiblically. Work your 40 years, plan well, and "enjoy" the rest of life. This is often called "retirement". But nowhere in scripture is this the call. Yes, we are to be hard workers, good stewards of the gifts God has given us, and wise with investments, but NEVER is that to be used simply for ourselves, to somehow check out of the flow of ministry, loving of others, or of perpetuating the gospel. Those who no longer have to have an 8-5 job have been given a gift of time to focus solely on the work of the gospel, freed from the daily grind of bringing home a paycheck.

This is as important to 20 year olds today as it is for 70 year olds. Those on the front end need to be clear about what their life is about, what money is for, and how to best spend the days of their youth glorifying God. Too often we are caught chasing a dream of "bigger, better, and more" and realize it is all a mirage when we get there, or fail to get there. We must live wisely, spending our time and money as good stewards, investing in things that last, rather than something that simply can slip through our fingers like so much sand.

For those on the other end, whether retired or facing it, we must be clear on what and why we are living for. John Piper said, "*God has not given us 70-somethings a lifetime of experience with God and with the world to be shelved while we putz around endlessly with our hobbies and games and leisure.*" The work of ministry is never done, and there is much to still do and impart.

Each of these areas calls into question **who we are in Christ**. We should each live in a way that reflect that fact that we are secure in our salvation, that our life is hidden in Christ, and that our future hope is set. It is then that we live the same whether we have wealth or poverty, a job to go to or freedom from it. *How would you live differently today if money were no hindrance? How would you live if you knew you only had a certain number of days left?* If the answer to those questions are radically different than how you are living now, it is absolutely time to evaluate life today.

A Perspective on Riches (12:21)

Luke 12:21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

- **How we lay up treasure matters**

Jesus concludes His parable with a statement of perspective that leads to action. Treasure will be "laid up" somewhere, and it will either be for ourselves or for God. Again, wealth is given by God to us as a stewardship, and with every stewardship there is an expectation of return. I've often imagined our time before the Bema seat of God (2 Cor. 5:10), where God will review our life and give us our due for what we have done in this life, both good and evil. I imagine a simple question posed, "Out of all the world, I put you in a time and place where you never had to worry about hunger, never went without clothes, and always had a roof over your head. I not only gave you those things, but you had extra, more than enough to live on. And I gave this all to you when over 90% of the world had less than you with no choices concerning money. **What did you do with it, my son?**" I often think about that question and don't always have a great answer. *Have we laid up treasure for ourselves, or is it clear that we are rich toward God.*

- **How we should lay up our treasure**

1 Timothy 6:17-19 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.¹⁸ They are to **do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,**¹⁹ thus storing up treasure

for themselves as a good foundation for the future, ***so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.***

So what does it mean to be rich toward God. Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 6:17-19:

- We don't let ourselves trust in riches, but God
- We enjoy God's gifts to ultimately enjoy Him
- We seek to do good - to the lost and to those in the household of faith. We can do good because we can now that we have Christ's righteousness
- We seek to be rich in good works - knowing that good works were prepared beforehand (Eph. 2:10)
- We seek to be generous - with our time AND money, knowing that neither are truly ours
- We seek to be ready to share - READY means we need to prepare to be generous, both functionally in planning our finances as well as keeping our mind fixed on the glory of God.

In doing this, we take hold of what life really is. Coveting money is chasing a mirage. It cannot last. It does not define you. It does not satisfy. We want to invest in things that last, storing up a good foundation for our future.

Concluding Questions to Discuss:

- Where do you see issues of covetousness in our culture, church, or your own life? Why do you think this sin leads to so many other sins? What other sins are produced out of covetousness?
- Why does God give us money? What does the Bible say it is for?
- If having wealth is no wrong, how do we make sure we don't use it wrongly?
- What does our love of money or possessions reveal about our view of God, our life, or our identity in Christ?
- What would you do if you inherited more money than you needed (like millions)? What would change about you? Why? Is that a good thing?
- How do we redeem retirement for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of God's glory?