

## *“Where Treasures Lie”*

*Ecclesiastes 5:10-14; Luke 12:13-21*

August 9, 2020

Have you ever said something to someone else and their response betrayed that they either weren't paying attention or they totally misheard what you said? It's happened to all of us, to be sure, but there is something about preaching just about every Sunday that leaves preachers experience. Getting to stand up in front of a pulpit for 15-25 minutes every Sunday means preachers spend a large part of their week crafting what they hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit, will be a message that helps people live out their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But sometimes, no matter how tight the logic, no matter how obvious the meaning of the sermon seems to be, someone will always come away with something that you simply did not intend. Now look, more often than not, this is a good thing. The Gospel of John, chapter three teaches us that the Holy Spirit blows where the Spirit wishes, and so it isn't surprising that the preached Word moves people in directions completely unimagined by the pastor as they wrote the words.

Ah, but then there are those times when a congregant's take-away is so far afield that you simply have no earthly idea how they arrived where they're at given what you just said.

I remember this one time, at Myers Park, I did a lesson on becoming a better disciple of Christ. I asked the question, “What is the one thing you can do today to follow Jesus more closely?” As we chatted after the lesson, it was clear most people understood where I was heading. Then, this one large, garrulous man spoke to me on the way out the door.

“Thank you so much,” the man told me. He went on to add that he'd figured out exactly what he should do to be a better disciple of Jesus Christ. “What was that?” I asked him. No kidding, he looked at me and told me, “I need to sue my money-hungry ex-wife. She and her lawyer took me for over a million dollars. I made that money. She didn't. Getting it back will allow me to be less resentful and do more for Jesus.”

Yeah, wasn't expecting that one.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus speaks to a gathered crowd in which “so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another.” During the course of this particular oration, Jesus talks about blessedness and how it follows a life dedicated to God. He's talked about the curses of the lawyers and the pharisees. To be sure, there are a host of topics that Jesus' talk could easily inspire. But then, all of the sudden, comes this:

I read to you now from the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Luke, verses 13 through 21. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

“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. 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.”

This is the Word of God for the people of God...Thanks be to God.

So, yeah, out of nowhere, this guy who has presumably been listening the entire time, comes up with this little gem to ask Jesus to help him with. Getting more from his brother. In fact, the man suggests, perhaps the brother will listen to Jesus.

Oh, and it's easy to poke fun at the man for being so clueless, isn't it? But I think we've all experienced things in life so consequential to us that they become a black hole of our thought. NO matter how hard we try, we just can't stop our minds from twirling the thoughts over and over in our mind until we can hardly think or focus on anything else.

And, isn't it funny to note how often the thoughts that can overtake us like that tend to deal with money and/or our possessions? Here, the man speaking is laser focused on getting some money from his brother. So much so that he's oblivious as to what's actually being said around him. His concern over this has completely overtaken his mind.

And it would be totally funny if things like that didn't happen to us as well. Personally, most recently, I was so caught up in figuring out what kind of replacement grill I was going to get that I totally forgot about starting dinner one night. Like the man in the passage, I was so laser focused on getting what I wanted that I was largely oblivious even to the kids.

Jesus, of course, being Jesus, doesn't make fun of the guy for being so clueless. Heck, he's just one of many, right? No Jesus does what's right and uses the query as the means to share wisdom with the man and the crowd and us. Jesus gently rebukes the man, asking him, "...who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" and then cuts to the quick.

You see the man has obsessed with his brothers possible wrong-doing; Jesus understands the matter more deeply. Sees the crux of the matter more clearly. *You see, it isn't about the brother's lack of concern for his brother, the problem is the man who spoke's greed and envy.*

Ever noticed how those two go hand in hand like some set of evil twins. They're so frequently in the presence of one that oftentimes it can be difficult to see how one promotes the other and vice versa. Envy can make us detest the blessings we have while greed sends us on an going quest to acquire the good to slake the fire of our covetousness.

You see, when we excessively want what someone else has, we are bound to view our own things, what we actually have, with great displeasure. Then, cutting corners to get what we covet, we tend to create havoc in our lives and damage our relationships with others. In this very manner, greed and envy rob us of precious hours of enjoyment of our lives.

"Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Jesus says. And, well, that really says it all.

But, as we've been talking about in this summer sermon series on the parables, Jesus is going to add emphasis and depth to His teaching through the inclusion of a parable. A story by which the fuller meaning of his teachings can shine through.

The parable of the rich fool succinctly encapsulates the depth of the Biblical teaching and brings it to life as we hear about a rich man, so delighted with all that he has. Ah, but he sees that he can't store all of the riches his land produces. So he determines to build more storage space. And, notice how he imagines life to be once he's able to build those new barns and store even more stuff than he already has. Don't miss this.

The man assumes that, in having more stuff, not only will he be happier, he'll be safer, too.

In a great book that I suggest you all read,

That's an assumption I think we all make on occasions, isn't it? I tend to feel it most strongly in an odd place...on I-85 South heading towards Gastonia. There, on the left as you reach exit 21 is a sign. It's a Mega Millions lottery sign which lights up exactly how much the jackpot presently is. No matter what the number is, I always imagine how great it would be to win. I imagine how happy I'll be with my new, \$1,500 Big Green Egg Grill and my fully decked-out man cave. So too do I lust after the idea of knowing that we have so much money that we can keep everyone in the family safe and protected from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

And I've noticed something recently. You see, when someone wins the Mega Millions, the lottery amount resets. It goes to \$40 million dollars. I've noticed recently a small measure of disappointment when, on I-85 South, I get to that sign and the Jack Pot is a paltry \$40 million. Oh, how deprived I'd be if I only one that lowly amount, right? I mean, with only \$40 million dollars, I couldn't even think of buying into ownership of a major league baseball team.

It's amazing how much happier we imagine ourselves to be, if we were only crazy rich. Like a tech founder rich.

But the fact of the matter is that our perception here is wrong. And there is growing evidence which shows that contentment with life actually drops with extreme wealth.

Take, for example, the story of the creator of Minecraft, a videogame kids are fairly infatuated with. His name is Marcus Persson and he sold the game to Microsoft for \$4 billion (that's billion with a "b"). Shortly thereafter, he bought a huge Beverly Hills mansion, outbidding Bey and Jay for the thing. Surely, he thought, all this money will make for a great life.

But things didn't turn out as expected for Mr. Persson

Turns out, all that money, life-changing money, didn't make him happier, it made him enjoy life less.

The data is all there, of course. Money and things don't really itch the scratch we have for a more content and complete life. That is to say that greed and envy deplete us.

Founding Father Benjamin Franklin once made a very insightful quote when it comes to the love of money. "Money never made a man happy yet, nor will it. There is nothing in its nature to produce happiness. The more a man has, the more he wants. Instead of it filling a vacuum, it makes one. If it satisfies one want, it doubles and triples that want another way."

As I've told you before, I was a big fan of the HBO show Game of Thrones. And in that show, there's a particularly nefarious character who is manipulating all the good characters. At one point, he's on a harbor watching a boat come in. With delight, he tells the young woman he's with that it's his boat. You'd expect him to be happy. It is after all, a fine ship, ideal for carrying cargo and making the man even richer.

Alas, the man isn't happy. Decidedly not so. As the woman reflects on the beautiful ship, the man says something very telling – "Now that I've got one," he said, I want another ten.

There's just more to life than money and the accumulation of things. One of the facts about corporate life is that the average chief executive of a company today works 60 hours-plus every week of his life. And yet, at an unprecedented rate, CEOs of large corporations making enormous salaries are leaving their companies because they can't handle the emptiness.

Regardless of your situation in life, you can never satisfy a hungry soul with money. *There is a big God-shaped hole in the middle of your heart that can be satisfied only by God. Try as you may, money will never satisfy your hungry soul. Only God can do that.* Long story short – we hunger for God and all the other things of the world fail us miserably.

Greed and Envy fail us because they both lead us towards a pernicious idolatry. The Apostle Paul writes about this. From Colossians 3:5 we hear, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." And again, in Ephesians 5:5, Paul writes, "For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

In a survey titled "Joys and Dilemma of Wealth" by Boston College the wealthiest set revealed they are an unhappy bunch -- worried about appearing ungrateful, rearing bratty children and failing to meet expectations. But most importantly, they live in abject fear of losing what they've got.

The report gives a glimpse of the wealth and fulfillment level of 160 households, of which 120 had amassed fortunes of at least \$25 million. The findings: Despite great wealth, many are miserable.

\$25+ million dollars and their miserable. Tells you something, doesn't it?

Great thinker and philosopher Bo Derek once said, "Whoever said money can't buy you happiness simply didn't know where go shopping" -- but that's not true, say happiness researchers. It's not the Chateau Laffite, one of the world's most expensive wines, or a Chanel handbag or a Ferrari sports car that bring the most joy. It's knowing how to do good with your money, say experts."

It isn't the case that the Bible as a whole doesn't speak quite frequently about our inordinate love of money as well as how it damages us and the people around us.

Consider this:

The Scriptures speak about money over 1,000 times.

Jesus talked about money more than He did Heaven and Hell combined.

Jesus talked about money more than anything else except the Kingdom of God.

11 of 39 parables talk about money.

1 of every 7 verses in the Gospel of Luke talk about money.

The Bible warns that the pursuit of money can cause problems in one's faith and in other areas of life.

Over and over again, the Word comes directly at our sinful human drift towards greed and the concomitant love of money.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 notes, "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless."

In Matthew 6:24, Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

1 Timothy 6:10 states, "For 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."

Guys, the likelihood is that I could stand at this very lectern and spend a great portion if not all of the time allotted for the sermon this morning simply reading the Scriptures and the wisdom, they share about the dreadful dangers of loving money more than we love God. Because when that happens, we end up spending money in ways that are counterproductive to our contentment:

One reason money might not provide as much happiness is because people might not spend it right," says Elizabeth Dunn, who conducts research on happiness. "We find that people get more happiness by spending money on others."

Money and the possessions they have the ability, like no other thing, to wrap us up so tightly that we're largely oblivious to the world around us as well as the needs of the people around us.

And, perhaps more distressingly, it has the ability to damage our relationship with God. After all, when one is focused on earthly riches, it's quite difficult to be rich towards God as Jesus reminds us at the end of the parable of the rich fool.

Because when we're maniacally chasing mammon, we can't help but lose sight of Jesus.

Do yourself a favor. Take some time and think about all the blessings you have from the hand of God. Think about the things that didn't cost you any money at all. In fact, why not make a list of them and share them with your friends as a testimony to the Lord? It's good for us to see once in a while just how very little money can do for us in an eternal way. Certainly, we need money to live. We need it in daily commerce.

But are you being good stewards? God has provided you every good thing. Since the old testament times, the standard giving to God is a tithe, a tenth percent of your income. In doing this, you release the pernicious hold money and the accumulation of wealth have over you as well as being rich with God and his purposes.

Have you trusted Jesus Christ today to be your Savior, or are you still trusting your money? Money cannot satisfy a hungry soul. Money cannot enrich a greedy soul. Money cannot deliver a doomed soul. And money cannot redeem a lost soul. If you're looking for eternal redemption, if you're looking for a future in heaven, you need to trust the blood of Jesus Christ. Trust Him as your Savior. That's the way to get God's redemption.

Here's a real pearl of wisdom. All the money in the world cannot do for you what one act of obedience at Calvary's cross did for you. You can hoard money. You can amass great wealth. You can build a sound financial portfolio. But one day you will leave it all behind. In fact, most people don't fully enjoy it while they have it. But that which is not bought with silver or gold--your eternal redemption in Christ Jesus--can be enjoyed now and counted on for all eternity. Make sure you're trusting in the right thing.

In short, money is quite often the thing that keeps us from trusting God fully. We look at our bank accounts and, finding them flush, we figure we're protected from all the uncertainties life has to offer. And then, one day, we realize the fallacy of that belief. There are some things that money just can't buy.

But faith in the Lord will never once, never ever let us down. For God the Father has shared with us his most precious gift – Jesus Christ who has atoned for our deaths and has raised us into new, eternal life. And until he returns in glory, he is never apart from us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

These are things money simply can't buy.

Fix it by giving money to the church and to others.

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PEOPLE GET MUCH MORE HAPPINESS THAN BY SPENDING IT ON PROJECTLS LARGER THAN THEMSELVES LIKE CHURCHES OR HOSPITALS OR EVEN OTHER PEOPLE.

But it can buy food for others, it can be used to support the work and ministry of this church, it can care for the infirm, it can be used to be hospitals and schools and places where people will learn more about the God that loves him.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Scriptures & Quotes

**Luke 11** – "...so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another,"

**Luke 12:13-21** – "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. 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."

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