

### Guard Against Greed

The story is told about the Klondike Gold Rush in the late 1890's in north-west Canada. The winter weather was so harsh that prospectors could only search for gold from spring through fall. One spring, some prospectors came upon a crude cabin. They looked inside and found large piles of gold, along with two skeletons. Two men had been so eager to get gold that they stayed too long and were not able to get out of the frozen frontier. They were rich, but they were dead all because of greed. This morning, Jesus lovingly urges us to guard against greed.

Greed is a desire to get more and it is very dangerous. Greed is what plunged the world into sin. Adam & Eve were – literally – living in the perfect place with the perfect spouse, but they wanted more. Wow, did that backfire on them. Ever since they sinned, all of us have been born with a sinful nature that is greedy. The richest athletes in our country refuse to play unless they can get just a few more million dollars. I wonder how many millions they need before they are finally happy. Greed is the voice of the devil whispering in your ear, “If you had more money, you would be happier.” But even when we get more money or more things, we want even more and – just like the professional athletes – we are never satisfied. How much “stuff” do we need before we are satisfied? Our closets are crowded and our basements are bulging. Ten percent of American households rent out storage units, spending \$40 billion a year for storing more “stuff.”<sup>1</sup> Greed is a serious problem in the world and in our hearts.

Greed was also a problem 2000 years ago during Jesus' earthly ministry. While Jesus was teaching a crowd of thousands of people, one fellow was so greedy that he felt compelled to interrupt Jesus (:13), “**Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.**” A man died and now his two sons were arguing over their inheritance. Jesus dismissed the petty complaint, (:13), “**Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?**” In other words, “Sir, my job is to preach the gospel and save the world. If you have a squabble over your inheritance, then tell it to the judge, not me.” Notice how greed caused those brothers to live at war with one another. Greed causes earthly possessions to ruin earthly relationships. I know of a family who had two sons and a daughter. Dad eventually died and a number of years later, mom died. Their will said that their estate should be divided equally between their three children. One of the boys thought he

deserved more than a third of the estate, so he sued his brother and sister even though he had plenty of money to survive. Absolutely tragic.

To reinforce his warning, Jesus told a parable about a man who had a lot of property and abundant crops. His only problem in life was that his barns were not big enough. So he built bigger barns and filled them full of crops. He had enough to retire early and enjoy life. He thought he was all set. What he did not know is that death was sneaking up on him and he was going to die that night. God said to him (:20), “**You fool!**” Could there be anything worse than hearing God call you a fool? Because the man trusted in his wealth, when he died, not only did he lose his earthly blessings, he also ended up separated from God and his blessings as he joined the devil in unending torment.

The guy in the parable was rich, for sure. But did you notice how self-centered and lonely he was? Six times he said, “**I.**” Five times he said, “**my.**” Four times he said, “**I will.**” As Jesus told the parable, he pointed to God blessing by saying that (:16), “**the ground ... yielded an abundant harvest.**” Yet, he took credit for all of his wealth without even thinking of saying “Thank you.” to God. Notice that he was so focused on his own happiness that he never even thought of helping others with his wealth. And even as he wondered what he would do, he had no close friend to talk to as he said (:19), “**I'll say to myself.**”

I am reminded of Howard Hughes. He was a successful Hollywood producer. His restaurants, hotels and casinos made Las Vegas the lucrative place it is now. He owned a private fleet of jets and fancy cars. Yet, he spent the last 15 years of his life alone, scared and suspicious of anyone he met. He suffered from neurosis and psychosis. He was 6' 4" tall, but weighed only 90 pounds when he died in 1976. When he died, he was the richest man in the USA worth \$2.5 billion. When he died, though, not one acquaintance or relative cried. His Las Vegas casinos paused for one minute of silence and then they continued gambling as he is never existed. His money did not do him any good. Once again, if you have everything but Jesus, you have nothing. And if you have nothing but Jesus, you have everything.

The problem with the fellow in Jesus' parable was not that he was a thief or a crook. He was a hard-worker. He plowed and planted, watered and weeded. It is not a sin to earn lots of money and to be considered rich. Solomon, Abraham, Joseph of Arimathea and others in the Bible are described as rich. The Lord blesses different people with different gifts and opportunities so, it's not surprising that some people have more money than others. In his

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.neighbor.com/storage-blog/self-storage-industry-statistics/>

infinite wisdom, the Lord has placed each of us on the socio-economic scale where he knows is best for us, so there is no need to complain about our lot in life or wish that we had more. The Lord is happy when you acknowledge that all of your gifts, abilities, and blessings come from him. The Lord is happy when you work hard and carefully manage your finances instead of wasting money. He is happy when you use your money and blessings to take care of your family and loved ones, to pay your taxes, to help others and to support the gospel ministry. The Lord is even happy when you use your blessings to go on a vacation or treat yourself once in a while, just like a loving parent is happy to see his child rejoicing in a birthday gift. But more than anything else, the Lord is happiest when you look to him in faith. The Lord wants you to see him as your greatest blessing, your priceless treasure, your Savior who takes away your sin and guarantees you eternal happiness in heaven. The Lord knows that greed can ruin you here and eternally, so he urges you to guard against greed.

The problem with the man in Jesus' parable was not his money. It was his attitude toward his money. He was trusting in his money for his security and he was not connected to God. His barns were full but his heart was empty. This account from Luke 12 is not just aimed at those who are in the upper tax brackets. This is aimed at each and every one of us, regardless of how much money we have. The Apostle Paul explained (1 Timothy 6:10), "**The love of money** – not the money itself, but the LOVE of money – **is the root of all kinds of evil.**" Then Paul pointed out that some people lost their faith because they loved their money more than their Lord. It is easy to have lots of stuff and yet be empty with God.

As sinners, it is natural to get nervous about our retirement savings when the stock market dips, or to stress about how we are going to keep up with inflation, or to get up tight when we think of the cost of raising children, or to get anxious when our future needs are not covered by our current wealth. It is natural for us to worry about finances, but that does not make it right. If we look carefully into our hearts, we will see that fellow from Jesus' parable living inside of us. He is trying to take control of our thoughts and actions. If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that all of us are greedy in one way or another. Money and the things it can buy can easily bump Jesus out of first place in our lives. It is so easy to trust in our money for security and think that if we have enough money we are all set. We could expect God to condemn us, "You fool!"

In a way, we could say that Jesus was also greedy. Certainly, he was not greedy for the things of this world. He did not have much money, or a home or a piece of property. When he died, the only thing he owned was a robe wrapped over his shoulders and even that was gambled away as he watched.

Jesus was greedy, however, when it came to you. He wanted you more than anything else in the world. He was willing to sacrifice everything, even his life, for you. He gave you first place in his heart and life so that you could enjoy eternal blessings! As St. Paul explained (2 Corinthians 8:9), "**You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.**" Because Jesus died for you, you are already forgiven of every greedy inclination. It's just as if you were perfectly content for your whole life and never complained once. Because Jesus rose for you, you already have your name written on a deed to a piece of property up north, up north in heaven. Jesus has given you an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade away, kept in heaven for you (1 Peter 1:4).

Your value does not come from how much money you have to your name, or what kind of house you live in or how fancy a car you drive. Your value does not come from what you have, but from what you are. You are a dear child of your heavenly Father. You are a saint bound for glory. You are a flesh and blood brother or sister of Jesus. That's why the Apostle Paul could write to the Colossians in our Second Lesson this morning (Col 3:2-4), "**Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.** <sup>3</sup>**For you died** [When the Holy Spirit brings people to faith in Christ, they die to their sinful selves and their old, earthly, sinful way of living.], **and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.** <sup>4</sup>**When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**" Christ is your life! Who could be richer than that?

Solomon was the wealthiest person in this world. His annual income was 25 tons of gold. He had the time and money to do anything and he tried to do it all – from lavish parties with lots of alcohol, the best of food, building projects, academics, agriculture, etc. Near the end of his life, after trying to have it all, he realized that without the Lord as your Savior, everything in this world is meaningless. Faith in Jesus as your Savior is more valuable than anything in this world. All the money in the world can not open heaven's gates one inch for you, but through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus has already opened heaven's gates for you and he is standing with wide open arms to welcome you. So, guard against greed because Jesus is your Savior! Amen.