

Jesus Teaches His Disciples

Lesson #2 – How to Keep Covetousness Out of Their Life

Luke 12:13-34

As Jesus was teaching one of the biggest crowds ever assembled during His ministry, a man interrupted Him with a request to intervein in an inheritance issue with his brother. Jesus refused to do so, but used the opportunity to teach on another subject: covetousness and worry over necessities.

I. Bold Request

“And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. ¹⁴And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?” Luke 12:13-14

“speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me” – From this statement, we are not sure why this man brought his need to Jesus. Perhaps he felt this popular Rabbi from Galilee would hold some power and authority to convince the brother or arbitrate. We can’t read this man’s mind or know his situation, but at first, it seems like a legitimate and reasonable request. But we must consider two things: the **cultural context** and **Jesus’ all-knowing reaction**. In Deut. 21:17, the law instructed that the oldest son would receive a double portion of the father’s inheritance. This was practiced during the time of Jesus. There should not have been any question or debate about an inheritance issue. If there was a problem, there were legal authorities to appeal to – he didn’t need to bother Jesus! So, from this question posed to Jesus, we are not sure why this man interrupted Him. But Jesus knew why he came, let’s look at Jesus’ reaction...

“Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?” – Wow, this man got a quick, straightforward answer, “No!” But remember, Jesus knew his heart, and, based on His reaction, most Bible teachers believe he did not have a wholesome, legitimate need, but was **full of greed**. Perhaps for more than his due inheritance according to law. Jesus would not further anyone’s selfish interest, and moving forward, Jesus will speak on **covetousness**.

II. Beware of Covetousness – Accumulating Possessions

➤ Thesis Statement:

“And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” Luke 12:15

“Take heed, and beware of covetousness” – Now notice, Jesus shifts the direction of His words here from the man with the question to the massive crowd, for Jesus needs them all to understand that covetousness is a sin all must constantly watch against! Jesus begins with this double warning: “take heed” – look sharply, observe yourself; “beware” – guard yourself. So, what is meant by covetousness? I found many definitions and comments on it, but basically, **it is a false philosophy or way of thinking that causes an unquenchable desire for what one believes will make them happy or satisfied**. And as Jesus says here, it is “**things**,” all kinds of things: (name some) possessions, job, status, power, money, success. And this is regardless of age! Ever observe the almost never-ending conflict between two toddlers playing in a room of toys? Or a group of elementary students playing a competitive game of dodgeball? They all want the biggest toy to be the last man standing! Or how about adults at work positioning themselves for the next promotion? Or constantly talking about their next

dream car, dream house, dream motorcycle, dream vacation, the dreams go on and on! These are all examples of covetousness, in all kinds of forms!

“man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” – Wow, this is opposite from the lie of the Devil! The lie he has spread since the beginning of time has been, “Man’s life consisteth in the abundance of the **things** he can get!!” Here, Jesus is saying life is not about what we have! So opposite of what the world says! In His teaching, Jesus is going to address two aspects of covetousness: **1) coveting as played out in the accumulation of wealth** and **2) coveting as played out in concern about having the necessities of life!** Both of these are sins, and both involve **faithlessness!**

➤ **Supportive Parable:**

“And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: ¹⁷And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? ¹⁸And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. ²⁰But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”
Luke 12:16-20

1) *Rich man’s dilemma* – too much wealth This man’s ground produced so well that he had no place to store it! What a dilemma! Instead of rejoicing in God’s goodness, he fretted like a man with a big loss! So, he had to go through a massive demolition and major building project! Have you ever done a big building project? John and I did it 2 ½ years ago, and I must say it was a real learning experience! Not sure we would do another, but we enjoy our cabin retreat. But realize, this man had a much bigger problem than a lack of grain storage. Let’s begin by reading **Proverbs 30:7-9**, these verses tell us about the “dilemma” of both wealth and poverty. (read) According to the writer of Proverbs, the wealthy tend to forget God! We certainly see this true in Jesus’ parable here. There are several dilemmas that one with great wealth must be careful about.

1. **Living life without a thought of God!** Unfortunately, the wealthy often feel they **don’t need God**. In Jesus’ story that day, we read the rich man saying “I” (actually 11 personal pronouns are recorded here), but we never read the word “God.” He had a false sense of security and didn’t need God’s help. He never considered death, judgment, and eternity. And that is true for many wealthy people. Warren Wiersbe said this, “People who are satisfied only with the things that money can buy are in great danger of losing the things that money cannot buy.” p. 178 This is very true in Jesus’ parable.
2. **The Word of God becomes ineffective!** In the parable of the sower, found in **Matthew 13**, we find these words in verse **22**, “He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.” Again, the **wealthy don’t need or have time for God and His word!**

3. **Creates snares and temptations!** Ever hear about those folk who, for one reason or another, suddenly find themselves with a million dollars? It seems it doesn't take long, and their lives go from joy, satisfaction, and endless planning to misery and disaster. Having wealth brings a whole new set of temptations and pitfalls that people without money don't share. Paul shared this sad truth with Timothy. **1 Tim. 6:6-10, 17-19**

- 2) *Rich man's decisions – save for the future* The man in the parable was ready for a future! He thought, set for the rest of his life! His ground (by the way, God allowed his ground) produced him a windfall! Now, he was going to take care of #1 – himself – there seemed to be no #2! He decided to store it away. Didn't seem he considered any other option. Let's remember that Scripture does advocate saving for the future, Paul said to Timothy in 1 Tim. 5:8, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." But this man's motivation was not providing for anyone but #1!
- 3) *Rich man's desires - enjoy success and security* We see here that everything this man did was motivated by selfish covetousness. What was he wanting!? A life of ease – "eat, drink, and be merry." Maybe big parties, for a big crowd, in a big house, on a big lake, with a big boat, off a big pier...you get the idea. But he forgot something; money can't keep you alive! This parable of Jesus points directly to His thesis statement, "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." The rich man ultimately had the wrong view of life and death!!
- 4) *Rich man's death – eternity without God* This man made several wrong assumptions: 1) His soul would be satisfied with everything he had attained 2) His goods would last for many years and 3) He would last for many years! He had never considered an early death, and the tragedy wasn't what this man left behind, but what he had to face: an eternity without God! Wow! Jesus' question in verse 20 is piercing, "then whose shall those things be...?" Ever watch the Antique Roadshow? It is a PBS program that goes about the country evaluating and appraising folks' antiques. I will occasionally enjoy a few minutes of video before bed. Many of the items are family heirlooms, handed down by grandparents or an old, rich aunt. But really, it's surprising that many of the high-priced items displayed and highlighted were found in some attic tucked away and forgotten, or in some musty resale shop piled with worthless junk. No one realized their value. The original owner had spent a lot of money on a treasured painting, jewelry, or pottery, but after their death, no one appreciated it or knew of it, and it was left at Goodwill or put in storage for someone else to deal with! Wow! Jesus is alluding to exactly this: all you cherish and treasure on this earth will likely become someone else's headache to dispose of!

4 Points Concerning the Rich Man taken from Warren Wiersbe, p. 178.

➤ **Jesus' Application of Parable:**

"So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Luke 12:21

"treasure for himself" vs. "rich toward God"

Jesus called this man a fool. He wasn't pictured as a wicked man, a crook, or a rabble-rouser, but Jesus said he was foolish! Why? **He was given much, and yet not rich toward God. He had planned for retirement and**

had no thought of **planning for eternity!** John MacArthur put it this way, “If you live as though this life is all there is, and live just for self and as though there is nothing beyond death, you are a fool.” p. 302 The loss of his soul was irreparable! **What does it mean to be “rich toward God?** (ask for thoughts) rich in faith, good works, peace, holiness, mercy, obedience, thankfulness, dependence, wisdom - other words, living for God, being obedient to His Word, and doing His work! Jesus was teaching that it was far more important to acquire spiritual wealth in our lifetime than physical wealth. Earthly things hold no value in heaven. One of my study books had this quote: “It’s far more important to learn how to **use money** than how to **make it.**” Shepard p. 390 But do we teach our children this lesson? Have we ever learned it?! We must remember that **money should be used for the cause of Christ by investing it in others and for the good of their souls!** These are true spiritual enrichments, not just personal enjoyment. Now, wealth can be used for God and enjoyed at the same time if our purpose is to acknowledge and honor Him! Solomon, the wisest and richest man who ever lived, understood this principle and wrote that wealth and possessions can be enjoyed as from God’s hand! **Ecc. 2:24, 3:13; 5:18; 8:15** But if we love money, and don’t remember that all we have comes from God, it is the beginning, the very root of all evil! And when pursued after, many have turned away from following Christ and are found to be suffering greatly! (1 Tim 6:10) Before leaving this, let’s read Paul’s words about laying up riches toward God. **2 Cor. 9:6-8, 11**

Jesus now shifts to another aspect of faithlessness....

III. Beware of Worry – Necessities of Life

➤ **Thesis Statement**

“And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.²³The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.” Luke 12:22-23

“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life” – Don’t miss this, Jesus now cast his look to the disciples, not just the twelve, but all those who were part of the little flock that followed Him. In this discourse, following the dinner at the Pharisees’ home, Jesus had already spoken to them about not fearing “when” the religious and political leaders of the land would call them to answer about their faith in Him. They must have been fearful; the hateful eyes of the Religious Leaders scared them! But Jesus told them that they would have the Holy Spirit to guide their words! But now, He will again say, “don’t fear, don’t be anxious,” and now Jesus highlights their fear for the basic needs of life, for...

“The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.” – They must have been asking themselves, “How shall we live? How shall we have just the basics of life?!” It is recorded in Luke 18:26, that Peter will later verbalize this by saying to Jesus, “Lo, we have left all, and followed thee.” What had they left? Homes, family, jobs, businesses, wives, land, maybe prospective homes, wives, and families – basically life as normal; life as planned; life as secure! And this is what Jesus will now address with them! “Don’t fear, take not thought, there’s a lot more to life than food and clothing!”

➤ Supportive Illustrations:

○ Ravens

“Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?” Luke 12:24 We have abundant ravens up at our cabin. They are big, black, noisy birds, especially around us when battling for territory with the local eagles. Ravens are found widely throughout the entire Northern Hemisphere! Jesus is using these common birds to illustrate how God feeds His creatures. So, I just had to Google their menu – small rodents, insects, berries, seeds, human trash, and almost anything dead. They are scavengers! And God has made sure they have sufficient food wherever they live! And Jesus finished by saying, “How much more are ye better than the fowls?” With that, Jesus was saying that these big birds get enough from the hand of God, and so will you, His dear children!

○ Stature/Length of Life

“And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature (Lit. - the Greek is ambiguous but most English translations refer this statement to length of life instead of height) one cubit? ²⁶ If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least , why take ye thought for the rest?” Luke 12:25-26 All the worry and fret in the world cannot **extend one’s life** or **add a couple of inches** to height! **We can’t worry anything into existence!** Jesus is saying with this illustration, “So, why worry! **It does not work!**” Sounds like a Hobby Lobby wall hanging to me, and I’m afraid many of us should have this hanging in our homes!!

○ Lilies

“Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸ If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?” Luke 12:27-28 When reading about these lilies, most think of beautiful day lilies or the large scented Easter variety, but the flowers Jesus is speaking of are humble wildflowers found in the open meadows of Israel. They bloomed in the colors of Jewish royalty – reds and purples. Maybe that is why Solomon was part of this illustration. I smile to think that in Jesus’ mind, these flowers outdid the splendor of Solomon’s wardrobe! Jesus is saying with this illustration, “If God would dress simple plants with such vibrant color, how much more will He care for man whose spirit lives forever! Why are you worrying? It’s because you have so little faith!”

➤ Jesus’ Believers’ Application

“And seek not ye what ye shall eat , or what ye shall drink , neither be ye of doubtful mind (Lit. - be held in suspense; anxious mind). ³⁰ For all these things do the nations of the world (Lit. unbelievers in God; heathen nations) seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. ³¹ But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. ³² Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Luke 12:29-34

- “**seek not**” – “**what ye shall eat**”/“**what ye shall drink**” – Yes, one must “toil and spin,” plant and harvest, go to Walmart and Aldi, and shop but Jesus is teaching the disciples and us, that our lives are not to be consumed with concern and worry about these things! It is actually contradictory to the very character of believers! Living with anxiety about needs is actually the attitude of the world, and how can a believer tell unbelievers of our great God when we live like them, fearful and not trusting Him for our basic needs!

 - “**neither be ye of doubtful mind**” – The **problem isn’t with God and His power**, but our lack of faith to live in confidence. When God gives, He gives well, perfectly, and completely gives what we need! So stop doubting, it’s faithless! Salvation wasn’t bare-bones; instead, it was abundant, free, and glorious! And so will be His care for us!

 - “**But rather**” -
- 1) “seek ye the kingdom of God” → “all these things shall be added unto you” Much of this teaching to the disciples is a repeat from the Sermon on the Mount. But instead of talking to the crowds on the hillside early in His ministry, Jesus is now speaking directly to His followers near the end. He tells them, “Seek the kingdom and leave the details of your life to me.” The writer of Hebrews said much the same thing, “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as you have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” **Hebrews 13:5** Also, please, be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer with thanksgiving let your needs be known unto God. Then the peace of God, which is beyond understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Phil. 4:6-7**

 - 2) “Fear not” → “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” Jesus is encouraging them to faith, not living in insecurity! **They have a new objective**; not survival or even covetous excess, but to **work for the kingdom of God**, and this is a job God loves to bless! It is His **pleasure** to bless you in it! Wow! So, fear not! Work for the kingdom, and let Him bless! Remember, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” Rom. 8:32

 - 3) “sell that ye have, and give alms” → “a treasure in the heavens that faileth not” Jesus is telling the disciples to use their money wisely, **for others**, and in doing that, it goes toward the kingdom! We find in the early church that it was a common practice for the believers to sell and give to the needy. Later, Jesus will tell the rich young ruler the same thing: “Sell what you have and give.” Wow, have you ever done that, sold something for the purpose of giving to someone in need? Jesus is teaching that very thing! John and I have really never done this, but we are talking about it now. There are so many ministry needs; and people desiring to do ministry; and young people preparing for ministry; kids that need to go to Bible camps, missionaries need Bibles, Bible schools need facility upgrades....all these places and ministries need money and Jesus said, “sell your access stuff, and give alms and then you will start storing treasure in heaven where stuff never grows old, or given to Goodwill, or quits working, or flooded with rain water, or some thief comes in and steals, or even eaten by bugs! Because.....”

- **And Realize**

“For where you treasure is, there will your heart be also” – After the man interrupted Jesus, asking for intervention into his family inheritance issue, Jesus gave this lesson on covetousness. He taught on two different concerns with money: **too much hoarding and wanting more**, like the foolish rich man in the parable; and, as Jesus said to the disciples, **overconcern and worry for the basic needs of life, or living with little faith**. His final point on this subject was this: **Your heart belongs to your treasure!** Another Wow! **What you love, you will serve; what you gain, you will stress over!** But let’s remember instead, **what you give, God will bless!** I want to finish with the writings of Peter. I’m sure this lesson on covetousness played over and over in the mind of this businessman turned disciple of Jesus. Years later, he wrote these words, **1 Peter 1:3-5; 2 Peter 3:10-14.**