

Text: Luke 12:13-21 (Pew Bible pg.1031)

Title: “Breaking the Grip of Greed”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to Luke 12:13. I’m so excited about how God has moved among our students this weekend. Students, you have spent the weekend focused on the fact that God desires to work through you. Now, we’re sitting at the feet of Jesus in the Gospels and learning from some of the parables or life stories that He told. Read vv.13-15.

Jesus talked about money and possessions as much as He talks about any other issue. He never shied away from challenging people about the use of their possessions and the prosperity. You see money can be either hazardous or helpful to us. It can either diminish our soul or develop it. And that’s true whether we are an adult with a huge stock portfolio or a student with the little money that you get for an allowance or a part-time job.

Money is important because we trade it for what we value ... what we think is important. So our money moves with our heart. And so what you do with your money is actually a picture of your heart. And that’s what Jesus means when He says later...

Luke 12:34 - For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Where your money goes, your heart is going. The way we spend our money reveals if we love things more than God (which ultimately destroys our soul), or if we love God more than things (which develops our soul).

And what complicates this is something very powerful that Jesus refers to here as greed. So what does greed look like? Well Jesus masterfully drops in a life story to show us what it looks like. Read Luke 12:16-21.

ILLUSTRATION – If you have read the book *The Hobbit* or *Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, or if you’ve seen one of the movies, you’re familiar with a slimy little character named Gollum (Smeagol). The plot of the stories revolves around a golden ring that Gollum had come to love ... he calls it “my precious.” But Gollum also hates the ring because of the powerful grip that it has upon his life and upon anyone who comes into contact with it. In the presence of the golden ring people are suddenly filled with the lust to have it at all cost. And so Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee have to carry the ring to a special mountain to destroy it, and to break its grip upon everyone.

Well, the golden ring of greed can have a powerful grip on our lives. Let’s think today about breaking the grip of greed. For you see this goes much deeper than just greed. Because the Bible says that covetousness (another word for greed) is actually idolatry. So this is all about who or what we worship. What you see in these verses is Jesus showing us that...

ON SCREEN - Desires lead to decisions which lead to a destiny.

So greedy desires lead to foolish decisions, which leads to a dreadful destiny. On the other hand, godly desires lead to wise decisions, which leads to a prosperous destiny.

Let’s talk first about the...

1. DESIRES (Luke 12:13-15)

Specifically this desire called greed. Now here’s the context.

Luke 12:13 - Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

Jesus is approached with a strange request to help settle this dispute over an inheritance. But Jesus declines.

Luke 12:14 - Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”

Rabbis in Jesus' day were frequently expected to arbitrate legal matters like this. But Jesus knew that this was not legal issue that could be settled in a courtroom; this was a spiritual issue that had to be settled in the heart. He understood that what was fueling this whole dispute was a sinful desire called greed.

ILLUSTRATION – Family feuds often erupt over how an inheritance is split. A precious widow in our church passed away in 2007. She had accumulated some sizable assets, and upon her death, because she had no children of her own, she wanted to pass her estate along to a cousin (who was like a sister), as well as a portion to our church, and a portion to the rest of the family. So this precious lady wrote out a will by hand indicating her desires and placed it among her important papers. When she passed away her cousin found the will and filed it in the appropriate way to begin to process the estate. Out of nowhere distant relatives, many of whom had never even met the widow, wanted a bigger share of the estate for themselves. So they hired an attorney to contest the will, purely on the basis that it had not been properly filed; only written by the hand of the widow. That estate has been contested now for nearly six years. All the time the estate is being drained of its value by mounting legal fees. That's the last thing this godly widow would have wanted for her family or for her estate. The moral of this story is two-fold: One, make sure prepare your will properly. Get the help of someone to draw it up properly. Two, greed is a powerful desire in the human heart. It will cause people to do things that are unthinkable.

And that's why ...

Luke 12:15 - "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Greed is an unquenchable thirst for getting more and more of something we think we need for satisfaction and happiness ... money or the things money can buy ... popularity ... prestige ... power.

Greed is *destructive*. When it says "be on your guard," it implies that there is something very harmful that we have to protect ourselves from. Greed is an enemy of your soul. Be on guard.

Greed is also *diverse*. Jesus said, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed." There's the greed fueled by ambition to impress others. There's the greed that is fueled by the need for the self-esteem and security we think we gain by having lots of nice stuff around us. There's the greed that is fueled by the love of pleasure that comes from stuff ... all kinds of greed.

This verse reminds us that greed is *deceptive*. It can sneak up on us. In another of His parables Jesus talked about the deceitfulness of riches. By that He means there is a subtlety about the temptation to greed and covetousness that the money and stuff we have is our life.

ILLUSTRATION – I have here a \$20 bill. Did you know that "money talks"? Have you ever heard that phrase? When you want the best seats at a concert, money talks. If you're willing to fork it over, it will get you into places that you might not otherwise get to go. Money talks. But did you know that money also talks to you. It can say to you, "If you don't have me, you don't have life, because I am your life. If you don't have me, you're nothing. So if you don't do anything else in life, make sure you have plenty of me." That's how our money can talk to us. And that's what this man's inheritance was saying to him. It's a lie.

Luke 12:15b - A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Life is not having things. Life is having God ... knowing God.

But desires do not stop with desires. Desires lead to ...

2. DECISIONS (Luke 12:16-19)

Evil desires lead to foolish decisions. Godly desires lead to wise decisions. Now here is where Jesus sets the parable down alongside the principle. It shows how the desires we have drive the decisions we make.

Luke 12:16 - And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop.

Note that the ground produced the crop. There was an exceptional summer that produced a plentiful harvest. It is by God’s grace, but that never enters the man’s mind. The “bad” in this parable is not that the farmer had a great year. And it’s not bad when you have a good year, get a good promotion, get a pay raise, or your stock increases in value. So...

Luke 12:17 - He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

“He thought to himself...” He’s in the process of making a decision of how he will handle this new prosperity. What will he do with it? But as this man talks to himself, his thoughts are filled with selfishness and pride. I counted eleven personal pronouns in his little “self-talk.” He steps onto a slippery slope. His pride and selfishness give way to self-indulgent decision-making.

Luke 12:18 - “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.

The circle of his life was reduced to a dot. It never occurs to him to use some of the increase to help the poor or to honor God.

Luke 12:19 - And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” ’

It’s not just that the man built bigger and better. It is that he then depended on those things to produce happiness in his life. So he built (bought) bigger and better barns. Here’s what he’s saying by his decision: “I value, I treasure relaxing, eating, drinking, and having fun. That is my life. And the riches in my barns will make that possible.”

And the words of Jesus ring in our ears: “A man’s (woman’s) life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

So the man’s greedy desires led to foolish decisions which led to a...

3. DESTINY (Luke 12:20-21)

Desires lead to decisions. Decisions lead to a destiny. In this case, the man’s destiny is not a good one. In fact, it is the worst one imaginable.

Luke 12:20 - “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?’

We’re talking here about the ultimate failure. I know people who are living under the illusion that they are successful, but they’re deceived. They’re really a failure because they have failed to invest in the right things. The man lived without God, died without God and would spend eternity without God, which is the essence of hell.

For each one of us, one day our lives will be demanded of us. Our earthly life will be forfeited. What then?

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

So there is a destiny for people who choose to live life as if earthly possession and pleasures are everything. And there is a different destiny for people who choose to live like people who are “rich toward God.” Now what does that mean ... “rich toward God”?

We're told in ...

1 Timothy 6:18 - Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

1 Timothy 6:19 - In 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.

So to be rich toward God is to live my life like I know that my life was made for God, not for the stuff money buys. Being rich toward God means my heart is drawn toward God as my real riches. It means counting my life in God more valuable than anything on this earth. It means using my earthly riches to show how much I value God and what's important to Him. This is what the prosperous farmer failed to do. He was a fool and lost his soul.

HOW TO BE RICH TOWARD GOD:

Note: I've listed verses with each one so that you can memorize them.

- **SEEK AND TREASURE CHRIST EVERY DAY (Philippians 3:8).**

Philippians 3:8 - What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

So read your Bibles and pray and worship everyday rejoicing that Christ is everything to you.

- **GUARD YOUR HEART AGAINST MATERIALISM (Psalm 90:14; Proverbs 4:23).**

Proverbs 4:23 - Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Jesus said to be on guard against greed and materialism. It can so capture our hearts. Instead our hearts need to be captured by Christ.

Psalm 90:14 - Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

- **PRAY ABOUT AND TRUST GOD FOR EVERY NEED (Philippians 4:19).**

You don't have to be rich to have to worry about greed and materialism. Greed can conquer your soul even if you have nothing. How? It happens when we do not trust God to supply our needs, and instead we worry and fret about it.

Philippians 4:19 - And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

- **GIVE HABITUALLY AND SPONTANEOUSLY (I Corinthians 16:2; II Corinthians 9:7).**

Nan and I have a practice of habitually setting aside a certain percentage of our income to give to God's work through our church. It is a biblical principle that we should make this as regular as paying our mortgage or our electric bill.

1 Corinthians 16:2 - On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

But so that it doesn't degenerate into just "paying a bill," the Bible also encourages spontaneity in our giving.

2 Corinthians 9:7 - Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

As a reminder of this act of heart worship we have offering times in our worship services so that when God prompts you to give above the regular, habitual amount, that you can do so out of worship.

- **PLACE BOUNDARIES ON YOUR CONSUMPTION (Hebrews 13:5).**

As Americans we live in such a materialistic culture. As we watch television or surf the internet we are constantly bombarded with the lie that our lives will simply not be worth living if we don't have a little bigger or better this or that. And it breeds greed in our hearts.

Hebrews 13:5 - Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

And in this way, we exchange our earthly riches for heavenly riches ... being rich toward God.

ILLUSTRATION – If I travel today to the nation of India with my \$20 bill I will not be able to spend it many places. The dollar is not the recognized currency of India. I can have a whole boat load of dollars from the US, and be poor in India. Because my dollars don't spend in most places there; the rupee is the currency of India. So what I have to do is I have to go to a bank and I have to exchange the currency of my homeland (dollars) for the currency of the land I'm going to (rupees). And I can buy something to eat and something to drink there with the currency of that land.

And it isn't until we exchange our love for the things of this world for the love of God that we become "rich toward God." And this is the only currency that will be recognized for eternity. You do that when you put your trust in Christ to save you from your sins. And you do that in every decision you make each day about where your real satisfaction is found.