

It Is Your Father's Good Pleasure to Give
Luke 12:13-34
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Introduction

Have you heard the country music song by Chris Janson called "Buy Me A Boat"? Some of the lyrics:
"I keep hearing that money is the root of all evil, and you can't fit a camel through the eye of a needle, I'm sure that's probably true, but it still sounds pretty cool 'cause it could buy me a boat, it could buy me a truck to pull it; it could buy me a Yeti 110 iced down with some silver bullets. Yeah, and I know what they say, 'Money can't buy everything,' well maybe so, but it could buy me a boat."

How many of us are like that guy? We know intellectually that money can't buy happiness, that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, that we're not going to find true peace by accumulating more and being greedy. BUT... if I just had a boat or a Jeep or a bigger house or a vacation home or a new wardrobe or fill in the blank with what you'd love to be able to afford. Recently, our study of Ecclesiastes chapter 5 told us that, "*He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income*" (5:10) and we've heard sayings like "wealth is like saltwater – the more you drink, the more thirsty you become.". So we know in our heads that getting that next thing won't actually satisfy us, it'll just make us desire something newer and better in the future. But we can't seem to shake our longing for more; we think that maybe we're the exception to the rule and we will actually find true peace and happiness in money and possessions. Maybe we need some hard words from Jesus and a whole new worldview to shake us out of this.

The passage today actually tells us that we should desire to be rich, but to be rich in the right things. It urges us to be rich towards God, but that is going to require some things from us. Our three points this morning give us some insight: being rich towards God means 1) guarding against greed and coveting, 2) trusting that He will provide, and 3) prioritizing treasures in heaven over treasures on earth. Let's read the first nine verses to see how Jesus teaches that being

I. Rich Towards God Means Guarding Against Greed and Covetousness (vv. 13-21)

¹³ *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 his possessions."* ¹⁶ *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?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."*

Just like in John 8 where Jesus was asked what to do about the woman caught in adultery, here was a situation where Jesus is shouted at from the crowd to decide a point of law. This was what rabbis were expected to do: make decisions about finer points of the law. This man who was having a dispute with his brother about their inheritance is not really asking Jesus to judge fairly, He's asking for Jesus to take His side! (It's worth pausing and asking if we talk to God like that. Do we pray for the best, most just and fair outcome to prevail in every situation? Or do we just ask that everything goes our way? Worth thinking about...) Anyways, Jesus declined to get involved by saying, "Who

made me a judge over you?" Of course, Jesus is the ultimate judge over all things, but He refused to be drawn into petty things like that, He was there to settle weightier matters.

So instead, Jesus got to the underlying issue between these brothers: greed. He turned to the crowd in verse 15 and said, "*Guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*" He said "guard" or "take care" or "beware" – which means not only is coveting serious, but it's going to take some action on their part to avoid; it's not just a philosophical idea that they have to be aware of. The 10th commandment forbids us from coveting our neighbors' possessions; stop looking around and desiring what everyone else has. The Westminster Larger Catechism asks "What are the duties required in the tenth commandment?" And the answer is that we are to have "such a full contentment with our own condition and such a charitable frame... toward our neighbor, as that all our inward motions and affections touching him, tend unto, and further all that good which is his." In other words, if you want to avoid greed and being torn up by jealousy of what others have, strive to be thankful and content with what you have and to treat others in a way that always seeks their best. I've heard it put another way: make sure you are loving people and using things, not loving things and using people.

The Apostle Paul ranked coveting way up there in terms of serious sins: Ephesians 5:3 says, "*but sexual immorality and all impurity and covetousness must not even be named among you*" and Colossians 3:5 says, "*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*" Coveting is on par with everything that is impure, because it is essentially a fleshly desire. When the Bible tells us not to covet, it's giving us advice that could both save us from losing a huge amount of money - how many people have fallen prey to pyramid schemes, bad investments, and huge gambling losses, because of greed? And the greater benefit is that you get a good perspective on what money you do own so that it doesn't have a stranglehold on you. Do you want your heart to be content or always agitated and wanting more?

Then we have this story about a man whose great harvest gets him planning for bigger barns, which is bad timing because his life was ending that very night. Now, there are a lot of things that I don't want God to call me, and I think near the top of my list is "fool." Which is what he calls this man. Is storing things and saving provisions for the future wrong, should we never open a savings or retirement account? Do you think God was taking this man's life because he built bigger barns? There is actually a lot in the Bible encouraging us to plan and provide. Proverbs 6:6-8 says, "*Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.*" 1 Timothy 5:8 criticizes the man who does not provide for his family, saying he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. The Bible does not forbid private property or saving. And as we saw throughout Ecclesiastes, our enjoying the good gifts that God provides for us is glorifying to Him and reminds us to thank Him.

This is a parable, so it's not a true story, but a story to illustrate a point. Our lives will all come to an end someday, and the point is that the man has not made plans for the right things. What Jesus was condemning is selfishness; thoughtless, fearful accumulation of goods and self-indulgence; it never entered the man's head to give away his surplus. St. Augustine said that he should have stored the grain in the bellies of the poor. It's not about wealth, it's about our attitude towards wealth, both accumulating it and keeping it. It's a lot more about priorities, right? Accumulating treasures on earth is contrasted with being rich towards God. The man had full barns but an empty heart. He was so concerned with this life that he made no plans for the next one. So God calls him a fool and he dies before he can enact all his big plans.

Now that Jesus has told us not to make accumulation a goal in itself, the next questions we have are: “Will I have enough?” and “Will I run out and be hungry and lacking?” The next nine verses answer:

II. Rich Towards God Means Trusting That He Will Provide Our Needs (vv. 22-30)

22 And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! 25 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 26 If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 28 But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! 29 And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. 30 For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.

So Jesus said, “Don’t spend your time worrying about your life, what you’ll eat and wear; God will provide the basics, what you need.” So, does that mean that we can quit our jobs and hang out until God delivers what we need; maybe through Uber Eats or Amazon; everything will just be delivered to our front door if we have enough faith? Not exactly what we’re talking about here. Part of God’s provision is when He provides you the opportunity to get an education, to get a job, to work hard and earn things. It’s not more godly to say, “No thanks, I’m going to wait for God to provide those things for me.” That’s rejecting His gifts to you and putting yourself in a position of having to be bailed out, when He’s already provided what you need.

It’s after you’ve been faithful to follow God and work and do the things that He’s called you to do, then to sit around worrying and be anxious about not having enough is a lack of trust in God. This whole section is predicated on one thing: that we have a Heavenly Father who knows our needs and loves us. Do we live like we have a loving Heavenly Father or do we live like we are spiritual orphans, fatherless kids who have to fight for every scrap we can? Every time you are tempted to worry, you are being invited to trust God on a deeper level. It’s always a choice between fear and faith. Sometimes I look at what we’ve set aside for our kids for college and our retirement accounts, because, yes, I believe that it’s faithful to save for those things when God provides the means to do so. But what I catch myself thinking is, “Those look good, but what if it’s not enough? What if the market crashes or we have huge medical bills or tax laws get passed that rob our accounts?” And then I get anxious and can’t sleep. And that’s where Jesus says, “Stop! Stop worrying, be faithful, and trust that your Heavenly Father knows your needs.”

George MacDonald said, “No man ever sank under the burden of the day. It is when tomorrow’s burden is added to the burden of today, that the weight is more than a man can bear.”¹ Jesus said that worrying doesn’t add any time to our lives, not one hour; if anything, it robs us of time that we could be doing other things. Identify the things you need to get done, the things that might cause problems, formulate a plan to deal with them, and get them done. But sitting around worrying about things you have no control over is pointless and insulting to God.

If you’re tempted to doubt God’s care for you, all you have to do is look at nature: Jesus pointed to the carefree raven who doesn’t store anything but gets fed by God, and then to the lilies that God clothes better than King Solomon when he was all decked out. So if God provides for birds and

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/quotes/3521/#!>

flowers, who are peripheral to God's designs (Jesus says you're way more important than a bird, humans have dominion and priority over all animals and plants), then you can trust Him to care for you. You have an eternal soul and will be a co-ruler with Him for all eternity; the grass will be burned up. God invests in what will endure, and so should you. So in the last four verses we'll see **III. Rich Towards God Means Prioritizing Treasures in Heaven (vv. 31-34)**

³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. ³² Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Every good sermon has points of application, and Jesus finishes this one with a lot of ways to apply what He's been teaching: seek God's kingdom, don't live in fear, give generously, and accumulate the right kinds of treasure. What Jesus is trying to do is help us get our priorities straight. Do we need to find food and go to work and attend to the daily things in our lives? Of course we do. But seek His kingdom FIRST. All those other things will follow when we get the right order. Think about how you are fulfilling your role as a citizen of God's kingdom, how you're modelling Jesus to others, how you're using your life to share Jesus' love FIRST. Then get to work, start learning, start earning; but your efforts will be guided by your spiritual commitments: How can I model Christ in math class? How can I be the hands and feet of Jesus as I'm working, as I'm coaching, as I'm living my life. At the very least (and I need to hear this a lot), start your day with prayer that your efforts will advance God's priorities. When you have extra money, before you figure out what room of the house to remodel or what new toy to buy, at least stop and ask the question, "Is there a way we can bless a ministry or someone else with this money? What does God want us to do with it?"

That's not even getting close to what Jesus says in verse 33 – "*sell your possessions and give to the needy.*" But it's a step towards that. We can show our faithfulness and trust by giving away money. And the irony is that as we give money away, we're actually storing it up for ourselves; Verse 32 – "*Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.*" People say that "you can't take it with you when you die," that's certainly the moral of the story of the man with the barns. But this verse tells us that we actually can. We send treasure ahead by investing in eternal things. When you do something unselfish for the Lord, when you make a sacrifice for Him, God promises to reward you:

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (our responsive reading) – "*And 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. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 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.*"

Matthew 19:29 – "*And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.*"

I don't know exactly what treasures in heaven are: whether they are crowns, a bigger mansion, pats on the back from God and the angels? Jesus calls them moneybags, but that is probably just a metaphor. I don't know, the Bible doesn't really say. I do know that there are many promises in the New Testament, so I'd like to find out. It's clear that we will not regret financial sacrifices and giving generously. When we get to heaven, we'll be so glad we did.

Conclusion

All of this reminds me of a George Clooney movie, where his character flies around to different companies to fire people. His life goal is to get 10 million frequent flyer miles. He explains to his co-

worker who doesn't understand why it's so important to him: "The miles are the goal... Let's just say that I have a number in mind but I haven't hit it yet... It's 10 million miles... I'd be the seventh person to do it, more people have walked on the moon... they put your name on the side of a plane." Later in the movie, he gets there, and they make a big deal about it on his flight, and the pilot sits next to him, "You're the youngest man to hit 10 million. Don't know where you found the time."² And what was supposed to be this climactic, amazing moment for him, what he's been orienting his whole life around, becomes this really hollow moment. And the point of the movie is that he's completely lonely, his life has been wasted travelling, chasing miles that ultimately mean nothing - he doesn't even want to spend them, just accumulate them to prove that his life was worth something. Until he realizes that it wasn't. What an amazing picture of idolatry and how we chase these big things in our lives that turn out to be empty; we pour all our energy into achieving them and they're just not satisfying, they're not worth it. Jesus wants to save us from this futility; the whole book of Ecclesiastes was a great prelude to this passage - stop chasing after the wind; stop investing in, and bowing to, the wrong things. Rest in God, He'll give you what you need.

Let's think back to the guy who yelled out to Jesus from the crowd asking for help in getting his inheritance: should we fight for our inheritance? I'm going to answer, that "Yes, we should. We should do everything we can to make sure we get the greatest inheritance we can!" I hope you don't think I'm talking about inheriting money from dad and mom, or trying to finagle our way into Grandpa Joe's or Aunt Edna's will. That's just money. I'm talking about our heavenly inheritance, our spiritual lives after our death. Verse 32 says that it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom! Live your life faithfully, in a way that He is pleased with and desires to reward you.

Jesus does not ask us to give up things, to sacrifice, when He was unwilling to make sacrifices Himself - He gave up His life in fulfilling God's will. We are given every spiritual blessing because He gave away His life. Jesus laid up treasures in heaven - US! Jesus used His time and treasure on earth with the very specific purpose that paid off: each Christian that Jesus ransomed and redeemed is going to heaven

-> Transition to communion

Benediction - Philippians 2:5-11 - *"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

² *Up in the Air* directed by Jason Reitman, 2009.