

August 8, 2010
Pentecost 11

"Don't Let Love for Money Rob You of the Riches of God's Kingdom"

LUKE 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." ¹⁴ Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" ¹⁵ Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." ¹⁶ And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 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. 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.'" 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?' ²¹ "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Before us this morning we have the examples of two people who had problems with money. The one man comes to Jesus with the urgent request, "Teacher, help me with my brother who refuses to share the family inheritance with me." Have you ever heard of families that were divided because of an argument over the family inheritance, even a small and insignificant amount of money? It happens all the time, doesn't it?

Then there is the example of the rich fool in the story that Jesus told about a man who let his money become more important to him than the Lord. He became so enamored with his wealth that he proudly boasted in his early retirement, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." That night he died, died a fool because he made no plans for what might happen to him after he died. Have you known people like this who are so caught up with the present life they are making no plans for what might happen to them if they die?

Can money turn a person into a fool? The other day I stopped at a nursing home and the large screen television was booming loudly. The elderly folk and even some of the staff were watching "Who wants to be a millionaire?" It came down to choosing between two brief cases. One had a million dollars and the other only \$25 dollars. The prospect of winning a million dollars can sure get people excited and thrilled, even those in a nursing home who spend most of their day sitting in a wheel chair. Remember Uncle Scrooge from the Donald Duck cartoons. When he became excited, what did you see in his eyes? You saw the dollar signs flashing. The cartoonists did a good job of portraying him as a fool.

It is relatively easy for us to look at people who are so swept away by a love for money that they take their eyes off the riches of God's kingdom. It is more difficult for us to take an honest look at our own lives and apply the warnings Jesus gives to us. It was our Lord Jesus who tells us plainly and clearly, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Look at what money can do to people

Money can sure turn the nicest people into total fools. A man comes to Jesus with the urgent request, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." This man is hardly listening to one word that Jesus is saying about the riches of God's kingdom. He comes across very demanding and abrupt as he tells Jesus to talk to his brother about dividing the inheritance. Jesus saw the greed in eyes. "Man, who made me a judge and arbiter between you?" That's what happens to people when they become consumed with this excessive and ungodly love and desire for money. Even the best of families can be ripped apart and shaken like a leaf by this ugly grizzly bear of greed.

You can almost see Jesus sigh as he comes face to face again with the corruption that exists in the human heart. He looks at the crowd and with love and compassion warns about the sin of greed. "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." The famed conquistador Pizzaro mercilessly slaughtered the ancient Incas to fill a room with gold. It has been estimated that Genghis Khan killed over 15 million people so his Mongrel hoards could satiate their lust for gold. It is easy to see how greed can destroy people and even lead them to hurt and harm others in the process, but it is more difficult to take an honest look at ourselves to uncovered and unmask the sin of greed that lurks within every human heart.

We have the words of Jesus to help us detect greed and realize that "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Greed is like a venomous scorpion threatening to get in your home. In a recent visit to Arizona, I watched as my brother in law walked around the perimeter of his house at night with a black light looking for scorpions that love to get into the house. The black light made them glow brightly. He joyfully killed them with an old BBQ spatula. Do you see that scorpion of greed over there that enjoys shopping for self more than helping others? Do you see that scorpion of greed over there that is jealous and angry because the person in the gas station is filling up a Ferrari while you fill up your aging Toyota? Do you see that scorpion over there that says, "If only I could pay my bills and have more money, then I could be happy?" And what about that scorpion of greed over there that gives the Lord the leftovers that no one else wants?

Jesus offers even more to help us spot the danger of greed that lurks within in every heart by telling the story of a rich fool. "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'" The man struck it rich. He had such a bumper crop that he needed larger barns in which to store the grain. Barns full of grain meant he could store the grain and when the prices went up, he could get even more money. Listen to what this rich man said after he had more than enough money for his early retirement. "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." Man proposes but God disposes. The Lord God had other plans for that man's life. "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?'" A multimillionaire died in Texas, and one woman said to her friend, "I wonder how much he left behind." She responded with dry humor, "I think he left it all behind." You can't take it with you. There are no pockets in shrouds. You never see a hearse pulling U-Haul truck.

This man not only lost his money, but he also lost his soul. He made no preparations to

be rich towards God with priceless treasures of God's kingdom. Mind you, this man was religious, very religious. His god was his money. This false god of money could not spare him from his problem of sin, eternal death and punishment in hell. We are not redeemed with gold and silver but with the precious blood of Christ that was shed for us.

Sam Sterling was his name. He had built up a large nest egg by buying up homes in Santa Barbara. He took an early retirement from work. He and his wife had planned multiple cruises and trips with their multiple earnings. Then he discovered he had cancer, terminal cancer. I can still hear him describe how his plans but then said with bitterness and anger in his voice, "God has done me dirt!"

I am holding a dollar bill in my hand. Written on this dollar bill are the words, "In God we trust." Satan would like to have us change these words to "In this god we trust." He wants us to add the letter "L" so it reads "In gold we trust."

Do you want more money? Money is a gift that comes from God and there is nothing wrong with loving a gift that God gives to us. The more important question is this: How much do you love money? When we love something very much we hang on to it very tightly, we don't want to let it go. At what point does the money and what it buys become more important to us than the treasures of God's kingdom. Rather than a death grip on money we want to have a dead grip on money. We want to let it go because the treasures of God's kingdom are worth far more than money.

Look at the riches you have in God's kingdom

Jesus wants us to be rich in the treasures of the kingdom. That is why he warns us about holding so tightly to our money with both hands that we let go of the treasures of his kingdom. "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

How rich are you in the treasures of God's kingdom? How much do you have in your account? To appreciate how wealthy we are I direct your attention to the words of Psalm 103 that tell us. "Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits--who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." Forget not all his benefits. Scan your past life. Look at the blessings of money, food, home, family, country, friends, and good times. Each one of us here can say, "I am so blessed." If God blesses you with the gift of enjoying life without being so consumed by money, then praise him and bless him.

How rich are you? Your God forgives all your sins. You are the richest people in the world. You know the debt of sin you accumulate in just one day of living on this earth. You know the blood of Jesus that cleanses you from all sin. You live each day covered with a robe of righteousness. You are so rich towards God, because of God's grace and God's goodness and God's mercy to you.

How rich are you? You know where you are going when you die. You don't have to be

afraid to leave it all behind because you have been redeemed from the pit. You will not wake up some day in hell as the rich man did in the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus. You know you have mansions waiting for you that Jesus is preparing just for you.

How rich are you? The Lord crowns you with love and compassion. You know what is liked to be loved by God with this deep, personal, unchanging, loyal, faithful love that will never fail you. I can be the poorest person in the world, and if I can sing "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me" then I am the richest person in the world. You are so rich you can take the money the Lord gives you and use it to help other people learn about these treasures we have in Jesus that last forever. Lord Jesus, help me always value the treasures of your kingdom more than I value the money you give me. Amen.