

COVETOUSNESS  
THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL  
Luke 12:13-21

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<sup>13</sup> Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." <sup>14</sup> But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" <sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, <sup>17</sup> and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' <sup>21</sup> So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

The Lord Jesus said, "Take care, and be on your guard against all **covetousness**...."

Since the Lord stressed the need to avoid covetousness it seems appropriate to study the subject and note some of the subtleties of this sin and how to recognize it.

The character of a man is often indicated by the thoughts he has while attending preaching. Here a man interrupts Jesus with an impertinent question that has nothing whatever to do with the subject that Jesus is speaking about. Therefore Jesus' answer is severe. There were courts for this sort of dispute. Humanly speaking, Jesus had no jurisdiction over this civil matter. So He refused to hear the complaint. But then Jesus does address the motive of the question [15] – viz. **covetousness**.

## What is **covetousness**?

From the International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia:

(kuv'-et-us-nes): Has a variety of shades of meaning determined largely by the nature of the particular word used, or the context, or both. Following are some of the uses: (1) To gain dishonestly (*batsa'*), e.g. the King James Version Ex 18:21; Ezek 33:31. (2) The wish to have more than one possesses, inordinately, of course (*pleonexia*), e.g. Luke 12:15; 1 Thess 2:5. (3) An inordinate love of money *philarguros*, the King James Version Luke 16:14; 2 Tim 3:2; *philarguria*, 1 Tim 6:10; negative in Heb 13:5, the King James Version.

Covetousness is a very grave sin; indeed, so heinous is it that the Scriptures class it among the very gravest and grossest crimes (Eph 5:3). In Col 3:5 it is "idolatry," while in 1 Cor 6:10 it is set forth as excluding a man from heaven. Its heinousness, doubtless, is accounted for by its being in a very real sense the root of so many other forms of sin, e.g. departure from the faith (1 Tim 6:9-10); lying (2 Kings 5:22-25); theft (Josh 7:21); domestic trouble (Prov 15:27); murder (Ezek 22:12); indeed, it leads to "many foolish and hurtful lusts" (1 Tim 6:9). Covetousness has always been a very serious menace to mankind, whether in the Old Testament or New Testament period. It was one of the first sins that broke out after Israel had entered into the promised land (Achan, Josh 7); and also in the early Christian church immediately after its founding (Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5); hence, so many warnings against it. A careful reading of the Old Testament will reveal the fact that a very great part of the Jewish law—such as its enactments and regulations regarding duties toward the poor, toward servants; concerning gleaning, usury, pledges, gold and silver taken during war—was introduced and intended to counteract the spirit of covetousness.

Examples of covetousness: Achan (Josh 7); Saul (1 Sam 15:9,19);

Judas (Matt 26:14-15); Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11); Balaam (2 Peter 2:15 with Jude verse 11).

### **WILLIAM EVANS**

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So then **covetousness** is not simply a desire for possessions and property, which can be altogether legitimate. It is the desire for money and things simply for the sake of having it, not for necessary goals, such as: Old age, children's education, etc. Just don't let the acquisition of wealth become the priority of life.

A man's life {worth} is not measured by the things he has, but by his character. What he is and not what he has.

So Jesus teaches a lesson on **covetousness** with the parable of the foolish rich man. This man is already so rich he that has no place to store his large crops. But his only thought is to keep the proceeds for himself [17, 18]. So he needs bigger barns. He wants to enjoy what he has [19], but he forgot God [20]!

Jesus says, "So...." [21] i.e., such a great fool is this man.

The interpretation of the parable lies in the answer to the question, "Wherein did this man's folly consist?"

#### Observations:

1. The man ignored God (17, 18, 21). No praise to God. Notice and mark the personal pronouns [17-19]. No doubt the man worked his fields, plowed them, and worked hard. But apart from God's blessing he would not have had a crop. It takes rain and sunshine. But he was a "self-made" man. Many people never thank God for their success in business, never pray about their business, or even consider God in their business dealings.

Communism and socialism is a cry against the abuses of wealth. And they are just as bad. Communism and socialism say, "What is yours is mine, and I will take it by force." The Christian says, "What is mine is God's; and I will use it under His direction, for the good of others. That is stewardship.

2. The man's folly is seen in that the man never thought of other ways to dispose of his goods. He might have helped others but he only thought of himself.

3. His folly is seen in that he thought material goods were food for his soul (19). Food will keep your body alive, but it is not food for the soul.

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word of God."

4. His folly is finally seen in that he ignored the fact that his goods were not to be his forever. "This night....!" [20]

Spanish proverb: "There are no pockets in a shroud."

A millionaire died and someone asked how much did he leave?

The reply, "All that he had."

Whose shall these things be?

To store up goods to be consumed by the courts or squandered by prodigal children.

My Last Will and Testament reads: "Being of sound mind, I spent it."

His goods belonged to God, and could have been used for God.

He would have still been a rich man, but not a rich fool.

**The moral of the story is verse 21.**

"So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Jim Gunn  
Vineland Park Baptist Church  
March 21, 2012

## Some texts on Covetousness

Ex 18:13-27

<sup>13</sup> The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. <sup>14</sup> When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?" <sup>15</sup> And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God; <sup>16</sup> when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws." <sup>17</sup> Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. <sup>18</sup> You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. <sup>19</sup> Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, <sup>20</sup> and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. <sup>21</sup> Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. <sup>22</sup> And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. <sup>23</sup> If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace."

<sup>24</sup> So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. <sup>25</sup> Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. <sup>26</sup> And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. <sup>27</sup> Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country.

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Ezek 33:30-33

<sup>30</sup> "As for you, son of man, your people who talk together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another, each to his brother, 'Come, and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.' <sup>31</sup> And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. <sup>32</sup> And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it. <sup>33</sup> When this comes—and come it will!— then they will know that a prophet has been among them."

1 Thess 2:5

<sup>5</sup> For we never came with words of flattery, as you know,  
nor with a pretext for greed— God is witness.

Luke 16:14

The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.

2 Tim 3:1-5

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. <sup>2</sup> For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup> having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

1 Tim 6:10

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Eph 5:3

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

Col 3:5

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

1 Cor 6:9-11

<sup>9</sup> Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.