

## *A Creed Against Greed*

#2 in Series: *Stories from The Master*

Luke 12:13-34

<sup>13</sup> Someone in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the *family* inheritance with me.” <sup>14</sup> But He said to him, “Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?” <sup>15</sup> Then He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.” <sup>16</sup> And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. <sup>17</sup> And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ <sup>18</sup> Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: 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 many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.”’ <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, ‘You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?’ <sup>21</sup> So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

<sup>22</sup> And He said to His disciples, “For this reason I say to you, do not worry about *your* life, *as to* what you will eat; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

<sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and *yet* God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! <sup>25</sup> And which of you by worrying can add a *single* hour to his life’s span? <sup>26</sup> If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? <sup>27</sup> Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. <sup>28</sup> But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more *will He clothe* you? You men of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. <sup>30</sup> For all these things the

nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things.<sup>31</sup> But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you.<sup>32</sup> Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.

<sup>33</sup> “Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys.<sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke is one of the four books of the New Testament that reveal details and insight into the life and ministry of Jesus.

As you turn to **Luke 12**, beginning with verse **13**, you may notice a subtitle for this section, printed in a lot of Bibles that reads: *The Parable of the Rich Fool*.

Many may argue that – that is a contradiction in terms... Many, if not most, people do not typically place the terms “*rich*” and “*fool*” together. As a general rule – if you have great wealth and possessions, you obtained that by being wise, not foolish.

Money can be a touchy subject, but God doesn’t avoid it. On the contrary – the Lord has a lot to say about our perspective and decisions about money.

As with the other parables, Jesus told this story to draw a comparison between what it looks like to live for this world and what it looks like to live as a citizen of the kingdom of God... Even when it comes to the subject of money, a Christian is to understand that any discussion about money is framed in the greater reality that life in this world is not all there is.

Jesus often spoke about the Kingdom of God and how we are to think about different subjects in light of that bigger reality.

The Kingdom of God is the greatest reality. It has always been and it always will be – because God, the King, is eternal. This world as we know it now, is temporary, with a definite beginning and a definite ending...

## **1. The Setting**

The first couple of verses give us the setting. Jesus is talking to His disciples when an unidentified man in the crowd interrupts him with a sudden request:

Luke 12:13-14

<sup>13</sup> Someone in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the *family* inheritance with me.” <sup>14</sup> But He said to him, “Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?”

In those days – the people looked to rabbis to help settle legal matters. This man had a beef with his older brother... The eldest brother would have received twice as much in an inheritance as any other brother. Perhaps this younger brother hoped that Jesus would intervene and declare that the inheritance should be divided equally... He wanted Jesus to fix his problem.

But Jesus simply refused to get involved. Why? ... It may be because Jesus knew that no answer He gave to that situation was going to address or solve the real problem... The real problem was covetousness in the hearts of the two brothers. (The “you” in Luke 12:14 is plural – so it seems that both brothers may have been in the crowd...)

Jesus wasn’t answering with a dismissive attitude, but he clearly bypassed what was on the outside to address, more importantly, what was on the inside.

## 2. The Caution

Luke 12:15

<sup>15</sup> Then He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed...”

This man thought that money was the answer to his problem. Jesus said that the amount of money he had or didn’t have was not the biggest problem – it was his motive – what was going on in his heart... Jesus’ instruction to stay alert and “be on your guard” against covetousness/greed means that this has always been a common struggle for humanity.

Wouldn’t it be interesting to know what people coveted in the first century?

Tents, camels, sandals? The point is, greed is not just a 21<sup>st</sup> century issue.

God’s warnings against greed go back even further to the Ten Commandments that God gave to His people through His prophet Moses thousands of years before Jesus. Those commandments are found in **Ex. 20** and repeated in **Deut.**

**5...** The 10<sup>th</sup> commandment is “**You shall not covet**” and three others (murder, adultery, stealing) can all be motivated by greed. This is why Jesus

was saying, “*Look out for this in your heart!*”

[ ] Most of us will remember the popular slogan from the 80’s – “*He who dies with the most toys wins.*” You may remember seeing that statement on a t-shirt or bumper sticker... You may not have a t-shirt or bumper sticker, but I can almost guarantee that at some point, greed has reared its ugly head in your heart. I know for sure it has been in mine. It is a sneaky sin that we have to actively be on guard against...

Jesus continues:

Luke 12:15

... for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.”

Slow down and let this sink in.

Jesus says the value of your life is not determined by your stuff. You are not defined by your bank account, the size of your house, the car you drive, clothes you wear or whatever else you have in your garage.

Greed is motivating millions of people in our country to gamble... Many people are lured into the trap of gambling with the argument that it is simply a *game*... You even hear the appeal to “*play* the lottery”... A couple of years ago a man SC won a record lottery of over 1.5 billion dollars... Can you imagine what you would do with a billion dollars? I can’t even comprehend that much money!... Yet – even a billion dollars can’t buy the real meaning of life.

Earlier in Luke’s letter, Jesus says –

Luke 9:25 (NASB) “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?”

We see the setting and read of Jesus’ caution against greed... Now let’s look at –

### **3. The Illustration**

Jesus illustrates His point with a very short story about a greedy farmer.

Luke 12:16-17 <sup>16</sup> And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. <sup>17</sup> And he began reasoning to himself, saying,

‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’

Jesus just spoke to a man who didn’t think he had enough money, and now He speaks about a man who had more than enough... Jesus addresses the poor and the rich, and everyone in between.

This rich man, obviously blessed financially, devises a plan to accommodate his growing wealth:

Luke 12:18-19

<sup>18</sup> Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: 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 many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and be merry.*”’

On the surface, this sounds like a great plan. The majority of financial advisors would probably commend him for his hard work, his shrewdness, and his prolific portfolio... This man had a neat, three-step strategy for financial security.

I imagine several people around Jesus were nodding their heads with affirmation and approval... And we would too.

Notice – Jesus does not condemn this man’s wealth, his success, or his possessions... He doesn’t condemn yours either.

But God calls this man a “fool.” ... Look at verse 20:

<sup>20</sup> But God said to him, ‘You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?’

“Fool” is a strong word! To put it mildly, a fool is one who is ignorant and lacks sense. *Rich man, you have less than 24 hours to live and none of your stuff and none of your plans are going to matter.*

God says this man was a fool because his view of life and money was completely one dimensional with no thought for others, for God or for life beyond this world...

You have heard that old idiom that says; *Don’t put all of your eggs in one basket?*... Well, this man put all of his eggs in the world’s basket – and as a result – he had nothing in the *eternal* basket...

20 But God said to him, ‘You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?’

**John MacArthur** (not in notes) – “Oh, the materialist’s worst nightmare; somebody else gets it all. ‘This night your soul is required of you,’ and the actual Greek says, ‘This night they demand your soul.’ That’s an old rabbinic expression, a common plural construction used by the rabbis to refer to an act of God, because God is plural: Elohim. ‘They’ – God, the Trinity, the very Trinity He had been referring to a few minutes before this – ‘are going to require your soul.’”

#### 4. The Application

Then Jesus pulls us in also:

Luke 12:21

21 So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

We are no different from the rich man in this story and no less foolish if we choose to live the same way. To be clear – it’s not wrong to have stuff... The problem is when stuff has us . . . when money and tangible things of this world consume our thoughts, our energy and our efforts. The Bible calls this “*the love of money.*”

King Solomon said –

Ecc. 5:10 (NASB) “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance *with its* income. This too is vanity.”

Not only is living for this world foolish, but it also is emotionally toxic... Living a life focused only on the temporal things of this world will only lead to a life filled with fear and anxiety... This rich man in our story was an anxious man! That’s why the writer of Hebrews said –

Hebrews 13:5a (NASB) “*Make sure that* your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have...”

And the Apostle Paul wrote:

1 Timothy 6:10 (NASB) “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

Every person in this room is very wealthy when you compare your income and lifestyle to what most people in the world have... Generally speaking, we

are a wealthy bunch... But – we are also a very anxious bunch of people...

According to one research group –

“Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults age 18 and older, or 18.1% of the population every year. Anxiety disorders develop from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events” (*The Anxiety and Depression Association of America*).

Please hear me... I am not belittling anxiety in any way... It is a very real and serious issue that cannot be taken lightly. Anxiety is a broad and somewhat mysterious subject. There are physical elements that are involved with anxiety, and there are many different types of anxiety... Our family has been impacted by anxiety so this conversation is very personal to us.

But – God desires that our lives be lived free of such anxiety...

**A.W. Tozer** – “In almost everything that touches our everyday life on earth, God is pleased when we're pleased. He wills that we be as free as birds to soar and sing our maker's praise without anxiety.” (*Inspired by Tozer*, p. 67)

Look closely at what Jesus says –

Luke 12:22-23

<sup>22</sup> And He said to His disciples, “For this reason I say to you, do not worry (be anxious) about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. <sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

The original word translated “worry” means “to be torn apart”...

**Corrie ten Boom** (NOT in your notes... who may have been quoting C.H. Spurgeon) – “Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.”

Jesus is giving a command, but not an angry command! He’s not saying, “Hey get it together you worldly-minded losers.” Jesus knows we are frail and easily worried. We can’t just “fix” our anxiety by “trying harder”...

Psalm 103:14 (NASB)

<sup>14</sup> For He Himself knows our frame (what we are made of); He is mindful that we are *but* dust.

Jesus' words to us in this passage are tender and filled with grace, shepherding us toward an eternal perspective that relieves financial anxiety.

**Warren Wiersbe** (NOT in notes) – “Worry is also deceptive. It gives us a false view of life, of itself, and of God. Worry convinces us that life is made up of what we eat and what we wear. We get so concerned about the means that we totally forget about the end, which is to glorify God (**Matt. 6:33**). There is a great difference between making a living and making a life.”

God is teaching me a few practical ways from this passage on how to maintain an eternal perspective and minimize financial anxiety in my life. I hope these will help you too:

## 5. What God is Teaching Us

Number one, He is teaching us to –

- **Remember every tangible thing in this world is temporary.**

Jesus reminds us that the purpose and meaning of life is much more than what we can see and touch.

I enjoy good food and nice clothes as much as the next person. But the best gourmet meal becomes waste and the most expensive outfit will eventually find its way to a landfill.

2 Peter 3:10 speaks of the ultimate end of all of our stuff:

2 Pet. 3:10 (NASB) “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”

Again, it is not wrong for us to have or enjoy nice things, but we must learn not to put our hope in them or to hold on to them too tightly.

One writer says it this way:

**Henry Donald Maurice (H. D. M.) Spence-Jones** (an Anglican dean and author in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> C.) – “It is the Master’s will that his followers should sit loose to all earthly possessions, possessing them as though they possessed not.”

One day, everything tangible will be gone... So, our greatest need is not more

money or more things. Our greatest need is a relationship with the Lord.

That brings me to the second principle:

- Remember every tangible thing in this world is temporary.
- **Rest, trust and rejoice in God as a loving heavenly Father.**

Jesus gives three back-to-back illustrations to prove this point:

Luke 12:24

<sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and *yet* God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds!

Birds don't farm – they don't have barns... But God feeds them. And you are more valuable to God than birds! God knows – and God cares about you personally.

Luke 12:25-26

<sup>25</sup> And which of you by worrying can add a *single* hour to his life's span? <sup>26</sup> If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters?

Jesus says that worrying will not add even an hour to your life. So if you can't even do that, then why worry about anything else! Creating an hour for God is a "small thing". God is more than able to provide what you need.

Luke 12:27-30

<sup>27</sup> Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. <sup>28</sup> But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more *will He clothe* you? You men of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. <sup>30</sup> For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things.

The last phrase of verse 30 is especially helpful to me: "your Father knows that you need these things."

God calls His people to live in joyful dependence upon Him, not relying on our own strength, skills or resources... This is radically different from those

who are not in a relationship with God – those who do not know Him as a loving heavenly Father...

You may be here today as a spiritually curious person – one who is just checking out Christianity. Or, due to life circumstances, you may have a jaded view about what a father truly is... Like me – earlier in my life – you are just not sure about God being a loving heavenly Father...

Before you think about God in relation to your finances – I first want to encourage you to think about what He has done to meet your deepest need and establish a relationship with you:

Paul said it this way in the book of Ephesians:

Eph. 1:3, 7 (NASB)

<sup>3</sup> Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

<sup>7</sup> In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

God's greatest gift to us is Jesus! Even if we had nothing else, we are incredibly rich because of His grace and His forgiveness of our sin. That gift is available – and everyone of us need Him!... If you realize that is you – God is calling you to take that step of faith, put your trust in Jesus to be the Lord and Savior of your life!... That is the beginning of a relationship with God as your loving heavenly Father...

When this happens, everything changes for you! God will give you a new heart, a new set of values, and He will change your life.

For those of us who profess already know Christ, God calls us to continually rest in Him for the meeting of all of our needs...

So how do we believe when life is hard and the financial tensions are rising? It's not a matter of closing our eyes, and saying "*I believe*" three times... We ask God for grace to believe. We pray like the desperate father who asked Jesus to heal his son –

Mark 9:24b (NASB) "... I do believe; help my unbelief."

Our faith is also fueled by the Word of God. Explore, study, focus on the nature and character of God.

Psalm 145 is especially encouraging – let me read just a portion of this for us:

Psalm 145:8-9, 14-20a

<sup>8</sup> The Lord is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.

<sup>14</sup> The Lord sustains all who fall And raises up all who are bowed down.

<sup>15</sup> The eyes of all look to You, And You give them their food in due time.

<sup>16</sup> You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing.

<sup>17</sup> The Lord is righteous in all His ways And kind in all His deeds.

<sup>18</sup> The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth. <sup>19</sup> He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them. <sup>20a</sup> The Lord keeps all who love Him...

- Remember every tangible thing in this world is temporary.
- Rest, trust and rejoice in God as a loving heavenly Father.
- **Live in your circle of responsibility.**

Luke 12:31

<sup>31</sup> But seek His kingdom...

Notice the word, “**But**” in verse 31. Jesus gives us a practical replacement for our fear – and that is the responsibility of seeking His kingdom.

To seek God’s kingdom means that the priorities of our thoughts and actions are re-arranged and the things that God says are important become our primary focus. Think about, pursue, live for those things that hold eternal value.

One way to think this is with two circles. Everyone lives with these two circles: the circle of responsibility, and the circle of concern.

[ **two circles** ]

We all have things we are responsible for, and we all have things that we are concerned about – but someone else is responsible for... Outside that circle is really not our business! We can become anxious and worried when things that

belong in our circle of concern creep into our circle of responsibility.

Think about this in relation to driving... Whatever vehicle you are driving is your responsibility. You have a lane to stay in and rules of the road to follow. Every other driver on the road is in your circle of concern. You can choose to stay calm and stay in your lane (your circle) or you can start pulling other drivers into your circle of responsibility and “help” them drive the right way.

You can apply this principle to many areas of life ... parenting, work, extended family relationships... The list actually goes on and on...

Our text today deals with this principle in relation to finances and provisions. God says when we live in our circle of responsibility – that is, seeking His kingdom – our needs rest in his circle of responsibility.

Luke 12:31-32

<sup>31</sup> But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. <sup>32</sup> Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.

While preaching the Sermon on the Mount – found in Matthew chapters 5 through 7, Jesus told much of this same teaching... In other words, Jesus preached this sermon – or at least part of it – on a different occasion... In Matt. 6:25-33 you read that Jesus preaches much of this same detail. However, in verse 33, Jesus added a phrase that He did not use in Luke 12:

Matt. 6:33 (NASB) “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

In fact – may I suggest that if you have yet to do so – memorize this verse this week... That in itself will be a part of your obeying this very passage – for a part of “seeking His righteousness” is saturating our minds with His Word...

Listen – God delights to meet our needs, and to fill our lives with eternal purpose and meaning that blows away anything that this life has to offer. It’s an incredible exchange.

The old hymn says, “*Turn your eyes upon Jesus . . . and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace*”

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
Look full in His wonderful face  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace*

So practically speaking – what does it look like for us to seek God’s kingdom

by living in our circle of responsibility? Jesus shows us one way in verse 33:

Luke 12:33

<sup>33</sup> “Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys.

Some of us literally need to do this. Most of us could eliminate some excess stuff or spending in order to have a greater financial margin for generosity...

The broader principle is this – we are to seek God’s kingdom by actively looking for opportunities to invest in the lives of others...

The challenge is for all of us is to live generously investing in the lives of others – hearts set on heaven and hands open to share God’s love.

Seek God’s kingdom by loving God and loving others will choke the life out of worldly financial anxiety.

Luke 12:34

<sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Notice the “**treasure** investment” precedes “**your heart**” – in other words – your heart will follow your investment... Invest in the pursuit of His kingdom and His righteousness...

May God give us grace to examine our hearts, receive His truth and make application as He works in us.

Questions to consider in Community Group:

- What is greed, and why is it something that we need to guard against in our hearts?
- What in the story of Jesus on this subject, most challenges you?
- Just what is anxiety? Can a Christian avoid, or overcome it? If so, how?

- What are your thoughts about the **Corrie ten Boom** quote? (“Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.”)
- What is/are the Christian’s “responsibilities” (as opposed to “concerns”) in the text?
- How do we go about “seeking His kingdom”?
- Can you quote Matt. 6:33 yet?