

Sunday January 8th, 2023

Luke 12:13-21
“What Are We Doing?!”

Have you heard about the man in Southern California who was on his way to work one morning in his brand-new BMW? Suddenly, the “Big One” hit: a major earth quake began to tremble under his wheels and the car was swallowed by the earth. The man was seriously injured, but as he climbed out of the wreckage, he didn’t even notice that his left arm had been cut off at the elbow.

He just stood there at the side of the road, viewing the wreckage below and crying out, “Oh no, my Beemer, my beautiful Beemer!” A man who witnessed the disaster said to him, “How can you be crying about your car? Don’t you realize that your arm has been cut off?” The man looked down in horror at his missing limb and said, “Oh no! My Rolex! My beautiful Rolex!”

Unless you have been living in complete isolation for several years, all of us are well aware of how materialistic our society has become. Money has become the driving force behind much of what happens in our daily lives. Dare we suggest that the pursuit of wealth has become the new religion? Our daily bible readings have been replaced by our insatiable appetite to know what the TSX, Dow Jones, or our Mutual Fund is up to.

We no longer know what “delayed gratification” means. If we want something, we no longer save for it, but buy it now on credit. I ran across a great quote this week where someone quipped “What on earth will today’s younger generation be able to tell their children they had to do without?” What indeed? For believers, the situation is much more complicated, in that we struggle over issues of money that our secular brethren care little about.

Questions like: how much is enough, does God want me to even have money, can you be wealthy and still spiritual, should I give all my money to the poor, or should I give any money at all to the poor? Being sincere in our spiritual journey leads us to ask a more important question lying behind all our other questions about money; what would Jesus do about money?

It is not an idle question. In fact, you may be surprised to learn that in the bible, Jesus talks about money and possessions a great deal. Sixteen of his thirty-eight parables deal with how we handle our money or possessions. The bible offers 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions. Since the bible focuses so much attention on the subject, it is surprising how many misconceptions about faith and wealth there are.

For example; you may have heard it said that “*money is the root of all evil*”. Actually, these words are misquoted from a bible passage. The Apostle Paul writes in 1st Timothy 6:10, “The **love** of money is the root of all kinds of evil.” There is a big difference. Money, by itself, is neither good, nor bad; rather it is our attitude toward money that determines its usefulness and morality.

Sunday January 8th, 2023

Another misconception people have, is that God needs my money, or the church will fail. First of all, God is not poor. He owns everything. When you give to God, you are not “helping him out of a jam.” In the Psalms, David quotes God by saying, “I have no need of a bull from your stalls or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.” (Psalm 50:10)

A third misconception is that, having money will make me happy. The problem is that the target of how much I need to be happy, keeps moving. Financial guru Ken Roberts said that when he was first building his fortune, he thought one million dollars was the magic number that would make him happy and eliminate all his worries. When he became a millionaire, he realized he needed \$5 million to be happy and at peace.

When he had accumulated \$5 million, that target changed to \$10 million. He realized finally that no amount would ever be enough, and that peace of mind had to come from something else other than his bank account. A fourth misconception is that if I had enough money I could do a lot of good. While it is true that most charities and churches are not in a position to turn down a donation, it is also true that, as a church, we have needs superseding our financial obligations.

Money doesn't solve social problems, people do. Money doesn't spread the gospel, people do. Giving money is a good thing, but let us understand something; if you want to make an impact on this world, it requires something more than money. It requires your time and your heart. Then there is the misconception out there that God doesn't want me to have any money at all. Some people teach that there is certain spirituality in being poor.

They often refer to the story of the rich young ruler; whom Jesus told to go and sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor, as proof of the call to poverty. But Jesus said this only once-to a man obsessed with money. He had other followers who were quite affluent. In the Old Testament: David, Job, and Abraham were all wealthy. God doesn't insist that we become poor, but he does insist that we have the right attitude toward money.

So, what then is the right attitude toward money? Jesus said, “Watch out! Be on guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of things.” Jesus said our greatest danger is to become greedy. If you focus only on stockpiling things for yourself, and neglect your relationship with God and your obligations to others, you will ultimately self-destruct.

To maintain a healthy attitude toward money, we must first of all realize that money isn't the most important thing in life. Universities are full of students in medical, law and MBA programs who are there, not because they have a passion for their field, but because they believe their degree will enable them to earn a good income. Years later they find themselves earning great money yet dissatisfied with their careers.

Sunday January 8th, 2023

Perhaps you remember the remarkable story of Peyton Manning who decided to play his final year of football at the University of Tennessee and not enter the NFL draft. Many critics thought he was crazy to let such a chance pass him by. There are so many uncertainties in football-what if he was injured, or what if he lost his superstar status? What then? In an ESPN interview, Peyton's agent said the decision could cost him millions of dollars and cause him to be drafted much lower the next year.

Peyton's response was, "These people don't get it. I wouldn't trade my senior year at Tennessee for anything in the world." (By the way, the agent was wrong; Peyton went first in the next year's draft.) People who make career decisions or any of life's decisions based on simply money, often find that decision comes back to haunt them. Money is a miserable master. Jesus said, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

We also must learn to enjoy and be content with the financial blessings we do have. The truth is, no matter where we fall on the socio-economic scale, there are some people below us and some people above us. There are too many people who are focused on what they don't have, that they lose sight of what they do have. Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 6:9, "It is better to see what you have, then to want more. Wanting more is useless-like chasing the wind."

Remember Jesus' warning, "Be on guard against all kinds of greed." Being goal oriented doesn't mean we have to be possession driven. This leads to another principle Jesus tried to teach his disciples, and in turn those of us who call ourselves his followers; to have a right attitude about money means practicing giving to others. In today's parable, the man's sin was not that he was successful, but that he was selfish.

As a result, his soul was required of him that very night, and he never received any of what he prepared for himself. Then Jesus said, "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." (v. 21) It is no accident that the word "miser" and the word "miserable" come from the same root word. When you try to hang onto everything, you lose the joy of abundance.

Kevin Harney tells the following story in his book, *Seismic Shift*.

A little boy sat on the floor of the church nursery with a red rubber ball in each arm and three Nerf balls clenched on the floor between his pudgy little knees. He was trying to protect all five from the other children in the nursery. The problem was, he could not hold all five at once, and the ball nearest to his feet was particularly vulnerable to being stolen.

So, whenever another child showed an interest in playing with one of the balls, he snarled to make clear these toys were not for sharing. I suppose I should have stepped in and made the little guy give up one or two of the balls, but I was too wrapped up in the drama of it all. For five minutes, this little guy growled, postured, and kept the children away from the balls.

Sunday January 8th, 2023

Like a hyena hunched over the last scraps of a carcass, this snarling little canine was not in the mood for sharing. The other kids circled around for the kill, looking for a way to jump in and snatch a ball without being attacked and bitten. I honestly didn't know whether to laugh or cry as I watched.

Then it struck me: this little boy was not having any fun at all. There was no cheer within ten yards of this kid. Not only was he unhappy, but all the other kids were sad as well. His selfishness created a black hole that sucked all the joy out of that nursery. When church was over and his parents came to pick him up, he left all the balls behind. I guess the old saying is true, you can't take it with you. (Seismic Shifts, Zondervan, 2005)

The only way to release the grip of materialism in our lives is to learn to give. Most people intend to be generous, but too often we put it off until we can afford it. For most of us, that day may never come, because our expenses tend to rise with our income.

It is easy for our entire pay check to be consumed by “necessities”. If we do not make a concerted effort to start giving, then we will procrastinate forever. Solomon again in Ecclesiastes writes, “The more you have, the more you spend, right up to the limits of your income, so what is the advantage of wealth-except perhaps to watch it as it runs through your fingers!” (Ecclesiastes 5:11)

Jesus is stressing a basic principle of life in what he says to us. The secret to true abundant living is found in giving. Perhaps we put off giving because we don't feel we have much to give. We will never be able to give like Bill Gates, Warren Buffet or others that have made sizable donations that have caught the media's attention. We might think that way, but Jesus saw things differently.

One day, Matthew records that Jesus was watching people giving their donations to the temple. Many wealthy individuals made quite a show of putting in their money. They created a spectacle by blowing trumpets and basically shouting out, “Look at me! Look how generous I am.” In the midst of this circus, a poor widow came, who threw into the temple collection trumpets, two small coins, barely worth a penny.

Jesus said to his disciples, “This poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.” (Mark 12:43-44) Jesus is not saying we should shirk our responsibilities to our families and give away all our money. He is saying we should be willing to give until it hurts.

C.S Lewis in *Mere Christianity* wrote, “The only safe rule is to give more than we can spare...If our charities do not pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small.”

The secret to living, my friends, as scary as it seems, is found in giving. So, what would Jesus do about money? It is plain to see his attitude toward money is radically different than our own. He isn't against our having money; he just doesn't want money to have us.

Sunday January 8th, 2023

The best approach to money, according to Jesus, is to recognize that money is not everything, and recognize that we already have much to be thankful for, and to discover that the secret of living is giving. This will loosen the grip materialism can have on our life. This approach will enable us to have control of our money, without money having control of us. So I guess there is only one question left to ask this morning...

How big is your barns and what are you going to do with what you have stored in them?