

“BE ON YOUR GUARD AGAINST ALL KINDS OF GREED!”

The Parable of the Rich Fool is our text for this day. The words of Jesus from Luke 12:15 give us the topic for today's message.

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed . . ."

Dear Friends in Christ,

I'm guessing that when some of you figured out that today's sermon is about the Parable of the Rich Fool, you thought to yourself, "I'm off the hook today! I'm no fool, I'm a reasonable, rational person. And I'm certainly NOT rich! I'm neither rich nor a fool so I'm in the clear today."

Well the Parable of the Rich Fool is merely the story Jesus used to illustrate the important warning, *"Be on your guard against all kinds of greed . . ."* Greed is the subject today. And greed is: 'the excessive, intense and selfish desire especially for wealth or possessions.' When it comes to greed for wealth, the Apostle Paul used this definition, the "love of money." He wrote to young Timothy, *"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."* (1 Timothy 6:10 NIV). Notice, he didn't say money is the root of all evil. He said the LOVE of money . . . The excessive, intense and selfish desire for money - that's greed.

Now, maybe you're thinking that greed is only a problem for rich people. If you are of "modest means" you won't have any trouble with greed, right? Although being wealthy presents an extra challenge for a Christian, every one of us is faced with the temptation to sinfully and selfishly desire money and more and more material wealth.

Today we hear Jesus give one of his strongest warnings about greed. He says, "Watch out for what the love of money can do to you." It can distort your perception of what is really valuable in life. Greed can turn you inward so that you begin to care only for yourself. And worst of all, greed can lead you to a frightening situation at the end of your life. So all of us need to take these words of Jesus to heart.

“BE ON YOUR GUARD AGAINST ALL KINDS OF GREED!”

- I. Greed leads to a false view of life.
- II. Greed leads to a fool's death.

The first two verses of the gospel lesson for this Sunday describe the situation in which Jesus spoke his strongest warning about greed.

¹³ *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?"*

Jesus saw right through this man's request. It was greed that prompted him to ask Jesus to intervene in the squabble he was having with his brother over money. After making it clear to the man that a dispute over an inheritance was not any of Jesus' business he said to everyone, *"Watch out! Be on your guard*

against all kinds of greed." Beginning with this warning, Jesus went on to explain the dangers that lie behind greed. Greed leads a person to a false view of life. Greed leads to a fool's death.

I. Greed leads to a false view of life.

Just before Jesus told the parable of the rich fool, he stated one of the fundamental misconceptions that can cause a person to become greedy. He said, *"a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."* The people in the crowd that day were part of a society that measured a person's importance by what he owned. In the parable that Jesus was about to tell, he would bring home the truth that a correct view of life has little to do with the accumulation of money or possessions.

Measuring a person's value by what he or she wears, drives, or owns is common practice in our society, too. Why do Tom Cruise, Angelina Jolie and George Clooney demand \$20 million or more for their part in a movie? Money is how they keep score of who is the best. Does a professional athlete really need 100 million dollars for a ten year contract? Once again, money is just a means of keeping score and determining who is the best. It is considered the measure of success, the measure of a person's value.

How many employees will leave a job they love for a job they hate because it pays more? In the minds of many, your salary is a reflection of how important and successful you are. To this way of thinking Jesus says, *"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."* Greed leads to a false view of life, a false view of life that says, "Those who are famous or powerful or make the most money or have the most luxurious possessions ARE the most important or the most successful or the most valuable people in the world.

Have you been influenced by this kind of thinking? Have you incorporated the world's standards to determine what is the most important or most valuable? Have you incorporated the world's standards to determine your own value or importance? You don't have to be a movie star or a professional athlete to begin thinking that life is measured by money.

Satan likes to influence us through the culture in which we live, filling our hearts with greed. To set our thinking straight we need to hear reminders like this one from 1 John 2:15-16, *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world -- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does -- comes not from the Father but from the world."* We have this warning from Ecclesiastes 5:10, *"Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income."* To counter the culture of greed in which we live we need to regularly hear God's law that condemns greed and coveting as sin. We need to hear warnings from God's Word to be on our guard against greed. Greed leads to a false view of life. To illustrate this, Jesus told this parable of the rich fool.

¹⁶ . . . *"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.'"*

Here's the point Jesus made with this parable: Greed leads a person to have a distorted view of himself and a distorted view of life. Greed leads to sinful self-centeredness, sinful self-reliance, and a life directed toward pleasure instead of service.

This lesson isn't just directed to those who are rich. Any person, rich or poor, or in between, can fall into greed's grip and the false view of life it causes. Jesus used the rich man in the parable to illustrate an attitude of selfishness. The rich man's frequent use of "I," "my," and "myself," jump out at us, because it demonstrated extreme self-centeredness.

Maybe we have more in common with this rich fool than we might think. Haven't you spent your adult life trusting in your money more than in your maker when it comes to meeting your physical needs? Does the strength of your retirement plan hang on the number of zeros behind your savings or on the one in whose hands your future rests? Hasn't greed distorted your view of what is really important in life? In this country, our currency says, 'In God We Trust' which is ironic since most of us put our trust, our sense of security, our feeling of well-being not in God, but in money. In MONEY we trust. For most people in our society, financial security is much more important than spiritual security. And it shows. It shows in people who hold to the belief that "every dollar I give to church is a dollar less for me." It shows when a person feels more secure about the future by building a big bank account than by building up the kingdom of God. It shows when a person is generous toward himself or herself but stingy toward God.

"Be on your guard against all kinds of greed!" Jesus' words of warning certainly apply to us. Thankfully in Jesus we have a Savior who said "no" to Satan when Satan offered him all the wealth in the world. Instead Jesus went to the cross to pay for the times we have given into greed and adopted the world's value system. In the perfect life he lived in our place, Jesus never let greed guide him. Now you and I are able to say "no" to greed. With our living Savior living in us, we can conquer the sin of greed and coveting. We can be on our guard against greed so that it doesn't lead us into a false view of life.

After the rich man hatched his plans for the future, he thought he was going to have it made for years to come. But God had other plans for him. Jesus went on to say,

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."

The second part of Jesus' warning against greed is just as important as the first. Not only does greed lead to a false view of life, it also leads to a fool's death.

II. Greed leads to a fool's death.

The conclusion of the parable leads us to see the most tragic consequence of greed. The rich man's life was not really something over which he had control. His life was a gift from God. And just like your life, it was his chance to come to faith, grow in faith, live his faith and share his faith. He used God's gift of life to come to wealth, grow in wealth, live for his wealth and keep all his wealth for himself. When God took a final accounting of the rich fool's life, he wasn't rich at all. He was a pauper. He was a debtor and his debt of sin was still unpaid. He had lived his life for himself and not for God or in service to God. His life had evidenced greed not faith. So God called the man a fool. This word 'fool' means someone who

doesn't add up the facts correctly or someone who doesn't have a grasp of reality. A person blinded by greed is such a fool. He or she chooses to overlook the fact that wealth is temporary and God's judgment is eternal.

Many years ago, the story goes, at the time of sailing ships, a sailor shipwrecked on an island in the South Seas. He was immediately seized by the natives, hoisted to their shoulders, carried to the village, and set on a crude throne. Little by little, he learned that it was the custom of these people, once each year, to make some man a king, king for a year, and they had chosen him as king. He liked this idea until he began to wonder what happened to all the former kings. Soon he discovered that every year, when his kingship was ended, the king was banished to a barren, desolate island, where he starved to death. The sailor didn't like that, but he was smart and he was king, king for a year. So he put his carpenters to work making boats, his farmers to work transplanting fruit trees to the island, planting and growing crops, workers digging wells and building houses. So when his kingship was over, he was banished, not to a barren island, but to an island of abundance.

That story can be a good illustration of life: We're all kings here, kings for a little while, able to choose what we will do with the stuff of life. Our Savior would have us use the blessings he gives us to prepare for the life still to come. Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-20, *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."* You store up treasure in heaven when you manage your material possessions with spiritual goals in mind. Yes, God calls on us to provide for our families and meet our financial responsibilities. But beyond that, we are to manage our wealth with his kingdom in mind. Money is a temporary tool that you can use to sustain yourself and your family. Money only has eternal effects when you use it to share the gospel message and advance God's kingdom.

When greed leads a person to a false view of life it can lead him or her to a fool's death. That person will stand before God as one who wasted his or her life. Making money was more important than growing in God's Word. Taking care of personal needs was more important than serving others. Faith in God was replaced with faith in money. And so in the end that person will lose God's kingdom. You can see why Jesus says, *"Be on your guard against greed."* It can lead to a fool's death.

I heard this story from someone my age who grew up in Africa. He told about the time, back in the 60's or 70's, when there was a very lucrative market for live monkeys, and the monkey trappers had a clever method of catching their prey. A number of dried gourds were filled with seeds and nuts and small pieces of fruit and firmly fastened to the branch of a tree. Each gourd had a hole just large enough for the unwary monkey to stick his forepaw into it. When the hungry animal discovered the food, he quickly grasped a handful of it. But the hole in the gourd was too small for the monkey to withdraw his clenched fist. And he didn't have enough sense to open up his hand and let go in order to escape, so he was easily taken captive, snared in a large net.

This is a picture of how greed can work in the life of a Christian. The devil with his crafty devices tempts a person to put value in material things and try to collect and hold on to the things of this world. That gives the devil an easy opportunity to work on that person and get that person to intensely and selfishly desire more, i.e., be greedy. People are too foolish to let go because they want everything he offers, they want what they think is valuable and they eventually lose their spiritual wealth.

Greed is a deadly poison that destroys lives in time and souls in eternity. So take Jesus' warning and remain continually on your guard against greed. Because greed leads to a false view of life and to a fool's death. Amen.