

Part 45: What Will Remain

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I have two kids. The youngest is going to be 2 this summer, and the oldest will be 5. I have found one of the hardest concepts to teach my oldest is planning. Thinking forward. Trying to get her to consider more than just what is right in front of her. We are finally getting there recently. Considering the future came a lot easier when she learned to count. Previously, trying to discipline, by taking away privileges for like the next two days, or the week, or anything like that, just wasn't really a punishment. Because tomorrow or the next day she'll be absorbed by the moment again, and forget what she had lost.

Our text this morning is all about considering a future context. Something we all do, and have been doing most of our lives. Going to college is a short term cost, to get the credential, that nets you the career you want. Saving money is a short term sacrifice, to build a down payment, to purchase a home.

We suffer or struggle in the short term, for a greater long term reward. It's interesting though, as much as we bring this attitude to various spheres of our lives, we often, even as Christians, forget or neglect the eternal implications of our actions and decisions. This morning we are going to explore a parable all about the eternal implications of our attitudes toward wealth and excess.

Continuing our sermon series through the gospel of Luke, we are in a section where Jesus is giving wisdom and instructions for the Christian. Specifically, how to respond to the relational and material circumstances that we may find ourselves in. Jesus is opening his disciples eyes to the eternal context of their souls.

Last week, Daniel walked us through a challenge that Christians through the centuries would wrestle with: acknowledging Jesus, or denying him. In the face of persecution and death, what would you fear? Would you fear, as Jesus says, "those who kill the body..."? Or, would you fear, "Him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell." Why fear man, when it's God who has dominion over your soul for eternity?

Our text this morning is perhaps a bit less violent than the death persecuted Christians would face, but no less eternally minded. **Greed exposes a heart that is blind to God's eternal possession of our souls.** We are going to see this in three points this morning: **1. The mask of greed, 2. The heart of greed, 3. The death of greed.** Jesus is concerned with our hearts' attitude toward material wealth. Warning particularly against greed and covetousness.

1. The mask of greed. Luke 12:13. Jesus' instruction is interrupted by a man, a man who was listening to what Jesus had been saying, starting in verse 4. Warning the crowds to fear God not man, a call to stand for Jesus in the public square, and an encouragement to not be anxious, for the Holy Spirit of God will be with them.

This man interrupts with "Teacher." It's a word that implies respect for Jesus as a religious teacher. He asks Jesus, the respected religious teacher, for help in dealing with an issue regarding the law, an

inheritance dispute with his brother. Under the law, a father's estate was to be divided among his sons, and to the eldest would go a double portion. So in this case, two brothers, this man should be receiving $\frac{1}{3}$ of the estate, and his older brother (who would likely be the one to control the distribution), would receive $\frac{2}{3}$.

It appears his brother is not being fair in his distribution. We don't know this for certain, he could just want more, but he would likely not have any legal standing for more than his share. Actually, this could have been a reasonable request. Because the rabbi, the teacher, would have a role in helping ensure there would be a lawful distribution of assets.

After all, this man just wants justice, right? There are two problems here. First, the timing. He interjects and interrupts Jesus' teaching on eternity, to solve a financial dispute. Tone deaf maybe. Second problem is his statement. Cause it's a statement, not a question asking for help. He asks Jesus to make a summary judgment on the matter, not hearing a case for why or why not, he is expecting Jesus to exact justice on his behalf.

Jesus responds appropriately. **Luke 12:14-15**. Rather than helping this man exact justice, or entertaining this question of inheritance, maybe pivoting toward the inheritance offered through faith in Him, Jesus takes this opportunity to filet him and his greed. And warn his disciples and the crowds listening.

But what is greed? What exactly is Jesus warning against? The word for covetousness here, in other translations I went through, used the word greed. The intent behind the word generally means, 'the desire for more.' Almost exclusively used regarding material things. With our vocabulary shrinking daily due to social media and the internet, greed is better word for us to grasp this idea.

So greed is the desire for more material things. To further narrow our focus, Jesus also says in the second half of the verse, "one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." The word abundance is an overflowing, more than what is necessary. There is a distinction to be made between what is needed to live and survive, and what is an overflow of abundance. Starting in verse 22, Jesus will be discussing anxiety as it relates to our material *needs*, that which sustains us. This morning is about wealth and excess.

Jesus give's two verbs, two 'to-dos' in the face of greed. "Take care" (beware), and "be on guard." Perceive and protect. See and contend. Greed is a slithering, deceptive, subtle thing. It's quietly wiggles its way into us. Often bypassing our defenses against sin, because it's often so easy to justify or obfuscate our greed.

Like our inheritance seeking man, we can hide our real intentions. Recall, Jesus is rebuking, almost exclusively, material greed. We can deflect an uncomfortable discussion about wealth and materialism, by lumping in more abstract things, like being greedy in relationships, or our career, or greedy for attention or respect. Rather than focus on the wealth of 'things' gripping our heart, we deflect and find other possible targets for rebuke. If our materialism is just one of many objects of greed, we don't have to focus on it, or think about it as much. Sin is deceptive, and few are as successful as materialism. Greed can slither away, not unnoticed, but with a lighter hand than necessary. This is the mask of greed.

We do have to make something clear, Jesus isn't warning against wealth. He's rebuking greed. It's not about an amount, it's about the attitude. The heart behind the one handling. **2. The heart of greed.** Jesus rebukes the man, teaches on the dangers of greed, and tells a parable to make his point. **Luke 12:16-18.**

The story is of a wealthy man with productive land. Land that produces more than he can store or sell. He has a dilemma. Doesn't want what he has to go to waste. Needs a solution to his problem. So he begins to think one out.

Just like the man that interrupted Jesus, this seems like a reasonable problem that could use a reasonable solution. He's acting shrewdly in trying to figure out how to not allow his crop to go to waste. There seems to be planning and prudence in the way this man is running his business. Build bigger barns, to store a bigger crop.

So he does. And when he's finished, he makes a declaration. He actually preaches a sermon to himself. "And I will say to my soul.." **Luke 12:18-19.** Like most sermones, there is an truth, prosperous land and stored up grain, followed by a command, rest and indulge.

The problem for this man was not verses 16-18. A wealthy land, blessed to yield much, too much for his barns. A prudent course of action to ensure less waste. The problem for our rich man was the 11 times he said "I" or "my." The complete self-absorption of considering no one but himself. Including the God who made his land fertile. Who brought the rains. Who kept thieves and animals from taking his crop. In a profession more reliant than most on the sustaining work of the creator, it's sure seemed easy for him to ignore.

Such is the power of greed. When selfishness, pride, and myopic focus on self-exaltation are given the keys to the car, the end of the road is the heart of greed. The heart of greed is one who does not consider anyone other than himself or what he cares about. But most importantly, at the heart of greed is one who forgets the Lord.

The symptoms of this heart are deep. "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for *many years*..." His selfish greed has given him the delusion that he is control of the years of his life. Yet again, ignoring the umbrella of a sovereign God.

If this sermon he preaches to himself sounds familiar, it's because it is. It would have been familiar to the Jews in the crowd listening to the parable. **Ecclesiastes 3:12-13.** Words written by the wisest man to ever live, Solomon. And Jesus uses the wisdom of Solomon to harshly rebuke the rich man's lazy retirement, and our heart of greed.

So how are these different? Solomon's words are ones of wisdom and glory to God, but the rich man's a caricature of greed. Well we just gotta zoom out a little bit on Ecclesiastes 3. **Ecclesiastes 3:10-14.** The rich man has 11 I's and my's. Solomon has no less than 7 attributions to the provision, control, and eternal dominion of God.

There is so much room to enjoy the gifts of God. To take pleasure, in the work that our toil produces. God gave us taste buds. For the pleasure of taste. He could've made all food taste like tofu. Bland and tasteless, giving us what we need for sustenance, without the joy of savory, sweet, sour and spice. Or all food could taste the same. Imagine every good food, meat, milk, fruit, vegetable, all tasted the exact same, and all bad food, rotted food, poisonous berry, all tasted disgusting, something like artichokes.

The God fearing heart embraces the gifts of God in all their joy, praising the Lord for his kindness and provision. But a greedy, hedonistic heart embraces the pleasure and gifts, and makes them his god. Where the heart of greed forgets the Lord, a God fearing heart will forever cling to His provision and goodness.

3. The death of greed. As Jesus concludes his parable, we see the result of this man's worldview and sin. **Luke 12:20.** The Lord's response to this foolish man. This man will die, and in a moment, all his wealth will mean nothing. His soul will leave his body behind to decay along with all the abundance of things he accumulated.

More wisdom from Solomon, **Ecc. 2:18-19.** For what value does this man's wealth have when he leaves, but vanity. In ignoring and neglecting God, this fool ignored and neglected the very real consequences of eternity. Somewhere he cannot take his abundant wealth. He sought to relax and rest in this lifetime, rather than work for a more satisfying rest in eternity.

We feel the mortality of this fleeting shell. Read a NY Times article during the summer of the pandemic. I resurrected it when I was preparing for this sermon. As of the summer of 2021, there were roughly 500 people around the world, cryogenically frozen at death. All hoping, planning, expecting, that at some point in the future, technology and medical science would allow for their remains and consciousness to be resuscitated. To go on living long lives of eating, drinking and being merry.

There is a wealthy couple in Arizona, who plan to do this. They set up what's called a "personal revival trust." So that while they are frozen, their money will be invested, and by the time they come back, they expect to be some of the wealthiest people in the world. Absent an eternal perspective, the excesses you can indulge can easily become your priority. And when indulgence becomes your priority, this life is all you have.

But what is possibly most offensive to God here, is this man's perceived ownership of his own life and destiny. **Greed exposes a heart that is blind to God's eternal possession of our souls.** That more ambiguous final clause makes a whole lot more sense when we again read **Luke 12:20.**

That word 'required' has much deeper implications than shortsighted minds can easily see. A definition of the root word *apaiteo* is to "ask back, demand a return, ask back what is due." So if God requires this man's soul, he asks back what is due. What he already owns. What is already his. This man's soul, this man's life, is not his own, it is God's. He is merely a steward of what God has granted him to care for.

How arrogant is it for him to take what God has given him, to serve only himself! And not just the life God had granted, but his land, where God actively provides his riches. We are stewards over what little God allows us to rule. We are not little kings and queens of little fiefdoms, to do with our lives as we please, however we please. Our very lives are gifts from God, to responsibly honor him and love others while we live on this earth. Our rest, our “relax” is eternity with our creator. Work was appointed to us at creation, and toil and struggle in work a reality until that glorious day we will rest with him forevermore.

An accurate understanding of our eternal world will transform how we look at our finances and our material wealth. It is no longer mine, but his. To steward and use to the glory of Jesus, and to love my neighbor.

There is a pretty correlative example of the rich fool’s “I” focused indulgence: retirement. Retirement as we understand it, in the West. Reaching a certain financially stable position, through a pension, investments, ira, enough money to live and enjoy life, without having to work. For almost all of human history, people worked until we couldn’t.

There were some exceptions, always for military service members. It wasn’t until the late 1800’s this became an institutional thing, and then the 1930’s a more established pattern of life in our country. The idea that we *should* be working only like two thirds of our lifespan wasn’t a concept. Except generally in the case of the extremely wealthy, like our rich man.

Now I’ve seen recently, amongst people in my generation and younger, a dream of retiring by 30, 35, 40. The 9-5 job is seen as indentured servitude to the system. Therefore the goal is to have a stable enough financial situation, to retire as soon as humanly possible. This highlights a purpose destroying consequence of greed. The neglect of the creation mandate.

God placed Adam and Eve in the garden to work. Before the fall, God said be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Work the land, care for and steward the planet. In the fall, the curse was to make man toil in his work. To make work hard. If you’re life’s goal, is to get wealthy, and avoid working hard to care for, build, or serve, then your life’s goal is to avoid one of the very reasons God created you in the first place.

In our parable, the end of the rich man’s greed is a life of leisure. An end to the work of planting, threshing, plowing, harvesting, storing and selling. The same heart of self indulgence that breed the greed in this man’s heart, breeds contempt for a fundamental purpose of his existence: to work.

Do we have that same contempt? Is pleasure our purpose? Is rest, in this life, our goal? I recognize these are very uncomfortable questions. Some of us are retired, with pensions, or social security. Many of us are contributing financially to that eventual goal.

However, don’t hear me rebuking retirement accounts, or calling out retirement from a particular career. After all, Jesus doesn’t rebuke the wealth, he doesn’t rebuke the prosperity or the rich land. He rebukes the greed. I would contend that the traditional, western idea of retirement is unbiblical and foolish. The yearning to retire at 35 and live the rest of your life like this man, ultimately end in the same rebuke this man receives.

Luke 12:21. Where are you storing your treasure? There are only two ways for greed to be put to death. First, it dies with you. Like the rich fool. Leaving behind a wealth of things. The cruel irony of “in god we trust” on all our currency.

Or, it dies with Christ. We preach a different sermon to ourselves. One of need and helplessness. A soul longing for salvation in a world of suffering and pain, of struggle and heartache. A sermon of frailty and redemption. Weak vessels, longing for hope. Finding it in Jesus, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension to the right hand of the father.

We preach to our souls, a sermon of Jesus and his gospel. A gospel that makes sense, only in the light of eternity. A gospel that is vanity, if this life is truly all we have. A gospel that stores up for itself treasures in heaven and not on earth. A gospel that doesn’t promise rest for 40 or 50 years, but for the next 50,000. A gospel that returns us to communion with our creator and Father.

We spent all morning bemoaning the insidious nature of greed, warning against the temptations of excess and wealth, rebuking the selfishness that propagates our greedy hearts. That’s great. A lot of warnings, consequences and rebuke. But where’s the hope? What should I do? What does it mean to be rich toward God? What does it mean to store up treasures in heaven? How can we use our relative wealth to guard against greed, worship our savior, and love our neighbor? How can we put our greed to death?

Great questions, I’m glad you all asked. We’ll close with 4 ways to kill greed with our wealth. **1. Give to those in need.** Let’s skip ahead in the gospel of Luke, to the story of the rich young ruler. Asking Jesus what he must do to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus discerns he loves his wealth more than he loves the Lord. **Luke 18:22.**

Give. Specifically, give to those in need. The poor, the widows, the orphans, the broken, the disabled, the mentally ill, the oppressed, the homeless, the single moms failing to pay rent. Make no mistake, there is difficult discernment to be had in giving to those in need. We must be thoughtful about how to define excess and indulgence.

At the time Jesus give this rich man this command to sell and give, the needy and poor are those who can’t put food on their kids table. Those that have no home or are losing their home. The family that cannot afford a physician to care for a sick mother. The blind or the lame begging at the temple gate. When we consider our circumstances, giving to the poor must be done with discernment. If we are giving to excesses, and relabeling it as a “need,” we are moving the goalposts on abundance, and therefore greed. We end up contributing to the masking and justification of greed. Every believer that lives in the developed world needs to assess their excesses for this reason. That we would not be excusing and justifying that which Jesus rebukes.

The second way we store up treasures in heaven with our material things is to **2. Share our gifts. 1 Timothy 6:17-19.** Eat, drink, and be merry, to the glory of God, as Solomon says. But don’t do so alone. Share the enjoyment God has given you. Open your home to your church family. Break bread with your neighbors, feed them your favorite meals. Lend your car to a college student. Be quick to offer moving help with that new truck.

But most importantly, model God-glorifying enjoyment of these gifts. When you're thanked for your generosity, credit the one to whom that gratitude is really owed. Use these gifts as opportunities to reflect on how much better heaven will be, or to share the gospel, or to encourage someone who's having a hard time seeing God's goodness. Don't think about pleased gifts as yours, but as the Lords. Be thoughtful and thankful. What you have is not your own.

3. Give to missions. Around five or six times in first and second Corinthians Paul talks about how he and other gospel laborers are reliant on their brothers and sisters in the faith to fund their ministry. There were many problems Paul addresses in these letters. One of which, seemed to be their reluctance to give to their efforts in the gospel. He encourages them and rebukes them in **2 Corinthians 8:1-3**.

There are over 3.3 billion unreached people, over 7,400 people groups who haven't heard the gospel. Not all Christians are charged with planting churches, learning the languages, and evangelizing in places you're likely to be killed. But all Christians can at least, in part, participate in the very necessary work of funding the efforts of these gospel laborers. If we aren't ourselves going to go make disciples at the ends of the earth, we can at least help send those who are going.

A case study, Iran, this is information from Operation World. 22 years ago, the number of Christians who converted from an Islamic background was between 5,000 and 8,000. As of today, that number is estimated to be over 800,000, possibly more than a million. In those 20 years, more Iranians have become Christians than in the previous 13 centuries. That is what missionaries, and missionary dollars have produced. Possibly a million souls that we will worship with in eternity. Talk about storing up treasures in heaven.

If you want help doing this, we have several missionaries in Europe and the Middle East who we support as a church, and who many in our church support. Find an elder, hit the info desk, ask around if you need help just getting started. What a testimony to the eternal values of a church, should all its people be participating in the movement of the gospel through unreached peoples.

4. Give more to your church. Again, Paul discusses finances with the wealthy Corinthian church, **1 Corinthians 9:13-14**. Paul's way of telling this church to pay their pastors, and to support the mission of the gospel through Corinth. We should be doing the same for Missoula, through Sovereign Hope.

There are numerous ways that our church has been able to share the gospel, teach God's word, encourage the weak and fainthearted, provide needed relational and discipleship relief, counsel the hurting, teaching our children gospel truths, ministering on campus, sharing the gospel with students, participating in missions. We want to be as faithful as possible with the money we receive as a church.

But I want to highlight one thing, I think is spectacular. Kind of in line with the previous point, Sovereign Hope, the pastors and members, have a vision for teaching, training, and sending. We want to be a church whose gospel influence moves beyond these walls, beyond these city limits, into our greater area and beyond. Clear fruit of this vision is the number of preachers we have, who are part of this church. Just a couple years ago, the preaching roster was basically Tyler, and a couple of elders

when in a pinch. That number (basically one), has quadrupled in just a short couple years. Daniel, Jonny, Jonathan, and myself, with Paul Cheng champing at the bit, he's already preached at other churches in Missoula.

That's five additional men, who, on any given week, can preach the gospel to our body, and bless other churches in Missoula with gospel preaching. This is abnormal, this is rare. We are the ones that get called to fill the pulpit, because we have a bench. Churches two or three times our size don't have that. The people that have been giving to see that we could be trained are making this impact in Missoula.

Four practical ways we can spend our excess to the glory of God. Beware, and be on guard. Let not greed grip our hearts tighter than Jesus. Seek the riches of the kingdom of God, and not the riches of the kingdom of this world. For this world fades, but his is forever.