

The Parable of the Covetous Fool

Luke 12:16-21

September 20, 2020

We are continuing our study in Luke Chapter 12 in the theme we started last week. So if you could find your way to Luke 12, a section on covetousness that started in Luke 12:13 and following. There are a few things I wanted to cover last week that I didn't get to, but that is one of the benefits of expository preaching, that I get to chop it off where I want to and then pick it up where I left off and finish that thought. So we'll do that a little bit this morning in the first point. Just to recap briefly for any of you who have been unable to be with us over the past few weeks: Jesus has been teaching his disciples, and he is preparing them for opposition and hostility in the time span toward which he is heading, and he is heading to the cross, which is just around the corner in just a matter of months. It is a time of his betrayal, rejection from the leadership and all the people, and his execution just several months away. And even now in the text here, we see the tensions are ramping up in intensity toward Jesus Christ and his ministry.

In this context, Jesus and his disciples are surrounded by this massive crowd of people who have come, but they're really not coming with good intent necessarily. They are coming because they have heard of Jesus' rather controversial ministry, and especially that he just "owned" the scribes and the Pharisees. He just unmasked all their hypocrisy. Word got around as word gets around in that day; they didn't need social media for that. They just had social; that's all they did! They talked to each other, and word spread very quickly. So this massive crowd comes to see this controversial teacher. This crowd has been under the lifelong influence of religious hypocrisy. All their leadership have been, with very few exceptions, hypocritical, hypocritical religion, hypocritical Pharisees and scribes. And that is going to leave a mark. That actually shows up in this question that comes from the crowd.

No one in Israel really knows what a true shepherd looks like, so they don't recognize that Jesus is a true shepherd when he comes. No one in Israel really knows what true righteousness looks like. All they have been looking at this whole time has been hypocrisy, a mask, a fraud. So they think they know what righteousness looks like, but they don't. They don't really know

what ministry is about. They don't know what prophetic ministry is about. They honored the prophets by building them tombs, but they failed to realize what their fathers murdered the prophets for. They're about to commit the same sin with regard to the greatest prophet: the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

I find it's not much different today, sadly, in our own country. There are many people who come into our church, and many people who come into faithful churches all around the country, and they've been listening to preaching all their lives. They've been attending church. They've been hearing preaching, going to conferences, and all the rest. And they come in and they don't really know what shepherding is. They don't know what a church is. They think they know what it's all about, and they think they are all dialed in and have it figured out. After some time, they realize they have a lot to learn. I think that is the mark of maturity, knowing you have a lot to learn, understanding that the more you learn, the more there is to know and to see and understand. It creates a humility in the heart.

These people come to Jesus, and they think they've got it all figured out. Absent any true sense of righteousness, lacking

a knowledge of what true godliness and real piety look like, the people who come to Jesus on this occasion are led around by every covetous desire of their hearts, and they don't even know it. They don't even know how to recognize what is driving them, which is what Jesus encounters in this question interposed by a man from the crowd in Luke 12:13. Take a look at the text.

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

There are three points for this morning, and I'm just going to give these three points to you up front: Jesus confronts, illustrates and corrects those whose hearts are controlled by covetousness. Now when I say, a heart controlled by covetousness, I'm talking about an unbeliever. This is evangelistic in nature. There's a lot for us as disciples, as Christians, believers, to know and understand. Do covetous impulses come into our own lives, hearts and minds? Absolutely! Covetousness is behind a thousand sins in our lives, so we need to spot it when it shows up. It's always there to influence and insinuate. But hearts controlled by covetousness are not believing hearts. When I say, controlled by, I mean they are unbelievers. That's all they have to control them. That's all they have to motivate them. It doesn't matter if these unbelievers are religious or irreligious unbelievers. Greed drives the covetous heart to want, to long for, to yearn for what it does not have, but wants to possess.

In a religious context, people find plenty of things to want. So let's not fool ourselves and think that covetousness doesn't happen in church. People find a pathway in church to importance, recognition, appreciation, prominence. Some people just like being talked to because the world's too unfriendly to

even talk to some people, so they come to church because that's what they want. They want to be stroked. They want to have nice people talk to them. They have a covetous heart. They're not driven by love for Christ. They're driven by love for self.

The Pharisees, the scribes, they are Exhibit A of covetousness, a hypocritical religion that is haunted by all kinds of covetous spirits. Whatever happens in false religious contexts, you need to be clear, it's mirrored in the culture at large. We're not letting the culture at large off the hook as if being irreligious is more virtuous than being a religious hypocrite because they're just irreligious hypocrites out there. Make no mistake about that. The mask of hypocrisy that covers a coveting heart does not only wear a religious garb; covetousness can wear the black robe of the university. It can wear the white coat of a healthcare professional. It can wear the face of social protest. Covetousness is dressed up in tailored suits, blue jeans, uniforms. It wears Republican colors and Democrat colors. That's because covetousness is not a matter of the external. It's a matter of what's driving the heart.

So, friend, if you're here and you are controlled by covetousness, if you're here and you are driven by your own desires, if God grants you mercy to see that your heart has been oriented toward stuff, toward satisfying yourself, today is the day that you can hear these saving words from Jesus Christ and find freedom in his salvation. You can find power over covetous desire because covetousness is like a little pet snake. Have you ever heard those stories online? Some young person goes down to like Bolivia and they go get a little pet boa constrictor or python. They bring it back in a little bag, hiding it on the plane. And they come back and feed this thing and they feed it and feed it. Covetousness is just like that. Eventually, they become a news story. You go online and you see, "Oh, I just thought it was my little pet snake," and it has just wrapped around him and killed him. Covetousness is exactly like that. It's like a dangerous serpent, a dangerous animal you feed and feed and feed. And you think it's your friend. You think it's giving you joy and pleasure and everything you desire. But eventually, it just wraps itself around you and squeezes and suffocates the very life out of you.

So, my friend, if you're here or if you're listening online and you're controlled by covetous desires, may the Lord grant

you his grace to open your eyes to the truth about life: that you're not okay. You are in grave danger. Christ is going to give you deliverance today if you'll listen carefully. And you can join the rest of us who have been set free from the just condemnation that is due for our covetous hearts, the death that is due for our sins, all the sins that covetousness has driven us toward, the enslavement we were under. You can join us in Christ, putting our covetous desires to death as we obey Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and follow him into the joy of life eternal, which is true life indeed. That is what I want you to hear. So what Jesus teaches us here is going to accomplish all of that, okay? Freedom, hope, joy in Christ in a satisfied, contented, grateful heart.

Let's get to the first point: Jesus confronts a covetous heart. We studied this last week, so I'm not going to repeat that sermon, but there are just a few more comments I want to make that will help us to draw the most out of verse 15. When Jesus says, "Take care, and be on your guard," there is a double warning there. There are two words, he doubles them up to show emphasis, "I really, really mean it! Watch out! Covetousness is dangerous! Take care, be on your guard against all covetousness." And we could say, all kinds of covetousness. It

shows up in all kinds of things. As we said last week, covetousness is one of the chief culprits behind all our sinning. And just to remind you of this definition, covetousness is the sin of wanting more of what we have or wanting what we don't have. Coveting, as we said, is opposed to two of the greatest of Christian virtues: the virtue of gratitude and the virtue of contentment. Covetousness loves to obliterate those two virtues.

If we're controlled by covetousness, we're not grateful. If we're controlled by covetousness, by definition, since covetousness is a get-more-of, it's not content. This continuous desire for more makes us ignore all the reasons we have in our life for giving thanks, and it destroys any sense of peace and contentment we might have. That's why I like to tell people that I know in my life, if they are looking at a catalogue or surfing the web and going online, I like to say, You're practicing discontentment. It's an exercise in discontentment to keep on surfing for products, surfing the Amazon page, looking through the catalogue. What's happening? What are those retailers, those marketers trying to do to you? They are tapping into your covetous desire, making you feel like this toaster isn't as good as that toaster because this one, well, it cooks bagels, too,

and I need bagels. And we have to have the whole needs-and-wants discussion.

When we keep wanting more of what we already have, or we could say bigger than what we already have, or brighter or better colors than what we already have, when we want more respect from other people, more attention, more appreciation, or when we keep wanting what God has given to somebody else, but not to us, or not to us in the same measure, beauty, influence, position, wealth, we know for certain covetousness is the poison that is infecting the mind, robbing us of contentment, making us ungrateful for what we already have.

Instead of leading to joy and gratitude, covetousness turns all of God's good gifts, which are there, just look at your life, it turns all those good gifts into occasions for grumbling and complaint. How sad, right? And that is why in his great compassion and kindness here, Jesus said, "Take care, be on your guard against all covetousness, for," here's the reason, "one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Jesus is so concerned here about our life, not just that our atoms are well fed, the *bios*, kind of life. He's not just

concerned about the day-to-day mundane things we go through. He's concerned about our *zóé*, our spiritual life because our spiritual life is what is truly connected with God and his divine life. That's how we're created—to be in communion with Christ and communion with God. When we're cut off from that, man, our heart wanders. He's concerned about our life. He is concerned about the very essence of what it is to be a human being, to be created in the image of God. He does not want us to miss out on the entire purpose and meaning of life itself.

God created us in his image to be completely contented, satisfied, grateful for and fulfilled in love, okay? If I could just summarize it into one thing, I mean if we could talk about a number of different virtues, let's talk about the virtue of love. God created us to be fulfilled in love, in his love. It's a love that comes from knowing and worshiping God. For those of us in Christ, it's a love that we didn't know until he shed that love upon us. The love that he gave us by the Holy Spirit produced in our hearts is now a love that we then reflect back to him and then spread toward other people. And it produces such a joy in loving and knowing God and then in loving and knowing one another, as well. That love, that connection with God in that way, was severed when Adam and Eve fell into sin. When they

were tempted by the devil, when they considered, and covetous desire started to awaken in them and then led to transgressions, they were cut off.

In the beginning, when God created Adam and Eve, God placed them into this garden paradise. And this garden paradise was in the midst of this world designed for their pleasure and enjoyment and discovery. The perfectly designed world was a physical manifestation of God's goodness, his manifold goodness. There are a thousand, ten thousand reasons to give thanks to God in seeing all that he put in this world. And he said, "One thing I don't want you to touch. One thing I don't want you to eat. Obey me in this one thing. But look at the millions of things you can enjoy." He tested them. They had a million reasons to give thanks, a million reasons to worship God and find all their contentment in him. God gave Adam and Eve hearts designed in such a way that they could only be satisfied in him.

Solomon said it this way, summarizing in Ecclesiastes 3:11, "God has put eternity into man's heart." So by God's design, we have hearts that can only be satisfied with what is eternal. We have hungry hearts, desires, longings that cannot be fulfilled,

by God's design, with stuff, with any created thing. Because created things by definition are not eternal, and God has put eternity in our hearts to be satisfied by only that which is eternal, which is God and God alone. Only God is eternal, so all of our longings, all of our yearnings, which you need to understand, though they feel physical in the moment, they are deeply spiritual in nature, can only be satisfied in God. When Adam and Eve departed from God in the beginning, for them and for all of their fallen progeny, which means all of us, all of their progeny, all their hungry hearts started gobbling up all the things of creation.

We were cut off from him. We were cut off from what's eternal because of our sin, because of our unbelief, because of our pride, and we believe the devil's lies. So we started gobbling up everything. We are so hungry, an insatiable drive. None of it is satisfied, food, drink, sex, money, power, fun, entertainment, travel, vacations, all of it, power, ambition, achievement, accomplishment, buildings, ziggurats built into the heavens. We are trying to satisfy this God-given eternity in our hearts with non-eternal things, i.e. that which is not God. At its best, it is vain. It's an utterly exhausting pursuit that ends in futility, but at its worst, it is irreversibly

destructive. This is clear evidence of our fallen condition and of sin's effect on our minds, that we keep on chasing what can never satisfy us. We keep doing it again. It's like we jump on the merry-go-round and then jump off and say, "Hey, that was dumb. That just makes me sick going round and round and round. Let me jump back on for another ride."

Covetousness is the insatiable longing of an unbelieving heart. It's the unsatisfied yearning of an idolatrous heart, one that keeps on trying to find satisfaction apart from God and can never ever find it. Why? Because that satisfaction does not exist. You're chasing a pipe dream. It isn't there. And we have, as I was praying earlier, the litany of history to show us all the people who chased and chased and never found. So we really did die that day when Adam and Eve turned from the living God to pursue a deceptive mirage. Not only were we cut off from the source of life itself, but our insatiably hungry hearts were untethered from the eternal source of sustenance. Instead of being contented and grateful and filled with the love of God, our hearts became lustful, greedy, covetous. We were seeking joy and satisfaction in created things that were never ever designed for that. Lust, then, replaced love as the driving force, the driving motivation of our fallen life, fallen heart. And when

lust replaces love as the driving motivating force of life and personality, nothing but degradation and destruction and sorrow will be the result.

And I know so many here can raise their hand and testify that is true. I mean, we're speaking in tautologies here. It's a fact that's proven just by stating it. We've all lived this. We all know this. And that is why we say covetousness is violence against the very principle of love. Covetousness takes love and flips it on its head and turns it into lust. And lust destroys. Love is oriented toward another. Love seeks the good of the object that is loved. Lust or covetousness, that sin is turned inward. It's oriented to the self. It seeks the pleasure and the satisfaction of the subject, the lusting subject. So it eats itself alive. It's the self and not God which is at the center of the heart. Lust is like that dense gravity at the center of a black hole that just keeps sucking in everything into its space.

That's why Paul, in Colossians 3:5, when he commands us to mortify all these internal, lust-oriented sexual sins, talks about covetousness, and he equates it with idolatry. He says, "Put to death," or mortify, several sins. And then he writes,

"and covetousness, which is idolatry." Covetousness, idolatry, same thing. So the prohibition against idolatry, we understand, goes right back to the first of the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:3, "You shall have no other Gods before me." When we covet, when we lust for that thing, whatever it is, whether it's a tangible thing, a physical thing or it's an intangible, non-physical thing, status, popularity, whatever it is—when we lust for that thing, wanting it more than God, that is idolatry. God does not permit idolatry—no other gods before him.

He is jealous for his own glory, which means he accepts no rival in worship. And worshiping our Creator is our greatest good. It's what we're designed for. We thrive in the worship of God. We find all our satisfaction and contentment in him and him alone. So it is his gracious purpose to command our worship, to forbid our idolatry. It is so gracious of him to command that of us. And when we turn from him and try to find our satisfaction and our contentment in the things God has made, that is idolatry. Everything becomes a means to satisfy our covetous hearts. We become users and abusers, and we'll even treat God like that, too. We'll use and abuse him. It's called seeking what's in his hand, rather than what's in his heart. We'll even treat Christ himself like that. We even treat him like that in

our prayers. We saw that last time in the man who tried to use Jesus for his own selfish end. "Teacher, tell my brother." That is, "Do what I say." He's using Jesus.

So covetousness is violence against the very principle of love, and it starts with violence against the love of God by turning to idolatry and then carrying out that violence against our neighbor in all kinds of sins we commit against our neighbor. When we want what somebody else has, that is the very opposite of loving our neighbor, isn't it? Romans 13:9 says, "For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment [is] summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Right? So covetousness is at the very root of every other sin against our neighbor. Exodus 20:17: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or [broad category] anything that is your neighbor's." So you shall not covet your neighbor's wife. What is that? That is adultery, right? Exodus 20:14; "You shall not commit adultery."

Covetousness leads to transgression of the seventh commandment, and, by the way, every other sexual sin. Lust, even if it's not committed against a married person and taking that person's spouse, lust is violence against purity itself. Lust is violence against the dignity of that person's body. I mean, pornography has just turned our nation into a whole nation of Peeping Toms, people who make your skin crawl, that you'd call the cops on. That's happening in everybody's bedrooms. Every other sexual sin—lust is violence against people. It is violence against purity. It's essentially stealing the dignity, stealing the spouse, stealing the purity of somebody else. It is violence itself.

You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor: house, wife, servant, ox, donkey. Covetousness leads you to transgress the eighth commandment as well: "You shall not steal"—Exodus 20:15. Covetousness is a larcenous spirit. It prompts all kinds of stealing. There's theft. There's robbery, which is theft by force. There's burglary, which is theft by entering a building to get stuff. That's why Christians oppose socialism as a system, because it is, by definition, a violation of the eighth commandment. So covetousness leads to adultery, all other sexual sins as well. Covetousness leads to stealing.

And since people often try to resist others when they're trying to steal and take something from them, coveting also becomes the root of murder as well. James says in James 4:2, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" And then to reinforce the point, he uses the Hebrew parallelism, "You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel." Exodus 20:13 says, "You shall not murder."

Last Sunday, I saw an article on Forbes.com website announcing in the title, "At Least 13 Cities are Defunding Their Police Departments." You'll want to check that list for places you don't want to live, don't want to move to. Thirteen cities, at least, are defunding their police departments. Listen, rewriting laws to soften penalties for crime or defunding or reducing funding for police departments, those people who are there to enforce righteousness, you're going to see murder rates skyrocket. Unfulfilled covetous desire turns into anger in the heart. Anger is the root sin of quarreling and fighting and even murder itself. The only reason we don't see more murder in society at large is because laws punish it, because law enforcement officers enforce those laws. We have police departments, police officers, sheriffs, sheriff's deputies to

enforce those laws. So, beloved, be sure to thank your local law enforcement officer. Pray for your law enforcement officers. Vote in such a way that supports your local law enforcement and the establishment of law and order in society and isn't seeking to destabilize and tear it all down.

So when Jesus says, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions," listen, he is intentionally, but he has understated the case at this point. He is understating it. One's life, it's not just that it doesn't consist in the abundance of his possessions, it consists in so much more than stuff because we are so much more than just material beings. We are immaterial, as well. And we are satisfied in only God, who is eternal and spiritual. Covetousness is a sin that keeps us enslaved, chained, imprisoned, all the while circling our cage and chasing the wind. We are like a rat on the wheel, just continuing to spin, spin, spin, and every once in while stop to get a drink and a pellet. And keep on spinning again. And Jesus intends to liberate the people in this crowd, to set them free. And I hope if you're here and you're like the people in this crowd, I hope he liberates you, too. That's my prayer.

He's going to do that by illustrating the folly of covetousness in this parable he tells. And that leads us to a second point: Jesus illustrates a covetous heart. This is often referred to as the Parable of the Rich Fool. I don't have any problem calling it that, but since Jesus tells the parable in response to a covetous man, and since the emphasis in the parable is less on the "rich" part of that and more on the "fool" part of that, I prefer to call this the Parable of the Covetous Fool. Wealth is not the issue. His covetous heart is the issue. Let's read that again starting in verse 16, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself," Actually, the verb there is, he was thinking to himself, he's got this ongoing, internal dialogue with himself. "'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' 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. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'"

Let's stop there. Obviously, we can see the subject of Jesus' parable is not a God-centered man, is he? He is not a God-fearing man. This is a self-centered man. We can see in his reasoning, in his mind, thoughts of God never enter his mind at

all. Instead, he's consumed with thoughts about himself. If you are sitting here and want to know if you are a covetous person, think about how often you are at the center of your thinking and how little God is at the center of your thinking. That is the main thing Jesus wants us to see about a covetous heart, namely, that self is at the center of a covetous heart. Self is the reality that hides behind all idols, no matter what they look like, no matter what form, no matter what color. Self is behind all idolatry and all false religion. Any worldview other than the Christian worldview is a means to a self-centered end. Self is at the center. Self is the idol.

When you take that thought back into verse 13, Jesus wants us to see that self is at the center of that man's covetous heart, too. It just reinforces what we have already seen about him and know about him. He's not coming to Christ because he's enthralled with Christ. He's not coming to Christ because he's so caught up in Jesus' pure beautiful truth teaching. He's coming to Christ to see what he can get out of Christ and how he can use Christ for his own ends. So many people come into churches with that heart. So for the sake of this man, for the sake of this crowd, and also for the sake of instructing his own

disciples, Jesus delivers a parable to uncover and to illustrate the hidden sin of coveting.

Get ready to jot this down because I've got nine observations about this parable. They are nine observations we can make about coveting. I'm going to make the observation. I'm not going to dwell on it too long. I'll just make the observation. I'll include a brief point of exhortation for each one, something that you can take out of here and apply. So get your pens ready. Get your paper and take another swig of coffee. Here it goes.

Number one: A covetous heart is an ungrateful heart. Look back in verse 16. As Jesus sets this up, he tells us, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully." Notice that? It's the land, not the man, but the land is the subject of Jesus' opening sentence. Jesus assumes he is thinking about the fact that the land is productive. And who's behind the land being productive? God in heaven. He's the one that sends rain on the just and the unjust. He's the one who causes sun to shine on the just and the unjust. He's the invisible power behind crops growing, causing

ground to be fruitful, businesses thriving or not thriving. God is in control. The man's bounty came from God, not himself.

So you might stop and ask, "Where's the thanksgiving in this man? Where's the gratitude in his heart?" Not to be found, is it? He is like the pagans Paul indicts in Romans 1:21. This man "neither honors God as God, nor [does he] give thanks to him." He is like the rest of the unbelieving world. He doesn't honor God as God and doesn't give thanks. He is not thankful. Why? Because he thinks he is the reason for his wealth. He is ungrateful. "Who should I thank? Me, myself and I? Very well, thank you, me, myself and I." That's how he thinks. An exhortation for us: Be humble, don't be proud in your so-called accomplishments, whatever they are. Don't think highly of yourself. Think with sober judgment. Recognize how God uses means to bless and provide for us, and then take time to give thanks.

Number two: A covetous heart is a stingy heart. If you prefer the word "miserly," I like that word, too. Write that down. A covetous heart is a miserly, stingy, Scrooge kind of heart. Any generosity in this man? Do you see it anywhere? No,

not one thought of generosity. He is selfish. He hasn't entertained one thought of sharing the abundance that God gave him out of the soil. His only thought is to hoard it for himself. His heart is cold. It is unfeeling. It is uncaring. It was Saint Augustine who famously said, "The bellies of the poor are much safer storerooms than his barns." That's how we need to think as Christians. Listen, by storing his bumper crop in the bellies of the poor, it would of course be digested on earth; but in heaven, it would be kept all the more safely. What a great way of putting that, right? We need to think that way, to store our extra in the bellies of those who have need.

So our exhortation, Paul commands the rich of the world in 1 Timothy 6:18, "to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share." Look, here in this country, in comparison with the rest of the world, in the context of all human history, most of us are the rich in this present world, aren't we? So have somebody over to your house and feed them. Have somebody over who can't repay you. Bring them into your home. You say, "Oh, no. My home is a mess." Okay, well clean it up a little bit. Just tidy it up a little bit. You don't need to go through and do a field day. Military guys will know what I mean by a "field day." You don't need to go through and make

sure you can rub a white glove in the corners and never get a dust ball or anything like that. Don't overdo it; just tidy it up. Have people over; get them into your house and find those people who you think can't repay you. Be generous. We need to cultivate generous hearts and share with other people.

Number three: A Covetous heart is a narcissistic heart. Narcissus is that Greek legend who found himself staring at his own beauty in a pool, and he was so transfixed by his beauty in pool that he just died there because he couldn't break away. We say that about the younger generation. "what a bunch of narcissists," right? Look at his guy, he's a first-century guy. He's not a millennial. He's first-century guy—really, really old. He's a completely self-absorbed old person, don't you think? If you count the words in the Greek text of this guy's internal dialogue that Jesus gives him here: forty-six words of this man talking to himself. And you know what? Twenty of the forty-six words are self-referential. Almost half of the words are referring back to himself. He's got himself so fixed to the center. He loves himself. He's talking to himself, and he's talking to himself about himself. He's asking and answering his own questions. I mean if that's not narcissism, it's self-infatuation.

Exhortation? Get over yourself! You're not that pretty. Every passing day, yeah, I look in the mirror, and I'm not that pretty either. And after you repent of your self-centered thought life, get outside of yourself and consider others. Get to know others. Make your conversation about learning about others. Notice your own speech. When you get together and talk with someone, do you actually take an interest in them, try to draw them out, see how they're doing, see what's going on in their lives? That's a good practice to get into if you want to break the habit of self-referential narcissism. Get outside of yourself, get to know others, talk with them, give thanks for them when you break that conversation. Give thanks for that person. Give thanks for their uniqueness. Sometimes people bug you with their little quirks or whatever. Give thanks for those quirks because those quirks are signs they are not like you, and that's a good thing. God made us different. Give thanks for people, know them, serve them through the ministry of supplication, prayer. Pray for them. Acts of practical kindness for other people. So American Christian, it is not all about you; it is all about Christ. Be Christ. Act like Christ to some other people.

Number four: A covetous heart is an anxious heart. So look again at the question that is perplexing him in verse 17. He said, "What shall I do, for I have no where to store my crops." He is having an anxiety attack about this. Talk about first-world problems. Does he have any reason to be anxious? God just supplied him with this bumper crop. His barns are overflowing so much that he has run out of room to store all of his crops. Waahh! Having all of his needs met, having all his wants satisfied to overflowing, still having a super abundance of wealth left over, what is he doing? He is wringing his hands, asking, "What shall I do?"

Exhortation for us? If we have a heart of gratitude, we are more likely to be content with what we have and quick to share the excess with other people, which gets us outside of ourselves, which gets us focused on other people. We're going to have no anxiety worrying over all that extra stuff because we know God cares for those who fear him and trust him and share with others. This man's heart is covetous, ungrateful, stingy, narcissistic. That's a sure recipe, believe me, for worrying and anxiety. A covetous heart is an anxious heart.

What does he do when he's anxious? That brings us to a fifth point. He prays to his god. A covetous heart is an idolatrous heart. When lacking gratitude, failing to honor God in his heart, he exchanged God for an idol, that is, himself. The stinginess and the narcissism tell us about the contours, the shape of his idolatry. The lines are drawn as small and as close as his tiny little self-absorbed heart, and all that idolatry leads to anxiety, and that anxiety provokes him to pray. Instead of praying to God, he brings his concerns to his idol. He starts talking to his idol. He starts petitioning his idol with his problem. Verse 17: "What shall I do, for I have no where to store my crops?" And lo and behold, his god answers him in verse 18. He said, "I will do this." This is insight into this mental conversation and showing him actually praying for himself and answering his own prayers. This is evidence of prideful thinking. It's a crippling pride, and he has imprisoned his thinking in a very small, tiny little prison cell of his own brain. This man foolishly sees himself as the fount of all wisdom, as if he and his own resources are the answer to all of his problems.

What's the exhortation for us? Christian, try to discipline your mind to meditate on Scripture and pray. Pray to God. Pray

to the God of Scripture, the God of the Bible, the God who is saturating your mind because his Word is in your heart. Be saturated with his Word. And whatever else enters your mind throughout the day, whether it's news from websites or radio or television, whether it's grocery shopping, demands of parenting, laundry, food preparation, oil changes, co-workers, whatever it is, let those thoughts pass through the prism of God's Word in your mind and prayer. Have God alongside you in your day because he *is* alongside you. Walk with him. He is always present. He's always there. Pray through everything you think through. While you're developing that discipline, start with this discipline right away: Never ever have an atheistic conversation with yourself, one that cuts God out. Always involve God in your thought life.

Sixth point: Prayerless idolatry leads to weariness. It's exhausting. It's just exhausting. There is no rest for idolators. Number six: A covetous heart is a weary heart. He cannot rest until he takes care of all his stuff. Looking again at verse 18, the rich man says, "I will do this," and there's a flurry of activity coming out. "I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods." No rest. Just a ton of work. Listen, just unpack that.

You guys who build things, think about what this requires. To tear down his barns means he has to empty his granaries. He's got to transfer all the crops he's been storing into another granary, which means he needs more money to hire the trucks, pay the laborer, rent temporary space, move the grain. Then he's got this massive demolition project, clearing away all the rubble, taking it to the trash yard. He's got to prepare for the building project and clear the land. To build bigger new and improved barns, he has to hire an architect to design it, hire a builder to build it. He's got to find a trustworthy supervisor to oversee the project, protect his money so it's not wasted, squandered, or stolen. And then, when he is finally open for business, he's got to take all that grain he's been storing in the rented space and do the same process again and load it into those granaries. There is no rest in this flurry of activity.

So when his pastor says, Hey, dude, I haven't seen you in church for the past couple of weeks. Yeah, I've got barns to build. I've got barns to tear down. I've got barns to build. I've got so much to do, I just can't make it. Pastors hear this all the time. And we want to point you back to Solomon's wisdom, who, after considering all that he had built, Ecclesiastes 2:11, all that his hands had done, the toil he had expended in doing

it, he came to this conclusion: "Behold, all was vanity and a striving after the wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun." Do you think you're wiser than Solomon? Of course not.

Exhortation? Stop it. Just stop it. Stop wearing yourself for money. Proverbs 23:4-5 says, "Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist." You can hear him pleading there. "When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven." Try chasing that eagle. Listen, don't tire yourself out. But he can't stop. Why? Because idolatry is a cruel task master.

Covetousness keeps him grabbing, grabbing, reaching, reaching, driving him toward a false promise, which is number seven. Number seven: A covetous heart is a self-indulgent heart. By being stingy instead of generous, by hoarding instead of sharing, this man will find no actual pleasure, no real joy in his wealth. He's not even living in reality, talking to himself like this. He's living in this dreamworld in his own mind of this utopia that he's creating. He's motivating himself with visions of self-centered consumption. Look at verse 19: "I will

say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.'" Does he have any of that? No. He says, "Relax, eat, drink, be merry." He's already spending it. That is not reality. That is fantasy. He's playing fantasy barn-building right there. When he says to himself, "Relax, eat, drink, be merry," what he imagines as the ideal, you need to understand, is a twisted distortion of heaven. It's a perversion of what is truly good. Instead of seeking the rest that God promises, he wearies himself trying to create his own. No wonder when he gets there he just wants to tell himself, "Relax." It's present tense. Keep on relaxing. You're going to need a few years. Just take it easy from here on out. Keep on relaxing.

There is no true rest in passivity, and so the only activity he can imagine in his dreamworld is when he stirs himself to consume something, to eat and drink. "Give your body what it craves." This is hedonistic paradise, isn't it? "Indulge all your sensual impulses, don't deny yourself any pleasure. Get rest, keep on resting. When you're bored from resting, respond to your body. Respond to your central appetite like the animals do. They're happy. Give your body what it wants. And the deception of all deceptions: You'll finally achieve happiness. Be merry! Another present tense verb. Keep on being merry. Keep

on being glad. Go on celebrating. Keep on living the good life. Don't ever let it end. Eternal party!

Exhortation for us? Don't get caught up in the world's versions of utopia of heaven, of paradise, of everything they chase. Again, let your mind meditate on what God says the good life is about. The good life can be found in a dark, dank prison cell, and your heart will erupt with hymns like Paul and Silas. Loving and worshiping God, giving thanks, rejoicing, finding contentment in God and his gifts, loving others, sharing with them, being generous with your excess, accepting your lot, your station from God, enjoying all that God has given you in the fear of God, entering into heavenly rest and eternal reward of God himself—that is the Christian version of joy and happiness.

A covetous heart is an ungrateful heart, stingy heart, narcissistic heart, anxious heart, weary heart, self-indulgent heart; and the sad truth about self-indulgence is that it is so barren and lonely. Point number eight: A covetous heart is a lonely heart. Where are all his friends and family in his imagination? Again, verse 19: "I will say to my soul, 'Soul, [...] relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" There is no one else around. Just

he and all his cold, dead stuff. Everyone else has been crowded out by his self-centered ambition. I'm sure in getting there he sacrificed a lot of relationships. He probably left a whole bunch of wives and children in his wake. Solomon wrote about a rich man whose covetous heart denied him relationships with others. He said this in Ecclesiastes 4:7-8, "I saw one person who has no other, neither son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, 'For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?'" Answer: for no one but himself. So lonely!

Exhortation? Beloved, use your earthly treasure to build treasure in heaven, which means investing in God's Word and investing in God's people. This means investing in others. Fill your life with other people; make your life about serving others. Don't live for self-fulfillment and self-gratification. Don't treat others like tools, like a means to making yourself happy, getting what you want. Serve God, serve others. You will find joy. Why? Because Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Do you trust him in that, or do you think he's out to lunch?

The worse is yet to come. Number nine: A covetous heart is a proud heart. Instead of being wise and saying, "If the Lord wills," this man assumed that tomorrow would be just like today, and he'd have a whole string of tomorrows that look just like today. He's presumed upon God, thinking he's going to live long enough to see his plan come through. James says this in 4:13 and 14: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit'—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time then vanishes." Proverbs 28:11: "A rich man is wise in his own eyes." That's the problem with this guy. His covetous heart has made him proud. He thinks very highly of himself, his own thinking. That is why he prays to himself. Ten chapters earlier, Proverbs 18:11 says, "A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his imagination." In his pride, this guy has erected a castle, and that castle is his fortress to protect him from all harm, to mitigate against all disaster, and little does he realize his castle has become his prison, and his fortress is going to be his grave.

What is the exhortation? Well, that brings us to our third and final point, which is Jesus' admonition to the pride of the

covetous heart. Number three, Jesus corrects a covetous heart. He has confronted, illustrated, and now he is going to correct a covetous heart. For those to hear with ears in this crowd, Jesus clears away the mirage of greed in verse 20: "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." This is the end of those who trust in wealth. This is the end of those who are deceived by their covetous heart. And in being deceived, they make three major miscalculations. They commit three sinful errors. Let's go through this quickly.

The first sinful error is that they fail to see the difference between ownership and stewardship. They make an error, and it's a sinful error. They fail to distinguish between ownership and stewardship. God told the man in verse 20, "This night," that's emphatic in the Greek; it's very sudden, "your soul is required of you." Jesus has God interrupting this man's musing, his planning, his dreaming, his vain imagining. And all these plans for building this little dreamworld paradise evaporate in a second. They're consumed by the cold reality of death. The verb translated "required of you" comes from the world of commerce. "Required" indicates the man's life was not

his own. He didn't own it. The loan came due. He is required to pay. His life isn't his; it's God's. His life itself is on loan from God, and the loan has come due, repayment demanded immediately. This man failed to realize that, failed to realize his very soul, let alone what the ground produced for him, was due

All the wealth, goods, even the barns to store it in, and should we add his body, his strength, his energy, his mind, his mental acumen for business, his favor within the community, getting loans and all the rest—everything this man had, including his own soul, was all on loan. He didn't own it. He thought he was the owner. But he was just a godless idolator, a self-centered, blind, ungrateful steward of what is God's. The true owner came back to take what's rightfully his by virtue of the fact that he created it. He came to requisition the soul he created. He came to bring the man before his reckoning and accounting table to demand an accounting.

Listen, when God comes to collect your soul, there is no bargaining for more time. Your soul belongs to God, not to you, and he takes it when he wants to take it. Not only that, but

you're going to give an accounting to God for everything he has given you and what you have done with that soul. You're not the owner of your soul or your life or anything in it. You're just a steward, and a steward must give an account to the true owner. "Moreover," 1 Corinthians 4:2 says, "it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." Who is the one who is going to define the word "faithful" on that day? It's God.

His second sinful error is failing to see the difference between gift and gain. I know some people in our church have been reading a really good book on the Book of Ecclesiastes called, *Living Life Backward*. Fantastic book. I recommend it. It's very thin and easy to get through. He really camps on this point of distinguishing between gift and gain. It's the error of treating the gift like gain and completely ignoring true gain altogether. That's the error. God told the man, "This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" When not even his soul is his own to do with what he wants to, what happens to the rest? Job said in Job 27:16, "Though a man heap up silver like dust, and pile up clothing like clay, he may pile it up, but the righteous will wear it, and the innocent will divide the silver."

Listen, since all wealth comes from God and belongs to God, only God, and not the government, I'll say, has the right of redistributing wealth. The covetous fool thought everything he had was something he needed to cling to, hold onto, hoard, to keep as gain so he could use it for his own pleasure, for his own personal satisfaction. He hoped to earn his own rest, merit his own reward, and he would work his fingers to the bone to get it. In his toil, laboring to prepare all of his stuff, Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 2:23, "For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest." Listen, covetousness makes the heart so weary. Why? Because you think you've got to hold onto it because you think it's gain. He looked upon God's gifts as his own personal gain.

He failed to recognize God's gifts are just signs. They're gifts that are signs that point to God's favor and goodness. The true reward of life, what true gain is, is God himself. "What will it profit a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his own soul?" This man was so inattentive to what true gain is that he got lost in all this stuff, in thinking the gifts were his gain. That's the tragic tale Jesus tells us in Luke 12:21 of the "one who lays up treasure for himself but is not rich toward God."

Job tells us he will go to be rich, but he'll do so no more. He opens his eyes; his wealth is gone.

That brings us to a third sinful error, which is perhaps the chief error: failing to discern the difference between poverty and prosperity. He's failing to see the source of true wealth. He fails to understand what true treasure is. If you see yourself not as an owner, but as a steward, then you see yourself in the right light. When you see the things of your life as gifts for a steward to manage and not as gain for you to stash, hoard and hold onto, then you see what all that stuff of life points you to. You see God as the only real treasure. Your relationship with him is the only true reward. And when that happens, we use all earthly goods to gain a heavenly reward.

William Gurnall asked this question: "Where layest thou up thy treasure? Dost thou bestow it on thy voluptuous appetite? On thy hawks and on thy hounds? Or dost thou lock it up in the bosom of Christ's poor members? What use makest thou of thy owner and greatness to strengthen the hands of the godly or the wicked? And so of all thy other temporal enjoyments, a gracious

heart improves them for God. When a saint prays for these things, he hath an eye to some heavenly end."

Proverbs 11:4 says, "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death." Righteousness: That is what it is to be rich toward God. To be rich in righteousness, you don't need a dime. Jesus did not use, I just want to say this as a footnote, he did not use a wealthy man as the subject of his parable because he doesn't like rich people. Jesus is not some socialist at heart, advocating for communism or the redistribution of wealth. He does not have anything against property ownership or wealth. Some of his closest disciples were wealthy. He was supported by the wealth of many wealthy women who followed along in their retinue. The commandments themselves, "You shall not steal." "You shall not covet anything belonging to your neighbor." They tell us the Bible affirms property ownership and the accrual of wealth. The Bible attests to God's blessing and favor that comes up on rich and poor alike and increase in wealth is a blessing. It creates an opportunity for a life of generous stewardship.

That said, though, wealth has with it, and the more wealth, the more problems, it has an attendant danger. Wealth and riches have an attendant danger, and that is why Paul tells Timothy to warn the rich. As for the rich in this present age, he charged them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future so they may take hold of that which is truly life.

It is one of the reasons that I love that here in America, we are the rich. I love that here in America so much of American money in the best sense has gone to support missions around the world, supporting and trying to build churches and sending faithful, godly, called, trained men and women around the world to build churches, to bring the Gospel. We're funding that from here, from our plenty. That's what wealthy people do. Jesus does not tell the rich to give away everything in some singular act of generosity. Why? Because you do that one time, and then you're poor, and you're the one begging. But they are to manage what God gives them and manage it wisely so they can keep on growing wealth and then showing generous stewardship to those

who are in need. They only do that, though, when the rich understand what real treasure is, that it is rich in righteousness before God.

J. C. Ryle asked this, "When can it be said of a person that is he rich toward God? Never until he is rich in grace and rich in faith and rich in good works. When can it be said of a person that he is rich toward God? Never until he has gone to Jesus Christ and bought from him gold that has been tested in the fire. When can it be said of a person that he is rich toward God? Never until he has a house not made with hands, but an eternal house in the heavens. Such a person is truly rich. His treasure is incorruptible. His bank never breaks. His inheritance does not disappear. Man cannot deprive him of it. Death cannot snatch it out of his hands. All things are his already. And best of all, what he has now, is nothing compared with what he will have hereafter."

Folks, the same can be said for all of us who put no hope in the uncertainty of riches, but who put all our hope in God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. When we do, our hearts are filled with gratitude. We're content in him. And our

earthly treasure is for building heavenly treasure. That is why Jesus said at the end this section in verse 32, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you," not just some riches, not just some coin, "the kingdom." The entire kingdom! "Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches, and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart be also." Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you so much for Jesus' teaching in this text. We do pray it would reorient all of us, believer and unbeliever alike, that it would reorient us to your economy, your way of thinking. May we find all our riches and pleasure in you and you alone. And may we treat the stuff of this world as just passing, fading glory that we are going to use to invest in the kingdom, to give to other people and care for other people. Thank you so much for the wisdom of all of Scripture. We've seen in Jesus' teaching here, I just ask you to help us own this for ourselves and for any here who are still held by a covetous heart. Father, we understand that. We were there once, too. We just ask that you would give salvation even now. Open their eyes to the truth. Use the parable of this covetous fool to prompt

faith in Jesus Christ. It's for your glory we pray in Christ's name. Amen.