

got god?

August 1, 2010

Luke 12:13 – 21

Listen now for the reading of God's Word for the people of God.

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

¹⁴Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" ¹⁵Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

¹⁶And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷He 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. ¹⁹And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." '

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."

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

Dear God, thank you that you are interested in every detail of our lives, no matter how small or how insignificant we ourselves believe these details to be. Today we commit ourselves to trusting you for all that we need and praise you for all that we have. Lord, grant us the insight to see clearly Your Will in every situation in our lives and give us the courage to move into action when you call. In the meditations of our hearts and in the words of my lips, may you be honored by our worship today. Amen.

I have to be honest with you. Today's reading makes me a little nervous at first. All this talk about money and material possession is not the kind of topic that most people want to hear about on Sunday morning. We've been talking about discipleship; about telling others that God loves them and will provide if only we seek after God's Will and Way for our lives, taking the time to sit at the feet of Jesus and revel in his teachings and about prayer, an integral part of our discipleship journey. But wait; that second thing above – sitting at the feet of Jesus and reveling in his teaching. That was an important lesson for us and today we are being offered another of Jesus' teachings. So, to simply skip it would be irresponsible at best. We have never been offered a promise that the lessons Christ has for us are going to be easy to hear. We have, however, been promised that the lessons he offers us are not in vain, so let's look deeply at what Jesus has to say here today.

First and foremost, Jesus doesn't tell us this morning that it's wrong have wealth and material possession. As we read God's Word, we often tend to pick out the portions of the readings that hit our secular center and it has often been taught that this reading warns us against material wealth. But this simply isn't what Jesus is saying. He doesn't say that you cannot be his disciple if you have wealth. In fact, Jesus doesn't propose a target income that is acceptable and then tell us that beyond that standard we are in trouble. Rather, Jesus says, "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life [is not defined by] the abundance of possessions." So, as not to miss an important lesson here, let's reiterate this construct once more. Jesus DOESN'T say it's wrong to have wealth. Jesus does, however, warn that *obsession with wealth* can become an idol. (Samuel Zumwalt, 2004)

Our Sister Tammy wrote about idols and the many forms they come in a few weeks ago in one of her "Bountiful Blossoms" post. It seems that "Idols come in many forms" and that the

author of Acts wrote of this in Acts 17:30 which states, “God overlooked peoples’ former ignorance about these things, but now God commands everyone everywhere to turn away from idols and to turn to God.” (NLT) The question Tammy posed was this, “If something takes up a lot of your times or takes you away from God, is it indeed an idol?” It is apparent in today’s reading that Jesus has an answer for her question. Yes! Absolutely! Most definitely! Anything that keeps you from relationship from God is indeed an idol and for the man in our reading today, it was not the possession of his wealth that made him a fool, but rather the fact that his wealth had become his major focus. God and a call to discipleship were not a part of this man’s life.

As I stated before, there are many Christians that think that Jesus is opposed to wealth. There is this secular idea that we live in a world that has a limited amount of resources. There logical conclusion, then, would be that Christians shouldn’t acquire material possession because that would prevent others from being able to obtain the resources they need. This being the case, they would say, would then call us to not buy a new car, or nice clothes, or to live in nice homes or eat out at nice restaurants. Live a simple life so that others can have some of the world’s limited resources, too. (Samuel Zumwalt, 2004)

This would then lead us to the discussion of tithing. Some see tithing as a means to wealth. “If I give 10% to the Church, then God will bless me with material possession.” But it doesn’t quite work that way. We are not called to give so that we can receive. I am not even sure we are called to give exactly 10% or only 10%. We are called to give in accordance to God’s plan for each and every one of us as determined by God’s Will and Way for our lives. Deciding of our own accord that we do not need to give when in fact we have the means and call to do so places us in the same position that this man in Jesus’ parable found himself.

The simple truth is this – Jesus doesn't say there are limited resources in the world. Jesus doesn't say that if you give God 10% the rest is yours as a reward. Jesus absolutely doesn't say that you can live as if God and money were separated from one another. Rather, the Lord Jesus says that greed is bad and being consumed with possessions is worse. If you become obsessed with having more and more, your possessions will possess you. In turn, you will forget that God is the maker and owner of all things including everything you have and all that you are! (Samuel Zumwalt, 2004)

His parable is one of his starker warnings to those obsessed with building wealth. Of course, Jesus' parable isn't new teaching. It's a colorful restatement of the kind of wisdom contained in the book of Ecclesiastes. If you are devoted to building wealth above all else how foolish you are, because you're going to lose it all anyway when you die. On top of that, those that inherit your money may indeed be as frivolous with it as you were frugal. So don't be so foolish as to chase after the things of this world when there is so much more to gain in relationship with our Creator and our God. (Samuel Zumwalt, 2004)

It's not wrong to be wealthy. It's not wrong to accumulate wealth through wise and honest management of God's things. It's wrong to think that being wealthy is the answer to your greatest needs and yearnings. For in an eye blink you can be dead and your assets can be taken away from you and given to someone else!

Knowing that you are God's beloved child changes everything! It changes how you look at your life, how you look at your calendar, and how you use what's in your wallet and investment accounts. When you remember that everything belongs to God, then it's fun not only to use money wisely. It's fun to invest God's money in His mission and ministry.

You are rich compared to most of the people in the world simply because you live in the United States of America. But as a child of God, you remember that you are rich because God has given you everything you have and everything you are – especially His own life on the cross that you may be His child forever!

The point is clear, if we honor God with what he has given us, God will bless us with more so that we can honor God with more. This, again, doesn't mean that we are giving to God's Kingdom so that we can revel in our secular wealth. There is a passage in Second Corinthians that summarizes this. (2 Corinthians 9:6-15) In the passage Paul says, "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that having all contentment in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." We are blessed by God, so we can in turn "abound in every good work" and be a blessing in the lives of others. So if God has blessed you with material wealth "set not your heart on it" and "be rich toward God."

So, where does this place you today? Do you have idols in your life that are preventing you from fulfilling all that God has called you to do? Is your material wealth something that is distracting you from God? Maybe you've never had a relationship with God. Maybe you have been cruising through with little to no thought about this life and the next. I would like to encourage each of you today to take some time during our sermon hymn and then again this week to look deep within your heart, your soul and yes, even your checkbook and ask yourself the question, "Where is God in all of this?"

³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [that is the things you need to carry out God's Will and Way for you life] will be given to you ~~as well~~. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. (Matthew 6:33 – 34a)