

A Worthy Pursuit Luke 12:13-34

Over my years of ministry I have been to my share of conferences and pastoral meetings. Many of these meetings have a question and answer time set aside where attendees can ask questions of the speaker or panel of presenters on topics related to their talk. Invariably someone will stand up and ask a question about a issue that has nothing to do with the conference and generally it is a question that 99% of us in the audience can't identify with. In my opinion it's a waste of my time.

Jesus has been teaching about hypocrisy, how much God knows about you, the sin of rejecting the Holy Spirit's work, and when brought before judges not to worry about what to say because the Holy Spirit will guide their words.

Out of the blue, a man in the crowd asked for help. We pick it up in verse 13 and from our passage today we see that Jesus responds in a way the man didn't expect. Based on the motivation of the man's question, Jesus is going to teach about two besetting sins. They are subtle sins. They are dangerous sins. They are sins that can derail the Christian.

Jesus teaches about avarice (greed)

Jesus teaches about anxiety

I. JESUS TEACHES ABOUT AVARICE – v. 13-21

A. An Improper Pursuit – v. 13-15

“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

Here is a man, his father had died and as a rule the eldest son received a double portion of the inheritance, while the rest was divided among the remaining siblings. We aren't told how long the father had been dead, nor are we told how much the inheritance was. In that culture matters of civil

dispute were brought to a Rabbi to arbitrate. Many of the disputes could be settled by referring to the Old Testament Law and following its principles. And that is the case with the law regarding inheritance found in Deuteronomy 21 which provides the basis for this issue should be handled. So it's not unusual that Jesus being a Rabbi should be approached.

This man came to Jesus, not because he was interested in hearing what Jesus had to say about spiritual truth. He was solely interested in Jesus' arbitration of this dispute over inheritance. He had only one thing on his mind and he wanted Jesus to settle a dispute between he and his brother regarding what he believed he had coming to him.

One of the chaplains I worked with in hospice told me of a dispute he encountered while officiating at the funeral of one of our patients. Following the service three sisters began arguing over an expensive ring that had belonged to the mother. Each claimed it had been promised to them. The father took the ring and gave it to the funeral director to put it in the coffin so it could be buried with his wife. And so ended the argument.

Avarice is another word for greed. Webster's defines it as an excessive desire for getting or having more, especially wealth; the desire for more than one needs or deserves. Greed doesn't necessarily mean you'll get it; it simply is wanting something you don't have. The core or root of greed is selfishness. It's difficult to let go of something when greed is the motivator.

The Zulu people of Africa easily trap the ringtailed monkey because of its love for the seeds of a certain kind of melon. With the melon still attached to the vine they cut a hole in the top just large enough for the monkey to slip its hand into the hole to get the seeds. The monkey will grab a fistful of seeds but with its clenched fist it cannot get its hand out because it won't let go of the seeds. It refuses to let

go of the seeds and the Zulus easily trap the monkey.

British politician Sir Fred Catherwood stated that “Greed is the logical result of the belief that there is no life after death. We grab what we can while we can however we can and then hold on to it hard.”

Greed took Lot to Sodom.

Greed took Haman to the gallows.

Greed took Ahab to kill Naboth.

Greed took Judas to betray Christ.

Leo Tolstoy wrote a story about a successful peasant farmer who was not satisfied with what he had. He wanted more of everything. One day he received a tremendous offer. For 1000 rubles, he could buy all the land he could walk around in a day. The only catch was that he had to be back at his starting point by sundown. Early the next morning he started out walking at a fast pace. By midday he was very tired, but he kept going, covering more and more ground. Well into the afternoon he realized that his greed had taken him far from the starting point. He quickened his pace and as the sun began to sink low in the sky, he began to run knowing that if he did not make it back by sundown the opportunity to become an even bigger landholder would be lost. As the sun began to sink below the horizon he came within sight of the finish line. Gasping for breath, his heart pounding, he called upon every bit of strength left in his body and staggered across the line just before the sun disappeared. He immediately collapsed and in a few minutes he was dead. Afterwards, his servants dug a grave. It was not much over six feet long and three feet wide. The title of Tolstoy's story was: How Much Land Does a Man Need?

Greed - the insatiable desire for more. The man who came to Jesus was interested only in his cut of the inheritance. Greed drives the heart and mind. It's an unquenchable thirst, satisfied with nothing less than getting it. He obsesses over it, calculates

how to get it, is consumed and preoccupied with it. Greed is a love for what you don't have, but want, and when you get it you obsess over it to the exclusion of anything else.

A friend of mine in his single days owned a sharp looking Thunderbird. Every night in the winter he would drive it home, park it in the garage, wash it and hand dry it. Did I say every night?

Greed isn't just about material possessions whether a bigger bank account or a home or a boat. You can be greedy for a position or power.

The single cry of the greedy is give me – give me more, give me what is mine, give me what I deserve, but it's never enough and this guy expected Jesus to tell his brother to divvy up the good.

Instead of telling the man what he wanted to hear, Jesus questioned His role as arbitrator. **“Who appointed Me a judge or arbiter between you?”**

Turning to the crowd He warned them to watch out for all kinds of greed because life is not measured by how much you own. The word life used here is not referring to this body made up of tissue and bone. It means what is purposeful or meaningful. This kind of life is not made up in the worldly goods we possess or desire. Jesus wants us to guard our heart because greed can subtly enter in and before we know it, its roots are deeply imbedded and difficult to remove. There is something better worth pursuing.

As Jesus points out, greed is an improper pursuit. It is motivated by selfishness.

B. An Illustration About Priority – v. 16-21

Jesus told a story to illustrate the effect of greed in a person. This farmer, who was already rich, had a bumper crop. It was a great year on the farm and he did quite well. But it posed a dilemma. The problem

was that he didn't have any room to put all the crops. He pondered his situation and came to the conclusion that he would tear down his barns and build bigger barns. It wasn't that he was going to build more barns; he was going to build bigger barns. After all, if he built more barns it would reduce the amount of property on which to raise crops. Bigger barns could store all the crops. His reasoning to build bigger barns to store the crops was this: a) If he sold all the crops at once, there would be a glut in the market and the value of his crops would drop, so if he stored the crops he could get the best price as he sold them over time. b) He also reasoned that with such a great harvest he would be able to retire and live off the profit. He could take it easy and enjoy life to the fullest, maybe get on a program like Lifestyles of the rich and famous.

Now notice that the man did not come by these great assets through illegal means. He didn't cheat someone out of it. He didn't steal them. As far as we can tell he came by it from honest, hard work and it just happened that his crops did very well.

But he forgot to factor in one thing in his calculation. He forgot about God and making God a part of that equation. God has the final word on the length of our life. The man thought, as many people do today, grab everything you can, this is all there is, there isn't anything after death, so enjoy it to the max, as long as you can. He thought only of himself. He did not consider giving any of it back to God or even to the poor. He thought only of how it would benefit him.

But God called the man a fool and took his life that same night. The word fool means someone lacking sense, someone who is destitute of knowledge or truth, someone who makes poor choices.

He was a fool thinking he had more time. He was a fool for thinking only of his body instead of his soul. He wouldn't be able to take any of it with him

and what he had was left for others to enjoy. All his plans to enjoy pleasure were snuffed out in an instant and he benefited from none of it.

Jesus concluded by stating that is what would happen to anyone who was not rich toward God. He didn't mean that if a person was greedy God would take that life in the same day. God had looked at the man's heart and not at his bank account and in God's book, the book that counts, the man was bankrupt. Jesus was saying that such a person is foolish who would rather pursue earthly treasures instead of having a relationship with God. *The tragedy in his death wasn't in what he left behind, the real tragedy was in what lay ahead.*

Warren Wiersbe wrote "People who are satisfied only with the things money can buy are in great danger of losing the things that money cannot buy."

Money can buy you a lot of things, but it will never buy you a relationship with God, it will never buy you a ticket into heaven. *Someone aptly wrote that if you live without God, you will die without God.*

So just how do we become rich toward God?

Declare your soul to be bankrupt and turn to Christ. Understand that possessions don't mean a thing when it comes to eternal life. What you have here won't get you a nicer place in heaven, as a matter of fact what you have here might keep you from heaven, that's why Jesus said it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter heaven. Greed will keep many from letting go.

Romans 3:9-12, 21-25

Being rich toward God also means that we acknowledge that everything we have comes from God. God didn't judge the man based on his wealth, but on his heart. He was selfish and greedy. Loving things causes people to be unfaithful to God and to ignore the needs of others because He wanted it for himself.

There is a song you may know.
 Modern times have brought us many comforts.
 People live in wealth and luxury.
 But the Master still asks the question,
 Lovest thou Me, lovest thou Me more than these.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 “Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.”

John MacArthur writes “There is no bigger fool than he who does not prepare for the life to come.”
 H.A. Ironside stated “You may not see anything wrong with [greed] now, but if it keeps you out of heaven you will find it serious indeed.”

It is a sad commentary on the state of our culture when people follow the motto “he who dies with the most toys wins.” God says we are all going to die someday and then who will get your stuff. We’re better off in the long run to be rich toward God.

Jesus warns against the pursuit of things fueled by greed and tells us that the greater priority should be having a relationship with God. Let’s check our heart and see if there is any greed. Let’s desire God more than things.

What are you pursuing today?

What is your priority?

Jesus teaches about avarice – greed.

II. JESUS TEACHES ABOUT ANXIETY – v. 22-34

Jesus continues the thought with another sin and talks about pursuing what is earthly vs. pursuing what is eternal.

A. Earthly Pursuits – v. 22-30

One day two men were talking. One man told the other that he was broke with a mountain of credit card debt, he had lost his job, his car had been

reposed and his house was in foreclosure. But he told his friend that he was not worried about it.

The other man didn’t understand how his friend could not be worried. The man with all the financial trouble said he didn’t have to worry because he had hired a professional worrier who did all the worrying for him.

Thinking that was a fantastic idea, the friend asked how much a professional worrier cost. The first man said it cost \$50,000.

\$50,000 dollars said the first man. “How can you afford that, I thought you were broke.” The first guy said he didn’t know how he was going to afford it but it wasn’t his problem. That’s why he hired the professional worrier.

Anxiety or worry is a word that means to be tossed about, like a ship that is out on the sea during a storm. When Jesus tells us not to worry or be anxious it has the force of a moral command. In essence it means stop being anxious once and for all and because it is a moral command, anxiety is a sin.

Jerry Bridges in his book *Respectable Sins* says it is a sin for two reasons.

First, worry is a distrust of God. Worry says that God isn’t capable of taking care of me. Worry says I have to figure out how to solve the problem.

To refute this idea, Jesus used two visible examples, what we consume and how we are clothed. He then tells us not to worry about those things. He first talked about the ravens. Understand that a raven was considered unclean according to the law. It was a scavenger. It didn’t sow or reap. It didn’t store up food for itself, yet God took care of it.

Job 38:41 “Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food?”

Then Jesus put it into perspective by stating that we are of greater value than a bird concluding the obvious that worrying can't even add a single hour to our life. As a matter of fact as medical science has proven, worry is detrimental to a person's health.

Worry is a lack of trust in God no matter how many verses claim otherwise, no matter what God's track record is in keeping His promises. If you're wondering about His track record, it's 100%.

How many of you know Psalm 23:1?

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”
NLT “The Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need.”

Do we believe it or are they just empty words?

How about Isaiah 41:10?

“Fear not for I am with thee, be not dismayed for I am Thy God...”

What about I Peter 5:7?

“Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you.”

Phillips translation “You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon Him, for you are His personal concern.”

Consider the well-known passage **Philippians 4:6-7**
“Be anxious for nothing...”

If God can't be trusted in some things, He can't be trusted in anything. If we worry about one thing, we are not trusting God as we should. Claim His promises.

Jerry Bridges gives a second reason worry or anxiety is a sin. It is a lack of accepting God's providence in our lives. He says **“God's providence may be simply defined as God's orchestrating all circumstances and events in His universe for His glory and the good of His people.”**

Does God know what's best for us?

Does God know what we need?

Those are rhetorical questions.

Of course He knows what's best for us.

Of course He knows what we need. That's He's God and we're not and worrying about those things isn't going to bring them any faster or in greater abundance than God has planned.

Jesus asked us to consider the ravens and notice God feeds them.

Then He asked us to consider the lilies and notice how God clothes them. Even Solomon in all his splendor wasn't as gloriously arrayed as the lilies of the field. Even though the grass of the field is tossed into the fire tomorrow, God still clothes it in beauty today.

If we don't believe that God will take care of us then we have little faith and become just like the pagan unbelievers who run around pursuing all that stuff, worried about what to eat and what to wear. They chase after all that stuff..

Matthew Henry called anxiety **“A disquieting, tormenting thought, which hurries the mind here and there, and hangs it in suspense; which disturbs our joy in God, and drives out our hope in Him; which makes us sleep less, and hinders our enjoyment of ourselves, our friends, and what God has given us.”**

Let me ask you again, does God know what you need? Do you believe it?

Sometimes we argue with God or say to God **“I need this or I need that?”** Check the heart. **Is it something we are asking for out of greed? Is it something we are not trusting God for as we should?**

Did you know that worry is the number one mental disorder in America. The Mayo Clinic claims 80-85% of their caseload is due directly to worry and anxiety. Many experts say that coping with stress is

the #1 health priority of our day. One leading physician has stated that, in his opinion, 70% of all medical patients could cure themselves if only they got rid of their worries and fears. We know that medical science has closely tied worry to heart trouble, blood pressure problems, ulcers, thyroid malfunction, migraine headaches, a host of stomach disorders, amongst others. For example 25 million Americans have high blood pressure due to stress/anxiety; 1 million more develop high blood pressure each year. 8 million have stomach ulcers, and every week 112 million people take medication for stress related symptoms.

Worry is one of the besetting sins of believers. If we worry about such things living in this country with all its available resources, think what it must be like living in a third world country. Palestine in the time of Jesus was much like a third world country today and Jesus told those listening to Him not to worry because God knew their need. As a matter of fact, He went on to state that it was more important to pursue the kingdom of God, something that is eternal, than to pursue earthly stuff. If we seek first the kingdom of God, then God would take care of what we need.

These verses tell us that anxiety is foolish because life consists of far more than possessions.

Anxiety is foolish because it cannot change the situation or outcome.

Anxiety is foolish because it is the attitude of unbelievers.

Don't be afraid, God has been pleased to give you the kingdom. We have a loving Father who never stops thinking about us and who cares for us. Then Jesus says to go sell what you have and give it to the poor. I think that is a way of trusting God for daily needs. He is not telling us that we must become poor in the process and neither is He saying that selling your stuff and giving it to the poor is a way to earn eternal life. He made it abundantly clear from **John 3:16** that believing on Him is how

we are given the kingdom of God. Giving to the poor is a demonstration of our faith.

If we truly understand the depth of God's love, then we will not worry because we trust and believe that God will provide.

Philippians 4:19 "But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Psalm 34:8-10 "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. Fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing. *The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.*"

(emphasis added)

Jesus ends this discussion about avarice and anxiety with this simple but profound statement: "**Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**"

Jim Elliott wrote in his journal "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

There is nothing to worry about if your treasure is in heaven.

Are your treasures earthly or are your treasures eternal?

There isn't anything wrong with wealth or possessions. The Bible gives examples of some wealthy individuals who were also very godly. But let's be careful, wanting more of what we don't need or wanting what we can't get can cause us to worry a great deal. Both are sin. Seek first the kingdom of God and God will provide you with the things you need.

Trust God – **Proverbs 3:5-6**

Put God first

Don't give in to anxiety

Reduce your worry load

A pastor once said "The crucial issue in life is not the amount of our treasure but the location of it."

What priority are you pursuing today?

Seek God first and His kingdom and He'll provide what you need.