

“ON LOAN”

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Text: Luke 12:15-21

An extremely wealthy man was on his deathbed. He called his wife to him and gave her his final instructions. “What I want you to do is this,” he said, “I want you to go get two of the biggest and strongest bags you can find. Then, I want you to take those bags down to the bank, open my account and fill those bags with as much cash as they will hold.” “Then, haul the bags up to the attic and hang them from the rafters. As soon as I die, I will grab them on my way up.” The man’s wife did as she was told, and the man died not long after.

Several months after his death, the woman was up in the attic cleaning out some junk when—low and behold—she bumped her head on one of those money bags. They were both still there, hanging from the rafters as her husband had instructed. Upon seeing them, the woman banged her fist in frustration and said: “I knew I should have put those bags in the basement!!!”

No matter how many bumper stickers there are that proclaim: “The one who dies with the most stuff wins,” the fact remains that you can’t take your money nor your stuff with you. You never see a hearse pulling a U-haul. There are no storage units in heaven, no banks, no barns.

Jesus talked a lot about money. For instance, 16 of the 38 parables deal with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of every ten verses deal directly with money. In the Bible there are 500 verses on prayer but 2,300 references to money and possessions. Why would Jesus spend so much time, and have so much concern about how we use that which is entrusted to us?

A 2012 Boston Globe article asked the following question: “Does money change you?” The article stated that “most people are convinced that gaining a lot of money wouldn’t change who they are as people.” But is that true? The article reported: “As a mounting body of research is showing, wealth can actually change how we think and behave—and not for the better.

Rich people have a harder time connecting with others, showing less empathy to the extent of dehumanizing those who are different from them. They are less charitable and generous. They are less likely to help someone in trouble. And they are more likely to defend an unfair status quo. If you think you’d behave differently in their place, you’re probably wrong: these aren’t just inherited traits, but developed ones. Money, in other words, changes who you are.”

The article went on to summarize research studies which found that even the mere suggestion of getting more money—a technique known as “priming”—makes people less friendly, less sensitive to others, and more likely to support statements like, “some groups of people are simply inferior to

others.” The article noted that “If you win the lottery and you want to avoid becoming an insensitive lout,” there is a simple solution: “Give most of it away.”

Of course, money itself is not evil. If it were not for many generous folks who have been successful in the business world, but give much of their wealth away—we would be in terrible straits indeed. Paul put it aptly, “godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it... People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge [people] into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

In our Gospel Lesson for this morning Jesus says, “Watch out! Guard yourselves against all kinds of greed. After all, one’s life isn’t determined by one’s possessions, even when someone is very wealthy.” Then Jesus told a parable about a guy who had missed the purpose of his life. Isn’t that sad? He had missed the purpose of his life. “What will I do?” the man asked himself.

There can be no doubt that he had prepared for the harvest, but it had exceeded all his expectations. He had really hit “pay dirt” and he finds that he has no place to store all his “stuff.” So, the problem is not so much the size of the harvest, but the fact that the guy insists on storing it all for himself!!! The thought of giving to persons in need never crosses his mind.

Instead, his immediate solution is to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. In the parable, the rich man used the pronoun “I” six times; “my” is used five times; and even a “you” is used to refer to himself. His entire life was turned inward on himself. And his inner conversations were with himself as well, not with God.

A Church leader from the 4th century once said, “There is your brother, naked and crying! And you stand confused over the choice of an attractive floor covering.”

Another early leader wrote, “The bread you do not use is the bread of the hungry. The garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of the person who is naked. The shoes you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot. The money you keep locked away is the money of the poor.” We sure do miss the point of life when we fail to understand that our lives and possessions are on loan from God. They do not belong to us. And they are to be used for God’s purposes.

If we waste them, or do not share them, is this not a slap in the face of the One Who has shared His Creation with us...of the One Who gave His very life on the Cross for the salvation of our souls? And not just for our souls but for the souls of all people...our neighbors who don’t know Christ...the person who is getting more and more ruined by addiction...the murderers...the criminals...those who hate.

The poor “rich fool’s” presumptions and self-centeredness are shown in the way he uses the possessive pronoun in his thoughts: “my crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, and finally, my soul!!!” Of course, as we see, this is not the way it is. Even the man’s soul, his very essence belongs to God, is on loan from God. Do we think of our souls, our essence, our lives in this way?

There is no doubt that the grip of money on a person's life can have a power that rightly only belongs to God. And granting this power to money and stuff, no matter whether you are rich, poor or somewhere in between is idolatry. And idolatry is a sin. And sin is anything that separates us from God.

It's interesting that we, in the church, often tend to put more emphasis on some sins and less on others. As a matter of fact, historically the Church has far underestimated the power of sin when it comes to money. It's been noted that in the confessional booth, people confess all sorts of sin, but hardly ever covetousness or greed.

From listening to the media and some preachers and many Christians, one might think that sexual impurity were the only sin that exists or matters. But Jesus didn't talk about that kind of stuff much at all. He did, though, as I mentioned talk about the evils and dangers of storing up for ourselves treasures on earth rather than treasures in heaven, many, many times.

"How terrible for you who are rich," Jesus bemoans in Luke Chapter 6, "How terrible for you who have plenty now." In Matthew Chapter 19 Jesus said, "I assure you that it will be very hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. In fact, it's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom."

In Luke 14 Jesus says, "none of you who are unwilling to give up all of your possessions can be my disciple." And in Matthew 25 Jesus gives a picture of the Great Judgment Day, and those who enter God's Kingdom are the persons who gave food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, took care of the sick and visited those in prison. And it goes on and on and on.

How often do persons judge those who make mistakes sexually, or those who have problems with addictions, or anger, or whatever...and yet if a fine church member drives up in a \$60,000 car, just having pulled it out of his or her \$1 million dollar garage and is dressed in the most expensive clothes, we say, "Bravo!!! Good for you!!! What a great person you are."

I'm not saying that we should judge anyone, I'm just saying that the "sin" of greed is, perhaps, the "forgotten sin," or the sin which we consider as no sin at all. It's been said that the "rich fool" in Jesus' parable practices what is called "practical atheism." Oh, he may and probably would not agree with this. He may say that he has always believed in God, but when it comes to managing his life, dealing with possessions and planning for the future, he lives as though there were no God.

This parable, therefore, kind of probes our basic commitments, does it not? What difference does our faith in Jesus Christ make in our approach to life? Where do our priorities lie? Who or what is our god?

By exposing the rich man's inner thoughts in this parable, Jesus fulfills an earlier warning that everything secret will become known, whatever is said in private will be broadcast in public. And Jesus has also reminded us again and again that the secrets of a person's heart are not hidden from God. The man in Jesus' parable has shut everyone else out of his life and his thoughts. There is no one else in the story—just the man and his possessions—until God speaks to him. No sooner has the man laid out his own future than God speaks to declare what that future actually holds for him.

And then God addresses the man as a “fool,” which brings back a similar reference which is found in Psalm 14 which states, “Fools say in their hearts, ‘There is no God.’” Moreover, in verse 19 the man says to himself, “You have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years...But God said to him, ‘Fool, tonight you will die...’”

Earlier, in Luke Chapter 9, Jesus asks the question, “What advantage do people have if they gain the whole world for themselves yet perish or lose their lives?” There can be no doubt that possessions will possess us, if we are not careful, and thus, we will miss the purpose of our lives.

And the purpose of our lives is to love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength and to love our neighbor as our self. How can we possibly do this if our eye is on earthly treasure...if our heart is in love with money...if our soul, our mind and our strength are used to try and acquire wealth for ourselves?

An interview on television with a man who had lost his house and all his possessions to a raging brush fire driven by Santa Anna winds in California gives a striking contrast to the rich fool. Remembering that his brother had recently joked that they should be careful not to allow their possessions to possess them, this man who had just seen everything he owned but the shirt on his back go up in smoke announced to the reporter with a note of unexpected triumph: “I am a free man now!”

Are you a free person? Are you free from the love of money? Are we guarding ourselves “against all kinds of greed”? If so, how? The best way to keep one’s self free from captivity to money is to be real and admit that our lives do not belong to us, our possessions are not ours to keep and use only for ourselves...our wallets and purses are not for our use alone. They belong to God. They are a trust.

How foolish it is to use the money we are given for ourselves only. It is meant to be shared. What percentage of God’s money do you give to God’s Church? When you get your paycheck, do you give to God first and then, whatever is left over after giving God ten percent or 15 percent of your income...do you then, budget your household and life accordingly? How we use our money says a lot about our relationship with God.

In the parable for this morning, Jesus calls the rich man a “fool” and tells him, “tonight you will die,” and then he states, “This is the way it will be for those who hoard things for themselves and aren’t rich toward God.

This past week, we clothed and provided school supplies to nearly 300 children at our Back to School Carnival. Someone saw a need and we have been responding for years. When the call went out to provide new clothes for those children as well, checks were written that covered the entire expense! This is what it means to be rich toward God. When those checks were written, a barn was pulled down—so to speak—so that the kingdom of God could advance on this earth. How many more kids could be fed, wounds bandaged, love made manifest and souls saved if we were not afraid of the cost?

Jesus gave His ALL for us. What will we give back to Him? After all, everything we have is on loan from God.