
“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

“We’re Spending Our Kid’s Inheritance.” Perhaps you’ve seen that bumper sticker as you’ve traveled around this great land of ours? It’s a tongue-in-cheek way of saying that instead of saving it all up to give to our kids, we’re going to spend some of it right here and now. Those people have every right to do so. They aren’t obligated to leave it all to their children and their children aren’t entitled to it.

In our text for today we meet a man who felt he was entitled to an equal share of the inheritance. But in Jesus’ day, it didn’t work that way. No, in Jesus’ day, the oldest son received a double portion of the inheritance. That didn’t seem right or fair to this man so he asked Jesus to do something about it. Jesus would do something about it alright. He would look into the man’s heart and see what the real problem was. In so doing, he would issue a warning to him, to the crowd, and to us today. In it, we see a warning and an encouragement. Watch Out! I. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.

Greed can be defined as an excessive desire for more. John D. Rockefeller was once one of the richest men in the world. He was once asked how much would be enough. His answer? “Just a little bit more.” Of him, King Solomon’s words ring true. “Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.”

In our text for today, Jesus tells us a parable of a farmer blessed with a bumper crop. Was it because of his excellent farming skills? Maybe that had something to do with it. But we all know how a farmer back in Jesus’ time would have received a bumper crop. God obviously showered down an abundance of rain and sun. The crops were loving it and so was the farmer when harvest time came. So much so that he didn’t know what to do with it all. So he came up with a plan. He was going to tear down his old barns and build bigger and better ones. He was going to take life easy, eat, drink, and be merry.

Don’t misunderstand Jesus. There was nothing wrong with tearing down old barns to build bigger and better ones. There was nothing wrong with taking life easy, eating, drinking, and being merry. The sin in all this is pointed out by Jesus in the last verse of our text. “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.” The sin was failing to include God in his living, in his giving, and in his plans for the future.

After all, it was God who had given him the gift of life in this world. It was God who had blessed him with the talents and abilities to be a successful farmer. It was God who had blessed the work of his hands and the crops in his fields. But God hadn’t been included in his life, or in what he was going to do with his newly acquired wealth. He thought he had many years ahead of him. He thought wrong. Yes, the One who had determined the day of this man’s birth had also determined the night of this man’s death. In this case, it would be that very night. He would never enjoy the many earthly treasures he had laid up for himself. Worse yet, that very night he would be forced to stand before God as a spiritual beggar doomed to spend an eternity apart from God in the fires of hell.

Sad to say, he won’t be alone. He made the same tragic mistake that leads many to their eternal destruction. The mistake Paul warns us about when he writes, “people who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” But “he who dies with the most toys wins” a familiar bumper sticker states. We know that he who dies with the most toys still dies and must stand before God. It’s been said that death is the great equalizer of all mankind. Standing before God, all the riches and possessions and titles and accolades acquired on earth are stripped away. And if people don’t have the robe of Christ’s righteousness covering them, they will stand before God naked and cold, with no hope of walking those streets of gold in heaven. Jesus never condemns money or riches, rather he condemns hearts that make those things more important than the spiritual and eternal riches that belong to us in Christ.

How important are those riches to you? More important than earthly riches? Does it show in your living and giving? It’s been said, “show me your checkbook and I’ll show you what’s important to you.” How would you describe your attitude in being rich toward God? The Greek word is a present active participle. It carries the idea of being generous now. Not waiting until later when you feel the time is right, because we all know how much later that later often turns out to be. Next week becomes next month becomes next year becomes when the kids are out of college becomes when I finally retire. When it comes to making use of the time, talents, and treasures God has given you, don’t wait until tomorrow, because tomorrow may never come. The rich fool learned that lesson the hard way. May the Holy Spirit lead us to repent and look to God for forgiveness before that same lesson is learned by us.
The psalmist writes, “the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it,” which means that my money and possessions aren’t really mine. They actually come from God and rightfully belong to God. In fact, everything we have is on loan from God for us to use while living here on earth. We call this “stewardship.” Stewardship involves God making me a manager of the blessings he has given me. How does God want me to use his blessings? He wants me to provide for my family. He wants me to pay my taxes. He wants me to help the poor and needy. He wants me to give back to him in my offerings so that his work here on earth might continue. In the Old Testament, God established the tithe, or ten percent rule, when it came to those offerings. That’s still a pretty good deal when you think about it. If I were to wander out into the congregation like Monte Hall in “Let’s Make a Deal” and peel off ten fresh one hundred dollar bills in front of you, telling you that you could keep them if you gave one of them back to me, I’m guessing you would walk out of here today a pretty happy man, woman, or child. But unfortunately, God’s Old Testament people weren’t happy with that deal. They often gave their ten percent with less than happy hearts. Truth be told, things haven’t changed much for God’s New Testament people either. We’re no longer under the ten percent tithe rule. We have the freedom to give as much as we want! Unfortunately, that freedom is often used as a license to give as little as we want. On average, giving across our synod is about 3% with many giving more and many giving less.

But then again it really doesn’t matter what others are giving. What are you giving? How would you describe your giving? Does God receive the firstfruits? Or does he receive what’s leftover after all the other bills and obligations have been taken care of? Does God receive an offering that’s proportionate to how He’s blessed you personally, individually? Or does he receive what you feel is your fair share of the congregational budget? And what are your plans when death finally strips it all away from you? Is God and his work included in some way, shape, or form?

We all struggle with a selfish, sinful flesh and will continue to do so until the day we die. Do you want to know how to overcome that struggle? Do you want to know the proper incentive for being rich toward God? The Apostle Paul tells us, “you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich...God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things and at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work...You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”

Though he had created the world and everything in it, Jesus had no place to lay his head. Though he had control of the sun and rain, Jesus didn’t spend his days planting crops with the hopes of living the good life. But he wasn’t bitter, resentful, or envious of what others had. As a child, his hands were put to work in his father’s wood shop. As a man, his hands were put to work helping and healing and teaching people about the kingdom of God. As a Savior, his hands were stretched out on a cross to forgive our sins. Our selfish and greedy ways. The times life has been all about me instead of being all about Jesus. The times we’ve been rich toward ourselves and poor toward God. These and all of our sins have been completely forgiven and forgotten through the perfect life, the innocent death, and the glorious resurrection of Jesus our Savior. In Jesus, we have true and lasting treasures. We all know how quickly and easily earthly treasures come and go. That’s not the case with the treasures we have in Jesus because the Holy Spirit has buried those treasures deep down in our hearts where no con man, no job loss, no bad economy can ever reach them. Those treasures were buried in our hearts through Word and Sacrament and those treasures actually increase and multiply every time we make use of those Means of Grace.

Jesus truly is our greatest treasure in life, a treasure that we will take with us for time and eternity. A treasure that he calls us to share with others through the use of our time, talents, and treasures. There are all sorts of ways and opportunities to use what God has given you to leave a lasting legacy for years to come. Offerings and endowments and wills and estate planning are all great ways to glorify God and further his work in your living and even in your dying. When the question of the rich fool crosses your mind, “what shall I do?” May God grant you the wisdom to say, “Here’s what I’ll do. I’ll thank God for the blessings he’s given me. I’ll remember that I don’t deserve them. I’ll remember that they all come to me by God’s grace. I’ll seek to be a good steward of those blessings. I’ll look for ways and opportunities to give back to God in the use of my time, talents, and treasures.”

Who will get what you have prepared for yourself? That’s a question only you can answer. Jesus tells us, Watch Out! I. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. II. Look for opportunities to be rich toward God. You have God’s own promise that you and who knows how many others will be blessed by it.

Amen.