

The Parable of the Covetous Fool, Part 1

Luke 12:16-21

If you could find your way to Luke 12, a section on covetousness that started in Luke 12:13. Jesus has here been in Luke 12, been teaching his disciples, and he is preparing them for opposition and hostility, that in the time span in, in where he is heading, he is heading to the cross and the cross is just around the corner; just a matter of months. Time of his betrayal, rejection from the leadership and all the people, 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.

Jesus and his disciple, they are here in this context surrounded by this massive crowd of people who have, all of them 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. So this massive crowd comes to see this controversial

teacher. They have been, this crowd has been under the lifelong influence of religious hypocrisy. All of their leadership have been, with very few exceptions, their leadership has been hypocritical, hypocritical religion, hypocritical Pharisees and scribes. And that's gonna leave a mark. That actually shows up in this question that comes from the crowd.

No one in Israel knows really what a true shepherd looks like, so they don't recognize Jesus as 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 honor 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 do, 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, is knowing you have a lot to learn, understanding that the more you learn, the more there is to know and the more there is 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 piety, real piety looks like, the people who come to Jesus on this occasion they 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 it 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.'" "

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, a lot for us 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, 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 that they have to control them. That's all they have to motivate them. It doesn't matter if these unbelieving 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.

People find plenty of things to want in a religious context. 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

context, you need to be clear, it's mirrored in the culture at large. Okay, 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 Democratic colors. That's because covetousness is not a matter of the external. It's a matter of what's driving the heart.

So, my friend, if you're controlled by covetous desires, may the Lord grant you his grace to open your eyes to the truth about your life: that you're not okay. You are in grave danger. Christ is going to give you deliverance today if you'll listen, 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. Jesus confronts a covetous heart. Verse 15, where Jesus says, "Take care, and be on your guard," there is a double warning there, two words, he doubles them up to show emphasis. I really, really mean it! Watch out! Covetousness is dangerous! So take care, be on your guard against all covetousness. Or we could say, all kinds of covetousness. It shows up in all kinds of things. 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, 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 go 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 that 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. That's an exercise in discontentment to keep on surfing for products, surfing the Amazon page, looking through the catalogue. What's happening? What are, what are those retailers, what are those marketers trying to do to you? Tap into your covetous desire, make you feel like this toaster isn't as good as this toaster, because this one, well, it cooks bagels, too, and I need bagels. And we have to add 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 of 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,

nor not to us in the same measure, beauty, influence, position, wealth, you know for certain covetousness is the poison that is infecting your mind, robbing you of contentment, making you ungrateful for what you already have.

Instead of leading to joy and gratitude, covetousness turns all of God's 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, for "one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Jesus is so concerned here about our life, not just our atoms that are well fed, *bios* kind of life. He's not just concerned about the day-to-day mundane things we go through. He's concerned about our *zóié*, our spiritual life because our spiritual life is what is truly connected with God and his divine life. That's how we're created, is 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. It's a love, 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. And 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.

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, they cannot be fulfilled with stuff, with any created thing. Because created things by definition are not eternal, and God has put eternity within 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 and they can only be satisfied in God. So when Adam and Eve departed from God in the beginning, for them and for all of their fallen progeny, all of us, all our 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. So hungry; insatiable drive. And none of it is satisfied, food, drink, sex, money, power, fun, entertainment, travel, vacations, all of it, power, ambition, whatever achievement, accomplishment, buildings, ziggurats that built them into the heavens, 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 utterly exhausting pursuit, it ends in futility, but at its worst, it is irreversibly destructive. And 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.

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. 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.

We've all lived this. We all know this. And that is why we say covetous, 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, everything into its space.

And that's why Paul, in Colossians 3:5, when he commands us to mortify all these internal, lust-oriented sexual sins, he talks about covetousness, and he equates it with idolatry. He says, "Put to death," or mortify; he lists 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. Right? 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, whatever it is, 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. It's what we, we, thrive in the worship of God. We find all our satisfaction and contentment in him and him alone. So it is his, 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, when 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 like that himself. We even treat him like that in our prayers.

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?

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, 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 that 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 transgression of 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 verse 2, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this: 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."

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 and thank your local law enforcement officer. Pray for your law enforcement officers.

So when Jesus says, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions," listen, he is intentionally here, 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, who's spiritual. Covetousness is a sin: keeps us enslaved, chained, imprisoned, all the while circling our cage, chasing the wind. And Jesus intends to liberate the people in this crowd, to set them free.

PILLAR OF
—TRUTH— 

And I hope here too, if you're like the people in this crowd, I hope he liberates you, too. That's my prayer.