

The Gospel According to Luke

Luke 12:13-21

Reading: Luke 12:13-21

Sermon #54
October 20, 2019

Possessions

The Voice of Sirens

This parable is only found in Luke's gospel account and it has lessons for us. Last week we understood Jesus was in a crowd that was acting like a mob of some 10,000 strong. Jesus is still in this mass of people who have mixed purposes. Some are undecided as to who Jesus is but they are listening. Others are interested in the show; miracles, signs and wonders, but are still trying to figure Him out. Then there are those who are there because they sincerely want to know God more and listen intently to what Jesus is teaching and their souls are becoming ever more alive spiritually. Yet, even though the miracles and the teachings of Jesus verify he is sent from God, there are those who are steeped in man-made traditions and believe the lies of the Pharisees, the Jewish sirens, as those found in Greek mythology, who lure people into believing that Jesus was sent by Satan and their belief seals their destruction. **Trivia question, "Can anyone tell me what the Sirens of Greek Mythology were?"**

The Pharisees and their followers are there to cause trouble and keep others from coming to believe in Jesus as the Christ and the truth is, they and the Pharisees are serving the prince of this world in his effort to hold onto control and deny God worship. These people are still frozen back in Luke chapter 11 where the leaders claimed Jesus "casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons," (v.15) This logically makes no sense, but then, the logic of man does not always make sense and yet, many believe. Just listen to the politicians of our day. People at the time of Christ believe because the traditions and teachings of the Pharisees

allows them not to have to deal with their own sins and their desperate need for the Messiah. The Pharisees serve man and fallen man is bound to the world and its prince, who like sirens, lure people to their destruction.

I think we can figure out how the Pharisees could manipulate the crowd into thinking Jesus was from Satan. You see, man-made traditions tend to cause trouble for the truth. Can you think of any traditions within the broad “Christian” community of churches today that cause trouble for truth? Most of the people in the crowd were use to a certain type of teaching, even though it was wrong. The people connected the Pharisees to God, which was also wrong. So, when Jesus begins teaching the truth, it is something that the people have only heard a shadow of; the half-truths of destruction. Because the crowd knows only the half-truths of the evil one and he lures them like a siren and the Pharisees are able to convince people that the teachings of Jesus, because they are different, come from Satan. The lure of the sirens of false teachings results in the crowds getting more and more hostile toward Jesus.

As Jesus is teaching, a man interrupts and asks a question based on the false goals of society for more material possessions. We will examine Jesus’ response and I pray in this response there will be food for our souls and we will grow in wisdom and grace. Let me pray for the Holy Spirit to open our hearts, minds and souls as we study this passage in Luke this morning.

PRAY

We heard Brother David read the Word of God from Luke chapter 12 a few minutes ago and it is the Word that has power, not the messenger. So, this morning let the Word flow over you; may it enlighten and spiritually strengthen you.

Lie 1: We Need Possessions

Reading verses 13 to 15, “Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’¹⁴ But *Jesus* said to him, ‘Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?’¹⁵ And *Jesus* continued saying to the man and those around him, ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’” This man in the crowd yells out in the midst of our Lord’s teaching and demands that Jesus make a ruling or a judgement. Observe the wording in verse 13, this man is not making a request but a demand, he is commanding Jesus.

Let’s consider the situation we are reading about. Jesus is in the middle of teaching about the kingdom of God; about sin, repentance and salvation. He is teaching concerning spiritual matters. This man is not the least bit concerned with his soul and cares nothing about what is being taught. He is consumed with materialism and greed. Greed has overtaken him. He thinks his life depends on possessions. He has believed the lie that the quality of his life depends on an abundance of possessions. I was raised in a family that one’s material possessions defined who they are and their level of success and this is also the theme of our America society. Our society, as all the societies of the world, live under the influence of the prince of this world, promoting self-indulgence, while Jesus says peace and fulfilment are found in the pursuit of self-denial. It is as Aristotle wrote, “The self-indulgent man craves for all pleasant things... and is led by his appetite to choose these at the cost of everything else.” (The Nicomachean Ethics)

In verses 13 and 14 we have this man blurting out a command to Jesus. We also see Jesus’ very firm response; Man...in today’s vernacular would be similar to saying Mr. or Sir. Very quickly our Lord clarifies that His concern is not with

helping this man sort through his problem with possessions but rather, this man becomes a sermon illustration on how greed can consume us.

Last week we read that Jesus told his disciples to “**Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.**” (v.1) Today, Jesus teaches us something else we are to guard against; believers are to be ever on guard against greed, covetousness and materialism. The word here for guard against is a very important word for us today. It means more than to stand guard, it is a word that is more aggressive than just guarding something to protect it. It means to protect at all costs; and it also means, concerning truth, that one is to uphold, observe, to practice without fail – one is to not let covetousness into their life for it will be like leaven and affect everything. There is a middle eastern idiom for this; “*Do not allow a camel to put his nose under the edge of your tent, for soon you will have a camel in your tent*” and that spells disaster. A believer is to do whatever it takes to keep greed and covetousness out of their lives; if they let a little in, like the nose of a camel, soon greed will take over their lives – it will be inside their tent or home.

Possessions whisper like sirens to us from outside and are trying to enter into our lives; inch-by-inch or like a camel’s nose. The calling of the sirens lies to us and tell us that we will find happiness in an abundance of possessions. Jesus tells us that our lives have nothing to do with the abundance of possessions. Peace and joy are found in a relationship with God through Jesus and serving others in his name.

Lie 2: Possessions Provide Security

The second lie of the society and the evil one promotes is found in verses 16 to 19, listen as I read. Jesus “**told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a rich man**

produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, “What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?” ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” ’ ’” The man has no thoughts of God’s Kingdom or helping others. This rich man, as well as the man in the crowd think only of themselves. We do not see any thought or consideration of wife and children or any others. This rich man does not seek the advice of others, but seeks his own advice alone. Like when John D. Rockefeller was asked how much was enough? His answer was “*Always a little more.*” Rockefeller was worth 1% of the entire USA’s economy in the early 20th century and he was still not satisfied. The man in the parable is not satisfied and wants to amass more, notice how he starts, “*What shall I do?*” It is about him alone, so he says to himself – My barns, my grain, my goods and my soul.

Here is the lie - this man believed that the success of his crops came about through hard work and sweat. His thought is not even based on his own hard work, but that of others he hired. He thought he was responsible for the bumper crop. We know that we can sow and water but it is God who brings the increase. The lie he believed was the lie of hard work brought about an abundance of crop.

Another lie the rich man believed was that it all belonged to him, he says, my...my...my. The reality is God has placed us as stewards over our possessions. When we are given an increase or an abundance, we must ask God why and determine what He wants us to do with the abundance. I guarantee it is not to hoard it but to use it for the kingdom and others in some way. He also wrongly believed he could keep it and that his life would now be comprised of pleasure, enjoyment, rest and relaxation. He says proudly to himself, “*Look at all*

the wealth I have accumulated and it is all mine - I am set for life.” Martin Luther rejected the greed of the Catholic Church and began the protest known as the Protestant Revolution. Luther said, **“I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God’s hands, that I still possess.”** One key element Luther learned about his spiritual life was being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ is to guard against self-indulgence and pursue self-denial.

For many Americans beginning in the 20th century the goal in one’s life became focused secondarily on family, raising children and the primary focused was on their career and the end goal of retirement. They thought that once they retired, they can sit back and enjoy life; travel, hobbies, dining out, etc. so the goal shifted from those early Christian principles that influenced the founding of America and trusting God to the goal of placing one’s trust in acquiring an abundance of material wealth and possessions. They are like the man who decided to build bigger barns believed the lie of the world that possessions provide security. I am afraid that too many people trust in the abundance of possessions rather than trust God. They believe the lie that possessions provide security.

Because he sought security by keeping all he had, he began to think irrationally, as the world thinks irrationally today. He was going to tear down his barns and build bigger ones, which would use up money that could have been more wisely invested in other ways. He would do anything to keep his stuff. It seems crazy to me that here in American people will pay rent on a storage unit to put the stuff they no longer use under lock and key so no one else can make use of it. They will pay storage fees for years, only to have their heirs have to sell it for pennies on the dollar or cart it off to the dump. Today, many people are seeking security in possessions and not in God. Jesus made the choice clear, **“Do not lay up for**

yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21) The man in Jesus’ parable in Luke chapter 12 was set for life but he was not set for death. Jesus reveals all of this man’s plans were for not – for his death was but hours away. My beloved seek self-discipline so you live this life for the glory of your Savior and you are prepared for death and the eternal life to come.

Lie 3: Possessions Are For Keeping

We take up the parable with Jesus’ strong ending, reading at verse 20, ²⁰ **“God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’”** The reality was that this man had placed all his apples in one basket. He banked on the fact that he had many years ahead to enjoy the life of ease. But in truth, all he really did was hoard stuff to be given away after he died. If one knew when they would die how would it affect the way they live? King David lamented, ⁴ **“O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! ⁵ Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! *Selah* (meaning to pause and reflect) ⁶ Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather! ⁷ And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.”** (Psalm 39:4-7) I am sure those who inherited the dead man’s riches enjoyed a time of eating and drinking and making merry as they divided their inheritance. We come into the world with nothing and leave it the same way. **“God creates out of nothing. Therefore, until a man is nothing, God can make nothing out of him.”** Martin Luther

The Voice of God

Simple, clear and to the point Jesus says in verse 21, “**So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.**” Everything the man had banked on to make his life easy and secure was now going to someone else and what he really needed he did not have. He was penniless and bankrupt when it came to a relationship with God. He had nothing of any value for eternity. His money bags in heaven were empty. He had laid up treasure for himself on earth but had no treasure in heaven; he was a foolish investor. He is made known as the rich fool. In today’s way of thinking, he had just cashed in his 401k and had purchased a beach house and poured himself a glass of fine wine and as he was ready to enjoy, he fell over dead. He had never given God a second of his time or even a second thought. But now he was meeting God and all his wealth was worthless. His soul was required of him and his soul would reside for eternity without the comfort and love of God.

We too, must fight against listening to the call of the sirens and believing the lies of possessions. We live in a country that has been given an abundance of possessions. We have a lot of stuff - but do we find true happiness in our stuff? America is the richest but most unhappy and the most medicated culture in history. America promotes the chasing after possessions and it is like chasing after the wind. People never have enough and their stuff never quite satisfies and they spend their energy in keeping what they cannot keep. Riches are either stolen or rust out or vaporize in the stock market or are given to others when one dies. While we have possessions within our power, we must use them for the most good and the most glory for God. My beloved, may our “**hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ,**”³ in whom are hidden all the

treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.” (Colossians 2:2-4) It is all about a relationship with God through Christ.

This man in Jesus’ parable had more than he could use. He had more than anyone could use in this lifetime and still he wanted it all. We also see this man really was not as happy as he thought he would be because he was anxious about how he was going to be able to keep everything for himself. I am sure he spent many sleepless nights thinking about how he could keep it all. When we misuse our abundance, we too will become anxious. We too, will spend energy and resources trying to keep it because we do not realize it all belongs to God.

The Bible teaches that we are to work hard and then depend on God to supply our needs. It is good to have some resources in the bank for the unexpected. But abundance needs to be evaluated by the standards of God and we should seek God for spiritual wisdom in how his abundance is to be used, for truly it is not ours. How are we to use God’s abundance? God’ abundance is to be used and shared – not hoarded.

The biblical principal is, we are to work hard enough so that we do have more than we need, not to hoard the extra but to give to others who are in need and to support the work of God’s Kingdom. How are you doing? Are you busy at work in order to have some extra to give or are you one who expects others to give to you? Are you working to build abundance because like the man with barns you think it will give you security or are you finding security in Christ?

The sirens of the evil one call to us saying that the “good life” is dependent upon possessions. Jesus says, this is not true; our quality of life, our joy and peace is found in God alone. The world says security for the future is found in amassing

possessions. Jesus says this is also not true. Our security is found in having a relationship with God through Christ and it is everlasting. Society teaches that what we amass belongs to us and we can keep it all. Jesus says this too is not true. Jesus says, give it away to be used for the kingdom. As Martin Luther said, **“I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess.”** My beloved, the good life of joy and peace – security for our future here on earth and in heaven – the joy of the excess we work for and God gives – the good life is found in God and our serving him. Let us live the Gospel of Christ and not listen to the sirens of the prince of this world. D. L. Moody said it well, **“Let God have your life; He can do more with it than you can.”** May God’s Spirit live in you and you in Him and may you share all that Christ is and you have become with others. Amen.