

Pastor Mark Jacobson † Pentecost 8 Sermon † July 31, 2022 † Luke 12:13-21

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

¹⁴Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” ¹⁵Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” ¹⁶And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ ¹⁸“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ ²⁰“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ ²¹“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

YOU HAVE A MONEY PROBLEM IF...

As it turned out one Sunday morning in the month of May ended up costing me \$850. I was in here chitchatting when Cailey Ryan told me, “You need to go outside.” It was my mini-van. Apparently, a truck with a trailer was driving eastbound on Palmaire Avenue and its huge, up-to-my-waist tire, came off and hit the mini-van about 15 minutes before the 8 o’clock service. The whole story would take about 15 to 20 minutes to tell you, but if I chose to take up this block of time for that story I would be like the someone in the crowd who said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

1. ...You prioritize your earthly wealth over your eternal inheritance.

Jesus, apparently, held his pregnant pause, just a little too long. Sometimes a teacher has a pregnant pause for the class to think through what she has just said. Other times a pause can indicate a changing of the subject. And for teachers like me, a pause can mean I don’t remember what I am supposed to say next. Whatever it was, the someone in the crowd saw the pause as an opportunity to raise an issue that had taken prime real estate in his own mind: a family inheritance. Jesus will tell a story to warn the crowd about all kinds of greed, but we better be careful about the judgment we make about the kind of greed this man had. We really don’t know if he was greedy or if his brother was being greedy or if something entirely different was the cause of this family issue regarding an inheritance. Like the \$850 I unfairly lost from my car insurance deductible, this someone talking to Jesus may very well have been unjustly left off the family inheritance. We don’t have enough information to know. What we do know is how Jesus responded to him, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Isn’t Jesus the judge and arbiter? Isn’t Jesus the judge for the living and the dead? Won’t Jesus “arbit” who spends eternity in heaven and who spends eternity in hell?

Many financial books will tell you whether or not you have money problems. They will tell you, “You have money problems if you spend more money than you earn.” “You have money problems if you don’t pay yourself first, that is, tuck some money away in a savings or investment account.” “You have money problems if you keep paying those exorbitant interest rates on credit cards.” In God’s Word today, Jesus teaches us, **“You have money problems if ... you prioritize your earthly wealth over your eternal inheritance.** It’s only money. That \$850 won’t prolong my life on this earth for a single second. The earthly inheritance this man felt was his could never be used to pay God for one single sin. Whatever amount of money is on your mind can’t be used to purchase a square inch of real estate in heaven.

Jesus was calling on this man (and every man) to right-size their priority with wealth. Jesus said, “Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” Life is not about what you have. Life is about who you are. And you are a child of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Jesus brokered a deal to bring you into God’s family. Jesus spent a fortune on you, every last drop of his holy, precious blood. With that kind of eternal investment made and with that kind of eternal inheritance waiting, Jesus is not

going to diversify his attention to a measly earthly inheritance or my \$850 or what amount of money is on your mind. That's why Jesus asks, "*Who made me a judge or arbiter over you?*" That's why Jesus will tell Pilate, "*My kingdom is not of this world.*" And why the apostle Paul will say, "*Our citizenship is in heaven.*" Let it go. If you have been wronged financially, let it go. You have a money problem if money matters so fill your mind they become a priority over your eternal inheritance.

2. ...You don't thank God for your possessions and you don't think of others.

Pregnant pause to move to a new subject. Jesus picks up on a different kind of greed with the story he told about the rich fool. Again, as with 'the someone' in the crowd, besides Jesus' commentary we don't have enough information from the words of the rich fool that he did anything overtly wrong. The results of his crop would speak of him being a good farmer. The building of another barn was a good plan to preserve and protect his property. And it's not a sin to enjoy life. There's nothing in the text that paints this man as greedy. It's what's NOT in the text that paints this man as greedy. There is no mention of God. Did you notice that? There are 3 "I's", 3 "mys", 2 "I'lls" and a myself. The only time a "you" is found is when the man was talking about himself. No mention of God until God himself comes to him and says, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"

A missionary once shared a story about his time in Africa. He talked about how witchcraft is so ingrained into the culture of Africa that the natives don't see what a problem witchcraft is for their faith. The missionary wondered if any of them believed in Jesus with all the witchcraft. Witchcraft was a blind spot for them. Years later the missionary came back to the United States and brought some of the native pastors with him. The African pastors talked about how wealth is so ingrained in the culture of American that the Americans don't see what a problem wealth is for their faith. The native pastors wondered if any of them believed in Jesus with all the wealth. Wealth is a blind spot for Americans. Can you see the blind spot of wealth if the blind spot is pointed out to you? You have money problems if ... **You don't thank God for your possessions, and you don't think of others.**

God was not mentioned in the text. Neither were other people. What was mentioned was another barn. Our country is filled with these kinds of barns. That's not how it used to be. Did you know in colonial times, homes were built without closets? They didn't need closets. They washed their clothes every day. Today, you can't build a house without a walk-in closet. And if you need a storage unit, good luck. Chances are you will make multiple calls until you find a unit available. There are other barns for us to park our wealth. There are people in need. That man in the story did not think of these others? How often are you thinking of them? This generosity isn't about becoming poor. For the man, there was still another barn filled to the top with crops. These crops would all go to others that night.

You see the problem. It's important, though, that you also see the solution. The solution is not, "don't be greedy." You can't get rid of greed unless you replace that greed with something else. It's like this cup. This cup is filled with air. Whether I flip this cup upside down or blow wind into the cup, the air is still there. But if I fill this cup with something else, the air goes away. Be filled with Christ. As Jesus says, "Be rich toward God." The Greek wording allows for the translation, "Be rich in God." That's what God is doing now. He's making you rich in faith. He's not telling you that you need more forgiveness. He's telling you that you already are forgiven. He's not telling you that you need to earn heaven by your mental powers in worship or your money in offerings. He's telling you that you already have heaven as a free gift, paid for by Jesus. Even your financial setbacks just as the setback told by the man in the gospel, is being used by God to teach us how God takes care of everything for us. You are rich in faith through saving work and gospel proclamation of Jesus Christ. And you show your wealth of faith by how you react to financial setbacks, by giving God the credit for your security in good financial times and your trust in bad financial times, and by being generous to people in need of basic necessities and of eternal life. Amen.