

The number one competitor for our attention and efforts would have to be money. I say that because in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, ²⁴ *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”* Matthew 6:24 He didn't even add another competitor. I believe the reason Jesus selected money as the main competition for our devotion is that it can be a substitute for God in so many ways. It can be our means of supplying our necessities, provide a sense of security, and it give us a sense of worth and importance and being in control. Each of these are what God should be to us: provider, protector, the reason for our self-worth, and our Lord. No wonder then that it is a temptation to put money first. The love of it is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10ⁱ). After all, we think that if we have enough of it, we can control our lives as we please, but God wants to be in control of our lives for our good (Deuteronomy 10:12,13ⁱⁱ).

While Jesus was teaching the crowds were so numerous that they were trampling one another (12:1ⁱⁱⁱ). As He taught, people yelled out a comment or request. ¹³ *Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”* Luke 12:13 Jesus had just taught on the importance of confessing faith in Him to others. It was a heaven or hell warning. Someone in this great crowd radically changed the subject by asking Jesus to tell his brother that he should divide the inheritance with him. I'm always amazed that when the Spirit is moving and things become very serious, people can ask the most unspiritual questions that disrupts the Spirit's conviction.

In Hebrew culture the oldest son would inherit twice what other sons would. That usually involved property, which was meant to keep the family farm together and carry it down the family line. But this person didn't like the situation and wanted his brother to sell off his portion so he could go his own way. He thought maybe Jesus would order the brother to sell his portion. It was really a demand. "Tell my brother!" Obviously, he thought he was in the right.

¹⁴ *But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”* Luke 12:14 Fitzmeyer suggests that Jesus addressing him as "man" implied he was a stranger to Jesus. The wording even gives a sense of the man's impertinence. Jesus refused to play the role of an earthly judge over what was legal regarding this world's possessions. There are courts for that. Jesus will judge whether we received His salvation, and He will reward everyone according to their actions that came from their hearts (Revelation 22:12^{iv}; 2 Corinthians 5:10^v). The next verse implies that Jesus saw the motivation of the man's demand as coming from his covetous heart.

One of the sad things that pastors experience is seeing families fight over an inheritance. A godly person passes and in the memorial service the family pays lip service to the deceased person's faith but then fight over the inheritance. The happiest people in these situations are the ones who sit back and just let the situation be decided by the will as written. Those who hire attorneys and fight over money end up the losers, emotionally, relationally, and often financially. Even in the case of injustice, trust God. Be at peace. Wish others the best. Relationships are much more important than passing

material goods. The man had a right to the property, but covetousness was poisoning his relationship with his brother.

¹⁵ 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." Luke 12:15 Jesus first words were a command in answer to the man's command. "Take care!" NIV translates it as "Watch out!" Be careful what you are asking because it reveals your heart and there can be evil in there. Greed is a poison. It poisons those who possess it and hurts those around them. Don't think life is about physical possessions.

People start planning what they will do with the money they believe they will inherit, and then they are so disappointed when they don't get it that they are ready to fight, to end relationships, and even to stay bitter throughout their lives. Why? **Things that perish are not life nor are they worth the fighting for.** Money has a way of growing wings and flying away (Proverbs 23:5^{vi}). The new car smell doesn't last long, and a much nicer model will soon be on the market. Every physical thing grows old and needs repairs and will soon be useless. Jesus is saying those things are not what life is about. Even what seems to last forever, like land, or an investment that pays dividends, or Publishers Clearing House \$1000 a week for life - are not life. The more you get the more you think you need (Ecclesiastes 5:10^{vii}). How many stories have you heard of where the lottery winner is broke and in debt after just a few years of winning a massive jackpot?

Years ago, there was a popular bumper sticker: The one who dies with the most toys wins! I haven't seen that one lately. It was a declaration of ignorance. The one with the most toys spends all his time maintaining the toys and leaves them to be auctioned off when he or she dies (1 Samuel 12:21^{viii}).

What is life? Jesus said He is the life (John 14:6^{ix})! To know Him is to know life (John 17:3^x). To live for Him and have His Spirit in you is to experience life (John 3:36^{xi}). To see Him touch another life through you is touching life in action. It is a heart overflowing with love for Him and from Him. It is joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Peter 1:8^{xii})! The problem is things that are visible and tangible and so temporarily satisfying are alluring, but Jesus is experienced by faith. The greater the commitment to Him, the greater the experience of Him. His all surpassing love has nothing in creation that can compare. But if you choose Him, you can't remain the master of your fate and do things your way. To experience Him you must surrender to His majesty and let Him lead you. It is a life of faith that is not often experienced by the five senses (Hebrews 11:6^{xiii}; John 12:26^{xiv}).

Lately I've been saddened by the people I see around me chasing vanity as hard as they can, and by others settling for a false spirituality that leaves them in the place of God and thinking they are superior to everyone else. It's heart breaking to consider their end, and even their present emptiness.

¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully," Luke 12:16 Jesus told the parable to help us see why possessions do not offer security or lasting importance. He starts with a man who was what many people aspire to be. The man was already wealthy, but then he had a great harvest. That is wealth upon wealth. Lucky man! Who wouldn't want to be in his shoes?

¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' Luke 12:17 He has so much wealth that he doesn't know what to do with it.

Where do you put all your stuff? When all your storage space is full and you can barely squeeze your car in the garage, what do you do next? You rent a storage unit! When that unit gets full, you rent another unit, or you can have a big garage sale. With the money you make you upgrade your stuff to more elite stuff and call Goodwill for the old stuff.

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. Luke 12:18 This rich man chose the bigger storage unit. In fact, he bought the whole storage facility. It could hold all that big crop and all the stuff (referred to here as my goods). Now he doesn't have to worry about food or more stuff for the rest of his life! He is secure. He has provision against famine. He has a reputation as a rich man which brings honor. What more could one want?

Let me ask you a question. If the voice of God said to you, "I'll give you anything and everything you ever ask for, or - you can know me, one or the other, but you can never have both (Matthew 4:8,9^{xv}). Which would you choose? Honestly, most of us try to live in the middle. We want what we want but we want to know God and the peace that only He can give. We avoid Jesus' words, love the one and hate the other, be devoted to one and despise the other. But Jesus warns us in a later chapter that we must renounce all that we have if we would be His disciple (Luke 14:33^{xvi}). That does not mean literally give it away, as with the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:21^{xvii}). It means that Jesus is first and things in your life are His to do with as He pleases. That is knowing Jesus as Lord and master of everything in our lives (Romans 10:9^{xviii}; Luke 6:46^{xix}).

The rich man did not ask, "What does God want me to do with this blessing?" Nor did he even ask, "How can I help others with this abundance?" His sole thought was for himself. His god could be spelled with one letter, I.

¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."' Luke 12:19 He's so self-centered he starts talking to his best friend. Hey self, you got it made. Kick back. Relax. Enjoy life. Enjoy the food and wine. Don't worry; be happy! It's all good. Hakunamatada (Isaiah 22:12-14^{xx}).

He thinks all he needs are tangible goods. He thinks joy comes from consuming those goods without fear of running out. With a smile on his face and a calm assurance in his heart he blows out the flame on his lamp and lays down for a night of blissful sleep.

I know people living on pension funds that are underinvested and will one day soon come to an end. And for the many of us who are hoping social security is bullet proof, I think the projection for its bankruptcy is 2035. There is one way around the problem and its not by political saviors or more savings. Just inflate the dollar and pay off the national debt. Of course, then it will take \$200 or more to buy a modest lunch. I'm not trying to scare you, but I do want us to see that our security must be in God alone and not in any physical things or human promises. Anything other than God is unreliable!

Jesus taught us in His most famous sermon to lay up our treasures in heaven.

¹⁹ "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 This was certainly not the rich man's perspective. Is it ours?

²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' Luke 12:20 He has been so busy talking

to himself and planning his future he hasn't heard the still small voice of God, but that doesn't mean God is not speaking. Then, perhaps in his dream, or I should say nightmare, God spoke to him. God addresses him with one word, "Fool"! O foolish man!

A fool one who is out of touch with reality. A fool says in his heart, "*There is no God.*" Psalm 14:1^{xxi} A fool always thinks his way is right and doesn't listen to advice (Proverbs 12:15^{xxii}). A fool has no sense (Proverbs 17:16^{xxiii}). He trusts in his own mind (Proverbs 28:26^{xxiv}). That is how the Word of God describes this fictional man, but it also describes many people throughout history, as well as anyone today who thinks that money can buy true joy and peace.

God told the man that very night his soul would be required of him. The man required his portion from the sharecroppers to whom he loaned his fields. They had to produce. But he forgot his life was on loan from God, and now God is calling in the note. He would have to give an account of his life (Romans 14:10^{xxv}). How had he responded when the Spirit of God wooed him? How had he dealt with conviction? What had he done with the life and blessings God gave him? He had climbed the ladder of success only to find it was leaning on a collapsing sand castle and was crashing on rocks below.

All he labored for would go to others. I've noticed that when things are not earned, they are often quickly wasted. Worse yet, I've seen families torn apart over an inheritance. All the blessing the former owner thought it would be to his family turned into a curse that tore his loved ones apart from one another.

And now Jesus' punchline to the man who wanted Jesus to make his brother share the inheritance and to all who would put possessions above eternal things. ²¹ *So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.*" Luke 12:21 One can be rich and be rich toward God, but it is a difficult task. It is more typical for one to focus on material wealth and forget God or make Him a side issue. We cannot serve God and money. We will have to choose one or the other. God gives a few people the grace to use wealth as a means to advance the kingdom of God. When I was a young Christian, I thought wealth would be a nice calling. I didn't realize how difficult that calling is.

I had an associate pastor for many years who had worked for the CIA. He had served as an undercover mob informant. He told me that the temptation to slide over to the other side was enormous. The physical luxury, the power, the seduction was overwhelming at times. He said it was only the grace of God that kept him from giving in to it all. We all experience that to some degree. It is only the grace of God that keeps us from giving in to the old nature. But the question we must ask ourselves frequently is, "Am I compromising and justifying being my own lord?"

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were wealthy when they chose to follow Jesus. There have been many throughout history who had wealth but put God first. Their assets were at God's disposal. They blessed the kingdom of God. Too often assets are considered one's own. It happens to rich and poor. Does what you have belong to God? It certainly came from God. One day we too will give an account. We all have the challenge of obeying the Spirit when He asks us to give financially and to provide for our own household as well (1 Timothy 5:8^{xxvi}).

The issue is not that one cannot have material success and be godly, but are we rich toward God? Have we laid up our treasure in heaven? Where our treasure is, there

will our heart be also. This tells us that what we spend the majority of our time focused on reveals what is in our hearts.

I think if that man had come to me and demanded I tell his brother to divide the inheritance, I'd have suggested mediation. But Jesus saw past the demand and saw the man's heart. He was in tune with the Spirit and saw a spiritual need behind the man's demand. It is a need that so many of us have, to see that spiritual things are eternal and all the physical things of this life are passing.

What is true wealth? It is certainly not a pile of green paper with pictures of presidents on each one. Nor is it a bar of refined minerals. King Tut's treasures are in a museum. As much as he tried, he left them all behind. **Real wealth is knowing and experiencing the love of God. It is knowing your eternal destiny is secure. It is the promises of God. In a word, it is Jesus.**

I am so grateful that you are a generous congregation, and most of us have learned the truth of what Jesus was teaching in this chapter. More than 25% of this small church's income goes to missions. That is highly unusual. Dr. Mathai once told me that the more he saw a church give to missions, the more he saw them blessed. Why not? If we give to those things that the Spirit of God leads us to support, He will provide the funds.

I do not believe in the teaching of sowing money to get money. Blessings come in many forms. Giving to get is still covetousness. I do believe the more we let God use us the more opportunities He will bring our way to serve Him. **In the upside-down world of God's kingdom, being a servant is a blessing and giving is a joy.** If you know these things, happy are you if you do them (John 13:17^{xxvii}).

I commented on the first verse by saying that money can substitute for God as our means of provision, our security, and a sense of importance. But God is a more reliable provider. He can feed a million people in the wilderness. He provides much better security, for He sees and knows all. And to be loved by Him to the extent that He would give His only Son to save us should give us a much greater sense of importance and purpose (Romans 8:32^{xxviii}). Let us hear Jesus' admonition, "Watch out for covetousness." Life is not measured by possessions. Better to be rich toward God than to lay up treasures here that moths can eat and rust destroys. How is your heavenly portfolio doing? Is it eternal or temporal?

Questions

- 1 What was the man's demand and why?
- 2 What did Jesus tell us to be careful of?
- 3 What does life not consist of?
- 4 What was the situation in the parable?
- 5 What did the man say to himself?
- 6 What did God call him?
- 7 What was about to happen?
- 8 Does what you have belong to God?
- 9 What does it mean to be rich toward God?
- 10 What can you take with you?

ⁱ **1 Timothy 6:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

ⁱⁱ **Deuteronomy 10:12-13 (ESV)**

¹² "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,
¹³ and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?"

ⁱⁱⁱ **Luke 12:1 (ESV)**

¹ In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

^{iv} **Revelation 22:12 (ESV)**

¹² "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.

^v **2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

^{vi} **Proverbs 23:5 (KJV)**

⁵ Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for *riches* certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.

^{vii} **Ecclesiastes 5:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.

^{viii} **1 Samuel 12:21 (ESV)**

²¹ And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty.

^{ix} **John 14:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

^x **John 17:3 (ESV)**

³ And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

^{xi} **John 3:36 (ESV)**

³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

^{xii} **1 Peter 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,

^{xiii} **Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

^{xiv} **John 12:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

^{xv} **Matthew 4:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

^{xvi} **Luke 14:33 (ESV)**

³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

^{xvii} **Matthew 19:21 (ESV)**

²¹ Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

xviii **Romans 10:9 (ESV)**

⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

xix **Luke 6:46 (ESV)**

⁴⁶ "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"

xx **Isaiah 22:12-14 (ESV)**

¹² In that day the Lord GOD of hosts called for weeping and mourning, for baldness and wearing sackcloth; ¹³ and behold, joy and gladness, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." ¹⁴ The LORD of hosts has revealed himself in my ears: "Surely this iniquity will not be atoned for you until you die," says the Lord GOD of hosts.

xxi **Psalms 14:1 (ESV)**

¹ The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.

xxii **Proverbs 12:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

xxiii **Proverbs 17:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Why should a fool have money in his hand to buy wisdom when he has no sense?

xxiv **Proverbs 28:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.

xxv **Romans 14:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;

xxvi **1 Timothy 5:8 (ESV)**

⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

xxvii **John 13:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

xxviii **Romans 8:32 (ESV)**

³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?