

Sermon for August 4, 2013 – 11th Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:13-21

Theme: Greed vs. Grace

- 1) *Lord, forgive our greedy hearts.*
- 2) *Lord, thank you for your grace.*

“Teacher,” someone in the crowd said to Him, “tell my brother to give me my share of the property our father left us.” “Man,” He asked him, “who appointed Me to be your judge or to divide your property?” “Be careful,” He told the people. “Guard against every kind of greed. Even if you have more than enough, your property doesn’t give you life.” Then He told them a story: “A rich man had good crops on his land. ‘What am I going to do?’ he said to himself. ‘I have no place to store my crops,’ Finally he said, ‘This is what I’ll do: I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grain and goods in them. Then I’ll say to myself, “You have a lot of good things stored up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.”’ “But God said to him, ‘You fool, tonight you die. And what you’ve prepared – who will get it?’ That’s how it is when you store up goods for yourself and aren’t rich toward God.

Who do you think about when you hear the word “greed”? Do you think about Wall Street bankers at Lehman Brothers or Goldman Sachs? Do you think about the Enron scandal, Worldcom or Bernie Madoff? Or do you think about yourself?

Our sermon text for this morning should really cut us to the heart. Jesus masterfully shows that greed is not just a problem on Wall Street, but that we are all greedy – everyone one of us here - and we all ought to be damned for it.

But, thank God for His grace. It alone saves us from our greed. His grace awakens faith in our hearts and enables us to live selfless instead of selfish lives.

Let us consider the parable of the rich farmer, under the theme **Greed vs. Grace**. May Jesus’ warning against greed lead us to pray: 1) *Lord, forgive our greedy hearts.* 2) *Lord, thank you for your grace.*

Part One: Lord, forgive our greedy hearts.

Imagine the scene: Jesus is teaching a large crowd of people when, out of the blue, someone yells, *“Teacher . . . tell my brother to give me my share of the property our father left us.”*

Wow, talk about impetuous. What nerve to interrupt Jesus’ sermon! But before we go too far in condemning the man, let us imagine the situation from his perspective: His father had died. His brother might not be giving him what is rightfully his. This man might have a family to provide for. His inheritance is important. If you were this man, would you not also be thinking about how you were cheated by your own brother?

When we consider the situation from the man’s perspective, his request does not seem all that bad. Impetuous? Yes. Criminal and deserving of hell? No. But from God’s perspective, this man was in danger of falling into that horribly deceptive sin, which has filled hell with many seemingly upright people. And what sin is that? The sin of greed. And I want to make an important point about the sin of greed: The sin

of greed even includes coveting things that are lawfully yours. Did you catch that? Sinful greed even includes desiring for yourself the things that are lawfully yours. This is why Jesus warns us *against every kind of greed*.

Jesus replied, "*Man. . . who appointed Me to be your judge or to divide your property?*" Jesus was not on this earth to act as a civil judge. He was on a far more important mission – our salvation. This man's "stolen" inheritance was nothing in comparison to the eternal inheritance that Jesus offered him through the preaching of Gospel. Yet, this man was so focused on petty, earthly things that he was in danger of losing the eternal treasure God offered him.

"Be careful," He told the people. "Guard against every kind of greed. Even if you have more than enough, your property doesn't give you life." A more literal translation of the last part of this verse would be: one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." (Luke 12:15 NKJV)

How different Jesus' words are to those of the world. This world teaches us that the most important thing for a person is his "quality of his life." But let me ask you: does the sum and substance of your existence revolve about your quality of life - around how little suffering and how much pleasure you can have? Absolutely not!

To illustrate this truth, Jesus told the following parable

"A rich man had good crops on his land. Notice that this rich man is not described as a crook, or a thief. No, he is a man just like any other. We could imagine him as honest and hard working; a man who always paid his taxes and did not cheat his neighbors. We could imagine him as outwardly upright; a man who went to the church pretty regularly and even gave offerings to the LORD. This rich man could be any one of us.

Notice that the LORD blessed him with a good crop. It would be no different than anyone of us getting more than we expected in a tax return or an unexpected raise or bonus. The point is that the LORD gave him a gift. Unfortunately, this man doesn't acknowledge that this gift from the LORD.

"What am I going to do?" he said to himself. 'I have no place to store my crops,' Finally he said, 'This is what I'll do: I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grain and goods in them. Then I'll say to myself, "You have a lot of good things stored up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.'"

Again, this man is like any one of us. After receiving his unexpected blessing, he wonders what to do with it. He considers his goals in life. He makes plans to save and retire well. In all honesty, can any of us say that, if we were in his shoes, we would have done differently? What is wrong with this man's plans? He is not stealing or cheating anyone. He is not planning anything illegal. He is not even coveting anything that doesn't already belong to him. He is doing what anyone else in the world would have done, what bank and investment commercials continually tell us to do: save up in order to live your retirement dreams.

But God said to him, 'You fool, tonight you die. And what you've prepared – who will get it?' That's how it is when you store up goods for yourself and aren't rich toward God.

"Aha!" some people say, "the reason this rich man is condemned is because he did not give money to the poor, or he did not give money to the church." No, that wasn't the man's problem. He could have given a quarter of his money to the poor and a quarter of it to the church, and God would still have pronounced the same judgment over him. The problem was not in his actions; but in his heart, which his actions

revealed. The last phrase of our text translated as, “*and aren’t rich toward God,*” is more literally translated the way Luther did: “*but are not rich in God.*”

The problem the rich man had is that he was not rich “in” God. All he thought about was himself and making his life his god, instead of making God his life. When the man pondered what to do with his wealth, he used the words “I,” “Me,” or, “Myself” 9 times in three short verses, but does not mention the LORD once.

What was the man’s problem? In his desire for the good things that God graciously gave him, he did not recognize God at all. He did not thank the LORD. He did not pray to the LORD as how to use this blessing. He does not involve the LORD in his plans. The LORD is completely off his mind as he focuses only on the extra income and what to do with it to make his own life better.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, do you see why this parable cuts us all to the heart? We all have been like this man at one point or another - when we did not thank God for his gifts, or left him completely out of our planning process, not once asking for his guidance and blessings in our decisions. Even if we have never have stolen, cheated or even coveted that which was not ours, there still have been times when we put our things: our houses, vacations plans, cars, money, savings, leisure, etc., ahead of the LORD – being more concerned about these things than our relationship with God. This is sin, damning sin, for which we all deserve eternal death.

Let me stress it again: this text is not about giving money to church or to the poor as if that is what God wants us to do to correct our sinful attitudes. No, this text is about how sinful and greedy our human hearts are: how we put ourselves ahead of God in what we think, say and do.

Part Two: Lord, thank you for your grace,

Now, dear Christian, if this parable has caused you to feel guilty, then there is hope. Remember: Jesus, our dear Savior, spoke this parable. He spoke this parable so that we might repent and believe in him for the forgiveness of sin. We are most certainly evil and greedy. He is loving and merciful. Everything He does, He does with us in mind.

In love, He left his heavenly home to take on human flesh and blood – to be put under the law in our place. He lived the perfect life of love that we failed miserably to live. He took all our sins upon himself – our greed and selfishness - and was nailed to the cross to suffer the death we deserved. He rose from the dead to prove that our sins have been paid for in full. His Word called us to repentance and faith. In baptism, His Spirit sealed us as His own.

Even though we have often been like the rich man in the parable, the LORD no longer sees him when he looks at us. The LORD sees his Son. And why? Because the Scriptures say: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3:26 NIVO) When we repent of our greed, the LORD sees his children asking for forgiveness; and forgive us He does. God’s forgiveness, then, enables us to recognize that all we have comes from His hand. And this recognition leads us to pray to Him for guidance in the use of all His blessings. Even though we are still tempted to chase after the things of this world, we hold on to Jesus’ promise to provide for us. A few verses after our text, Jesus says: *do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.* ²³ *Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.* ³¹ *But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.* (Luke 12:22-23, 31 NIVO)

As we seek first Jesus and his righteousness, we will no longer focus on the things of this world. Then we learn to be content in plenty and in want. As we look to Jesus in faith we are able to do what our 1st lesson commends: *There is nothing better among men than eating, drinking, and finding satisfaction in your work. I also saw that this comes from God's hand. Without God, who can eat and enjoy himself?* (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25)

Be rich in God. Rejoice in all the love God has shown you: spiritually and physically. Be content with what he gives you, trusting that he will make sure you have all you need. And if He blesses you with more, rejoice in the LORD and ask for His guidance as to how to use what He has graciously given you. God takes great pleasure when we freely give as He has freely given to us (Matthew 10:8). He takes pleasure when we trust in Him and are not afraid to *sell [our] possessions and give to the poor.* (Luke 12:33 NIVO) We can only do this if we are rich in God's grace, treasuring Him and the salvation He won for us above any and everything on this earth. Such an attitude is a fruit of faith in the amazing grace He has poured out upon us.

Greed vs Grace. LORD, forgive us for our sinful greed. LORD, thank you for your amazing grace, which has freely forgiven all my sin, and has blessed me with so much - not the least of which is my relationship with you and my eternal home in heaven. Amen.