

# God is Pleased to Give Us His Kingdom

Luke 12:13-34

Key Verse: 12:32

**“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”**

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus taught his disciples spiritual truths that would guide them to live fruitfully as his people. In this passage Jesus deals with what has been called the material problem. As man is both body and spirit, so we have both material and spiritual needs. Some people disregard the importance of managing materials or money, thinking it is not related to the weightier, spiritual aspects of life. This kind of thinking is not Biblical; it falls under the category of dualism. Man's body and spirit are not two separate entities; man is one holistic being. When we follow Jesus, we must do so in body and spirit. This means that we should manage our material lives well. Otherwise, we cannot be good disciples of Jesus. So we should pay close attention to Jesus' teachings about material things. In this passage Jesus deals with two main subjects. In verses 13-21, Jesus warns us against all kinds of greed. In verses 22-34, Jesus teaches us not to worry. How can we overcome greed and not worry? Let's learn by listening to Jesus' words.

## **I. Jesus warns against all kinds of greed (13-21)**

As Jesus was teaching, someone in the crowd said to him, **“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”** Though we don't know the specific details of this case, it sounds like the older brother took more than his rightful portion of the inheritance; he took it all, leaving the younger brother empty-handed. So the younger brother asked Jesus to enforce the law and make his older brother share. Though this may sound childish, we should realize that such struggles are very common. The stories of siblings suing each other over inheritance rights are numerous.

Jesus' first response was, **“Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”** It was a rebuke. This man was treating Jesus like a small claims court judge. He should have seen Jesus as the teacher of God's truth. He should have listened to Jesus' words in order to have life in his soul. But he wanted Jesus to solve his legal problem. Furthermore, by entreating Jesus publically, he was treating his brother like an enemy during wartime. This man was not speaking and acting like a man made in God's image, but more like an animal fighting to survive

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in the jungle. His view of Jesus, and of man in general, was degenerate. Why did this happen?

Jesus implied that the man's problem was greed. Look at verse 15. **“Then he said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’”** Jesus gave a strong warning against greed. What is greed? Greed is desiring more than is needed. This greedy desire leads one to strive blindly for something, such as material gain, while ignoring spiritual life. Jesus said there are all kinds of greed. There is greed for power, knowledge, sex or food. Any greed consumes an inordinate amount of one's time and energy. Yet the greed Jesus primarily refers to is the desire for more material wealth or money than one actually needs. The Bible says that greed is idolatry (Col 3:6). Historically, greed is one of the seven deadly sins. This greed is deadly to the bearer, and to others. 1 Timothy 6:10a says, “**For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.**” Evil industries driven by greed include gambling, drug trafficking, prostitution, pornography, and human trafficking.

Though greed is deadly, it has a mysterious appeal. The devil uses it to deceive people, falsely promising that money will solve all their problems. It is true that we can do many things with money. We can travel the world. We can hire domestic servants. We can buy fancy houses, luxurious cars or nifty electronic gadgets. But Jesus said, “...a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” We cannot buy life with money. We cannot buy a godly spouse with money. We cannot buy true friends with money. We cannot buy repentance, righteousness, or peace with money.

To illustrate the limitation of money's power, Jesus told an interesting parable. A certain rich man enjoyed an abundant harvest. In fact, it was so abundant that it exceeded his storage capacity; it was far more than he had imagined. So he planned to build bigger barns, store it all away, and use it for himself in the years to come. His philosophy of life was, **“You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry”** (19). In modern terms, he wanted early retirement in ease and pleasure. Many people share this desire. They imagine that with enough money they can stop working, sleep late every day, enjoy delicious food, fine wine and all the pleasures that money can buy. They really believe that such a life will make them happy. But something happened just as this man was about to retire early. God said to him, **“You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who**

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**will get what you have prepared for yourself?”** (20) In a moment the man's life was taken. At that time, he had to leave his money behind. As the saying goes, “You can't take it with you.” He departed this life and entered eternity as a soul under condemnation.

God called the man a fool. In the Biblical meaning a fool was not just a person who lacked intellectual power, but one who had a flawed value system, or one who was morally degenerate. “Fools” deny the existence of God in their practical decision making, though they may claim to believe in God. Psalm 14:1a says, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” The rich man's godlessness was revealed at the time of abundant blessing. When he experienced an unusually good harvest, he should have thanked God, and offered a tithe to God. Then God would have blessed him with wisdom and freedom to manage it well. But he did not acknowledge God. So he could not discover God's purpose for his harvest and was overcome with greed. Perhaps there were hungry people whom God wanted to feed through him. But he ignored the plight of the poor. He was preoccupied with enjoyment of luxury. He reminds us of bankers who smoked \$1,000 cigars in the midst of the recent economic crisis. Godlessness leads to corruption and grave injustice. This, in turn, leads to God's divine judgment.

When a person denies God's existence, he can easily deny the spiritual world altogether. This man thought that money and physical pleasure were everything. He lived to indulge his flesh. But man is not just body. Man is also spirit. The body is merely a tent for the spirit. The real value of a man is in his spiritual life. As God is Spirit, so man must worship in spirit and truth. It is in his spirit that man can pray, listen to the word of God, find his meaning and purpose, and enjoy true life. Man without spirit is no longer man. He is a walking corpse; he is only evil all the time. When man loses his spirit, he comes under God's righteous judgment, as did the people of Noah's time. It is no coincidence that God demanded this man's life at the very moment he became engrossed in satisfying his flesh.

Jesus concluded, **“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God”** (21). Jesus applied the parable universally. Anyone who lives without God, and only stores up treasures on earth will share the fate of the rich fool. **So Jesus urges us to be rich toward God. Then, what does it mean to be rich toward God? It means to give generously of what we have to serve God and others.** Having an abundant crop is not a problem; it is a blessing. Yet what we do with it is important. When we use it well

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for the glory of God and the benefit of others, we can please God and gain many true friends. I know of a person who was rich toward God. He is Jim Elliot. He wrote, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” He lived by this wisdom. He left a comfortable life in America to go as a missionary to the Oudani tribe in Ecuador in 1956. While sharing the gospel with them, he was killed with a spear by one of them. He died young, before he could enjoy his wife and children. But he had no regret. No one lives on earth forever. All people are destined to die once. In giving his life for God’s mission, Jim Elliot gave what he could not keep to gain eternal reward. He won a whole tribe of Oudani natives for Christ. He helped advance God’s worldwide mission by inspiring many others to follow his example. Moreover, his act of sacrifice was his entry into eternal life. According to the testimony of Oudani witnesses, Jim Elliot’s death was marked by heavenly angels appearing in glory to welcome him into eternity. In addition, he gave his family a good spiritual influence and a wise example. Let’s not be rich fools who only store up things that we cannot keep. Let’s repent of our greed and learn to be rich toward God.

## **II. Do not worry; trust God and seek his kingdom (22-34)**

In this part, Jesus turns his attention toward his disciples to address the problem of worry. The disciples had already left everything behind to follow Jesus. They may not necessarily have struggled much with greed. But they did have a problem with worry. Let’s see how Jesus helped them.

Look at verse 22. **“Then Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.’”** What does it mean to worry? The dictionary defines “worry” as tormenting oneself with disturbing thoughts. This is what the disciples were doing. Though their bodies were following Jesus, their minds and hearts were tormented by disturbing thoughts. They worried about what they would eat. They saw themselves becoming thinner and thinner, suffering hunger pains until they perished. Their worry or anxiety was palpable, like a hand gripping their necks, making it hard to breathe. They felt panicky inwardly, though they said to others, “I’m fine.” Sometimes they felt that Jesus did not love them or understand them, and their lives would end in malnutrition, starvation and failure.

The disciples also had a problem with clothes. They were impressed by the religious leaders in their ornate priestly garments. These men seemed to exude honor and dignity; they were dressed for success. Comparatively, the disciples

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wore plain clothes which might have been patched and stitched in many places. Sometimes they slept in their clothes. They might have felt much ashamed of their attire, like junior high kids who don't wear the right brand of shoes to school. This kind of worry about food and clothes has paralyzed many people and made them useless. It was time for Jesus' disciples to learn from him with wide open hearts so they would be ready to take over his ministry after his departure. But they were sometimes blocked by anxiety and became useless. Jesus wanted to free them from worry so they could learn and grow and be fruitful. He helped them in three ways.

**First, Jesus taught them to depend on God the Creator (23-24; 27-28).** Jesus used two examples from nature. In regards to food, he used the raven. Ravens are birds. They cannot harvest crops or store them for future use. Yet God feeds them. God the Creator provides for the creatures he has made. Since God provides for birds, creatures of instinct, Jesus assures us that God will take care of people who are made in his image.

In regards to clothes, Jesus used the lily. Lilies are beautiful flowers that have come to symbolize Easter, the time of glorious new life. Lilies do not operate sewing machines that make nice garments. They simply grow out of the ground, as God causes them to grow. Yet their beauty graces meadows and clothes the grass of the field in such splendor that not even Solomon can compete with them. God is a great artist and he loves to make his children look beautiful both inwardly and outwardly. We can be sure that God will clothe us well. When we feel anxiety rearing up within us, we should visit the Botanic Gardens and see the wonders of nature. Our Creator God takes good care of the world he has made.

**Second, Jesus taught them to accept their limits as creatures (25-26).** Worry consumes a lot of energy. It can lead people to experience serious health issues, such as heart attacks and mental illness. Then, what benefit does it give? None. It cannot add one hour to our lives (25). We gain nothing from worrying. Why, then, do we worry? It is rooted in taking God's responsibility upon ourselves. Instead of recognizing God as our Creator and Provider, we put ourselves in his place. This is ridiculous and presumptuous. We cannot be God. When we put ourselves in God's place, we worry. So we should regard worry as a warning sign. It means that we need to repent our presumption and accept our limits as creatures.

**Third, Jesus taught them to set their hearts on his kingdom (29-31).** In order to overcome worry, our hearts must be set in the right place. If we set our hearts on eating and drinking, we will worry about these things. Jesus said that the pagan

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world runs after these things as if they were the most important things to obtain. So those in the pagan world constantly check the grocery stores to find the best bargains. From God's point of view, they look like lemmings, who are all rushing toward the cliff in one accord to throw themselves off in a mass suicide.

Jesus' people should not run after material things like that. God did not make man to be like the animals who live instinctually. God made man in the image of God, to have fellowship with God. We can only be truly satisfied when we experience God's presence in our hearts. So God wants us to seek him. This is the secret to overcoming worry and living victoriously. Let's read verse 31. **"But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well."** When we seek his kingdom, he promises to provide everything we need to live in this world.

**What does it mean to seek his kingdom? It means to seek God himself through prayer, Bible study, and obedience to God's word. It means to grow in our inner beings in the image of God and to reveal his glory to the people around us. It means to lead others to know God and to live for his purpose. Ultimately it is to restore God's rightful reign over all mankind and over the world so that it may become a paradise once again. When we seek this, God is pleased, and provides everything we need.**

I met Jesus as a student and began to grow in faith through Bible study. Upon graduation, I entered into internship training for full-time service in ministry. Materially speaking, I had nothing. When Deborah and I married, we had nothing together, except the old car she brought with her. However, we had a clear direction to seek God's kingdom and to make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. For this, we were ready to sacrifice. Still, I had a problem. After our daughter Sarah was born, I began to worry. There was no food in the refrigerator. My wife was hungry and I was hungry, and we sometimes struggled to provide enough milk for Sarah. In my heart, I began to wonder if God cared for us. One day, as I was pulling weeds in the center parking lot, I began to shed tears out of worry and doubt. Then the word of God came to my heart, **"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."** It was a life-changing moment. I could believe that God would provide. From that time, I trusted God and devoted myself to his work without worry. Mostly, I have struggled with the word of God by studying the Bible and preparing and delivering Sunday messages. As he promised, God has been faithful to us over the last 25 years and generously provided everything we need. Sarah graduated from Loyola with a degree in biology and no debt. Now she is about to finish up

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her first year of medical school at Northwestern. Soon she will be a medical doctor who makes plenty of money. So it is time to pray for her not to be a rich fool. In addition, God blessed my family with five other children. Though we have various kinds of problems, we can testify that God has kept his promise to provide for our material needs without fail. God's word is true. When we seek his kingdom, he gives us everything we need. But what God really wants to give us is much more than material. It is the greatest treasure. It is the greatest blessing. What is it? It is the kingdom of God itself. We really need to know God's heart.

**Fourth, Jesus taught us God's heart (32-34).** Look at verse 32. **“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”** When God sees people seeking his kingdom, he is pleased to give it to them. It makes God happy to bless his children with the kingdom of God. God is not reluctant. God is not hiding the kingdom from us. God is pleased to give us the kingdom. Our God is a wonderful God who loves his children and is pleased to bless them with the best gifts. He gives us his kingdom willingly and joyfully. This gives us great assurance in serving him.

What is the kingdom? It is God's reign over us with his love and peace. God forgives our sins, cleanses us, and dwells in our hearts by his Holy Spirit. He keeps us safe from the evil one and enables us to serve him joyfully. This is possible through the blood of Jesus, who died for our sins. It is possible through his resurrection, that enables us to cross over from death to life. When God reigns over us, he fills us with peace and joy and love. He gives us eternal life and an inheritance in his home which can never perish, spoil or fade. He gives us access to all the resources of heaven in an endless supply. When we pray and obey his words, he pours out his spiritual and material blessing upon us in such rich measure that we cannot contain it all. So we feel really rich. We can be very generous with our possessions. Out of the overflow of our own hearts, we are moved to give to those in need.

Heavenly treasure is different than earthly treasure. Earthly treasure is temporal and it spoils. Even if we have a lot of money in the bank, eventually our debit card will run down to a zero balance. But heavenly treasure is eternal. It is like a debit card that never runs out. Even though we use it a lot, there is still an infinite balance of resources left. When we experience the joy of heavenly treasure, we eagerly invest in the kingdom. As our hearts dwell in this kingdom, we are free from all worry and can be happy indeed. And nothing can disturb our happiness.

# **God is Pleased to Give Us His Kingdom**

Today we have learned the secret of managing our material lives as Jesus' disciples. It is to trust God, our Creator, who cares for us. It is to seek his kingdom and to know his heart. He is pleased to give us his kingdom. May this assurance be each of ours, so that we may be rich toward God. Then we will be happy and enter eternity as truly rich people.