

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.”

For the last several weeks, we have studied the second part of Luke’s gospel. While Luke is one of the synoptic gospels, the second part of his gospel (9:28-19:27) is unique. Some parables in this part are recorded only by Luke, such as the parable of the good Samaritan and the parable of the prodigal son. Luke writes about universal truth and the absolutes of God in order to draw all people, especially Gentiles, to Jesus, the Light of the world. Today’s passage includes the parable of the rich fool. Jesus addresses the problem of greed and how to overcome it. Especially, Jesus teaches his disciples not to worry about their lives in this world but to seek his kingdom with all their hearts, for God is pleased to give us his kingdom. The kingdom of God is our living hope and everlasting reward. May God help us through this study to avoid greed and worry and to set our hearts on the kingdom of God.

First, be on guard against greed (13-21).

Look at verse 13. “Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’” As we studied last time, Jesus was surrounded by large crowds of people who were drawn by his shepherd heart and powerful Bible teaching. Among them was someone who had a gripe with his brother over the family inheritance. Perhaps he was a youngest son who felt that, regarding inheritance, Jewish favoritism of the oldest son was unfair (Dt 21:17). Maybe he hoped that Jesus would intervene on his behalf and make a judgment in his favor. He saw Jesus in the same way that many Americans may see Judge Wapner or Judge Judy.

How did Jesus respond? Look at verses 14-15. “Jesus replied, ‘Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?’ 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.’” To Jesus, it was tragic that this man had only money on his mind. He had an opportunity to talk personally with Jesus, the Son of God. But he did not seek eternal life or to edify his inner man with the words of wisdom. Instead, he saw Jesus like a small claims court judge. He was spiritually blind and a victim of greed. In this man, Jesus saw the problem of greed in all mankind. Jesus gave an immediate warning to watch out for greed. Jesus also proclaimed that a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Then what is greed? Simply speaking, it is to want more than we need. For example, in the wilderness, God gave the Israelites daily bread training, supplying each day’s portion of bread by sending manna from heaven. But fallen men, in their greediness, tried to gather more than one day’s portion and store it for the future. So God disciplined them—making maggots grow in any left overnight. It was to help them overcome greediness. It was preparation for their entry into the promised land, where they would have flowing milk and honey in abundance. They really needed to learn how to be content with daily bread, or they would only struggle with a weight problem in the promised land. Greed is the sinful desire to accumulate more money than we need so that we can depend on money, not God. The fallacy of this assumption is that man’s life can be sustained by money alone. At the root, greedy people are under the devil’s temptation (Lk 4:3). Jesus said plainly, “...a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Greed has been a serious problem in America. Some would argue that greed is the driving force of American capitalism. A famous Wall Street figure in the ‘80s boldly declared that “greed is good.” Later he went to prison. Greed is not good. Recent scandals have revealed the power of greed at work in top corporate leaders. These men had enough wealth; they could live well for many years. Yet they were not satisfied. They robbed their employees’ pensions, depriving their children of college tuition money, in order to have tens of millions of dollars for themselves instead of just millions. A greedy man is addicted to money just as a drug abuser is addicted to cocaine. He thinks only about getting more all the time and he never thinks he has enough. He hardens his heart to the damage he causes others in his blind pursuit. However, to Jesus greed was not primarily a moral or ethical problem, but a spiritual problem. The worst effect of greed is that it leads to utter godlessness, death and divine retribution. To illustrate his point, Jesus told the parable of the rich fool in verses 16-21.

In this parable, the main character is a rich man. Notice that he was already rich. Then the ground produced a good crop. This was God's grace. Only God can make the ground produce a good crop. Therefore, there must have been God's purpose for this bumper crop. Perhaps God wanted to feed hungry people in a nearby area. But this idea never entered the rich man's mind. He had no concept of God, nor did he care about others. He thought of the crop as his own possession. To him, the best thing he could do was to hoard it, storing it all up for his own use and pleasure. He decided to retire early and live a hedonistic life. He said to himself in verse 19, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." But in verse 20, 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?" At the moment he was most wealthy, he died. He could not bring his treasure with him. He was taken from this world to stand before God. No doubt, he would be condemned to eternal punishment for his greed that produced godlessness and selfishness. He was a fool who valued money as supreme, ignoring God's sovereignty over life. In conclusion, Jesus said in verse 21, "This is how it will be for anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

We Americans must take these words to heart. God has blessed our land abundantly to produce amounts of food that are unprecedented in world history. Surely, it is God's intention to use America to feed the whole world both materially and spiritually. We thank God that there are many generous Americans who have given sacrificially for the poor of the world. But there are still many who wallow in material abundance, living a hedonistic life. Greed robs man's humanity, makes him a slave of money and leads him to eternal punishment. Jesus warned us to watch out for all kinds of greed. Jesus teaches us that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Second, do not worry (22-28).

Jesus had been speaking to mankind in general, for all men need to guard against the dangers of greed. Now he turns his attention to his disciples. To them, overcoming greed was not enough. They must also overcome worry and furthermore, set their hearts on things above. 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.'" Here Jesus defines two categories of specific worry: what to eat and what to wear. Most men seem to worry about what to eat and most women seem to worry about what to wear. And most people worry about both to some extent. But Jesus tells us not to worry. Why?

Look at verse 23. "Life is more than food and the body more than clothes." Here "life" means God's life in us and it means the spirit of God in man. Jesus' disciples had received his word in their hearts. Jesus' word is the very word of God. The word of God imparts eternal life and the Spirit of God to our souls (Jn 6:63). Jesus' disciples no longer lived in the cursed world, eating three meals a day to survive, as Peter had once done while running his fishing business. Now they knew Jesus personally and had a clear calling to follow Jesus by taking up their crosses and living for his mission. They had become key members in God's world salvation plan. Indeed, their lives were more than food. They were growing in the image of Jesus, who said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (Jn 4:34). The disciples would find true satisfaction and fulfillment in completing the mission of God for them. They were vines of the true branch Jesus, whose eternal life was flowing in their souls.

Still, worry about their next meal was not a small matter to the disciples. Jesus gave them an illustration from nature to help them overcome the tendency to worry. Look at verse 24. "Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!" In the Chicago area we do not see many ravens. But we do have an illustration from nature: squirrels. There are so many squirrels around the Chicago center. They work hard to fulfill their mission as squirrels, chasing one another and jumping from tree to tree, and sometimes onto our houses. They never worry about what to eat. During the summer they have a very thin covering of fur for their bodies. But no squirrel ever sat down and worried about what to wear in the winter. They just work hard at being squirrels. Then a few days before winter, suddenly God gives them a winter coat free of charge. God is concerned about providing a winter coat for the squirrels. How much more valuable Michelle Kilby is than many squirrels! Therefore, we must trust in God's providence for his people.

Finally, Jesus taught them that worry does not help at all. Look at verse 25. "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?" The practical result of worry is to damage one's health. It does not bring about any good result; it does not add an hour to our life or even half an inch to our height. We must realize our great limitation. More than that we must realize the greatness

of God, our Father and Maker. For God, to add an hour to our life is a small thing. In fact, God gives us eternal life in Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 27. "Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these." Lilies are really beautiful flowers and they are one of the Christian symbols for Easter. But the important point here is that their beauty is God's gift and it transcends anything manufactured by mortal men. No fashion model or GQ poster boy can be clothed better than the lily. Look at verse 28. "If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!" In this verse, the lily is considered the clothing of the grass of the field. God spent so much artistic effort for this, even though it is temporal. How much more will he clothe his disciples. Here, clothing is not limited to material fabric for the physical body. It also includes the spiritual body we receive from Christ at the resurrection. The spiritual body is glorious beyond imagination. 1 Corinthians 15 says that it is imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual. Surely, God who made the beautiful lily as a temporal decoration will give his children the best clothes for them both in this life and in the life to come. Therefore, we do not need to worry about anything.

Third, seek his kingdom (29-31).

Look at verses 29-31. "And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well." Jesus' disciples must be different than ordinary physical men. While the pagan world runs after food and drink, the disciples must seek the kingdom of God. Many young people set their hearts on Friday night drinking parties. But Jesus' people share their Bible testimonies on Friday nights, encourage one another, and pray for America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Jesus strongly encourages us to seek his kingdom. When we do so, he gives us all that we need in abundance.

Our American forefathers sought God's kingdom first. They came to this land to worship and serve God and to establish a city on a hill to reveal God's glory to the world. It was not easy for them. The Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony confronted severe malnutrition that claimed the lives of many. They held on to Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Then God blessed them abundantly both spiritually and materially.

Jesus' disciples must overcome the habit of worrying about food, or their future security in this world. Jesus' disciples seek his kingdom, believing he will give us what we need. Jesus' disciples set their hearts on God's kingdom. When Dr. Isaac Baek depended on God in prayer, God led him to a new job at the University of Chicago. It required him to take a substantial pay cut. But he and Missionary Rebekah are very happy because they are growing in faith and participating in the life-giving work of God to preach the gospel at U.C. We also remember Missionary Daniel Yoshiba. Due to the economic downturn, he lost his computer job. Now he is studying at Northeastern to be a high school teacher in order to participate in God's work more in the future. Both he and Missionary Rebekah are joyful to serve the work of God. Their hearts are set on the kingdom of God. They are not worrying, but seeking God's kingdom. God knows what we need. We can trust his perfect provision. With faith, we must seek first his kingdom.

Fourth, God is pleased to give us his kingdom (32-34).

Look at verse 32. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." Still, Jesus' disciples were a little fearful. They had no income and their pockets were empty. Sometimes they felt that they had left everything for Jesus and had no reward. But Jesus said that the Father is pleased to give them the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is our reward! The kingdom of God is built by the blood of Jesus; it is forever (Rev 5:12). There are no tears or sorrows in the kingdom of God (Rev 21:4). There, we dwell with our Lord Jesus Christ and enjoy eternal life, the grace of Jesus, and the peace of God. While on earth, we live as holy pilgrims in his protection and guidance.

Look at verse 33. "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys." Faith in God's kingdom must lead us to live sacrificially for the glory of God and for the sake of God's people. Instead of hoarding

and hugging and kissing dollar bills, we must use them freely for the work of God. Look at verse 34. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” When we live sacrificially for the kingdom of God, he fills our hearts with inexpressible joy. Then we can be really useful in the work of God.

In this passage we learned that we must overcome greed and worry by trusting God. He gives us the glorious kingdom of God as our everlasting inheritance. May God help us to believe Jesus’ promise of the kingdom of God and live a sacrificial life for his glory.