

INSTEAD, SEEK HIS KINGDOM

Luke 12:13–34

Key Verse: 12:31

“Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.”

How do you feel about money? Many never speak of it. It seems taboo! We may think money is unspiritual. We like to keep our financial situation private. If we're honest, we might admit fantasizing about having lots of money. We can get obsessed with money. But some people are actually afraid of money. They're afraid it might not be enough, afraid of getting robbed, or afraid even of having too much. Having lots of money can make us proud and self-reliant. It can destroy relationships and families. Lots of money can make us feel guilty. But then, having no money can make us feel ashamed, lonely, panicked or depressed. With all these complex emotions, no wonder we hesitate to talk about money.

In today's passage Jesus tells his famous Parable of the Rich Fool and gives words of comfort and promise regarding our material needs. In fact, in Luke's Gospel, there's quite a lot said about money and possessions (1:53; 2:7,24; 3:10–14; 4:3–4,18; 6:20–28,30; 7:22,41–43; 8:14; 14:12–14; 16:1–13,19–25; 18:18–30; 19:1–8,11–27). Why? It's because money and possessions affect us on so many levels. Money and possessions reveal our values, our hearts; they even can set our life direction. Jesus has already taught us not to depend on material things (9:3; 10:4). Now he goes deeper, challenging us to struggle against both greed and worry. How can we not fall into the ditch of either of these? How can we find a truly spiritual direction and not lose it, especially when we're faced with material temptations and needs every day? We need training.

On this journey to Jerusalem Jesus has been training his disciples. He sent them out as laborers for God's kingdom (10:1–24). He taught them to be “Good Samaritans,” serving the wounded with his compassion (10:25–37). To complement this, he taught them to prioritize sitting at his feet to listen and learn (10:38–42). Through his own example he taught them how to pray (11:1–13). As the Pharisees resumed their attacks, he taught his disciples to be radically different from such hypocrites (11:14–54). He challenged them to overcome their fear and boldly confess their faith in him, depending on the Holy Spirit (12:1–12). Now he continues his training on three main topics: how to handle material things (12:13–34); how to be ready for his Second Coming (12:35–48); and how and why to repent (12:49–13:9). We'll be studying these passages for the next three weeks. In this part about material things, Jesus highlights three things.

First, be on guard against covetousness (13–21). Look at verse 13. “Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’” There’s not a lot of information about what’s going on here. But this man clearly has a conflict with his brother over money. It seems like the parents have recently died. Some speculate that this might be a younger brother fighting for his rights. In any case, Jesus has been talking about acknowledging him before men, but this man hasn’t been listening at all; he’s absorbed with his own problem and desire. What happens? Look at verse 14. “But he said to him, ‘Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?’” It’s abrupt and dismissive. Doesn’t Jesus care about people? Doesn’t he care about injustice? Of course he does. But he refuses to get involved in petty squabbles. He uses this as a teachable moment for his disciples.

What does Jesus want to teach? Read verse 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.’” “Take care” literally means “Be alert!” “Be on your guard” means to be like a soldier, vigilantly watching out for danger. What’s the danger? Jesus says it’s “all covetousness.” What’s that? It’s the strong desire to have more and more material possessions, especially more than other people, irrespective of need. In adding the word “all,” Jesus is saying there are many subtle kinds of it. What is it? Basically, it’s greed. Jesus has just rebuked the Pharisees for their greed (11:39). Now he’s warning everybody, even his disciples, about it.

According to the Ten Commandments, greed, or coveting, is a sin (Ex20:17). It’s a sin against God and against other human beings. The Bible calls coveting “idolatry” (Col3:5). It lists greed as one of the traits of our sinful nature (Ro1:29) and says plainly that greedy people cannot enter the kingdom of God (1Co5:10–11; 6:10; Eph5:5). Greed disqualifies anyone from church leadership (1Ti3:8; Tit1:7). Greed leads people to become false teachers, and the Bible says their hearts are even “trained” in greed (2Pe2:3a,14). Apostle Paul struggled honestly against coveting (Ac20:33; Ro7:7–8). On the list of the “seven deadly sins,” greed ranks number 2.

How does Jesus help us with this sin? The last part of verse 15 says, “...for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” It’s this idea that drives people to be greedy. To make money off of people, advertisers try to brainwash us to think otherwise, constantly showing us all the things we think we need to be happy. Someone even coined the slogan, “Whoever dies with the most toys wins!” Actually, the older we get, the more burdensome our possessions become. Jesus already taught, “For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” (9:25) To lose oneself over possessions is tragic, especially to lose our humanity.

But in every place and generation, people just keep doing it. Our culture is steeped in crass materialism, oblivious to the pain and injustice of so many people. Ordinary people call it “money-grubbing.” It’s based on the fallacy that lots of money will make us happy. But does it? Then why is it that some lottery winners experience bankruptcy, divorce, prison time and even murder? The overwhelming evidence is, wealth can’t solve our inner problems at all. Still, people chase after wealth like they’re crazy, seeking the status or significance it can never really give.

Jesus says more. Look at verses 16–18. “And he told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, “What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?” And he said, “I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grains and my goods.”’” The words “I” and “my” are repeated here nine times. That’s a lot of self. The idea to build bigger barns is not necessarily evil, but this man has no thought of God or of others. God blessed him, but he just wants to hoard it all. And there’s more. Read verse 19. “And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry!’” That sounds like “The Good Life.” Just enjoy it all for myself. But is that really “The Good Life”?

Jesus’ parables always have an unexpected twist. Read verse 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?’” This guy forgot one thing: life is in God’s hands. God is in sovereign control of it all. God controls the number of our days, our health, and our prosperity. When he blesses us with anything, with even one more day of life, what does he want us to do? Not waste it, not just give it all away. God blesses us to be a blessing. God wants us to use our blessings to love him and to love others. God wants us “to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,” which is “that which is truly life” (1Ti6:18–19). This rich man thought his business plan was brilliant. But God considered him a fool. It’s always foolish to trust in wealth and to boast in the abundance of one’s riches (Ps49:6).

Read verse 21. “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” Wealth is not the problem; the problem is what we do with it. If we become selfish, stingy and self-indulgent, God considers us “poor.” So what does it mean to be “rich toward God”? The only way is to repent, believe in Jesus and follow him. Without Christ, anyone is spiritually poor, regardless of wealth, whereas in Christ we have every spiritual blessing (Eph1:3). It’s not just knowledge or talk; it’s a lifestyle. Apostle Paul lost all things to gain Christ (Php3:7–8) and he became rich toward God. It involved hardship. Paul wrote, “...through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold,

we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything” (2Co6:8–10).

Second, do not be anxious (22–28). This next section speaks to a different group. Read verse 22. “And he said to his disciples, ‘Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.’” Disciples of Jesus face their own inner struggles with material things. Why? The original disciples left everything to follow him. They literally had no job security. So, do all disciples of Jesus have to be jobless? Of course not. But following Jesus does require making him our top priority, and, making various personal sacrifices for him (9:24,57–62). As we put Jesus first, sometimes we feel strange. Everybody else seems to be pursuing their own security in this world. Our sacrifices can leave us feeling very insecure. It’s especially true if we start having children. We say, “I can suffer, but what about them?” People can have many “first world” struggles. But suffering disciples might have more relatable struggles, like, “I’ve actually got nothing to eat right now, nothing to wear.” In following Jesus, our hearts can become full of thorns, “choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life” (8:14). Anxiety leaves us feeling tense, worried, sleepless, and increases our blood pressure. It can even develop into anxiety disorder, which is constant, overwhelming and excessive.

Jesus says here, “Do not be anxious about your life.” Why? He adds, “For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes” (23). We can become so anxious about material things but forget why we’re living in the first place. If we have money for plenty of food and clothing, but life is over, our body is dead—what’s the point of that? Jesus then goes on to give examples from nature. Read verse 24. “Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!” Twice in this passage Jesus says, “Consider” (24,27). “Consider” means to think about it carefully or closely. First is the ravens. To many people, ravens are a nuisance. They damage crops, they’re noisy, they leave messy droppings, they strew around garbage and cause property damage. They don’t seem productive. And they’re not anxious. Jesus says, “...yet God feeds them.” God provides even for such creatures. Then Jesus says, “Of how much more value are you than the birds!” When we realize that we’re so valuable to God, that he’s more than able and willing to take care of us, our anxiety melts. Jesus adds, “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?” (25–26) Anxiety doesn’t improve our lives a bit, so why give in to it?

Read verse 27. “Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Lilies have stunning beauty, more beautiful than even the richest king’s clothing. Where does lilies’

beautiful clothing come from? God. Read verse 28. “But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!” Fields of grass are also beautiful, but so temporary. Jesus puts his finger here on the root cause of worry: too little faith in God. He repeats that we’re so much more valuable than the grass of the field. When we’re consumed with worries, we’ve left God out of the picture. We can’t even see his presence and loving care of creation all around us. To overcome our anxieties, we all need to slow down and consider who God is.

Third, seek his kingdom (29–34). In this last part Jesus gives us a spiritual direction that keeps us out of both greed and anxiety. Read verses 29–30. “And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.” In verses 29–31 Jesus repeats this word “seek” three times. Seeking something means wanting it and striving to get it. When his first disciples started following him, Jesus said to them, “What are you seeking?” (Jn1:38). Not what we’re doing outwardly, but what we’re seeking is most important (Ro2:7–8). Basically it means, “What are we giving our hearts to? Where is my heart?”

Where does Jesus want us to give our hearts? Read verse 31. “Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.” Seek his kingdom. What does that even mean? It means so much. First and foremost, Apostle Paul says it means to seek to know Jesus better—especially the power of his resurrection and to share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death (Php3:10). Are we seeking to know Jesus like that? Paul told Timothy: “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2Ti2:22; cf. 1Ti6:11). Here, to “seek his kingdom” also means to pursue growing in the godly character of our Lord Jesus. In the Lord’s Prayer Jesus taught us to begin by saying, “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come” (Lk11:2). So to “seek his kingdom” means to pray for his kingdom to come. We need to pray earnestly for his kingdom to come into our personal lives and families, our community, our church, our nation and the world. It even means to pray that our Lord Jesus may come again soon (Rev22:20).

One specific and practical way to “seek his kingdom” is to actually tell people about it. As we meet with people for Bible study, somehow we need to introduce to them the good news of the kingdom of God. The author Luke repeatedly describes this in his other book, the Book of Acts (Ac8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31). To seek his kingdom, we need to pray fervently and help people to accept this good news. To seek his kingdom, we need to make sharing it our focus, our priority, the main mission statement of our lives. To seek his kingdom, to pursue his kingdom, we need to develop a personal passion for it.

What happens when we do? Jesus promises, "...and these things will be added to you." God knows all that we need. And as we give our hearts to pursuing his kingdom, God takes care of us. To overcome our anxieties and worries, we need to personally believe this promise of God.

Read verse 32. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." As we seek his kingdom, we also need to remember that God is our Father, who in his gracious delight in us wants to give us this best gift. With his kingdom as our security and joy, we can let go of the false security of earthly possessions (33a). We can be assured we have a treasure in the heavens far more secure than any treasure on earth (33b). To seek his kingdom is a matter of heart. Read verse 34. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Where is your heart?

May God keep our hearts from greed and worry. And may he help us seek his kingdom from our hearts, as our real direction in life.