

True Wealth

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 February 2009

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 00] So if you can turn to page 70, that would be great. You can follow along. You're looking at me expectantly, so I'm going to say something about Quinquagesima Sunday.

I know it's one of two things. It's either a medicine to prevent malaria, or it's about 50 days before Easter.

Actually, it's 49, but they didn't take that into account earlier in the church. Sex Adjustment Sunday. David gives a very good Sex Adjustment talk, so you might want to ask him for that as a group at some point.

Now we're looking at Luke 12. This is a passage that really is so relevant to us and to our lives right now.

There's a doctor, a psychiatrist, who was in the news very recently, talking about the situation in the world that we have, a world that's filled with anxiety right now over financial issues.

[1 : 05] He's working at the Cornell Weill Medical Center in New York, and he says that he's treating 25% more people because of the recession. And patients are suffering from insomnia due to anxiety.

And what he says has happened is that the recession has created a culture of anxiety and fears. So, he says, you're not talking about a handful of people.

You're talking about a situation in which the whole environment is fearful. It's contagious, he said. Even people whose jobs are secure feel frightened that they too could lose their jobs.

And so, what he wants to do is to send a team of psychiatrists around the country to explain to people what to expect with regard to anxieties and to counsel people to resist it.

Now, of course, the difficulty is how do we resist anxiety? It's a very difficult thing to try to undertake, and you won't be successful. But Jesus calls his disciples in this passage not to just resist anxiety, but to replace it with a right understanding of God.

[2 : 17] So, it's a tremendously hopeful passage that we have before us today that goes right to the heart of our lives as people in this culture. The passage opens with a guy who shows us what anxiety can do to a person.

If you look at verse 13, he shouts out this request to Jesus. And it's an incident which really tells us a lot about the whole passage that we are going into here.

He is anxious about money problems in his family. And what it does, it blinds him to the life that God gives.

Blinds them to the truth and the power of Jesus Christ. And that is why he says, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. He doesn't say, mediate our dispute.

He says, pressure my brother to do the right thing and decide in my favor what has owed me this money. Jesus refuses to do it, of course.

[3 : 19] Now, if you were in this guy's shoes, and you're listening to Jesus with this whole crowd, and there was one thing you could ask Jesus for, what would it be?

Now, remember, Jesus has just been talking about hypocrisy in one's relationship to God. He's been talking about eternal life, eternal death. He's talking about the forgiveness of sins, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, the incredible importance of acknowledging Jesus on the day of judgment. Now, would you ask him to settle a financial dispute in your favor, if you had one thing to ask him for? Well, the answer is no. You'd ask him for eternal life.

He has just shown his authority over everything that has to do with eternal life. So how could this man have missed the opportunity? The opportunity to ask for the most important thing he could ever receive.

Well, Jesus tells us, he tells the crowd, how this extraordinary mistake happens. He says in verse 15, Take heed. Be very careful.

[4 : 27] Beware of all covetousness, for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. That's what our passage is going to be about. He talks about, be careful about covetousness.

That word, which we don't often use, means simply a strong desire to acquire more and more material possessions. Covetousness is really about replacing God with something else, with something of material value.

And that's why the Bible tells us that covetousness is actually idolatry, perhaps the most common type of idolatry. And that's what Jesus is warning the crowd about.

It's a desire that can blind people to who Jesus is and what he offers, as is the case with this man. Now, as far as I know, Stats Canada has never taken in their census a question that asks whether anybody practices covetousness.

And perhaps they should, because it might be the number one religion in our country. Jesus is saying, this is a temptation that affects everyone in that huge crowd that he's talking to.

[5 : 42] It is something that you and I are tempted to. It's something that I struggle with as well. And so Jesus tells a story in verses 15 through 21 that really reveals the nature of idolatry and helps us understand how that is such a big pull for us and to reveal it for what it really is.

It's about this story about a wealthy landowner who's anxious, actually, because he's produced a huge crop. And he is wondering, what shall I do because I have nowhere to store my crop?

He's wondering if he might miss out on the really, really good life, on all that this money could actually accomplish for him. And so he spends the rest of the story talking to himself.

He talks to himself about how he can become self-secure. How can I become immune from all the cares of the world around me?

It's an easy thing to fall into because in a lot of ways, he's being very responsible, isn't he? He's into planning for his future. He is preparing for his retirement.

[6 : 53] He's taking care of his money. But, of course, the crucial problem is that God is nowhere in the picture. God has been replaced in this man's life.

Notice how many times Jesus has this guy saying the word, I, in verses 17 through 19. And, in fact, the only time he says, you, is when he's talking to his own soul in this little dialogue.

But Jesus exposes the folly of this idolatry when God speaks to him in a shocking way in verse 20. He says, fool.

And fool in the Bible is anyone who disregards God, who does not think of God and his lordship over their lives. He says, fool, this night your soul is required of you.

In other words, his soul doesn't actually belong to him and neither does all his earthly belongings. It belongs to God. And the searching question at the end is, the things you have prepared, whose will they be?

[7 : 58] Well, the answer is, we don't know for sure. It can belong to anybody. We know for sure it won't belong to this man. In fact, all of his wealth is taken away from him at death and he was left with nothing.

That's the end of the story. There's a sting to it. And Jesus speaks to the crowd and he says in verse 21 that this is the case for every person who lays up treasures for themselves and are not rich towards God.

It's a very revealing parable. Very revealing application. It tells us that there's much more to life than possessions. They are temporary. They are left behind at death.

But there is a wealth that has very long-term returns. And that wealth comes from any part of our lives that we invest in God, Jesus says.

Being rich towards God means putting Jesus and his gospel at the very center of our lives, in the center of our plans and our hopes and our activities.

[9 : 06] So, and it's not just about money that Jesus is talking about. When we talk about the Lord Jesus to somebody who doesn't believe, even if it's brief and halting, we are rich towards God.

As we intentionally raise our children to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ and to model what it means to obey God's word, we are being rich towards God.

As we plan our finances so it makes it possible for us to give money for the ministries of the local church, we are rich towards God. Imagine if you have a financial planner and I haven't talked to

mine for years, I don't think.

He's a bit of a stranger. But imagine talking to him about your retirement and saying to him, I want to plan my finances so that I can do all that I can for the kingdom when I retire.

So that I can support ministries that have to do with the kingdom of God. So I can be about that ministry in my retirement. Or the financial planner would sit up and take notice. He'd have to scramble a bit perhaps as well.

[10:11] It's a wonderful way to be rich towards God. As we serve each other and give of ourselves to people that can't give back to us, we are rich to God. And as we support Christian churches and witness far beyond our borders, we are rich towards God as well.

And finally, as we pray for God's powerful work in our lives and in the lives of people around us, we are rich towards God. We are about the things that create incredible wealth.

Wealth that has to do with the kingdom of God. And Jesus says that kind of wealth creation is what real life is all about. We actually take it with us when we die.

And wonderfully, there's great hope in this. We are exchanging idolatry with true treasure, with the living God. And what this means is that in God's eyes, many of you here have a true wealth that far exceeds the wealth of Warren Buffett and Bill Gates combined.

That's the implication of what Jesus is saying here. And of course, it's a wealth that Revenue Canada cannot tax. It's a wealth that we take with us.

[11:29] when we die. Now, that's a shocking thing to think about and to believe. It's hard for us to believe. It's hard for the disciples to believe as well.

They were like us. They were constantly pulled away from the real life that Jesus gives. And in their case, it wasn't a fear of not getting the full benefits of their abundance of possession.

It was a fear of not having enough, of what's going to happen tomorrow to my daily needs. And that's why in verses 22 through 34, Jesus teaches them how to be released from the grip of anxiety and to exchange that with a life that is about the real life that God gives.

So if you look at 22 through 29, four times, he mentions the word anxiety and he says, don't do it. It's unproductive. You can't add an hour to your life.

Verse 25. But in using that word anxiety, Jesus is not talking about a normal anxiety that makes you study hard for a test or makes you keep your kids safe or causes you to do well on a project at work.

[12:45] He's not necessarily talking about an anxiety that requires medical attention. either. Jesus is talking about what Calvin calls excessive anxiety.

And that's an anxiety in which you are self-absorbed. You are unable or unwilling to pay any attention to the only one who gives you true security.

It's an anxiety that causes to replace the living Lord Jesus with something else. and does that by pulling us away from the kingdom by attempting to produce our own security.

Now the wonderful thing, there is a good thing about anxiety, is that it is a sign. It is like a red flag that tells us this is an area where idolatry is creeping in to your life.

So if you are excessively worried about your children, it may be that your children, your family, is your idol. If you are excessively worried about finances, then money may be your idol.

[13:50] If we are excessively worried about what people think of us, then our status is our idol. And Jesus, in these verses, wonderfully cures our idolatry and our anxiety by reminding us of who God is.

He does it by replacing those things with the Heavenly Father. And by the way, that's why we go to church and read the Bible with other people. It is to remember who God is and to put our worship in the right place.

Knowing God frees us to live the real life. And so Jesus tells his disciples to consider two things, ravens and lilies. In other words, he's saying, look at God's creation.

Look outside yourself for a moment. Ravens were considered unclean birds. by the Hebrew people. But Jesus says, even though they don't work or they don't store food, God cares for them.

He feeds them. And lilies, they don't last long. They bloom and then they're gone. and they don't make textiles either according to Jesus.

[15:00] But God said that even Solomon in all of his glory was not as beautiful as these lilies. And of course, what Jesus is teaching then is he says, how much more value are you than those birds?

And in verse 28, how much more than the lilies will he clothe you, O men of little faith? He's reminding us of the care of the Father for us.

And he's saying, anxiety comes because of lack of faith. And I think all of us have certain aspects of our life that actually put God out of the picture.

You may forget that God places great value upon you. In fact, so much value that he gave his one and only son to die for you, that you might know the forgiveness of sins and live this new life with God as your Father.

It is very easy to forget also that every provision, all that we have, all that sustains us, comes from God himself. The lilies of the field remind us of that.

[16:07] So verse 29 says, don't focus your life on what you are to eat and what are you to drink. Don't fill your head with anxious thoughts about how I can make myself secure. All the nations of the world, Jesus says, in other words, all those who don't know that God is their Father, they strive after those things, they seek those things.

And instead, Jesus says, understand that your Father knows that you need them. And that's a wonderful truth for us to bring out of this because the antidote to anxiety and idol worship is to remember that you have a Father in Heaven.

replace those idols with the knowledge of God as our Father. I want to close this with what the passage closes us with because there are implications to what Jesus is saying for us.

Two very practical things that Jesus calls us to act in. And it's because God is our Father. The first thing he says in verses 31 through 32 is instead of being faithful and anxious, seek the Father's kingdom.

And these things, all you need for life, real life, your soul will be given to you. Fear not, he said, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

[17:30] You see, even though you are a small insignificant group by the world's definition, a little flock, the Father is well pleased. The same word that the Father uses of Jesus at his baptism.

He is well pleased to give you the kingdom. He is your shepherd who cares with tenderness and he gives you the gift of the kingdom that is infinite value. He has given it to you and he loves giving it to you.

It gives him incredible pleasure to give you the great gift that he can give. Now, seeking the kingdom means living in a way that honors God's presence and his rule.

It is about replacement again. It is about orienting your life around that kingdom to seek after it and you will see how God provides. Now, I don't know how many of you, if somebody asks you, what is the kingdom of God, can quickly answer that question.

It is often not an easy one to answer and the kingdom of God runs all through the gospel of Luke.

So, it is important for us to be clear about what it is. So, if you have a pen or pencil handy, this might be the one note you take from this sermon on the back of your bulletin.

[18:40] David shared a very good definition with us at staff which comes wonderfully out of Genesis 12 where God promises to Abraham a new nation. And that happens to be the passage we read.

It is in the lectionary for today. And here is the definition. The kingdom of God is God's people in God's place under God's rule living in God's way.

Living in God's way. Isn't that marvelous? It is God's people in God's place under God's rule living in God's way. And you see how this works is that Jesus is bringing that kingdom.

He brings anyone who has faith to be God's people. They know God as their father. And he dies to prepare God's place for them. Heaven.

The glorious kingdom of God that Jesus will bring to earth. And he brings us under God's rule because God made him Lord of Lord and King of Kings.

[19:44] The everlasting king by the resurrection of the dead. And finally he saves us to live in God's way. He saves us for good works in Jesus by the power of his Holy Spirit.

So it's a kingdom that we actually experience now but it won't be completely accomplished until Jesus comes again in glory to rule over all things.

And we live in this in-between time where we're waiting for that glorious kingdom to come. The world therefore doesn't acknowledge that kingdom. We belong to it but we look fairly small and insignificant.

for Heather Bellamy in Afghanistan and Richard and Dawn Bates in Egypt we ask that they may feel the presence and encouragement of your spirit as they minister
Lord in your mercy hear our prayer and for our world we pray we pray for political stability we think of the Middle East Iraq Iran Israel other areas in Africa we ask for the safety of our troops in Afghanistan we ask for guidance for our politicians and our police as they deal with an increasing prevalence of crime for those in our church who are sick we also pray along with those who we know we pray especially for Paul for Elizabeth Rowena Lee for Gail and for Ted from Iran's situation with the immigration board we pray and commit it to you and we ask that you would comfort each in their sickness and hurt and may they feel encouraged by your spirit as they heal also we pray for those who are bereaved the pain of death doesn't go away easily and we ask you to comfort those who are hurting and even after what seems like a long time to us who are not directly affected we thank you for those in our church who have a ministry of caring and helping and commit them to you for wisdom and for guidance in their ministries

[28 : 30] Lord in your mercy hear our prayer and finally as David prayed answer me when I call O God of my right thou hast given me room when I was in distress be gracious to me and hear my prayer there are many who say oh that we might see some good lift up the light of thy countenance upon us O Lord thou hast put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound in peace I will both lie down and sleep for thou alone O Lord makest me dwell in safety
Amen