

Covetousness & Anxiety

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[0 : 00] I want to turn again to the chapter we read in Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 12. And I want us to look at a large section, but to look at this section that we read today, from verse 13 through to verse 34.

And we read, someone in the crowd said to him, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. And in verse 15, Jesus says, Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions.

Then in verse 22, Jesus said to his disciples, Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, not about your body, what you will put on, and so on.

Now, as we said before, Jesus always got right to the heart of the matter. That was one of the many wonderful skills that he possessed as the great physician, the physician of human souls.

When we speak to people, we go by what people say, by people's words. And sometimes what people say is not really what they mean. Or sometimes what people say they're saying because they have another agenda.

[1 : 23] They have a more subtle agenda, and yet they're covering up what they're saying with particular words. Well, the thing was that with Jesus, nobody could fool Jesus.

Nobody could wrong-foot him. Nobody could cover up what they were really on about. And so we find that as Jesus is teaching the crowd, somebody in this huge crowd steps forward, and he asks Jesus to intervene, to become involved in this family dispute that was going on.

And he said, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. Jesus refused to get involved, but it is clear that Jesus was able to diagnose that there was a problem.

And that problem was covetousness. He could see right in to this person's heart and could understand where he was coming from. And so, as we were looking last week at the other section, the first section where Jesus was warning against hypocrisy, against the great danger of being a hypocrite and living your life as a hypocrite, he now turns and warns us against the sin of covetousness.

Because covetousness is an incredibly subtle sin, and it is one that eats away at us very often without us realizing. And it begins to bring us to focus on the wrong things so that our life is caught up by either what we do have or what we don't have.

[3 : 10] Covetousness can be on what we do have, and it can also be upon what we don't have. But Jesus is saying if we live out our lives caught up by what we have and what we don't have, then we've got it wrong.

Because Jesus says, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. And that's something we all need to hear because it is incredibly easy to become taken up and consumed by what we have and by what we want.

We live in a world which is full of so many great things, so many blessings, so many God-given blessings. God has given them to us. And it is right for us to use them, to involve ourselves with them, to enjoy them, but they are never to become our master.

They are never to become our obsession. And that's what Jesus is warning about here. For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

And so this is a warning that Jesus is giving that we all need to hear. Because covetousness really is a cheap sin. And I believe that covetousness in the Ten Commandments comes at the end because there's a trace of covetousness in the other commandments.

[4 : 35] For instance, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Why? Because we covet the other day. God has given us six days. We want seven for ourselves.

Covetousness. Thou shalt not steal. Why do people steal? Because they want what somebody else has. That's huge. Well, I want it. And I'm going to get it.

In fact, if I'm not going to get it, I'm going to get something similar. In fact, I'm going to get something better than you have. Covetousness. Covetousness. Covetousness. That's your wife.

Well, I want a turn of her. It's your husband. Somebody else wants a turn. That's adultery. But it comes from the heart of covetousness. David saw Bathsheba.

He desired. He wanted. I want her. He was warned. People said, hey, she belongs to Uriah. There was the warning. Didn't matter. Covetousness.

[5 : 33] David says, I want her. And so, Jesus, you can go right through Jesus' warning against covetousness. Because he said, it's so dangerous. It's so subtle. It's down there.

And it's working away. And it gives us the wrong perspective. The wrong focus. You can trace the origin of sin, in a sense.

It's right all there with covetousness. We believe it was the sin of heaven. Where Satan, he wanted the place of God. And he was cast from, and all the angels had fell with him.

It was a mixture of what we could say of pride and of covetousness. It was the sin of Eden. Remember how Satan whispered to Eve that you will be as gods.

He plays to this part of Eve. And he says, look, God's made you like that. But you can be like him. Take that fruit. And you'll become like him.

[6 : 33] You will know both good and evil. And so, there was this desire. Yeah, I need that. I want that. And so, we find that covetousness is that great sin.

And remember, we're told that covetousness is idolatry. Because you may and I may. And I've often said it. Oh, no, I'm not given to idolatry. Well, if we're given to covetousness, we are given to idolatry.

Because that's what the word of God says. And so, Jesus gives us this warning. Now, of course, there's a very fine line between covetousness and healthy ambition.

And Jesus is not saying people aren't to be ambitious. Because to a certain extent, people couldn't get on in life or make progress in life if we didn't have any ambition.

And there is an ambition that is right. And there's an ambition that is wrong. There have been people who are ambitious and that are fired by power. And Hitler was ambitious.

[7 : 36] But his ambition was completely wrong. It was an ambition that was fired by hell. So, there is a wrong ambition and a right ambition. A person can get on very well in life and build a very good business on whatever field.

And they do so on honorable and right principles. And God acknowledges and God will prosper. And God will bless. And it's not just in business. In all different areas of life.

And we must recognize that. But people can also build on wrong principles. And I wonder how many people we may look at in this world. People who have reached, as it were, the very pinnacle of success.

And if we were to see what they've achieved with the eye of God. And maybe they have achieved it through greed and covetousness and abuse and injustice.

Then for them, no matter what they've achieved, a day of reckoning will come. Because God is judge of all. God cannot bypass. And he sees, he takes note of everything.

[8 : 45] And so the Lord is warning us. It's not just about business. It's about everything in life. Business, I suppose. The reason we talk about that is because we're coming to look at this, the parable of the rich fool.

But Jesus is saying it about every area, every avenue, every aspect of life. However we build our life. Build it upon himself. Build it upon honest, right principles.

And the Lord will bless. And the Lord will open the doors. The Lord will prosper. We're not teaching a gospel of prosperity. But the Lord himself will so often own and acknowledge and bless those who.

And he says it. Those who honor me, I will honor. And so the Lord knows what is in the heart of each person. And so, after having warned against covetousness, the Lord tells the story of what we know as the rich fool.

Just to highlight the danger of becoming preoccupied with the things of this world. And here was a man who was having a wonderful times. Record crops.

[9 : 47] Exciting times. Probably never seen anything like it before. And at one level, everything, there's nothing wrong with these. The Lord is not condemning this man for his success.

And nobody must think that. That's not, that is not what this parable, this story is about. He is not condemning the man for his success.

What the Lord is condemning is the fact that God is not in the equation as far as this man is concerned. This man has become very prosperous and may indeed have prospered by honest means for all we know.

The problem was that this man has blanked God out of the picture. That was a big mistake. And this is a mistake that so many people are in danger of making.

Now I'm not judge of any passion. And thankfully I am not. And thankfully you are not. We are not other people's judges. The Lord is. But my fear is as we look around that so many people have just done what this man has done.

[11 : 01] And they've blanked God out. People are just, they don't think about God. God is not, he's not in the thinking. And the reason, remember what, the parable of the rich fool.

Now he might have been a very nice man, an incredibly intelligent man. He might have had the highest IQ in the area. But he is still classed by the Bible as a fool.

Because Psalm 14 says the fool hath said in his heart there is no God. And even a person who may believe that there is a God and yet lives as if God is not, is living in the category of the fool.

And that's what this person has done. Because he has put God out of the picture. And so one of the things that we see here is that it's not something that we see often.

But the Bible has given us an insight into the thought process of this particular man. And he's saying to himself, as the land is produced so plentifully, verse 17, what shall I do?

[12 : 06] For I have nowhere to store my crops. And so he begins to plan. And verses 18 and 19 tells us what he's going to do. I'll tear down the barns I have.

I'm going to build bigger ones. And I'm going to store all my grain and my goods. And it's been so good. And he's been so prosperous. He says, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.

Relax, eat, drink, be merry. Now, again, I suppose there are times, if we live in a very busy society and our lives are very busy, there are times we say to ourselves, you know, I would just love to take the foot off the pedal.

I would love a time where I could just sit back and relax. And maybe you're saying, well, that's all that this man was saying. And at one level, that is not wrong.

The Lord himself said there was a time for people to come apart. You have to. We cannot. You cannot live with resistance or being pressed down all the time.

[13 : 15] It's impossible. As we said before, the Lord said, if you don't come apart, or somebody said, if you don't come apart, you will come apart. And so it is essential.

But what has been highlighted here is that the conclusion that this man came to was that he had it made.

Everything was there for the rest of the enjoyment of his life. But the problem was it was a life based on greed and selfishness.

It was all about himself. No thought of God. No thought of anybody else except me. It's me.

It's me that matters. Somebody in trouble there. See that person there? I'm just thinking about it. He was the kind of person, supposing a neighbor.

[14 : 09] Their house had gone on fire. These are days there's no insurance or anything like that. Their house has gone on fire. They've got nothing. And there's a widow woman living there. It wouldn't enter his head to put his hand in his pocket and go over and say, here's some money to help you out.

This is the kind of person he is. He's completely self-centered, completely obsessed with himself. In fact, in the Greek, there are eight I's and four my's as he talks to himself.

It's all about me, my, what I can do, what I can get. Life is all about me. It's not about God. It's not about anybody else. And Jesus is showing here the absurdity of building our life on these kind of principles.

On the great day, the Lord is going to ask us all, what have you done? Or what did you do with what I gave you in life?

With all the different things, all the abilities, all the talents, all the opportunities, all the money, all the energy.

[15 : 15] What did you do with all the different relationships I brought you into? All the resources I equipped you with? What did you do with all these things?

Were they all for you? Or did you use them? Yes, of course we use them for ourselves.

But did we use them also for the well-being of others? And you know, that's going to be one of the great challenges that's going to face governments.

And all these people, when you look at the world situation today, and when, to me, when you look at it from heaven's perspective, and when we see famine and people starving, there is more than enough food for this world.

You know, sometimes people will accuse God and they'll say, isn't it, what kind of God allows these famines in these lands? What kind of governments?

[16 : 22] People are far too ready to accuse God. When we see out for because of greed, because of economic structures that sometimes don't make sense.

When we see fish being dumped in their hundreds of tons, beautiful fish. And people say, oh, you can only take this. You know, sometimes you look at it, and I'm not a politician, and I'm never going to enter into the world of politics.

But when we look at it globally, there's an awful lot of things that don't make sense. And there is enough in this world for everybody. It was distributed in a right way. So we can never, ever, ever accuse God.

There will be a day of judgment, a day of reckoning before all and those who have made decisions, which have brought people's lives into bondage and into these things.

And that's the very, this is what Jesus is talking about. This is the very message, the very thrust of this passage. Because while we can look at it at an international level and at a national level, Jesus is bringing it home to this one individual who has got it all wrong.

[17 : 33] And then, just the last thing we say about this man is that he has neglected not only everybody else, he's neglected God. And in neglecting God, he has neglected the most important part of himself, his own soul.

He's been so caught up with himself, but only in relation to this life, with no thought of eternity. And the Lord is saying over the man who is busy making all these plans for the future.

For the rest of my life, I'm going to party. I'm going to eat and drink. And I'm going to have a great time. And the Lord is saying, you fool. You don't have a future.

You have a matter of hours left in this world. And see all these things you're so obsessed with and taken up with. Who are you going to leave them to? Because you're not going to take them with you.

It's over. And you know, we've got to take these things on board as well. Jesus says at the end, there is only one treasure, really, at the end of the day we've got to make sure that we have.

[18 : 45] And that is that we lay up treasure and become rich towards God. And then Jesus then moves from this picture and he turns, after a warning against covetousness, to give a warning against anxiety.

And I don't want to go through because it's a large part, just to sum up really what Jesus is saying. Worry and anxiety are destructive in their nature.

The word anxiety means to be torn apart. The word worry means to strangle. So you see when you put these two words together, how destructive they are.

To be torn apart and to strangle. And you can see straight away the danger that these two things, these two forces that are at work so often in people's lives.

It was Corrie ten Boom who said, in her own inimitable way, worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow. It empties today of its strength.

[19 : 55] And that is true. If we are so worried and filled with anxiety, we know what it's like to lose. It takes away your strength and your abilities.

And Jesus shows us some very simple things. He says worry blinds us to the creation. Worry blinds our focus upon life.

If we weren't so eaten and consumed by worry, we would be looking around and taking lessons from nature. And what would we see? We would look at the lilies and all their beauty.

We would look at the flora. We would look at the flowers. And we'd say, wow, look at these flowers. The intricate beauty. In fact, Jesus says their intricate beauty surpasses all the glory and the man-made wealth of Solomon.

And Jesus is saying, look, stop and think for a moment. Look at the ravens. They don't sow. They don't reap. They don't have barns. They don't have storehouses.

[20 : 59] And yet God feeds them. Right? If God is able to make these beautiful flowers whose glory really excels the riches of Solomon, and God is providing for these scavenging birds, Jesus' argument is from the lesser to the greater.

If he does this with plant life and with bird life, how much more is he going to do it with you, who are at the very highest point of his creation?

That really is the argument that Jesus is using. God will provide for us, and God wants us to trust him in all these things.

And Jesus shows us that worry doesn't accomplish anything. He says, which one of you can, by worrying, can add any length of time to your lifespan?

You can't. In fact, worry is more likely to shorten it. Can you, by anxiety and worry, add an inch to your height? No, you can't. And so Jesus is really saying that what you've got to do in life is that you've got to change your outlook.

[22 : 18] Start looking, if you haven't already done so, start looking at life from heaven's perspective. Take a big view. Don't be caught up in just this little view.

We are so bound up in what's happening to us. I've got to do this, I've got to do that, what of this, what of that? We live our lives, now, don't get me wrong, we live our lives at a very hectic pace.

And I'm sure we would love to be able to slow it down. It's like being on a treadmill that's just getting a little faster and a little faster. And there's no slowdown. You know, you can have a button that pushes the speed up or a button that pushes it downward.

Imagine being on one and there's never a button, there's no button to slow it down. It's just getting faster and faster. And you're saying, I want off. I want to stop. Well, Jesus is saying really the answer to this speeding up treadmill is stop looking down, start looking up.

Start taking heaven's perspective on life. And start just trusting the Lord more. And we've said this before at other parts.

[23 : 27] That's what Jesus said. Jesus didn't take his agenda from other people. Other people will regulate your lives. Other people will tell you. They're great at telling you where you should be and what you should do all the time.

And they were trying to do that with Jesus. Even his disciples were trying to do that with him. Jesus kept saying to them, No, look, this is what I'm doing. And I'm going to do my Father's will.

And this is what we've got to learn to do. We need God's grace. And every day we need to go to the Lord and say, Lord, guide me today. Please, Lord, help me to work. Help me to work in partnership with you.

And if we go through life like that, then we will be looking at life as it were almost through the eyes of our Lord. That he will give us the mind.

Ask for these things. Lord, give us heaven's mind to work on this earth. So that our life will be fruitful. Our life will be to God's glory.

[24 : 30] Our life will be to the benefit of others. And you know, the Lord will prosper us so that we ourselves will be fulfilled. This is the way to true fulfillment.

As has been somebody summing up these two passages, put it very simply and said it like this. It's all right to own things as long as things don't own you.

And I think that's a very, very telling thing. And Jesus is saying to us at the end of the day, wherever your treasure is, that's where your heart will be.

If your treasure is fixed upon just on the earthly, that's where you're going to be. You're going to be caught up with this. With this. Get your, fix your eye upon me, Jesus is saying.

And if you fix your eye upon me, and upon my kingdom, the Lord is actually promising, and he's saying, all these other things that are so filling your life with anxiety and with worry, I will see to.

[25 : 42] Just trust me. And I will see to these things. May God grant us a grace then to trust him as we live out our days in this world.

Let us pray. O Lord, O God, O God, we give thanks for the word that is teaching us, the word that is often so revolutionary, the word that hits right into where we're at.

we pray for the right focus so that our eyes might be challenged heavenwards, and that our trust may be in the Lord, and that we may see him work in our lives for the good of others and for our own good.

Build us up and strengthen us. Bless every home and family. Lord, be gracious to us and lead us in the right way. Guide us in everything and take away from us all our sin.

In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.