

The Lord Jesus Calls Us to Beware of Covetousness

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...through to verse 34 and then our text will be verses 13 through 21. This is what is known as the parable of the rich fool.

In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows. Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven. And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.

And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them,

saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.¹

So far the reading of God's holy Word.

After the Word of God, we sing Psalm 136.

Children, have you ever asked your mom or dad to settle an argument between you and your brother? Maybe you were playing with your toys together and your brother took a toy you wanted to play with. And so you went to one of your parents and you said, "Dad, Johnny took my toy and he won't give it to me. Tell him to share. Make him give it to me."

That is selfish, isn't it? And usually your parents will tell you how to learn to get along with each other and to learn how to share. And as we grow older we don't necessarily use the same words anymore, but grown ups can also be selfish. We may use different

¹ Luke 12:1-34.

words, bigger words, but the bottom line is the same. Tell him to share, to make him give it to me.

What is the attitude behind these words in our hearts? Covetousness. It is a greedy and selfish desire to have more. And our culture is obsessed with having more and more.

All of the Word of God is, of course, relevant, but for some years now I have been thinking more and more that this parable is especially relevant. Never in the history of mankind has the average person enjoyed as much prosperity as we have enjoyed in North America and yet even non Christian talk hosts are saying this. It seems like we are living in one of the most dissatisfied generations in a long time. The desire for more is the bottomless thirst of thousand around us. People work long hours, extra hours for their possessions. The advertisements bombard us with the latest model of car or computer or whatever it is. Like the story of the donkey with the carrot dangled from a string and a stick in front of his nose to make him walk, we are constantly enticed with having just a little more and a little more.

Our text today presents us with a man who would feel right at home in our culture. He came to the Lord Jesus Christ with a claim. Jesus was preaching to the people and telling them about the providence of God and about God who cares for his own. Listen to these beautiful words.

“...five sparrows sold for two farthings,”²

Meaning a handful of pocket change. And God doesn't forget even one of them.

“But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.”³

And Jesus is preaching beautifully and this man is working his way through the crowd until he stands right at the front and when he has a chance, when there is a brief pause in the teaching, he says, “Master, tell my brother he has to divide the inheritance with me.”

We see how covetousness gripped this man's soul because instead of listening to the message on how God provided for his own, his mind was still about having more for himself.

And so the Lord Jesus Christ delivers a rebuke to him, to our culture, to our hearts. We are not told whether he was right or wrong. We are not told whether his brother was being unjust or not. The Lord saw into his heart and saw that this riches was his greatest treasure and so he refused to be the judge, but he didn't stop here. The Lord Jesus was moved with the heart of this man and many others who are too busy grubbing for money and possessions to think of their souls. And he uses this opportunity to deliver a warning

² Luke 12:6.

³ Luke 12:7.

to the entire listening crowd about the danger of coveting and this parable is addressed to the whole crowd. Did you notice this?

Verse 14 Jesus speaks to him, the man asking the question. Verse 15 he speaks to them, the whole listening crowd. This parable is for each of us today.

Our theme is this. The Lord Jesus calls each of us to beware of covetousness.

In the first place, he warns us solemnly against covetousness. Secondly, he shows us the devastating folly of covetousness and, lastly, he teaches us the urgent necessity of being rich towards God.

Now the Lord Jesus refuses to be the judge or an arbitrator of earthy disputes, not because there is something wrong with mediation and arbitration in courts. In fact, the verses before our text mention the courts and Scripture in other passages tells us when and how such things are being used as respect for the authorities God has placed over us.

But Jesus refused to become involved because this man didn't understand who he was. He was not sent from heaven to be an earthly judge for petty disputes. He was the Lord of the heavenly kingdom. He refused because the soul of this man was in danger. The Word of life was being preached and this man was anxious about what he had.

And so instead of answering him further, the Lord Jesus simply turns to the entire crowd. They had heard the request. They were standing on tiptoes. They were wondering whether Jesus would step in. After all, in those days respected rabbis were asked to participate in such things.

And the Lord Jesus feels their eyes on him. And so he turns and he delivers to them a serious, but loving warning.

“Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”⁴

We notice several things about this word of warning. In the first place, the Lord Jesus uses not one, but two commands. He doesn't say, “Beware of covetousness.” But he also says “Take heed and beware of covetousness.” And this doubled up command shows us how urgent, shows us that it is a life and death matter spiritually.

But the next thing we notice about this command is that the Lord Jesus uses words that underline the ongoing character of this watchfulness. There is two ways of giving a command in the Greek language. In the first way you can simply emphasize doing something one time. For example, you can say to your child, “Could you please go get the mail for me?” And you are just asking them to do it once. But the second kind of command, the kind Jesus uses emphasizes something that has to be done all the time. It is like saying to your children, “Cover your mouth when you cough.” It needs to be done

⁴ Luke 12:15.

every time you cough. And it is this second commandment that the Lord Jesus uses to press this warning on our hearts as if to say, “This must be a 24/7 command.” And all the time we have living command. As you go down the street in the morning you are to watch out for covetousness. And as you see things during the day that belong to others, you are to beware of covetousness and as you do your work you are to take heed and beware of covetousness and as you receive your daily wages—because people were paid daily and they would buy the day’s food on the way home—they are to be ware of covetousness.

Just like we don’t cross the street without looking both ways, in the same way we are go to through life taking heed and being aware of covetousness.

The third thing we notice in this warning is the danger itself. The Greek word covetousness is really two words glued together. It means the greedy desire to have more. Covetousness is like a raging fire. When its flames are in your heart you don’t say, “Now I have enough. Now I am satisfied.”

The book of Proverbs pictures it for us with a sucking leech.

Children, have you ever been wading in a stream or a lake with a muddy bottom and you came out and you found you had a leech stuck to your toes. They are hard to pull off, aren’t they? Why? Because they always want to have more. They are never satisfied.

Proverbs 30 verse 16 says the leech has to daughters, give and give. That is all they think about. The covetous person has two thoughts, more and more.

And the Lord Jesus warns us against this attitude, this constant desire for more. But why? Why is it something we need to be warned about? We are given the reason in the same verse.

“...a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”⁵

Covetousness fills your thoughts and mind with what you have and it pushes out thoughts for others and most importantly it pushes away thoughts of God and it leaves us with this false idea that having things is what makes of a good life and that is a deadly mistake. For we have to ask one more question. Why does the Lord Jesus go to such lengths to warn us about covetousness? Why does he use a double command one that tells us to constantly be on the alert? Why is there such urgency?

Well, the problem is our hearts. The ruin of our hearts is this, that we try to fill our hearts with the things that God has made, rather than God the maker and giver. And that is why covetousness is often in the Bible, especially in the New Testament called idolatry. The covetous man is in idolatry. Your possessions become god. And it is not just true if you are a multimillionaire. It can be just as true if all you have is 100 dollars to your name.

⁵ Luke 12:15.

And instead of loving people and using things to express that love, you love things and you use people to get those things.

We think that somehow having just one more thing will be enough, will lead you to the mountaintops of happiness.

A very wealthy man by the name of Rockefeller in the United States was once asked by a newspaper reporter, "Mr. Rockefeller, how much money is enough?" And the man's answer was sadly perceptive. Mr. Rockefeller said, "Just a little more."

What foolishness, trying to satisfy your soul with food, drink, houses, lands, pleasure, whatever it may be. It is like drinking salt water in the ocean when you are dying of thirst, the more you drink the worse it gets. And the warning of the Lord Jesus is so urgent because that sin of covetousness is so devastatingly enticing. Covetousness twists your heart down into further sin. It appeals to you to be self-focused. It appeals to you to be proud of your accomplishments. Isn't our society so constantly pursuing being the self-made man, earning your way and enjoying what is yours, to be independent, to be self-dependent. But that appeals to the depravity of the human heart. And even the child of God is not immune to those suggestions and seductions.

Notice that Jesus delivers this word and not just to the crowd, but to his disciples. Those who believe also need to hear this.

Let us examine our hearts as we hear his Word this morning. Our culture has luxury and those of us who possess the least in this culture, comparatively speaking, are still wealthy compared to the poverty and filth of most of the world. One only needs to see pictures of children and families and homes elsewhere or go to Mexico or some other third world country to realize this.

And yet our airwaves and our entertainment and everything bombards us with temptation. Just get some more. There is always one more thing you could get, one more thing that is presented to you as satisfying your needs and solving your worries. And it is so easy to let your mind and your heart be filled with having and getting and enjoying things. And material things are so available and pursuing them comes so natural to our character as sinners.

How about you? What about you? Do you live your life remembering this warning of the Lord Jesus? Do you guard your heart against covetousness? Do you realize that what you have is so unimportant in the grand scheme of things? Do you live your life preoccupied with what you have or don't have?

The warning of the Lord Jesus comes to each of you and to me this morning.

"Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."⁶

⁶ Luke 12:15.

And to make sure that we don't forget the Lord Jesus adds a parable or a vivid illustration to his warning. He doesn't want the warning to get lost in the crowd of warnings and danger signs and bewares that we run into all over the place. So he chooses this striking parable to show us the devastating folly of covetousness and that is our second point.

We are told about a certain rich man, a farmer. He had a great year on the farm, much like the summer we had this last year in Alberta. And a few weeks before harvest time this man is walking through his fields. He is deep in thought. Just imagine him stroking his chin. There is this deep frown or wrinkle on his forehead as he thinks. You just see the thoughts turning in his head.

“My barns are too small. This is never all going to fit in there.”

And he doesn't have a place to store it and there isn't a local co-op where he can store them either. And he is looking for a solution. Do you see how Jesus catches our attention and pulls us in? Wouldn't this be a nice problem to have? Those of us who are farmers, isn't that the kind of year you would like to have all the time? Isn't that a good problem to face?

And suddenly as he is in the middle of pacing his fields and thinking he stops and he lifts his head and it strikes him. And he says in excitement, “That is what I will do. I will tear down all my barns and I will build new ones and bigger ones and I can expand the farm.”

There is a famous painting that shows him at night in his home, his money scattered on a table in front of him, a far away gleam in his eyes as he considers the future. You can almost hear him saying these words to himself.

“And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.”⁷

He is going to live out the Canadian and the American dream. This is a good businessman. He has made it.

But then the focus shifts from the heart and hope of this farmer to the throne room of almighty God. The world and many of us would approve of the actions of this man. He is being wise. He is showing foresight. Maybe he is a candidate for the businessman of the year award. But the solemn judgment of the courts of heaven rings out devastatingly. The judge of all pronounces a different sentence. Listen to the words issuing from his lips.

“Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”⁸

Do you notice the contrast in the two speakers? The rich man displayed worldly wisdom, but God said he is a fool. He said to himself, “You have got many years,” and God said,

⁷ Luke 12:19.

⁸ Luke 12:20.

“This is your last night.” He thought his soul would be filled with eating and drinking and God required of him and stripped him of everything in judgment. What was his folly? What brought this terrifying sentence down on his head? Was it injustice? Did he rob the poor and cheat those around him? Did he steal? Was he refusing to pay his suppliers or employees? No. We have no reason to see him as anything less than a respectable man who gave to everyone what he owed him. He is a farmer. That is a good job. There is not a hint that he did anything wrong to get his money. The Lord has blessed his efforts with a bumper crop. It is not hard to imagine him as respectable Jew who would have the praise around him of those around him. His folly is simply this. First he forgets that God gave him his wealth. No one is a self made man or woman. Every opportunity resource and blessing you have is a gift, even the strength and the wisdom with which you earned that is a gift. Nothing you have is self made.

And, second, he forgets that... he thinks that everything he has is his own. You don't have anything that is your own. God is letting you borrow and manage some of his possessions for his glory.

But, third, he thinks these things will satisfy his soul. He thinks that he has reached the mountaintops of human experience so that it is good enough, that he needs nothing else. And, fourth, he doesn't think about the daily possibility of death. He is not spiritually prepared. Those are the only things he is condemned for.

Do you see how easily any one of us, any one of you, young people, could fall into that mentality and that way of living? And that fool went to bed that night thinking he gained the world.

But consider everything he had lost. He comes before the judge that night with four lost things. First he comes with a lost name. We sang in Psalter 89.

“Their very name shall die.”

Scripture does not record his name. The world would call him wise. They would preserve his name on monuments and plaques. They would tell his story as a success story, but God has such a low opinion of someone like this that his very name is not recorded. He is remembered as nothing more than a fool.

And, secondly, he has a lost soul. He comes before God and it is taken from him by force and he must give an account of it.

But, third, he comes with a lost world. Everything he earned, everything he worked for, everything he dreamed about, it is gone, it is stripped. It profits him not at all.

Scripture says we brought nothing into this world. We can carry nothing out of this world. You have never seen a U-Haul behind a hearse on the way to the cemetery.

Fourth, he comes with heaven lost to him, because he didn't store up any treasure there.

He lost everything and nothing is left. He thought he had gained the world, but he lost his soul and all his gain couldn't help him now. And here we see the fruit of sin exposed for us with sobering clarity, the covetousness which gripped his mind and closed his mind to everything and anyone outside of himself has destroyed him. He was bent on satisfying all his desires in his self dependent pride.

And covetousness makes you proud. Did you notice this? When his greedy desires appeared to be satisfied, this man reeks with pride. Do you notice how many times in these verses he uses the words "I, me and my"? My fruits, my barns, my goods. It reminds you of Nebuchadnezzar in the Old Testament standing on the roof of his palace at Babylon and saying:

"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?"⁹

In his pride he feels himself to be on top of the world, but God sweeps his feet from underneath him and brings him to the dust like a beast. He didn't take into account God who created heaven and earth, God who rules everything. He forgot that the one thing that matters in life and in death is God. And his mind was closed to God. He was so busy he didn't have any time to think about God or think about how he could glorify God with his riches.

Scriptures says this of the wicked.

"God is not in all their thoughts."¹⁰

That is the height of wickedness. Maybe a good business man, a hard worker, honest, industrious, but if God is not in your thoughts, that is wickedness. And sin makes you blind to reality till it is too late, till its raging flames of loss are all over you. What did he trade his soul for? He thought he would get a life of ease. He thought he would get soul satisfying relaxation. But in light of eternity, even if he had lived for 10 years from that crop, it is just a short moment before the eternal hurricane of God's wrath.

And then he met his maker unprepared and he wasn't ready. You must have a right heart to do this. You must know God now to be greeted with eternal life then. Oh, how this story strikes to the heart of our culture with its fever of consumerism and materialism and covetousness and greed.

But we don't need to focus on unbelievers this morning. We need to examine our own hearts. How do you and I live before God? Believer in the Lord, where is your heart? Do you live for the Lord? Do you have a heart for his honor? Is his glory the thing that you desire most? And is his glory in the back of your mind even as you make your plans and enjoy the things that he has given you?

⁹ Daniel 4:30.

¹⁰ Psalm 10:4.

How do you use your possessions? Do you have your riches or do your riches have you?

We read about Abraham, a rich man, that he lived as a pilgrim and stranger on the earth. He was looking for a better city, for a heavenly country, a city with foundations whose builder and maker is God.

Are you and I aware of how foolish, how deadly covetousness is? Do those around you, do your own children see you living like a pilgrim hoping in a better city? When you speak about the things that God has given you is the main word attached to them I, me and my?

Another point of application. This man wasn't a criminal. He wasn't in the mafia. He was a member of society in good standing, a model citizen on the right side of the law. Jesus [?] picture the coming of man. He went to church regularly. Convicting, isn't it?

It is possible for us to be model citizens, respected in the community for our business sense to be thought wise in the eyes of those around us and to be condemned by God as being fools, because our hearts are wrapped around the things we have or want. It is possible for you to forget that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he may have. It is possible to say all the right things, to do all the right things even to come to the house of the Lord and still be filled with your own possessions.

What does Jesus say about those who hear the Word and are filled with the cares of life? He who receives the seed among thorns, he it is who hears the Word and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and he becomes unfruitful.

And [?] this striking parable to expose and living this way means losing everything. And still today those who are entangled in the snares of materialism lose everything. You can live this way without ever having a bumper year or a bumper crop.

1 Timothy six.

“But they that will be rich...”¹¹

We could translate, “Those who desire to be rich...”

...fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things.¹²

¹¹ 1 Timothy 6:9.

¹² 1 Timothy 6:9-11.

The very desire for riches corrupts the heart. Remember the solemn words of Jesus.

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?¹³

Well, someone may want to say, “How then should we live? What does a wise life look like when it comes to material possessions?”

We find this in our third point as Jesus teaches us the urgent necessity of being rich towards God.

The concluding words of the sermon are these.

“So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”¹⁴

The main point of the parable is that we should make sure we are not living in the falling picture here, but thankfully our text is not finished. We are warned against covetousness. We are shown its folly, but we are also told the way of escape.

The fool stored up treasure for himself, but was not rich towards God. And those very words “rich towards God” show us it is possible to be to be different. We have read about that final end of the covetous, but the outcome is different for those who do not live the foolish life of the covetous. It is possible to be rich toward God.

What does that mean? Well, first it means a change of your very heart, change of the desires of your mind and of your will, change of people who are by nature storing up treasure for themselves into people who have as their treasure seeking God first and his righteousness and kingdom.

And, second, being rich toward God is not something that you and I can make ourselves into. It is the result of God’s work in you. Yes, you are called to be rich towards God, but you don’t need a list of self help steps or 10 tips to be less greedy. You need to be shown how to come to the Savior and to seek from him the very grace that changes our nature and that changes our evaluation of what real riches are.

Do you realize what a message of hope the gospel of a Savior who does the saving is better than a self help guru who teaches you to save yourself? Sin is part of our nature. It is not just something we do. It is part of our spiritual DNA. And even as the Lord begins to change your heart, you still have a life long battle against it. And the wonderful news of the gospel is that God does not come with a set of rules and dos and don’ts by which we can pull ourselves up out of covetousness and into godliness with contentment. He doesn’t ask us to batter our wills into submission and to grimly grit our teeth on our own.

¹³ Mark 8:36-37.

¹⁴ Luke 12:21.

The gospel is the news of what God has done in giving his beloved Son for sinners and what he does through his Holy Spirit in sinners.

The problem with our covetous hearts is that we place wealth and ourselves on the throne rather than God, that our desire are toward ourselves rather than to be rich towards our creator. Sin turns everything upside down.

So the first thing the Holy Spirit has to do in making you rich toward God is to turn your heart right side up, to convict you of your sinfulness of covetousness, to make you aware that you have been content with who you are, but covetous about what you can possess. And that is backwards. Our sin is intolerable to God and the one thing he cannot do is let it go.

And as the Holy Spirit reorders your priorities that is the first thing that changes, that you are instead content with what you have and not content with who you are. Your eyes go open and you say, "My sin means I forfeited every right to his blessedness." And when you look at everything you have in that life, then it becomes striking that you do have what you have, to realize, "I deserve nothing." But every possession becomes a great mercy, a great call to give thanks, to be amazed with what you have and sorrowful about who you are and the spiritual rottenness of greed is in that way replaced with a healthy desire for God, for being like God, for pleasing God.

But the key to it all is that the Lord proclaims his Son as the great answer. The great cure for covetousness is this. Consider Jesus Christ, because the Holy Spirit uses Jesus Christ as the only pattern by which he remakes the covetousness into the content. And that is why the great cure for covetousness is not just the promises of God for those who trust in him, but it is the very Savior in whom God calls you to trust.

Jesus Christ came to earth with a pure heart. His food and drink was always to do the will of his heavenly Father. He emptied himself of his glory. He took on himself the form of sinful humanity, even of a slave. He didn't covet honor and glory and rank and praise. He was content to be a servant, content to be homeless, content to have no place to lay his head. The creator of all, the beloved Son of God, the one whom all the angels praise with adoration, willing to be homeless man, despised and rejected of man, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He didn't even have his own wallet. He had one of the disciples carry it. He had a heart for the kingdom of his Father. He thought always first of the glory of his Father. He didn't grow weary of helping those who came to him. He was not rich toward himself, but rich toward God and his very thoughts, desires, fears and hopes were God centered. It was because he focused on the good God who showers his whole creation with abundant, countless good gifts that he was so generous to others. He saw his whole purpose to be enriching, eternally enriching even sinners at the greatest cost to himself.

And this heart of self denial, of being rich toward God and therefore rich towards sinners like you and me is the cross. He took the cross. He despised it poverty and shame. He

endured the scorn of men. And on the darkened hill of Golgotha we hear a financial word coming from the lips of the Son of God.

“It is finished.”¹⁵

That is a Greek word that reflects the money system. Paid in full. Paid the debt sinners owe as well as lived in full the life we owe. And now the riches of God’s kindness overflow in amazing grace. He calls all those whose hearts are smothered and choked out by the weeds of greed and covetousness to come to him for relief, to come to him for forgiveness.

And it is as you focus on Jesus Christ and on what he has done that your heart is melted that the Holy Spirit makes you willing to say, “Such amazing love demands my life, soul and all,” or to say with another Christian poet:

The dearest idol I have known,
Whatever that idol may be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
And worship only thee.

It demands that I be rich toward God, not just by the gift of a donation in the collection on Sunday, but by the gift of all I have and am, focusing on Jesus Christ. Pride and self centeredness are replaced with humility and dependence on God with amazement at grace.

Jesus Christ is your treasure and your old selfish thoughts and desires are swallowed up by hunger and thirst to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

And then as God looks at you from heaven the sentence from heaven is different. Oh, believer in the Lord, he no longer looks at you and says the word, “Thou fool.” Listen to what he calls you in verse 32. He says:

“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”¹⁶

The whole kingdom. What a great God, an unspeakably generous God. He gives and gives and gives and gives to the least deserving, to the hell deserving. And the more you focus on him, you learn to be generous, you learn to give back to him who has given so much to you and to serve those around you through whom you may serve in him.

It doesn’t mean that as believers we always live on the mountain tops, does it? We can slide into the greed of materialism. Repentance needs to be daily repentance. As we live in a material world there are two things that help you in putting sin to death starting, of course, with focusing on the Savior. First a fresh taste of the grace and goodness and

¹⁵ John 19:30.

¹⁶ Luke 12:32.

promises of God who will strike a blow at the roots of covetousness. And that is why we read verses 22 through 34. These beautiful words of Jesus.

A God who clothes the lilies and the birds and who will care much more for his own children, God who clothes the grass.... isn't it beautiful to see the grass on a summer day, the rippling fields? And yet they are going to be cut down and gone. Isn't that kind of care, to clothe grass that is going to be eaten as hay? How much more does he care about those who [?] to be his own?

Another practical help by God's grace to kill covetousness is found in verse 33. What do you say when you get a bonus? Do you say when you get a bonus? Do you say, "Good. Now I can get?" Or do you also sometimes say, "Good. Now I can give?"

One church father puts it like this. "You don't need bigger barns. The poor and the needy in this world, they are your barns."

The church father Augustine wrote this plea. "God does not desire that you lose your riches, but that you change their place. Suppose a friend would come to you into your house and find that you would store some fruits on a damp floor knowing they will rot and spoil there. He says to you, 'Brother, you are going to lose what you have gathered. It will rot there. Move it to a higher shelf, a better place.' You would listen to him, wouldn't you? And would you not listen to Christ who advises you to lift your treasure from earth to heaven. What you store there will never perish or corrupt or get lost."

Those who store up treasure by being rich towards God gather eternal things. Are you rich toward God? Is God your treasure so that you see what you have as a golden chance to serve God your true treasure? Sad that in every age and time there are those who hear the Word of God and who allow the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches to choke out the seed planted in their hearts of the Word of God.

The Word of God tells you plainly if that is you. And if you are not rich toward God and if you die that way, you won't hear the solemn words, "Thou fool."

[?] Why refuse the grace of Jesus Christ proclaimed and offered to you even this very day? The treasures of this world are only straw compared to the golden grace stored up in Jesus Christ. Change your ways. Repent of your sin. Focus on Jesus Christ. Say, "Lord Jesus, be my treasure."

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?¹⁷

Amen.

¹⁷ Mark 8:36-37.