

THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL

SIX-WEEK QUEST

SERMON OUTLINE 3

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

LUKE 12:13-21 & 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-8

INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

When I counsel people and when people come to me and confess something they are struggling with, do you know what I commonly hear about? Lust. But you know what I never hear? "You know what I'm struggling with? Greed. Oh man! I am just so greedy!"

Well guess what. Greed is mentioned in the Bible way more than lust. Why is that? Because for the most part, if you are greedy you don't know it. Lust has an obvious external expression, pornography or adultery for example. This is obvious. But greed is totally different. It's not nearly as obvious. How do we know if we are greedy, or conversely how do we know if we are generous? There isn't a number to put on it. We can't say if you make this amount you are fine, but if you make more than that, you are greedy. Or we can't say if you give away this much of your money you are generous.

This is why it's talked about so much in the Bible. It's so prevalent, but you just can't see it as easily. We are completely unaware of our own greed.

INTENSIFY THE ISSUE

Look in the Bible at Luke chapter 12. This is an account of an interaction Jesus had with a crowd.

READ LUKE 12:13-15

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

14 Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"

15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Jesus is teaching a crowd and a voice pipes up. "Hey Jesus! Tell my brother to share the inheritance with me!" Jesus says, "Who appointed me judge and arbiter between you?" Then Jesus makes a key statement.

Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed! That's not what life is about - the stuff - the collection of material things. That's not what's important.

Why does Jesus say "all kinds of greed?" Is there more than one type of greed? Isn't greed wanting more money? No. Not just that. That's partly why we don't see greed in ourselves, because it's not just one obvious thing.

Sometimes greed is the pursuit of more money. Sometimes it's wanting that paycheck, sometimes it's wanting more material possessions, sometimes it's wanting that corner office. And Jesus says this is not what life's about.

Greed is in us almost from birth. One of the very first words we learned to speak was "MINE!" And we have trouble growing out of it. My toy, my pencil, my stickers, my guitar, my friends, my social life, my education, my girlfriend, my career, my office, my house, my Lexus, my 401K, my retirement village, my free time...and on it goes through life.

And you might be silently arguing now, saying "This job is mine. The money I've earned is mine." But is that actually true? Did you earn everything you have? You may be a hard worker, but how much control do you really have? You didn't choose where you were born. I guarantee that if you were born in Sierra Leone, how much you earn would be drastically different than what you earn now, regardless of how much of a hard worker you are. In truth we don't have as much control as we'd like to think. We don't control our industry, the chance encounters you had that landed you the big deal, the promotion that you got because of it, the firing of people above you that opened up a spot for you. We don't control all that. This is the realization we have to come to first if we are going to fight greed.

Jesus had more to say. READ LUKE 12:16-19

16 And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop.

17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

18 "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." '

Jesus paints this scene. Look how it starts. The

ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. The story starts by talking about the ground. Do you think Jesus is trying to make a point about where your riches come from? He didn't say, "A rich man worked hard one year and made a lot of extra money." He says, "There were some circumstances beyond his control." The crops were just 'on' that year because the ground was great. So, the farmer comes up with a solution to his 'problem'; he wants to tear down his barns and build a bigger ones!

This farmer simply has too much! He doesn't have enough room to store all that he has! So he builds bigger barns. Let's look at this in a modern way.

A business man's company has gone public, and he has struck it rich. So he says, "I'm getting a bigger house, an exclusive platinum credit card, and I'm going to diversify my investments...buy gold bars and stocks and bonds and all that. And then, I'm going to build a HUGE house in Florida on a golf course, where I will spend the last 30 years of my life playing golf, shuffleboard, and bingo."

Now you're thinking, I thought you said this man has a problem. That doesn't sound like a problem. But look at what Jesus says about it.

READ LUKE 12:20-21

20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

In one statement, God puts this man's entire life - his attitude about his money, his security, his dreams - all into perspective by saying,

“You’re going to die, and what good will all that stuff be to you? It will just go to someone else!”

What are you really working for here? What is your money, your possessions in light of eternity? And then Jesus adds the kicker here. This is what it’s like for ANYONE who stores up for himself but is not generous towards God.

You might say, well that’s a nice story Jesus tells about rich people. But I’m not greedy. I’m not rich. I’m living paycheck to paycheck! I’m just getting by! And I get that, but let’s get some perspective.

Almost 60% of the people in the world live on less than \$900 a year! And another 30% makes about \$9,000 a year. That leaves about 10% of the world that makes more than \$9,000 a year. So if you make more than \$9,000 a year, you are among the top 10% richest in the world. You may not be in the top 10% in your town, but how does God, who is Lord over the whole world, see you?

Jesus doesn’t allow us to have any excuse here. This isn’t a story about rich people. It’s a story about the subtlety of greed. That’s why he says, this is how it is for ANYONE who stores up for himself but is not generous. You see, we define greed as having a yacht. But Jesus sees greed as having more than enough, and using that abundance on your own interests. And in that light, we are all guilty.

At this point many of you are thinking “Why did I come to church today?” I know, so far this seems like kind of bad news, but we’ll look at the positive side – and the antidote to greed.

INSTRUCT WITH THE BIBLE

If greed is a problem, then what is the solution to that problem? How do we become

less greedy? The solution is to become generous. But generosity is like greed. It seems to be a sliding scale. If you give away your car, is that generous? Not if you have 10 cars. Is giving \$100 dollars to someone to help them pay their water bill generous? Not if you make \$10,000 a month. Is there a monetary line where if we cross it we will be generous? I don’t think so.

So how can we become generous? It would be easy if I could just throw a number out there and said, give away 10% of your income, and you will be generous. But I can’t do that, because Jesus doesn’t do that, and Paul in his writings about money later on in the New Testament doesn’t do that. So let me give you a few ideas to increase your generosity. Look with me at 2 Corinthians 8.

CONTEXT: Paul is writing a letter to the church at Corinth, and in this section of the letter, he is encouraging them to be generous. He starts off by telling them about people in the Macedonian churches. Apparently the churches there had experienced a natural disaster and were going through very hard times. And yet, they gave money to help others around the world.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-4

1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,

4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

Here is a key point to learn from this passage:

1. REALIZE YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE RICH TO BE GENEROUS

Look at what Paul says about the Macedonian Christians. They were generous as a result of their overflowing joy, which is expected right? They have this incredible joy from following God. They have a sense of peace and because of what God has done for them; they want to give generously to help others.

But look what else he says. It says they gave out of their extreme poverty. What was that? How do you give out of poverty? That makes no sense! What kind of person financially gives money away while living in a difficult situation of extreme poverty and hardship? The answer: a generous-hearted person. The kind of person God calls us to be.

It's easy to think "Well one day, when I'm rich, then I'll be generous." But you don't have to be rich to be generous.

Pastor: You may want to give a personal example that you know that shows poor people being generous.

Let me give you some ideas on how to be generous.

2. GIVE YOUR HEART TO GOD FIRST

Look at 2 Corinthians 8:5. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

There is a very insightful quote by Amy Carmichael, a Christian missionary, who started an orphanage in India. She said, "You can give without loving. But you cannot love without giving."

People can give with wrong motives. They can give to impress others. They can give to try to get something in return. They can give in order to make themselves feel less guilty about having a lot. But they aren't giving out of love.

On the other hand, some people may say they love, but they don't give. That is impossible, because love gives – it is generous. You may not have a lot of resources, but you can be resourceful. You may not have a lot of stuff, but you give a lot of your heart.

And the way to do this is to love God first. God is love, and it is He who shows us how to love more, how to love better, and how to love generously. You can love people best when you love God first.

3. GET A BROADER PERSPECTIVE

Look at 2 Corinthians 8:8. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.

Paul is trying to get the Corinthian believers to get the concept of generosity. So he says basically- let's compare to others. Now let's be careful here. This can easily be a trap. If I said, let's compare your financial giving to everyone else's here, that could be really uncomfortable and messy. Ah this person gives away 5% and this person only gives away 2%. A ha! Sinner! But that's not what Paul is saying. No, what Paul is saying is "I'm showing you this example of poor people in hard circumstance who are joyfully giving money away. I'm showing you that so that it lights a fire under you!"

In this room you have people who make over 6 figures a year, and you have people who make about 3 figures a year, as well as everything in between. Our tendency in life is to hang with people who are just like us. Our co-workers,

people in our neighborhood, people who look and achieve about what we do. And so part of the reason we don't feel greedy is because we lack perspective. But when the church has some diversity, and you are exposed to people who make significantly less than you, then it can challenge you. It helps you have some perspective on what you have. It helps you develop some generosity.

For even a broader and better perspective, think globally. 2,600,000,000 people live on less than \$2 a day. People living in the United States are on average 75 times richer than people living in the poorest countries. We don't have to be rich to be generous, but if we just had a broader perspective, we would see that we are, in fact, rich.

4. GET AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

Let's look again at what Jesus says in Luke 12:15:

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

And verses 20, 21:

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

You can become more generous when you realize that this life is short and everything you make here, everything you accumulate, all your toys will eventually rust out and be destroyed or at best be handed over to someone else. What is your money in light of eternity?

If you have internalized hope, if you believe that God has a future prepared for you in a new heaven and a new earth, then what is this life really? It's a warm up. Why not invest in the real game that we will be in for eternity. That's where our resources should go. If you believe that this life is all you have, then it makes all the sense in the world to spend all you can, to suck all the enjoyment you can, out of all the days you can. But if we believe that we have a joyous future where everything we accumulated here won't matter at all, then let's use our time differently. Let's use our jobs differently. Let's use our wallets differently.

IMAGINE THE RESULT

Sir Fred Catherwood said: "Greed is the logical result of the belief that there is no life after death. We grab what we can, while we can, however we can, and then hold on to it hard." Conversely, it can be said then, that generosity is the logical result of the belief that there is life after death. We give what we can, while we can, however we can.

Just take a moment to look at your life. If you are living, buying, building, and consuming like there is no life after death, then, as a Christian, there is something wrong with that picture.

Pastor: This could be a good opportunity for a testimony. Select someone who is not particularly wealthy (compared to others in your church) but who is particularly generous.

ILLUSTRATE THE APPLICATION

I'd like to challenge you today. How many of you know what "The Bigger, Better Game" is? The point of the game is to start with a small object and keep trading up for a bigger object. It's kind of like a scavenger hunt. For example,

if you have a small group of people, you divide them up and give each person something small like a pencil or a paperclip. Then they roam the neighborhood asking the neighbors if they would trade something bigger and better. After they make that trade, they try to do it again for something even bigger and better – and so on.

Here is my challenge. Stop playing that game for at least 30 days and see what good it does for your soul.

The allure of bigger, better, more, whether we are talking about houses, cars, clothes, whatever it is – continuing down that road will lead you away from generosity. This is a pretty simple principle really; the more stuff you get, the less generous you can be.

Pastor: Share what you will do – invite people to follow your own example.

