

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ Stewardship Sunday ✠

April 30, 2006

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

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

Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" 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 he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

"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. 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."'

"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?'

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

(Luke 12:13-21, NIV)

Money is a touchy subject. It's a subject that many people find it difficult to talk about—even with your close friends or your family. For various reasons, it just makes people uncomfortable to talk about it.

Some preachers are also hesitant to talk about money—I think for the same reasons—that people find talking about money uncomfortable. Jesus didn't seem to have a problem with that. Jesus spoke a lot about money. And yes, sometimes it made people uncomfortable. But with Jesus there was no beating around the bush. When he spoke about money he got to the very heart of the matter. He spoke the truth. And that's exactly what Jesus did in our text for today. Jesus spoke the truth about life and money when he spoke these words: "**A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.**"

But when we look at these words, we'll find that this was no generic, philosophic truth. This was really the truth about *our* lives and *our* riches. And we'll see that the truth that Jesus speaks to us is revealed by what we want. And this truth reveals what we trust.

First let's see how Jesus reveals this truth. Even though Jesus never shied away from talking about money, in this instance he didn't bring it up. In the verses before our text Jesus was warning people against the dangers of sin and false teaching and encouraging believers who would one day face persecution. You could maybe say that Jesus was in the middle of preaching a sermon.

And then, seemingly out of the blue, a man from the crowd says to Jesus, "**Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.**" You see, Jewish law stated that the oldest son in a

family was to receive a double inheritance. He would get twice as much as his siblings. So this guy was probably a younger brother and he wanted his older brother to share that extra portion of the inheritance with him. That's what he wanted and he wanted Jesus to use his influence to get it for him.

But **"Jesus replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?'"** Basically Jesus asks the man, "Why are you asking me? That's not what I'm here for. I am here to talk about spiritual issues, like faith and salvation, sin and grace. I have all of these important matters to speak to these people about – matters of spiritual life and death – and you want to talk about your petty little disagreement with your brother. You call me 'teacher,' but you don't want me to teach you." Jesus tells him the truth: there's a problem with what you want because you don't want to hear what I have to say.

But now that he brought it up, there was a spiritual problem Jesus needed to talk about with this man. And not just him, but all of the people needed to listen to this. **"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.'" Your problem is greed. You want more than you now have, more than you're entitled to, more than you need, and more than you deserve.**

Jesus tells the truth about those things. "Watch out! They're dangerous." This warning also extends to us. These words Jesus speaks about greed – about wanting more and more – reveal the truth about our life and riches. They tell the truth about us, that we are terribly sinful. We can be very greedy – greedy with our time and our attention; greedy with our emotions and greedy with our money. The truth about life and riches in our own lives is revealed by what we want. Jesus knows that we're greedy because he knows what we want. He knows that what we want is all too often very different from what he wants – and that separates us from him. That causes conflict – deadly conflict – to stand between us and God. And so Jesus offers this man and us a very stern warning: "Watch out. Be on guard against greed."

Jesus then followed this warning with a parable. The parable describes why our greed is so dangerous – because it reveals something about our trusting. And he told them this parable: **"The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "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. 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." 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?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.""**

This man was blessed with great abundance. He was already rich. But now, on top of his riches, he pulled in a bumper crop that wouldn't even fit into his barns. And so, in order to accommodate his large crop he decides to upgrade his barns. And then he realizes that his stored crops would be enough to fully fund his retirement – he doesn't have to work anymore. Now he can sit back and enjoy life and take it easy. But suddenly God spoils his retirement plans with the news that he was going to die that very night.

Some people might use this parable to say that it's wrong to plan for retirement or to build big barns or even to enjoy life. But that's not really what Jesus is getting at here, is it? What was the

problem with this man's plans? It wasn't his riches—God gave him his riches. No, Jesus tells the truth about life and riches and says that this man's greed led him to put his trust in his riches. The problem was a spiritual problem, it was a sinful attitude of the heart.

You see Jesus knew that if he had gone and told that other man's brother to divide the inheritance with him, the money would not have solved the problem. Whether you're trying to get money or you already have lots of it, the problem is greed—because it reveals what you trust. The rich man's actions revealed that he placed his trust in his barns and crops to last and to provide everything he needed for the future.

Aren't we often tempted to do the same? We might not have the same success as that rich farmer, ah, but if we did, wouldn't things be so much better? If I had more money (not a lot, but just a little more), wouldn't life be easier? So if I can earn more, I'd be happier. And if I could just keep more of what I do earn for myself, stored up in my barns, in my garage, my house, or my bank, then life would be better. Life would be better with riches, we say.

But Jesus tells us the truth about life and riches. He doesn't say that riches are wrong. He doesn't say it's wrong to have money, to save money, or to spend money. The truth is about LIFE and money. Life does not consist of riches.

But how you handle your riches reveals what you trust. If you are holding on for dear life to your possessions and you find in them your joy and comfort—that reveals that you trust in them. And God says that's foolish. Or in other words, it's idolatry—it's loving or trusting something or someone more than God. And in God's sight idolatry is not only foolish, but deadly and damning.

But perhaps there's another way—another aspect of the truth about life and riches that Jesus teaches here. I think we can find it in these words, **"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."** This text gives us two bad examples of the way to view and use the physical blessings God has given to us. We could describe these men as living in earthly wealth but spiritual bankruptcy. Right here at the end of the parable Jesus suggests that instead they should have been rich toward God.

But what does that mean, to be rich toward God? If I am rich toward you it probably means that I am generous to you and give you some of my riches. But spiritually speaking, we have no riches. We couldn't give anything to God, even if we wanted to. God is rich. And he is not only physically rich, the letter to the Ephesians describes God as **"rich in mercy."** And we read in the 2nd letter to the Corinthians about the **"grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."** Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection he has given you his spiritual riches.

Now Jesus suggests that there is a even a way for us to use our life and riches in such a way as to reveal our trust—in God who is rich toward us. And that is, be rich toward him. We can manage our earthly possessions in such a way that we trust that God will provide all that we need (and more).

So we'll do our best to use our skills and talents to acquire the money and goods we need for our lives, but we will also recognize that these gifts and even the opportunity to work is a gift of

God. And at the same time we trust that God will continue to provide for us and sustain us at any level of earthly wealth or poverty.

But if, in my thanksgiving for these wonderful gifts of God, I decide to return a generous portion of that wealth to God for his work and through his church—I trust that he will continue to provide for me as richly as he has allowed me to gain it in the first place.

By recognizing that my life and my riches come from God, I reveal my trust in God—trust in him to continue to be my Creator (who provides for me and preserves me), my Redeemer (who has forgiven me and saved me), and my Sanctifier (who comforts me and strengthens me).

I guess you could say that Jesus wasn't opposed to making people feel uncomfortable about money. It would make any one of us uncomfortable to be rebuked by anyone, let alone Jesus himself. In these words, that is exactly what he has done. When Jesus speaks the truth about our life and riches, he's talking about our sin, especially the sin of greed. But this same Jesus also speaks to us the truth of his love and forgiveness and because of that truth, we have a whole new perspective on life and riches. Now they are a wonderful opportunity to serve God and put our trust in him. We can now be rich toward the one who has made us rich, and who will one day bestow on us the glorious riches of heaven. Amen.