

Luke 12:13-21
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
August 3, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“And he said to them, ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

What does it mean to you that *Jesus* speaks against covetousness and a love of ‘stuff’? Last week, he urged you to pray with confidence. That sounds like a pretty “spiritual thing” and ‘fair game’ for Jesus to talk about. The week before, he urged you not to be anxious about your efforts for him, but to sit at his feet and rejoice in His Word. Yep, that also sounds pretty “spiritual” and ‘in bounds’ with what we think Jesus should teach on.

But how does it strike your ears and heart that Jesus speaks today about idolatry, love of an earthly inheritance, and covetousness of wealth and stuff? It’s very easy to hear such teaching and immediately put up a guard of defense, to declare it out-of-bounds for the “spiritual life” of a Sunday morning, to rationalize that pastors are just curmudgeons who don’t want you to enjoy what the average American has. Children and teenagers find it easy to rationalize that their parents just don’t understand how important it is to have what all their other teenage friends have. But

it's hard to rationalize away that God-in-the-flesh weighs in on your love of stuff.

In fact, we may even find the supposed “advice” more believable when we hear it from Solomon in the Old Testament reading... because Solomon *knew* wealth; he was King of Israel at the empire’s apex; he had everything a man could want, and yet – in his wisdom – saw that it was all vanity. It could not extend life; it could not be more than a striving after wind; and – to pour salt in the wounds – all he had amassed would be left to someone who didn’t labor for it. But his words are no mere advice or human wisdom, for the word “Ecclesiastes” comes from the Hebrew term which means “One speaking before the congregation.” A *sermon* on the vanity of loving ‘stuff’!

Now, you might pick up on verse 24 of that Old Testament sermon and say, “But, Solomon says, ‘There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God!’” True, eating and drinking and daily labor *is* from the hand of God, as he designed it in creation... but not to worship it, not to idolize it, but to support one’s life of faith in God through it.

In fact, how does Solomon say it? – “To the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy” (the characteristics of the one who loves God’s holy will in Christ Jesus), “but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and

collecting, only to give to one who pleases God.” Fascinating! In other words, the one who idolizes wealth, God has condemned him to a life of chasing after the wealth, only for the wealth to eventually make its way out of that unbeliever’s inheritance into the faithful’s inheritance, just as Jesus himself says, “The meek shall inherit the earth.” Yes, in the resurrection, those who chased after the world will be consigned to eternal dying with those who idolized the world; but those who rejoiced in Christ and His promises will share in his inheritance, his throne, the new creation.

So, we ought listen very carefully, weigh very carefully – it ought give us pause and reason to reflect on our life in this American land of riches – when Jesus says, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

The Greek word translated “be on your guard” is the word from we get the military term, “phalanx,” which refers to a type of military defensive posture. It immediately made me think of the security guards that needed to be employed by retail stores at the height of the Black Friday shopping craze, when customers literally brawled over seasonal savings on a TV or laptop. We can all recognize the idolatry of such covetousness.

But the word in the Greek, and even the English “phalanx” urges us to meditate more carefully. For a phalanx is that defensive

posture which overlaps shields, which – if you will – locks arms. It depends upon the faithful help of those around you.

So, what a job the devil has done among us, to teach us in this American way of life that how you view and use material wealth is your own independent truth. He has convinced us that material wealth is not a corporate spiritual wrestling... notice, not a corporate *ownership*... what's yours is yours... but a corporate spiritual warfare!... not a private and individual one. For, one on one, we are no match against the temptations of the devil.

So, guard yourselves (plural, *together* – guard each other) from all covetousness. Indeed, think of the plural nature of the influences of this sin when it is discussed in the epistles. In Romans 1, covetousness is listed with the various offenses against God in rebellion, wherein he “gave them up to a debased mind”... a mind that loves and calls ‘good/normal’ that which is ungodly, so that they were “filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice.” We often think of that first chapter in Romans as being a condemnation of the sexually godless and grotesque, but does that first chapter not equally condemn the godlessness of sins like (quoting from Romans 1) “gossip, slander, jealousy, disobedience to parents”... and, yes, covetousness.

So dangerous is this sin of covetousness that Paul further qualifies it to the Ephesians by equating it to sexual immorality: “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be

named among you” (and, doesn’t the “among you” imply a plural togetherness!) And then, Paul goes a step further in this equal condemnation, saying, “You may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an *idolater*), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” Now, meditate soberly on this. Not one of you would treat flippantly the sin of sexual immorality. You may quietly wrestle with it, you may quietly be ashamed of it, but you *are* ashamed (especially among others) precisely because you know how evil it is. So, why would we brush off the Scripture’s equal condemnation of covetousness and explain it away as “the American way of life wherein I have no accountability or responsibility for how much I love, trust, and crave my material gain”?

No, the apostle calls covetousness *idolatry*...which he doesn’t even say of sexual immorality!... Would we be so flippant toward the holy Law’s accusation that we would walk around joking we are coveters / idolaters, when we would never joke about a reputation of being adulterers! But, there it stands in the Word of God – “covetousness, which is idolatry.”

And yet, it is so easy to dismiss this because we live in a culture of covetousness... a society driven by the covetousness of wealth (chasing after stuff!), so that the norm to ‘keep up’ is the two-income family. Such does not mean you are in sin if both spouses must work for income. But we do well to consider the overarching

picture of society's covetousness behind such a current state of affairs. For if there are two incomes, there's more ability to buy stuff, and if there's more ability to buy stuff, there's more demand for the stuff; and the more demand for stuff, the higher the price for stuff; and the higher the price of stuff, the *less* able those who don't conform to the chasing after stuff are able to enjoy the luxurious 'norms' in society. Therefore, to remain a Christian, younger generation, you *may* (not saying you *will*, you *may*) have to learn to push back against the narrative and live with less stuff, that you may live with Christ. For, the recent history is now clear: this materialistically-driven society's generations... the more they lived with stuff, the less they lived with Christ. Such is the idolatry of covetousness – not *my* words; the *Scripture's* words!

How covetous we are is even seen in our society's birthrate – reported by the CDC just this past week to be at levels of civilizational implosion, civilizational starvation. In our rat race for stuff, to enjoy our share of the material wealth, our society sees children as an impediment to our success and joy.

Moreover, God grants fertility to young women and seems to imply that young men and young women should become one flesh far earlier than society is ready to approve that you have what it takes to make a materialistically self-sufficient and comfortable life.

And, in the pendulum swing that we sinners get on, even the daily bread of marriage and the family can be viewed

materialistically, covetously... as if my only responsibility is to gain the spouse and churn out children and put such “things” and possessions on display, but not also point my spouse to Christ and raise our children in the faith. As long as I have them, I have my supposedly godly ‘stuff.’

We sinners must repent of so many ways we have idolized the wealth of God’s creation. True, what wealth God has provided for us in all the forms of daily bread in his creation! Yet, we pursue it as if it does not serve *him*, but serves *us*... as if degrees, careers, income levels, even families do not serve *His* will, but serve *my* will. Notice, the covetousness of our greed is really the idolatry not of *Stuff*, but of Self. For stuff ultimately serves Self, which is why Self is so offended and defensive when the Word of God calls out your love of stuff.

And yet, the Lord does not thereby strip you of your daily bread. We need not deny that God’s provision for daily life is all around us in flesh-and-blood truth! How are we to handle it rightly, so that it is not under the condemnation that “all is vanity”?

Must we not repent and run to the foot of the cross and be healed of our idolatry by the one true God who is to be cherished as he bleeds and dies for us? That’s the faithful image, though of course the sacrificial death is finished, the sacramental outpouring is ours. And yet, we would make those sacramental gifts, too, to simply be ‘stuff’ – stuff to be observed, frequency to be meritoriously

enumerated – if we did not constantly see it through the lens of Jesus dying in our stead, to pour out the benefits.

What an unspeakable perfection was his substitution for us sinners – giving up, laying aside, all the stuff, not only of earth, but of his equality with the Father, not considering it something to be hoarded or even safeguarded for Self, but pouring it all out for you and me, for the express joy of *sharing* His inheritance with us! Do we explain away His warning against covetousness by forgetting how much He gave up for our salvation? He became poor, that we might become rich... not merely in rusting treasures of earth, but in the eternal treasures of heaven. Who is better qualified – not only as God of God, but (if that doesn't impress you) – but qualified by experience of setting aside all his riches for God's better will – who is more qualified to warn us of our covetousness than Jesus Christ, who gave up all to redeem us from our idolatry, indeed to grant unto us the one thing needful – the grace and mercy of the one God truly to be worshiped, cherished... our relationship with Him to be phalanxed and safeguarded forever.

That is the gift of your baptism, that you were in that baptism tied to Christ, that He might bring you to God, adopt you into the family of God, make you an heir of God... so that you need not hoard for yourself only to be condemned as a fool, your soul cast away into outer darkness; rather, you may live with the treasures of God as your eternal inheritance, even in your daily life... for, if you have

been baptized into Christ and died with him in baptism, then you are already as good as raised with Christ.

So, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

Such does not mean you despise the things of earth; it means you love them in proper accord with the things above. Husbands, love your wives – not in the covetousness that idolizes Self – but in the faith that cherishes the promises of Christ. For if we love *Christ* more than our self, *Christ* even more than our wife, then we will forever point our wives to Christ in word and deed and thereby love our wives the very best they can be loved, the very truest they can be loved without being objectified or idolized. The same is true for our children – loving Christ more means loving them best and raising them up in the fear of the Lord. And the same is true for our stuff – our degrees, our careers, our bank accounts, our inheritances – always judge it all in view of and bending the knee to Christ, and you will see it and use it faithfully for godly enjoyment and for the benefit of your neighbor.

Such is the wisdom the Preacher of Ecclesiastes desired to share with all, lest all be swept away in vanity and – not being rich in faith toward God – will be greeted by the Almighty, “You fool! Your life is required of you.”

But, for you who have been blessed to live the baptismal life in the family of God, God has given you wisdom and knowledge and joy to sit at the feet of Christ, be fed by Christ, have your life hidden in Christ, and one day enjoy the flesh-and-blood inheritance of being raised with Christ. That is an inheritance worth safeguarding with your dear brothers and sisters – a phalanx within the household of faith... an inheritance worth safeguarding *all the days of your life!*

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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