
A PERSON'S LIFE DOES NOT CONSIST IN HOW PLENTIFUL HIS POSSESSIONS ARE

Sermon for Harvest Thanksgiving, 2020

Luke 12:13-21

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Luke 12:13-21:
¹³ Someone in the crowd asked Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!"

¹⁴ Jesus asked him, "Man, who appointed Me to be a judge or an arbitrator over you?"

¹⁵ Then He told them, "Beware and be on your guard against all greed! For a person's life does not consist in how plentiful his possessions are."

¹⁶ Then Jesus told them a parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, 'What am I to do? For I have no place to store my produce.'

¹⁸ "Then he said, 'This is what I shall do: I shall pull down my barns and build bigger ones and shall store my grain and all my other goods in them.

¹⁹ Then I shall say to myself, "Soul, you have many good things stored up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink and enjoy yourself!"

²⁰ "However, God said to him, 'You fool, this very night your life will be demanded of you. Then who will get the things that you have prepared?'"

²¹ Jesus said, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

"A person's life does not consist in how plentiful his possessions are." These words of Jesus are worth some serious thought. To illustrate this truth, this warning, Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool: **"The ground of a certain**

rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What am I to do? For I have no place to store my produce.’

¹⁸ **“Then he said, ‘This is what I shall do: I shall pull down my barns and build bigger ones and shall store my grain and all my other goods in them.’”** Then he gives what has to be one of the silliest speeches recorded in Scripture: He says to himself, **“Soul, you have many good things stored up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!”** After all, isn’t that what the soul is all about?

Hardly. God has the final word in the parable, saying to the rich man, **“You fool, this very night your life will be demanded of you. Then who will get the things that you have prepared?”** Of course, in themselves, there is nothing wrong with relaxing, eating, drinking and being joyous, but these are helpful treatments for the body and mind, not the soul. The rich man had expected his riches to take care of his soul - at least for many years to come. But saving souls is the work of God, and there was the rich man’s problem - as soon as he declared that his goods would take care of his soul, he made them into a *false god*. When God demanded his soul that night in the parable, the relaxing and eating and drinking and enjoyment could do nothing for him in the Judgment.

The rich man’s life did not consist in how plentiful his possessions were. They could not prevent his death; and when he would die, he couldn’t take them with him. Someone else would undoubtedly receive them - if moth and rust didn’t corrupt them first.

This parable is a clear warning to beware of the sin of greed. Obsession with possessions is a terrible temptation. It leads to a valuing of things over people. It leads to a placing of trust in things that fall apart and pass away. It’s a temptation to resent God if He does not give all that we want. It seduces one to believe that his soul is good in God’s eyes because he has enough things. Greed is a dangerous idol, and like lust, it’s never satisfied because the more you have, the more you want. It always requires that more sacrifices are made in order to pursue more gain.

However, while the rich man in the parable already has all sorts of wealth, remember, Jesus tells this parable because of a man who isn’t wealthy *yet*.

This whole lesson begins with someone in the crowd saying to Him, **“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!”** This person asked Jesus to mediate a family dispute. People would bring such requests to rabbis all the time, but Jesus refused to be drawn into this dispute between brothers, just as He did not intervene earlier when Martha wanted His support to get her sister’s help.¹ Though as God He provides all things, Jesus wasn’t there to divide out the inheritance: He had not come for such temporal things. Why had He come? To do what goods and grain, what relaxing and eating and drinking could not do: He had come to save souls for eternity - and if their souls, then also their bodies. So He warned the crowd against covetousness, against desiring things that they did not have. It’s a close cousin to greed, and with coveting comes a host of sins. Like greed, among these sins is the willingness to pursue things at the expense of others, of wishing harm upon your neighbour. Worse though, is discontent. Covetousness says, *“What I have isn’t enough. I should have more. I want more. God has messed up in only giving me what I have.”* The one who sins by coveting seems even sillier than the rich fool in the parable. At least the rich man said, *“I trust in what I have to take care of my soul.”* The one who covets says, *“I trust in what I don’t have to take care of my soul.”* So Jesus warns, **“Beware and be on your guard against all greed! For a person’s life does not consist in how plentiful his possessions are.”**

Our lives do not consist in the abundance of possessions. Greed and covetousness tempt daily. We shall always be tempted to want more, to worry about what things we don’t have or to resent those who have more than we do, but it doesn’t matter how much one does or does not have - it’s all quite relative. While it is true that the Lord has blessed our country with immense prosperity, no matter how much wealth we have, or don’t have, we are tempted to greed and to covetousness. We are often tempted to believe that, as long as we have enough of what we want, then life is good and our souls are taken care of. But **“a person’s life does not consist in how plentiful his possessions are.”**

¹ Luke 10:40

Let's expand on that a little. Life does not consist in the abundance of *popularity*. This is one of the devil's great attacks on our young. The in-crowd sets the standard, and if you conform, you're in. It's not popular to be a young, confessing Christian. So, if you have friends who are experimenting with all sorts of disobedience and immorality, and you don't want to run the risk of being called a goody-two-shoes, the temptation is to put your faith on the back burner because what Jesus says, isn't "in." But popularity can't do anything for your soul. On the Last Day, what is "in" now will be definitely "out." Way out. Outer-darkness out.

Again, life does not consist in the abundance of *looks or fashion sense*. Of course, there's nothing wrong with looking good, but society always seems to want to find one's worth by how you look. It's a losing game: age comes upon us all, and clothing goes out of style even faster. But that's not our life, either.

Again, life does not consist in the *abundance of health*. Our culture is quick to make gods out of athletics, health and nutrition. While there's nothing wrong with any of those, the temptation is to believe that we are only truly alive when we are disease-free, injury-free, cellulose-free, or whatever. This also is a losing proposition, because time and chance happen to all. If health becomes a god, we lose all, because life does not consist in the abundance of our health.

Once more, life does not consist in the *abundance of the knowledge we've accrued, or the peace within a family, or the goals that we've attained, or the promotions we've received, or the items we've crossed off our bucket lists*. Often we are tempted to covet all of these things, to believe that they are what gives life, and to believe they are good for our souls. *But none of these things gives life to our souls.*

Flee these temptations, and repent when you give in to them. All of these things are false gods when we place our trust in them, and putting trust in them reveals even more about us than greed or covetousness. It reveals that we don't really understand life or soul. It reveals that we do not love and trust in God above all things as we should. While all of the things we've mentioned are blessings that can make life happier, *none of these things can give life.* All of these things are meaningless vanity that soon passes away. More importantly,

none of these things can give life to a soul. That is why Jesus warns, **“Beware, and be on your guard against all greed! For a person’s life does not consist in how plentiful his possessions are.”**

Now all of this is true, but please note: we’ve answered this all according to the Law. The Law says to guard against all covetousness because it’s a sin to believe that life does consist in the abundance of possessions. However, there’s some very good news to be found here. If life does not consist in the abundance of possessions, then of what does life consist?

Life consists of something that does not pass away, and that is the life that the Lord alone gives. This is what the cross is about. Jesus became flesh and went to the cross for us. He has died for our sin, including greed and covetousness and every evil desire. He has died our death, so that we may not go the way of all things in this world which passes away. Jesus has risen from the grave to give us eternal life in heaven. He has made us children of His Father through Holy Baptism so that now we are heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

All things in this world will crumble to dust, but not His holy Word. *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will certainly not pass away,”* said Jesus (Luke 21:33). Jesus’ words include, *“I forgive you for all of your sins.”* They include, *“I shall never leave you or forsake you”* (Hebrews 13:5). They include, *“I am the Resurrection and the Life. The person who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will assuredly never die”* (John 11:25-26). These words will never pass away, and He speaks them to us. The kingdom of heaven belongs to us. In Him, we have hope.

Greed and covetousness are sins of the hopeless: if someone has no faith in God who will raise all from the dead, then this life is all that there is. If this life is all that there is, then the best one can do in this life is to grab as much as he can and hold onto it as long as he can. That’s a life of quiet desperation - maybe not-so-quiet. The things of this world are easy to lose, hard to regain; and eventually, all things pass away.

We still have the spectre of death hanging around, but we also have hope in Christ. If we worry about what we do not have, then we must consider the

lilies of the field and the sparrows of the air, knowing how much the Lord cares for them²: because we know that Jesus didn't become a lily to redeem lilies or a sparrow to redeem sparrows. No! He became man to redeem us: and if He has redeemed us at the cost of His own blood, then He will not fail to give us forgiveness and life.

Because things are so easy to lose and hard to regain, we are tempted to love things too much - to hoard things out of greed rather than use them in service to others. But that's the life of those with no hope, and that is not for us. The Lord sets us free from such greed, giving us instead a kingdom that will not pass away. Where things of this world we treasure are damaged or lost, we know that they were gifts of God for a while, but they are not our lives. Where any of us has an opportunity to help our neighbour, to care for those in need and support the proclamation of the Gospel, we don't clutch to keep all we have for ourselves, because we know that the things that we do have are gifts of God to be used in service to others. Besides, we can't take it with us.

Dear friends, we have hope because **“a person's life does not consist in how plentiful his possessions are.”** Each one of us has a much greater abundance than that: our lives consist of Christ, and the hope of glory. Our lives consist of His life, because He has joined us to His death and resurrection so that we shall live forever with Him. Life does not consist of things that pass away, but of Christ who keeps us for eternity. Of the rich man in the parable, Jesus says, **“So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”** Despite his trust in his own treasure, such a soul is not fed by his possessions, and so he is poor and dead before the Lord. To lay up treasure for oneself is hopeless, but we are rich toward God. We are rich toward God because He pours out His riches upon us - grace and life and every blessing in Christ. He is the Shepherd of our souls, and so we shall dwell in His house forever.³

So Jesus says, **“Beware and be on your guard against all greed! For a person's life does not consist in how plentiful his possessions are.”** We

² Matthew 6:25f

³ Psalm 23:6

shall always be tempted to hear Him as a killjoy as He warns against love for the things of this world, but ultimately, His message is this: He has better things to give - eternal things. Life isn't the sum total of our possessions. The Lord is our life and our salvation.⁴ Hopelessness is not for us, but eternal life because Jesus pours out abundantly the riches of His grace so that all our sins are forgiven. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ. Amen.

PRAYER FOR HARVEST THANKSGIVING

God our Father, You have created the universe in great wisdom, and sustain it by Your powerful word. You are good to everyone, and have compassion on all that You have made. We enter Your house of prayer with thanksgiving, and come before You with songs of joy. We thank You for the many blessings and joys You lavish on our lives. We thank You for soil and seed, sunlight and rain, health and strength, machinery and technology, and every other blessing by which You give us our daily bread. You have given us a plentiful land, rich in resources for agriculture, mining, and industry. You have blessed us with education and skills to use these resources for the good of our country and its people. Although You do not always spare us from trouble and dark days, we still must confess that our cup of blessing is overflowing, and so we praise Your name. Make us continually aware of Your goodness, O Lord. Increase our trust that in all things You are working for our good.

But, Lord, You not only care for our bodies; Your richest love is reserved for the salvation of our souls. Because You have revealed Yourself to us in Your Word, we know You in Your limitless grace, and live in the light of Your truth and love. We thank You especially for Your greatest of gifts: Jesus Christ our Saviour, and for all the blessings of the Gospel and the Church. Help us to appreciate fully these choicest gifts, and to produce in our lives a rich harvest of faith, goodness, and love.

⁴ Psalm 27:1

Free us from every temptation to trust in uncertain things like material wealth. Free us from covetousness, envy, and jealousy. Increase our joy in what You provide, and make us content. Make us more sensitive to what others need. Give us compassion to help those who have too little, and the opportunities to share Your blessings. Let our service to others pave the way for witness to the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ Your Son. Teach us to use wisely the things You place at our disposal.

Bless and strengthen the poor and the hungry, those who cannot work, the lonely, the depressed, and especially those who are suffering because of their Christian faith. Give them all the generous help of friends, but, above all, strong trust in Your presence and care.

Guide the nations on earth, and particularly those countries whose people are desperately poor. Grant that all who look up to You for material blessings may find Your kingdom, and Your righteousness. Bless our country Australia with a united spirit and godly goals. Teach its leaders and its people to know, believe, and do Your will. Remove from us things that are unwise and harmful.

Continue to supply the spiritual needs of our families, so that truth, love, and high morals may bless our homes.

We offer You our prayers and our songs of praise, heavenly Father, in the name of Your dear Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and honour for ever. Amen.

Harvest Thanksgiving

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

¹ “When you enter the land that the LORD, your God, is giving you as an inheritance and you take possession of it and live in it, ² you shall take some of the first from all the produce of the ground, which you will harvest from your land, which the LORD, your God, is giving you! You shall put it in a

basket and go to the place where the LORD, your God, will choose to make His name dwell! ³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and tell him, ‘I declare today to the LORD, your God, that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our forefathers to give us!’ ⁴ Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD, your

God! ⁵ You shall make this response before the LORD, your God: ‘My forefather was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt with few people and lived as a foreigner there. There he became a great, powerful and numerous nation. ⁶ However, the Egyptians treated us harshly, oppressed us and imposed severe forced labour on us. ⁷ Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our forefathers, and the LORD heard our cry. He saw our misery, distress and oppression. ⁸ The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. ⁹ He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ So now, look! I have brought the first produce of the land, which You, O LORD, have given me.’ Then you shall set it down before the LORD, your God, and worship before the LORD, your God! ¹¹ Then you shall be glad about all the good things that the LORD, your God, has given to you and your family, together with the Levite and the foreigner who is living among you!

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

⁶ In addition, I say this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each person should give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion! For God loves a cheerful giver.

⁸ God can make all grace abound toward you, that you may always have all that you need in every way and may abound in every good work, ⁹ as Scripture has said: “He has distributed. He has given to the poor. His righteousness remains for ever.” ¹⁰ He who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed and will increase what your righteousness produces. ¹¹ You are being made rich in every way that you may be totally generous. This is producing thanksgiving to God through us. ¹² This work, which you are doing in serving others, not only supplies the needs of the believers but is also overflowing through many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³ By this service, by which you prove yourselves, you are glorifying God for your subordinate confession of the Good

News of Christ and for your generous contribution to them and to all people, ¹⁴ while they also long for you deeply and pray for you, because of the extreme kindness that God has shown you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

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¹⁴ Jesus asked him, “Man, who appointed Me to be a judge or an arbitrator over you?”

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