

Prioritizing Possessions

Harmony M.B.C., June 5, 2011
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Luke 12:13-34

We live in a world that is all about materialism. The hearts of earthly people are focused on these things, and always have been. If there is no thought for a life after death, no thought about a set of standards that looks beyond getting and keeping, then getting and keeping stuff tends to be the big obsession of man. If you are a Christian and you have gotten side-tracked into thinking that getting and keeping stuff is the big goal of life, you are at the place in your life to re-think how you think.

Jesus saw something amiss in the thinking of the man who asked Him to arbitrate between him and his brother. The aim of the man was to get Jesus to force his brother to share his possessions with him. This man believed in the redistribution of wealth. We can see then, that such a communist idea is not new. It has been around probably as long as man. Such ideas can be called communist, or fascist, or statist but they are all of one cloth. Such philosophies hold that anybody who has wealth should be made by the government to share that wealth with those who do not have as much. It is a good thing for us to share our wealth with the unfortunate and those in need, but the idea that the government should be given the power to make people do this is nothing more than substituting the power of the law for benevolence. It is also one step toward establishing a government that dictates all the rules without any consent of the people. This is completely contrary to all rules of liberty. But, I digress.

Now, that brother had gotten those possessions as part of an inheritance, and the man who was asking Jesus to play lawyer was obviously feeling like he had a right to some of the stuff. In Jewish law, God commanded that firstborn sons receive a double portion of the inheritance (**Deut. 21:17**). If this is what happened here, and I believe it is, then this man was expressing covetousness in the strictest sense of the word. This is what brought Jesus to use the situation to teach something about lusting after stuff that actually goes beyond covetousness. This is what we want to think about today.

I. Coveting Possessions Can Be a Snare (vv. 13-15)

- We are warned to take heed and beware regarding whether covetousness plays any important role in our lives
 - ▶ Like a faithful companion who warns us when he sees a cottonmouth lying in our path, the Lord warns us away from every temptation to covet.
 - ▶ We are reminded about covetousness when we see two dogs eating at the same bowl. It is in the nature of those dogs to demand the entire meal, and they will become “animalistic” to get it. The dominant dog will win, because He will growl, snap, fight and injure the other dog if that other dog does not back off.
- If covetousness plagues us, we show that we are placing too much value on what is possessed, but there is an **added danger** in wanting what someone else has. The danger is that in a case of strict covetousness, we are **wanting to take possession of someone else’s**

stuff. This is not the same as seeing a nice shiny item at a store and wishing we had it. In true covetousness, we are mentally lusting after someone else's possessions, and this is the transgression. But this is not the whole lesson Jesus teaches us in our text. It is about something even more sinister that lies at the root of covetousness, and has the capacity to enslave us to a way of thinking that blinds us to real and lasting treasure or possessions.

- We are warned that measuring the meaningfulness of our lives by our possessions is a faulty yard stick
 - ▶ This undoubtedly includes (not only measuring our status among men but also) allowing ourselves to imagine that we cannot and will not have a fulfilling life unless we have a lot of stuff.
- We are also warned that becoming tunnel-visioned about material gain will lead us to a dead end.

II. Handling of Possessions Can Be a Snare (vv. 16-21)

- Note that Jesus taught this parable for the purpose of warning people about what happens when there is covetousness, but, as I said, He has turned this into a lesson about having too great an obsession about possessions (as I also said, that is essentially what makes men covet, but in our parable, the rich farmer isn't coveting anybody's possessions, yet Christ uses him as the example of how not to think).
 - ▶ There is no condemnation here about the plentiful harvest
 - ▶ There is no condemnation here about accommodating the plentiful harvest
 - ▶ The condemnation is not about seeking comfort
 - ▶ The condemnation is not about this man enjoying his bounty
 - **Ecc. 9:7** Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.
 - ▶ The condemnation is aimed at two things:
 - 1. The presumption he shows about his future (the length and comfort of his life)
 - ✓ His contemplations are all about him
 - ✓ His plans include no one but himself (including his household is understood)
 - ✓ He views his future as certain to be smooth, comfortable, a time of ease and enjoyment
 - ✓ His dependence for such an imagined future was resting in his sudden bounty (i.e. his wealth)
 - 2. Those with this agenda are not being rich toward God
 - Windfalls ought always to be contemplated with the Lord in mind
 - Any windfall we experience had to come by permission and providence of God
 - To treat blessings, or even the usual possessions in general, as though God had not part in it is sacrilege...even for unbelievers

Which brings us to our third thought:

III. Failure to Comprehend the Force of God's Providence and Failure To Rely On It Can Be a Snare (vv. 22-33)

- take no thought: Gr. Merimnao = don't be anxious
- v.23 - Prioritizing the life above even necessities
- vv. 24 - God's care of ravens becomes an example

IV. Priorities Determine the Focus of a Person's Affections (v.34)

- If getting and keeping stuff is the main focus of our lives, then our affections will be set upon whatever things guarantee that gaining of possessions
 - (this is why scripture tells us that the love of money is the root of all evil - people love money because money means having the power to have “things” in our lives)
- If our affections are on heaping up stuff to ourselves we will love that pursuit and its results more than we love eternal things
- It is essential to a Christian's witness and productiveness that his heart be on the things of the kingdom