

Consumed by Cravings

Luke 12:13-21

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Where do you look for satisfaction? Can you find it in the blessings you have received and the fellowship you have with the Lord, or do you find yourself looking longingly at the blessings and gifts of others? Jesus often contrasted satisfaction with covetousness, because He knew that covetous people can never be satisfied; they will never have enough. Let's learn from Jesus today that riches are not a guarantee of satisfaction; riches are a test to determine where true satisfaction comes from.

It's always interesting to discover how someone views you, and how their view differs from how you view yourself.

Young children or grandchildren sometimes express something that lets you know how they perceive you, and that can get interesting.

I remember many years ago when our children were young, we were playing a game—I don't remember what the game was—and when it came to my turn, one of my daughters wanted to change the rules to make it easier on me, God bless her for her compassion. But when I asked her why, she said, "Because you're so old."

Just the other day, one of our grandsons had a birthday, and I asked him, "How old are you now?" And he proudly said, "I'm four!" I said, "How old do you think I am?" He didn't even hesitate, but said, "You're really, really, really, really, really, really, old." I sent him to timeout; he needed to get his heart right!

You've probably heard the true account of Alfred Nobel who came to the realization that what people thought about him was the opposite of how he wanted to be perceived.

The year was 1888, and Nobel was a Swedish chemist who had made a fortune applying his discoveries of nitroglycerin as well as his invention of and the production of dynamite.

His brother Ludvig lived in France and when he died unexpectedly, Alfred was sent his brother's obituary. But the French newspapers had confused these two brothers and had written an obituary for Alfred.

The French newspaper headline read, "The Merchant of Death is Dead" and the obituary included the words, "He will be remembered for creating the potential for mass destruction."

He was confronted with the truth of how he was viewed by the world; he was so shaken by this that he resolved to change his legacy.

He immediately established a trust from his personal wealth of \$9 million dollars (that would be worth \$280 million in today's economy). Nobel went to work establishing international awards for people whose work benefited mankind on some level—most notably the advancement of world peace. He died eight years later.

And his plan worked. Today, when you hear his name, you think of the Nobel Peace Prize; you would never think of mass destruction, or even the invention of dynamite.

Adapted from Randy Alcorn, [The Treasure Principle](#) (Multnomah Publishers, 2001), p. 77

In one of the Lord's parables, we're introduced to a man who received from God his obituary just a few hours before he died.

He won't have nine years to change anything about his perspective, his passion, his purpose in life; in fact, he didn't want to.

And frankly, no one who knew him would have imagined that he needed to change anything.

He was an upright, upstanding, respected if not envied, successful, hard-working, honest businessman. There was not one smudge on his reputation.

And yet, just a few hours before his death, God speaks to him and calls him, to his face as it were, a fool. A fool—that's strong language.

No one would have considered him a fool. But he was a fool in the eyes of God.

Let's find out why and take note of the warning we're given; we're in the gospel by Luke, chapter 12, where the Lord is essentially interrupted by a rather angry young man.

Now verse 13:

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”

Luke 12:13-14

Now it was typical for rabbis of this day to be sought out as mediators for legal disputes, especially as it related to Mosaic law.

Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1 (Zondervan, 2002), p. 427

And inheritance laws were a big deal that affected just about everybody.

But this isn't the mission of Jesus. He's not setting up shop to settle disputes about the laws of inheritance.

And this particular inheritance had reached a boiling point. What was going on here?

Well, we know from Jewish law that the firstborn received as his birthright twice the inheritance received by younger siblings. The oldest brother was then responsible for the support of his mother, if she were still living, along with any unmarried sisters in the family.

Ivor Powell, *Luke's Thrilling Gospel* (Kregel Publications, 1965), p. 286

And quite frankly, that was a key reason why the oldest son got double the inheritance. It wasn't because he was twice as special; it was because he now had twice the responsibility.

We also know that the typical estate in Jesus' day would be settled in a few months and evidently this one wasn't being settled.

Evidently the older brother didn't want to divide the family property, which would mean a reduction in the overall wealth of the family estate.

David E. Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 512

The younger brother doesn't care about that; he just wants his fair share.

But one thing *is* certain from the Lord's response here: both brothers are embroiled in this inheritance dispute.

The younger brother wants more than he has, and the older brother is determined to hang on to what he has, and it's getting ugly.

If you take a closer look at **verse 13** you realize that this younger brother isn't *asking* Jesus what to do about it, he's *telling* Jesus what to do about it.

“Jesus! Tell my brother to give me my portion. Drop the hammer on him; tell him to divide the inheritance with me!”

And Jesus refuses.

But now the Lord responds in a more general fashion, not only to this younger brother, but to the crowd around Him, and remember, **verse 1** told us that thousands of people were jammed in everywhere to hear Him.

And they would certainly want to know what Jesus had to say about something like this which would affect them all, sooner or later.

But instead of expounding on the finer points of inheritance law, Jesus goes deeper; in fact, He goes directly to the heart. In **verse 15**, **Jesus said to them:**

“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness”

Luke 12:15a

The Greek expression for “**take care**” means “be perceptive; use your powers of observation.”

Charles R. Swindoll, [Insights on Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2012), p. 327

In other words, look around and watch what happens to people who are consumed by their cravings—which is a good definition of covetousness, to be consumed by cravings.

Look around at people who are on that dead-end street that never reaches satisfaction.

Listen to Solomon, who put it clearly:

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.

Ecclesiastes 5:10

Now don't miss the point: money and wealth are not the problem; it is the love of it, the pursuit of it, the desire for more of it that takes you down a dead-end street.

Look around, Jesus says. Use your powers of observation, look at people who have become consumed by wealth. Listen to the lessons many of them learned only at the end of their lives. Like:

- Vanderbilt who said, “The management of \$200 million is enough to kill someone.”
- John Astor, the first multi-millionaire in American history wrote, “I am the most miserable man on earth.

- John D. Rockefeller said late in life, “I have made many millions but they have brought me no happiness.”
- And Henry Ford said, late in life, “I was happier when I was a mechanic.”

Quoted by Alcorn, p. 50

Look around.

Now Jesus adds a double warning here—again verse 15:

“Take care, and be on your guard ...”

Luke 12:15a

The word for **guard** means to stay alert; post a guard and don’t let it ever go off duty.

The Lord goes on now to deliver here in **verse 15** a principle for governing our thinking; He says:

“For one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Luke 12:15b

In other words, really living—living a life worth living—has absolutely nothing to do with what you possess.

And that runs counter—in every generation, and in every culture—to the fallen nature of our flesh. It demonstrated itself all the way back in the Garden where Eve was tempted to have more. Satan effectively said, “Don’t be satisfied with who you are and where you are and what you have, Eve. Don’t you want more?”

That same temptation governs the world systems today and it’s just as dangerous.

Advertisers are skilled at developing consumer cravings early on.

Elementary school students are targeted by advertisements to the tune of \$15 billion a year. Early on a child is told they need something else, something more, because what they have isn’t new enough or good enough or cool enough or exciting enough.

Katy Kelly & Linda Kulman, “Kid Power”, citation:usnews.com (9-13-04)

Advertisers now know through extensive research that by the age of 2, children can recognize brand logos and reach for them from shopping carts. Children will influence more than \$600 billion worth of purchases annually; from the cereal they eat to the clothes they wear to the vehicles their parents will drive.

“Kid Power”

But again, the problem isn't cereal or SUVs. Our problem isn't what we possess, the problem is what possesses us.

Jesus effectively says, "You'd better stay alert, always post a guard on duty. Your fallen sinful selfish nature and the fallen world around you will do nothing but enable you to be consumed by cravings."

The word Jesus uses here in verse 15 for **covetousness** is translated elsewhere as greed; it simply means the insatiable desire for more.

Swindoll, p. 327

It can blind you to what matters most in life. I mean, think about it: imagine having one opportunity in your life to talk to Jesus. I wonder if this younger brother thought about it later. Thousands of people packed into this scene and he happens to be close to the front and Jesus pauses after speaking and he jumps in and basically says, "Jesus, there's something I want—and I want You to get it for me."

Just like many people today, they're using Jesus to cover for their covetousness. Prosperity theology is the latest term for covetousness and greed – God is reduced to driving the delivery truck to fill their orders.

Jesus cuts to the heart of it and calls it what it is: *an insatiable thirst for more.*

Now what the Lord does next is tell a story—a parable—to describe a man this younger brother would like to become, along with everybody else in the audience.

Jesus is going to show them what a dangerous dead-end it can become.

Now verse 16:

And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'"

Luke 12:16-17

Now you need to understand that in the ancient world, grain in the barn was as good as money in the bank.

Adapted from Swindoll, p.329

And keep in mind, according to the way the Lord describes him here, this man has earned this bumper crop; this is honest gain. This would be considered the approval of God.

The Pharisees were teaching, and I quote: "Whom the Lord loves he makes rich." This bumper crop was the evidence to them of Divine approval.

The Lord even implies as much in **verse 16** when He says, “*The land* of a rich man produced plentifully.”

In other words, the rich man couldn’t cause this to happen; God did it; He sent just the right amount of rain and sunshine on this man’s land; there had been no blight that year, no pestilence, no locusts. This year was going to yield an incredible bumper crop.

And let me tell you, his success in everyone’s eyes would have led them to believe he deserved even greater respect than ever. What they didn’t realize was that he was in greater danger than ever.

R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume II* (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 48

When God brings us a bumper crop, or in our economy, a record year of sales and bonuses, when we get more money, we often think, “This is a blessing from God.” And it is. But it isn’t just a blessing; it’s a test.

Adapted from Alcorn, p. 73

Perhaps you’ve lived long enough to know that the greatest tests to your vitality—your trust or dependence or even close companionship with the Lord—doesn’t typically ride on a horse named Poverty, but in a carriage called Prosperity.

If our cup is overflowing, and we complain about the size of the cup, that’s a sign we are failing the test of covetousness.

And that’s what’s going to happen here – **verse 17**:

“And he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink be merry.’””

Luke 12:17-19

This statement means, “I can now live like I really want to live, and it’ll all be about I, Me, and Mine from here on out.”

Relax; eat; drink; be merry; live it up.

Again, the problem isn’t the surplus; the problem is his spirit.

I want you to notice that in his conversation with himself, there's no reference whatever to God's hand. There's no prayer of thanksgiving, no plan to offer a first fruits offering to God, no mention of helping others in need.

Just 6 times, "*I - I - I - I - I - I*" and 5 times "my" – "*my crops,*" "*my barns,*" "*my grain,*" "*my goods,*" and even "*my soul.*"

God never entered his thoughts.

Which is why God comes to him here in **verse 20**:

"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you ...'"

Luke 12:20a

God says, "I have written your obituary, let me show you; everybody thinks you're blessed and honored and wise, but here's the truth: you're a fool."

But keep in mind, in the Bible, being the fool has nothing to do with stupidity. It has to do with spirituality.

A fool is not someone who is senseless. A fool is godless.

King David wrote in **Psalm 53:1**, "*The fool has said in his heart there is no God.*" He says it in his heart; he would never say it out loud, but he has that secret conversation with his soul where the truth is known: he doesn't care anything about God."

Jesus uses that same word for **fool** here in this text. He isn't saying anything out loud, but to his soul.

But don't miss it: he is the man this younger son wants to become. A rich man with more than he can handle, for which he will be applauded and respected and revered by his community. He's diligent, he's blessed.

God comes along here in **verse 20** and tells him who he really is. God effectively tells him, "While you're lying on your bed thinking of all you'll have tomorrow, your life ends tonight."

William Barclay wrote that the tragedy of this man's life was that he never saw beyond himself, and he never saw beyond this world.

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 164

Now notice the end of verse 20; everything he had collected and stored:

"And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

Luke 12:20b

In other words, who gets this rich man's money and possessions? Who gets his stuff?

This returns the subject back to the earlier question of the younger brother who was angry with his older brother over his inheritance.

Maybe Jesus looked directly at this young man, as he wrapped up this parable and asked, "Where will this rich man's wealth end up?" They will argue over it and none of them will be satisfied with either.

Adapted from R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), p. 691

Jesus now applies it to all of them, and us, here ***in verse 21***:

"So is the one who lays up treasure for himself ..."

Luke 12:21a

In other words, whoever lives for themselves ends up just like all these characters here in this scene.

The heirs of this rich farmer won't be satisfied; the rich farmer wasn't satisfied; the younger brother wasn't satisfied, and the older brother wasn't satisfied.

And that's because covetousness is never satisfied. It is a craving for more and those who go down this road end up being consumed by their cravings.

Jesus makes one final comment here in verse 21:

"So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Luke 12:21

What does it mean to be rich in God? Well, it means to be rich in those things that only God can give you. They are priceless things.

Peace, joy, forgiveness, purpose, daily mercy, wisdom and insight from God's Word, communion with Christ, the indwelling Holy Spirit who seals us and secures us and then gifts us to serve others, a home in Heaven forever.

Those are priceless gifts; to live with those things in mind is what it means to be rich in God.

In his convicting little book entitled, *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn writes:

Five minutes after we die, we will know exactly how we wished to have lived. But God has given us his word so that we don't have to wait to die, to find out. And He's given us His Spirit to empower us to live that way now.

Ask yourself this question: five minutes after I die, what will I wish I had given away while I had the chance? When you come up with the answer, go ahead and give it away. What will you wish you had done to please the Lord? Well, do them as soon as you get the chance.

Adapted from Alcorn, p. 79

Well said.

Beloved, let's not spend our lives like the characters in this passage who were all craving for more.

Let's not pursue the things of earth that we cannot keep; let's pursue the things of God that we will never lose.

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