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Luke 12:13-21

Life Consists in God

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14 Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" 15 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." 16 And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 18 "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. 19 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." ' 20 "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?' 21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Life does not consist in the abundance of things

"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). In our gospel reading for today, we find a man who wanted Jesus to intercede in the matter of an inheritance dispute. We can imagine the man probably had a good reason for trying to press Jesus into service. Maybe he was behind on his payments and needed the money. Maybe it was an issue of principle and he wanted his brother to follow through on his parents' wishes. Maybe his brother was a drunk who would drink the money away. There are many possible reasons why this man sought Jesus' help. However, whatever the reason, Jesus saw right through the man. Jesus understood that beneath his good reason was an evil motive, namely, greed. That is why Jesus said, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

These are serious words from Jesus. Greed is always a serious business. The apostle Paul tells us that the love of money is the root of evil (I Tim 6:10). We see this even today. The world loves money. The world will do anything to acquire more money. But money really isn't the problem. Many rich people use money in a godly manner. The love of money is the problem because it causes you to forget God and to forget your neighbor.

In the parable, we see the forgetful nature of greed. The man forgot that everything he has is a gift from God. Notice what Jesus says in verse 16, "The ground produced a good crop." Jesus does not say the man produced a good crop. It was the ground. The rain and sunshine were just right. The temperature and soil conditions were perfect. The result was a mountain of grain – a bumper crop that filled his silos and burst his barns. Does this man thank God for the sun, the rain, the temperature and the soil? No! He has forgotten God altogether. Instead, he thinks that everything he has comes from his hand. That is why he says: "my crops... my barns... my grain... and my goods." In his greed, the man has forgotten God.

In his greed, the man has also forgotten his neighbor. This man has a great crop. Does he throw a party with his family to celebrate? Does he give extra to his workers? Does he fill his silos full and then give the surplus to the poor? No! Instead, he speaks to no one in the parable but himself. He is alone in his greed. He has forgotten God and his neighbor. “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

What is God to do with someone who has turned money into a god? What is God to do with us who turn many things into gods? Whether it is money and possessions, ideologies and political convictions, addictions and abuses, whatever we place our trust in, that is our god. All of us have many gods. What is God to do with us?

We see God’s response to such idolatry in verse 20: “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you.” What does God do? He does not give the man a second chance. He does not drop off a self-help book for the man to read. He does not even tell him to search the Scriptures and repent. Instead, God takes the man’s life that very night. “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Life Consists in God

Why does God act this way? Why does God act so strongly against idolatry? We get our answer from the first commandment. “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:2-6).

The key word is jealous. God is a jealous God. Now you have to understand that God’s jealousy is different from our own. Our jealousy usually arises from insecurity. God’s jealousy arises out of love.

Let me illustrate it in the following way. When I was dating my wife, I was in seminary in Minnesota and she was still in college in California. Because she is attractive, many young men wanted to date her. There were two men in particular who made me jealous. The first man was a family friend who was a CHP officer. When I heard that he was coming around the house to see her, I got jealous. I was jealous of his uniform. I was jealous that her family liked him. I was jealous because I was insecure.

That same year, a freshman had a crush on Jamie. When I heard about this, I was jealous in a different way. I was not threatened by him. He was a freshman – a peanut I could stomp. My jealousy arose over the fact that he was able to spend time with Jamie. I was jealous that he could talk to her in person. I was jealous because I loved Jamie and wanted to spend time with her.

Though this is not a perfect illustration, God’s jealousy is more like the second situation than the first. With God, there is no insecurity. God’s jealousy arises out of his fierce love. God is jealous because God does not want anyone or anything else claiming your love. God’s love is constantly at work to bring us closer to Him.

In the passage, the man wanted the inheritance because he thought his life consisted in riches. He thought that riches would give him a full life. He thought he had no need for God. He was wrong. Life does not consist in possessions; life consists in God's love. You can see God's love all throughout the passage.

God reveals his love in the harvest. He gives the man a good crop. As the catechism reminds us, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true" (*Luther's Small Catechism*). God provides everything we need in this life. That is love.

God shows his love as Jesus takes time out of his busy schedule to deal with a man whose concern was money. Jesus could have passed by and said nothing. Jesus could have said, "Don't bother me. I have more important issues; I have to die on the cross!" Instead, Jesus stopped and listened to the man. Jesus preached law and gospel to him. That is love.

There is more. The very fact that Jesus was there at all is a demonstration of God's love. The man wanted an earthly inheritance that rusts. Jesus came to give a better inheritance – one that moth and rust cannot destroy. This inheritance is bought not with gold or silver, but with his holy and precious blood. Because it is an inheritance, we do not buy it. We do not lease it. We do not earn it. God gives it to us as a gift. That is why later in chapter 12 Jesus says, "Have no fear little flock, for it's your Father's good pleasure to gladly give you the kingdom." That is love.

This whole passage is about what sustains your life. If you think good possessions, good deeds, or good thoughts will give you life, you are wrong – dead wrong. There is life only in God's love. "But God demonstrates his love in that while we were yet sinners, Christ Jesus died for us" (Romans 5:8). As the hymn tells us:

There is welcome for the sinner,
And a promised grace made good;
There is mercy with the Savior;
There is healing in his blood.
There is grace enough for thousands
Of new worlds as great as this;
There is room for fresh creations
In that upper home of bliss.

"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Reformation, your life does not consist in possessions. Your life consists in Jesus Christ. You are in Jesus. You have life. God loves you.

**In Jesus Name,
Amen.**