

## **"Don't Call Us Greedy!"** **Luke 12:13-21 and Colossians 3:1-11**

**"Greed is good,"** shouts Gordon Gekko, in the movie, *Wall Street*. In the sequel *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* – Gordon, just released from prison, says, **"Someone reminded me that I once said, 'Greed is good.' Now it seems that it's legal."**

Or as sociologist Richard Harvey Brown put it, **"The seven cardinal sins of the church have become the seven cardinal virtues of capitalism."**

Yet Jesus warns of the destructive power of greed with an exaggerated caricature of a rich farmer.

So I suggest we put warning labels on our dollar bills rather than the hypocritical slogan, "In God we trust."

Pretty sure are we that we can see greed in others, but in us?: **"Don't call us greedy."**

Nail some investment bankers, corrupt union leaders, professional sports agents, and billionaires with off-shore accounts.

But how would we know if we are greedy?

### **First, let's read the story as a story of success.**

What says success better than being rich?

The warning is against greed, not against being rich.

Success is what we expect from hard work.

From birth we are programmed for success.

An entire motivation industry is built around propping up our sense of success.

Mostly harmless preachers lure in crowds with the gospel of success.

This farmer is one of us.

We share his work ethic, his business acumen, his business plan, and his retirement portfolio. Even his Epicurean "eat, drink, and be merry" makes us salivate.

National Farmer of the Year.

"The most interesting man in the world."

He's our guy.

How many of us are busy planning for retirement or worrying about whether the funds will last? Opening the quarterly report is a tense moment isn't it?

How can a farmer be condemned for producing a surplus?

We may question subsidies for not planting corn, but criticizing surplus?

If this is religion, we want nothing to do with it.

We are good people at heart.

Where would this country be if it weren't for hard-working folks like us?

We should get medals.

Read the story as success, but beware: success carries baggage – like greed.

**Now, read the story as a secular story – an exclusive humanism – a man who doesn't see what God can do for him.**

Great work ethic, powerful retirement plan, but read his total disregard for God with suspicion.

The rich farmer, seeing everything as a profit and loss statement, doesn't see God as a good investment.

Faith never enters the equation of the rich farmer's economy.

Henry Ford said, **"Whatever is good business is good religion."**

Well, the rich farmer says, "Whatever is good business is my religion."

Charles Taylor, in *A Secular Age*, says, **"We all sense that somewhere there's a place that will provide a fullness, a richness; that is, in that place, life is richer, more what it should be."**

The rich farmer thought that place was a complex of more land, barns, and profits luxury.

Taylor argues that our society has produced a **"humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing.**

**Of no previous society was this true."**

But when we are alone, there's a feeling that there should be more to life.

Greed, not liking silence, pushes the accelerator to the floor and sends us swerving from one side of the road to the other chasing after more – like Thelma and Louise taking their car into the canyon .

So we live one relationship short of happiness, one piece of property short of enough, one cruise, vacation short of euphoria, one promotion short of satisfaction, one winning lottery ticket short of being rich.

And the only satisfaction for this spiritual starvation – God – but **GOD IS NOT IN THE HOUSE.**

Look in the barn, look under the bed, or look on the back forty:

**THERE IS NOT GOD IN THE HOUSE OF GREED.**

Once greed kicks God out of the house, everyone else has to go as well.

His barns are full; his house is empty.

No family. No friends. No neighbors or colleagues.

"And he thought to himself. And I will say to my soul."

Greed tolerates no other loves; crowds out all other allegiances and relationships.

A successful CEO: "I have been so successful and I'm so rich, but the price has been too high. My wife left years ago; none of my children will speak to me. I am alone and there's no one to walk down the backside of the mountain with me and I am afraid."

**A little boy told his mom not to buy him any more hot cars because he said, "Who can love that many cars?"**

Greed wants all of you – heart, mind, and soul.

Hear the demon voice of greed: "my crops, my barns, my grain, and my goods."

## THERE MUST BE MORE!

Greed possesses our souls and drives God from our work-day lives.

Did you know major American corporations are adding prayer rooms?

Is it because Christians have lobbied CEO's for time to prayer? No. But Muslims, whose prayer lives are fully integrated into their daily work lives, have asked for space for prayer.

If we think Muslim influence is a threat, we should be praying and not protesting.

We are living in a secular age.

David Coggins said the other morning, "This is a misnamed parable.

It should be called the parable of the poor fool."

Read the story as secular person and believe me, we don't want this for any of you.

### **Now, read the story a third time as a story of salvation.**

Add Christian practices with the capacity to transform the man's life.

Right after the words, "And the land of a certain rich man produced abundantly," . . . .

"And he went to the house of the Lord, on the Lord's Day, and gave thanks to God for his many blessings."

Originally SABBATH, the Lord's Day returns our attention to God: sets our affection on things above.

Sabbath one of the Ten Commandments: God wants to keep us free from the greed-filled every day world.

The prayer-saturated life of the psalmist gave him a powerful love for the house of the Lord: "I was glad when they said, 'Let us go unto the house of the Lord.'" (Psalm 122:1)

"I will dwell in the house of the Lord all my life long." (Psalm 23:6).

"**LORD**, I love the **house** where you live, the place where your glory dwells." (Psalm 26:8).

Regular, sustained, passionate worship on the Lord's Day can make all the difference in the world.

The rich man takes a day apart, a Sabbath rest, a day for honoring God, and it changes everything.

Then the offering is received.

The rich farmer makes an offering from his surplus profits.

Greed meets generosity.

And the winner is: GENEROSITY.

"God loves hilarious givers."

The old-fashioned biblical name given for the practice that defeats greed is tithing.

Tithing – the most significant practice in the battle against greed,

Ancient seed fund so the village could have a crop the next year -

But for most Christians, "A TITHE? ARE YOU KIDDING ME?"

Yet the tithe is the most equalitarian way to give: everyone makes the same percentage of sacrifice.

One of my responsibilities is to ensure that First Baptist Church is and remains an institution that turns money into real human value, in Christian education, the practice and sharing of faith, the mission of helping the poor, supporting the arts and music, promoting the well-being of our city, nurturing our youth and children.

This is why we gently challenge you to give a tithe, put your church in your will, and provide for the endowment fund.

And after the offering, the rich farmer rises with the congregation of the faithful and prays the **Lord's Prayer**.

The Lord's Prayer puts us in the heart of God's kingdom, and God's kingdom in our hearts.

Every phrase that falls from his lips helps protect him, not only from the Evil One, but from greed.

Give us this day **our** daily bread.

A rich farmer with a surplus of wheat can be part of the answer for the request for daily bread.

Lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from evil.

And his brothers and sisters praying with him are a defensive perimeter for him.

Then the rich farmer, with fellow believers, receives the bread and wine of the **Lord's Supper**.

Greed slinks away as the church receives the life of the most generous human being that ever lived.

Instead of God saying, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you," God says, "I give my life for you. This is my body."

A man who takes that bread is less likely to say, "This is my barn and I will build bigger ones."

The man who drinks from this cup of salvation is less likely to say, "Eat, drink, and be merry."

Three stories but it is the story of salvation that rings true.

Four Christian practices each with the power to defeat greed:

The Lord's Day. The Lord's Tithe. The Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Supper.

Do we get it? What we do here changes who we are and how we live out there.

May your cup "runneth over,"

may righteousness go before you,

may your family, friends, and fellow believers keep you from all greediness,

may goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life;

may you flourish in grace, gladness, and generosity. **AMEN!**

