

INTRODUCTION

People of God, our whole current economic system is based upon greed. We know this. But not only greed, also the selfishness that drives greed. This selfish greed is seen in one particular commercial that my family and I absolutely hate. It is advertisement for an unlimited data cell phone plan. And in this commercial a couple is shown on the screen, and the man says, "After talking and texting for years, we got married...for the family plan." And she says, "Then we *really* expanded our family...for the wireless savings." And as the camera pulls back there are 10 kids in a tiny living room kitchen area, running around, causing ruckus and noise, and making a mess, and breaking things. The place is a disaster. And the guy says, "It seemed like the responsible thing to do." And the wife says, "And then just yesterday, my sister told me about visible."

The screen shifts to the sister, who is sitting alone in a big clean luxurious home, with nice things in peace and quiet. And she says, "Yeah, get unlimited data for as low as \$25 a month...no family needed."

And the commercial ends contrasting the two: The sister, sitting all alone in her clean, quiet, fancy house, with her cup of coffee, and a big, contented smile on her face, all alone. While the family is sitting there, utterly dumbfounded, exhausted, in a messy house with unruly disrespectful and loud children, and one of the children is bouncing a ball off of mom's head, dishes are breaking in the background, and another kid pours grape juice down dad's lap.

"We thought it was the responsible thing to do." "No family needed."

We must remember, people of God, that commercials are not just trying to sell you a product. They are trying to sell you on a way of life that they think will be most conducive to the companies bottom line. And the lifestyle this

commercial is advocating, is the single woman in her house with no children. The ideal feminist dream. Rich and comfortable, with all the symbols of luxury and success and a life of ease and prosperity. The only thing the woman was missing was a cat.

And she is clearly contrasted with the family of 10 kids. Clearly, the husband and wife thought they were doing the responsible thing, by expanding their family. But as it turns out, the responsible thing, according to this commercial, is to not have children, not have a family, but rather, to be a selfish, isolated, greedy consumer. That is what is being sold in this commercial. Not the cell phone data plan. It is irresponsible to have a family, and as you ladies know full well everytime you go the grocery store, and the people gawk at you and say, "Are these all yours?" They cannot believe that you would be so irresponsible as to bring 10 children into the world. Don't you know what causes that? Such behavior is irresponsible.

But this of course is just the reaction of a Selfishness and greedy generation, which has not bred children, but which breeds loneliness and isolation, which further brings spiritual poverty and ultimately death. Despite all the savings and money and possessions one has, if we are not rich toward God, then we are truly the poorest and most foolish people on planet earth.

Such is the case in our story today from Luke 12.

JUDGE OR ARBITRATOR

A man approaches Jesus and says, "*Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.*" I think we are safe to assume that the brother who received the inheritance was the first born, who, according to Deut. 21, was the son who received the double portion of the inheritance, so that he could take care of his parents.

This man who approaches Jesus is therefore the younger brother. And he is demanding that Jesus tell the first-born brother to share the inheritance with him. But Jesus recognizes this man's greed. The first-born brother received double so he could care for his mother and father. But the younger brother does not consider the needs and responsibilities that are attached to the double portion of the inheritance. He only sees that his brother got more than he did, and his greed rises up within him. And he tries to get Jesus to tell the first-born brother to give him half of the inheritance.

What this man wants is the financial benefits of the inheritance with no family needed. He wants the money all for himself. He does not realize, because he is selfish and greedy, that life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions, but in the company of friends and family that you share those possessions with.

Jesus responds saying, "*Man, who made me a Judge or an arbitrator over you?*" This statement shares some similarities with Exodus 2, when the Moses comes across two men fighting, and Moses intervenes and asked the one why he struck his companion. And the man answered, "*Who made you a prince and judge over us.*" In other words, the man tells Moses, like a little child tell his sibling, "you aren't the boss of me. You can't tell me what to do. You have no authority here."

Jesus utilizes this question for his own purposes - "*Who made me judge and arbitrator over you?*" Jesus says. He points out that the people themselves haven't really accepted his authority and rule over them, just as they did not accept Moses' authority. The man is selfish and greedy, and just wants Christ to give him something that doesn't rightly belong to him. He thinks that Jesus will benefit him financially. But he doesn't really want to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ. He just wants Jesus to give him his

brothers stuff. But Christ sees through the man's façade. And sees that behind it all, is not a matter of fairness, or anything like that. The man is simply greedy.

I wonder how often we do the same thing, though? We call upon God to do something for us, demanding even that God give us something. But the reality is, that we don't want him to judge the situation on our behalf so that he gets the glory. Nor even that someone else might receive the benefit. No. as James says: You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your passions."

We can wrongly treat God as though he were some kind of cosmic ATM. But despite how many blessings God may actually pour out upon us, the abundance of our possessions does not make us rich toward God. Sadly, as we increase and accumulate and hoard the blessings from God in order to keep them for ourselves, the poorer we actually become.

And so Jesus warns us, saying, *"Take heed, and beware of covetousness, for ones life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."*

And Jesus then proceeds to prove this point by telling the parable of the Rich Fool.

MATERIAL POSSESSIONS ARE GOOD

And he spoke to them a parable, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' ¹⁸So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." ' ²⁰But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'

²¹ “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Let us first note that God is not against material possessions. God is not against blessing people with material things. God created the world, and everything in it, and he himself is the giver of all good gifts. God, in fact, gives generously. He gives, and gives and gives. He gives so much that he even created the land to give food for man to live by. And here in this story the land, by the grace of God, gave to the man abundantly. Truly this was a blessing from God.

God’s abundant provisions come in the form of agricultural gifts that he gives to us. He God also gives us wealth in the form of money, and other possessions. As Deut. 8:8 says: “*But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth.*”

Therefore, if one has a lot of money, or an abundance of material possessions, land, or animals, or even sports cars, or properties, or books, or tools, these things are not intrinsically bad, immoral, or evil in and of themselves. Rather, they are gifts of God. And like all gifts of God, they are to be used to the glory of God.

Now, some people misquote the Scriptures and say that money is the root of all evil. But that is not what the scripture actually says. The scripture says that the *Love* of money is a root of all kinds of evil. The love of money, or greed we could call it, is a root of all kinds of evil. Not money in and of itself. It is not a sin therefore to be rich, and have lots of money. God gives people power to create wealth. And he does this so that we would honor him, and to seek first the kingdom of God.

GREED

What is greed? Greed is an obsession to hoard all things for oneself, blocking out any thought for God or for one's neighbor.¹ When a person does that, his desires become evil, and selfish, and self-serving. He does not honor God, nor does he seek the benefit of his neighbor. Loving your money and possessions so much that you refuse to share them with others because you want stockpile all the blessings for yourself, that is Greed, and that is evil.

God is the source of all blessings. As we sing, *"Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures here below. Praise him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."* And since God is an infinite being, God can never run out of blessings. The wells of God's goodness and treasures will never dry up. God is an eternal spring of blessings and goodness and joy.

So when you hoard things for yourself, when you are being selfish and greedy, what are you are saying about God? Because everything we do testifies what we believe about God. And when you are greedy, you are saying that God only has so much to give, and no more. You are saying that God is not infinite in glory, power, and grace. You are saying that because God is limited in some way, then one day, and one day very soon, in your lifetime, the well of God's grace will run dry. So, it is your duty to make sure that you store up these blessings for yourself and keep them for a later time, because one day soon, God will cease being God, but at least you will have something for yourself.

¹ Arthur A. Just Jr., [Luke 9:51-24:53](#), Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 505.

The greedy person therefore does not think very highly of God at all. Greed does not produce faith in God, rather it strips one's faith in God, and it forces the person to place their faith in their future in themselves.

Greed, then, is essentially atheistic. Which is why God, in the parable, calls the man a fool. Who is the fool in the bible? Psalm 14:1, "*The Fool has said in his heart, there is no God.*" And this greedy man in the parable, is one such fool, because he is acting like there is no God, because he is ignoring the fact that his bountiful harvest was a gift from God. And he refuses to acknowledge that God will provide for him in the future.

It is therefore important, People of God, for us to consider the temptations toward greed that we are likely to experience in a time like ours. It can be quite tempting for us to become such fools. We can get look at the state of the economy, and we can see inflation rising, we see the supply chains disrupted, we see an alarming number of food production and distribution plants being destroyed, we see that the govt. is changing the definition of recession in order to not admit that we are in one, we see the World Economic Forum telling us we are all going to eat bugs, and there are now even articles coming out telling us there is a time for cannibalism.

And if we had 2 brain cells to rub together, we could see that something terrible is looming on the horizon. And the spark that is created between those two brain cells tells us that we should be preparing for the future. And I think we should be preparing, I think we ought to be thinking long term.

I think we are in a Joseph moment here, where Joseph prepared for the 7 years of famine by storing up the grain. But the point was that he didn't

hoard the grain all for himself. He stored it up so that he might feed the people during the time of famine.

Thus, what Scripture is concerned about is a greedy spirit that says that in order to survive I must focus on me, myself and I. As the rich fool did in the parable. But God commands us to share with those who are in need. Greed is a part of Selfishness, which leads to loneliness which leads to death. But godliness leads to generosity, which leads to life. So in order for us to make it through the coming hardship that is rapidly descending upon us, we must be people who are willing to be wise, receive the blessings of God, and consider how we are going to use them for the sake of others in the future, and not just how we can gather all for our own individual selves.

8 times, the man says 'I' in this passage, and 4 times he says 'my.' This man is as selfish as one can get. ¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store **my** crops?' ¹⁸ So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down **my** barns and build greater, and there I will store all **my** crops and **my** goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to **my** soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry."

LONELINESS

Now what is also so tragic about his internal conversation is how so completely alone he is in his decision making process. He has no one else to consult with. No one else to talk to, or to share with. He doesn't talk to God in prayer, nor with his family or even his broader community. He must speak to his own soul, all alone, and his speech concerns his mistaken idea that he is completely self-sufficient. Now that he has taken care of his

future, he can only tell *himself* to “rest, eat, drink, be merry” (12:19). His greedy heart has sentenced him to celebrate God’s gifts *alone*.²

Greediness leads to loneliness, and loneliness ultimately leads to death. As the Proverbs teach:

*So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain;
It takes away the life of its owners.* Prov. 1:19

²⁵*The desire of the lazy man kills him,
For his hands refuse to labor.*

²⁶*He covets greedily all day long,
But the righteous gives and does not spare.* Prov. 21:25-26

You see people of God, God gives to you, and he gives to you generously, so that you might share with others. Paul’s command to the Ephesians was this – “*Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.*” Eph. 4:28

Now, I am not saying that the rich man in the parable was a thief, nor that he was lazy. At least not initially. Clearly this man labored, worked with his hands what is good, and God blessed him and gave the increase. That is all good. Hard work and manual labor, working with your hands are also good gifts from God, along with the blessings and wealth that come from it. But God gives these blessings to you so that you would share it with others and bless them, just as God blessed you.

God gives so that we may have something to share with others, but this rich man, does not. Instead he hoarded it all for himself. And then he became

² Arthur A. Just Jr., [Luke 9:51-24:53](#), Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 506.

lazy, and greedy, and stopped working. Instead of sharing this rich harvest with others, and continue working the rest of his days, as God intended, he decided that based upon one good year he would take his retirement early. And why not, he thinks. I have only one mouth to feed. Much like the sister in the commercial. The man's greedy leads to loneliness. No family needed.

EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY

And think about how crazy this is. He says to himself, eat, drink, and be merry. But who is he eating and drinking, and being merry with? No one. But the Law of God commanded that when the Israelites would bring in their tithes, and when they would celebrate their national feasts, that they were most definitely NOT to celebrate alone. The Israelites were to eat, drink, and be merry with others.

In Deut. 14, the law teaches that when the Israelites were to bring their tithes of flocks and grains to Jerusalem, that if the Journey was too far for them to carry all their stuff, that they could sell their tithes back home, convert it to money, and then bring the money with them to Jerusalem.

*²⁶And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, **you and your household.** ²⁷You shall not forsake the **Levite** who is within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you.*

*²⁸“At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. ²⁹And the **Levite**, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, **and the stranger and the fatherless and the***

widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.

The same was true for the Feasts as well in Deut. 16.

You see, People of God, the Lord blesses you with provision, so that you might turn around and be a blessing to others. He gives you food to eat, and wine to drink, and he puts merriment in your heart, so that you can share what he has given you with others, and they too can eat, and drink, and be merry. Eating, and drinking, and merry making are communal events. Celebrating the blessings of God is meant to be celebrated in community, with your families and friends. Not hoarding it up all alone by yourself.

Solomon, in all his wisdom, knew that there was nothing better under the sun than that a man should eat, drink, and take pleasure in all his toil – this is God’s gifts to man.

“¹⁸ Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. ¹⁹As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God. ²⁰For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.” Ecc. 5:18-20

But then Solomon says this:

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: ²A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction.

Or, as Jesus says: *“Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”*

So is the one who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

The person who falls into the temptation of greed is trying to establish and measure his life by what he *has*. Jesus says that a man’s life does not consist of the abundance of his possessions. Such a person who thinks so, simply does not understand who he *is* in relation to God and who he is in relation to others. Possessions are not the source of true life or wealth in relation to God. Instead, in order to be truly rich, one must be rich toward God, by sharing the blessings that God has given you with others. What the Lord has given you hold with an open hand. And then you will be able to receive more. But if you are filled with greed and selfishness, and covetousness, you cut yourself off from the true life of God which is found in the life of your family and friends and community.

CONCLUSION

The Cell Phone commercial is wrong, People of God. The joys of life and even the enjoyment of life’s possessions is empty and hollow if you have no one to enjoy it with. These companies are purposefully trying to attract the attention of the single person, who has no family responsibilities, one who is selfish and greedy, and who only thinks about themselves. And they pretend that this is the good life. No family is needed.

But these are foolish lies. Family is needed. Friends are needed. It is the responsible thing to do to consider sharing the blessings of God with others. To be rich toward God is *to believe* that God is the giver of all things, including life and salvation. *To show that one believes* in God’s grace, is to share with others the gifts which God gives. This is the consistent teaching of Jesus in his various words about possessions.

But behind it all is the Gospel of God's free grace: The greatest gifts of all is God's free gift of the forgiveness of all our sins in Jesus Christ.³ Receive his gift with faith and thanksgiving, and share that gift with others. For in this is life and joy. And then when God requires your soul back from you, you can hand it over joyfully, knowing that you have been rich toward God. Amen.

³ Arthur A. Just Jr., [Luke 9:51-24:53](#), Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 507.