Irvington Presbyterian Church

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**“What to Do With Surplus Grain”**

Larry Thorson

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Luke 12:13-21

***13****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; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”*

***16****And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest.****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 my surplus grain.****19****And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain 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 whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”*

*New International Version*

Today I’m going to talk about money. This is my annual stewardship sermon. This is to inspire you as you sit down with your pledge card and pray about how much God wants you to pledge to our church for next year. Now I am not so green as to think that in a little 20 minute message I could persuade you to change your giving patterns for 2016. If I could be that persuasive then I should be in another line of work which would make a lot more money and then be able to give a high percentage of it back to the church for missions.

No, I don’t intend to persuade you to give more money to the church although that would be nice because we need it. But what I would really rather do is help you put or keep your life in perspective. Do you know what perspective is? When a teenage girl’s boyfriend breaks up with her, she thinks it’s the end of the world for her. But is it really the end of the world for her? Of course not. Every situation has to be put into perspective. When the San Francisco 49ers lose a game 47-7 is that the end of the season for them? In their case, yes it is.

Perspective helps us see the big picture. What is it that we’re working toward? What’s our end product? What do we want to produce when our work is finished?

In our story today Jesus is speaking to a mixed multitude of people including his disciples. Some random guy probably not related to Jesus or his group yells out *“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”* Ok, that’s random. That’s like when I did a Bible study in a junior high group and I was teaching something about John the Baptist being beheaded. I was doing a heck of a job making this gory story more gory to hold their middle school gnat like attention spans and had them at the edge of their seats. I was even impressed with my teaching. Then Daryk raises his hand and says “Do you think there’s life on Mars, because I read where there’s water on the planet and that would be cool to see a martian.” What does that have to do with John the Baptist and anything I was talking about right now? The random thought of a junior higher.

*“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”* What does that have to with anything Jesus was teaching? I could see if he said “Teacher, heal my brother of blindness” because that’s what Jesus was doing in those days. He taught people and he healed people. Or if he asked “Teacher, what should I do about my brother who won’t divide our inheritance with me.” But this random guy had lost all perspective of what Jesus came to do. Since rabbis often settled inheritance disputes in those days he simply saw Jesus as a common rabbi.

So Jesus gave him a pretty stern response; *“Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”* That’s his answer. If you think of Jesus as always saying sweat, kind things he didn’t always. Obviously he wasn’t too happy with this selfishly random command. But he doesn’t waste it. He used it as a teaching moment. ***15****Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”*

Jesus linked the random man’s apparent obsession with getting all he’s entitled to from his inheritance to greed. *“Be on your guard against all kinds of greed…”* To be “on your guard” is to make yourself aware that the danger of greed can rise at any time and any place. In recovery programs like AA participants are told repeatedly to be on their guard because relapse is always possible. That’s why they have what they call sponsors so that recovering alcoholics have someone to call in times of temptation. For an alcoholic a time of temptation might be a celebratory party for a friend who just got a promotion. It’s one drink, what can that one drink do? Plenty.

We’re now seem to understand alcohol abuse and drug abuse and there are some good treatments for those abuses. But I don’t think we really understand greed and its effects on us. Greed is more often disguised as success or achievement. When the CEO of American Airlines orders the leg room on their planes to be reduced so they can sell more tickets we cry “greed.” But when we own stock in the airline and the reduced leg room produces more profits shooting our stock upward we celebrate and make the CEO a hero.

Recently the CEO of REI, the big box sports store chain announced that REI would remain closed on Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving and all their employees would be paid on that day. The chain is going to lose a lot of money by being closed on the biggest shopping day of the year. So why are they doing it? They want to model their brand’s principles of life and health rather than greed.

REI can do that because it's one of the country's few large retail cooperatives and not a publicly traded company. A cooperative, roughly defined, is a business that's owned not by shareholders but by members—people who use the business, such as its shoppers, producers or employees. In cooperatives, profits are treated as a surplus and are redistributed to members or reinvested in the business. And because the governing principle is to run the business in the best interests of their members, rather than shareholders, cooperatives tend to think in longer time horizons than the quarter-to-quarter whims of Wall Street.

As Jesus said to the crowd “*life does not consist in an abundance of possessions* or in our language “profits*.”* The winner is not the one who dies with the most toys because in the end he still dies. Life is more than profits.

To illustrate that Jesus told this story about a wealthy farmer who was reaping an abundance of grain. He had so much grain he didn’t know what to do with it all. Colin Kaepernick the 28 year old soon to be former quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers signed a 6 year, 114 million dollar contract to play for the team. I imagine or hope that Colin has some pretty smart financial advisors who are leveraging his money to bring him (and them) an even greater return. He should never have to work for money again. That’s how this wealthy farmer in Jesus’ story was. He had so much grain he had to build storehouses for his surplus and when he was finished was able to retire. It says he sat back and said to himself*“You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’* That to me is a definition of retirement.

But as is so often the case in retirement, instead of being able to take life easy he died, very suddenly. Jesus didn’t say he died because he built storehouses. He didn’t say he died because he relaxed too much. He died because that’s what we all do eventually. That’s the end of our physical existence and none of us knows when that day is coming. It may be a long ways off or it may be this week.

So Jesus tells the man that tonight he was going to die (but doesn’t say God kills him) and then asks him a big question: *Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’* In Stephen Covey’s Seven Habits of Highly Successful People the second habit is begin with the end product and then work backwards until you get to where you are now. When Jesus asked ”*Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”* he was asking what was his ultimate purpose for his life that he’ll leave behind?

If you ask a high school student what her purpose in life is she’ll most likely say to get good grades and get into a good college of her choice. Another one might say to find a husband and start a family. Ask a college student his purpose and he’ll probably say to graduate, land a good job, buy a cool car and get married. Ask a middle aged couple what their purpose is and they’ll tell you it’s to survive the teen years with their kids, pay for their college education and get them married off and out of their house. There is one major exception that I hear from all of those age groups and I hear it every Monday morning at our breakfast for the homeless. “What are you going to do today?” “What’s your purpose today?” Their answer is *“take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”*

After working for 14 years with retirees before coming here (but also working with other age groups) I learned about something called “entitlement.” Sixty six years of studying, working hard, paying taxes, staying above the law, raising the kids to adult hood, volunteering in church and in the community and still investing the left over grain to grow should entitle us to *“take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”* If we don’t get that I notice we often feel cheated.

Jesus didn’t say there was anything wrong with taking life easy; eating, drinking and being merry. It sure beats the alternative. What he was addressing was perspective. Remember that word? We have to put our life into perspective. We have to see the big picture of what we’re here for. What is our legacy? What will last beyond us?

Dick and Janet Gall was an elderly couple in one of my churches. Dick was basically a self-taught telephone lineman and Janet was a teacher. They were people of modest means who raised their three children well. They loved Christ, they loved his church and they loved choirs. So they decided to endow a scholarship program whereby the interest from their investment would pay college scholarships for any students who wanted to sing in our church choir.

While I was serving as their pastor, Dick was diagnosed with cancer and passed away. Later Janet moved away to be near her daughter but as of last Christmas she was still singing in two choirs, teaching Sunday school and hosting a lot of groups in her new home. Her scholarship program continues in our former church even though she lives a long ways from that church. It has become a part of her and Dick’s legacy.

What can a younger person do? Being generous to our Lord doesn’t start when you retire and you can see you have enough grain to make it to the end. Take Jesus’ advice *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”*

Remember that the person who dies with the most toys is still dead. Those toys will go to someone else at the end. But you can decide your legacy right now by what you give to. By investing in this church you are investing in a mission point surrounded primarily by Muslims, Hindus and people who are just curious about God but don’t know who he is. Just last week I opened our sanctuary to a Hindu woman who wanted to bow before the cross of Jesus Christ before she headed back to India. I sat in the front pew and prayed for her while she prayed on her knees and her grown daughter prayed behind her. She had raised her daughter in a Catholic school in India and you could tell they had a huge respect for Jesus Christ.

We don’t have a big glitzy program here with a guaranteed growth plan and we intentionally keep our expenses down and yet God is drawing folks here like with a powerful slow moving magnet. We surely won’t know our impact until we get to the other side but nobody really knows their impact until the end. All God commands us to do is love him first of all and then to welcome those who seek him. That’s what I think we’re doing in this vast seeker community.

So this week as you take your pledge card would you ask yourself, what am I doing with the money God is giving me? What legacy is going toward? And remember that money and success will never buy you a seat in heaven, only the blood of Jesus Christ can do that. Give your life to Christ by praying to receive him as your Savior and then trust that he will forgive you of all your sins. Then out of gratitude use the resources he’s given you to impact others’ lives. That’s the best way to fight off greed.

**TO LEARN MORE**

**Join a Small Group – call the church office for times and location 510/657-3133**

**To learn and encourage one another**

**IF YOU’D LIKE TO KNOW HOW TO**

**GET STARTED IN FAITH**

**1. Recognize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s ideal**

**Romans 3:23-24**

**2. Know that the wages or payment for sinning is death**

**Romans 6:23**

**3. But God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us**

**Romans 8:5**

**4. It is our responsibility to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow Him to become the master of our life**

**Romans 10:13**

**Invite Jesus into your heart by praying something like the prayer below…**

*“Dear Lord Jesus, in many ways I have sinned against you. I am sorry and want to turn from my sinful ways. I invite you to come into my heart and begin to make me like yourself. I commit my life wholeheartedly to you now. Thank you for saving me.”*