



“And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,” Luke 12:15.

Jesus Teaches About Possessions

Lesson Aim: To encourage consistent Christian Stewardship

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Topic: Covetousness; Stewardship.

Christian stewardship involves a blessed privilege and a solemn obligation. The privilege is that a Christian may share in a spiritual ministry through the proper administration of his material resources. The obligation is that each Christian must account to God for what he has done with what he has. Jesus spoke a great deal about the subject of material possessions. He knew what problems most believers would have at that point. One verse out of six in Matthew, Mark, and Luke deals with the subject of stewardship of wealth. Consider this list of things that Jesus emphasized on the subject of stewardship: (1) God is owner of all things. (2) He intrusts portions of material wealth to the administration of individual believers. (3) Man is but a steward, not the real owner, of what he calls his own, (4) Each man must account to God for what he has done with what he had. (5) Covetous hoarding of material wealth is a serious sin. (6) Liberal giving as an expression of love and praise to God is appropriate and commended. (7) Man's greatest stewardship is of the gospel. Material wealth is to be used to get the gospel into all the world.

Today's lesson aims “to encourage consistent Christian stewardship.” Keep your heart open to God as you study. The lesson examines the teachings of Jesus as He sets forth a principle, illustrates it by a parable, and applies it to you. What God speaks to you through this study, do it.

I. A PRINCIPLE, 12:13,15

“Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,” Luke 12:15.

There is the principle which Jesus gave by which we must measure our attitude toward wealth. How true His statement is. “The rich man can go where he pleases, but perhaps pleases himself no where. He can buy a library or visit the world, but perhaps has neither patience to read nor intelligence to see. He may have gained the world and lost himself; and with all his wealth around him . . . he may live as blank a life as any tattered ditcher”—Robert L. Stevenson.

Jesus' statement of the great principle of stewardship came when a man asked of him, “Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.” The request came as an interruption, Jesus was teaching the people about judgment, the loving care of the Heavenly Father, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's ministry in each believer, and kindred spiritual truths. The man's request indicated that he had little concern for spiritual things. He was caught up in anxiety lest he not receive wealth which he considered properly due him.

Jesus' answer suggests the possibility of a larger life than that which wealth secures. He spoke of men having life, and having it “more abundantly,” John 10:10. Such an abundant life comes through knowing Jesus personally and not by amassing a fortune of earthly wealth. Though contrary to popular opinion, Jesus' statement is true. **“A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”** Do you agree that real life and real living are not related to how rich you are? Consider the following illustration.

II. AN ILLUSTRATION, 12:16-20

Jesus said, “A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. So bountiful were his harvests that he could not store all that the fields produced. He studied his problem and came to this conclusion: I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones! Then I'll have room to store my wealth. And I'll sit back and say to myself, 'Friend, you have enough stored away for the rest of your life. Now take it easy! Eat, drink and be merry.' But God said to him, 'Thou fool! Tonight you will die. Then who will get it all?’” What an illustration! Examine it with care.

The rich farmer had many good qualities. He was wise in planting, cultivating, harvesting, and preserving his crops. Because he was an astute

businessman, his wealth increased.

Yet, God called this man a fool. Why? It was not because he was rich. Many great men of God were wealthy — Job, David, Solomon, Abraham. It was not because he stored up his produce and preserved his income. It is good stewardship to preserve one's increase from wasteful neglect. Jesus' word is, **“Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.”** It was not because that he was engaged in an unlawful business. Farming is one of the noblest of professions. It was not because he was disrespected by his peers. Men of his community probably looked with admiration upon him. And yet, God called him a fool. Why?

The rich farmer made some serious mistakes. He left God out of his plans for the present and future. He acted as if material wealth was the supreme good — the answer to every need. He presumed that he was master of himself. His little conversation with himself used **“I”** six times and **“my”** five times. He seemed to think that if man had enough wealth to care for his body, he need have no concern for the spirit.

The rich farmer made the same tragic mistake that multitudes are making today. Forgetting that man has both a physical and spiritual nature, he thought only of the physical. He was a fool because he thought only of the body and not of the spirit. How tragic!

The rich man faced a perplexing dilemma. He did not prepare his spirit for the hour when he would account to God. He did not make provision for his wealth in case of his sudden departure from earth. What could he do when God said, **“. . . This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”** What fools some wise men show themselves to be. **“For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?”** Luke 9:25. Make sure you are ready to meet God. Make sure that you have provided for a God-honoring disposal of the wealth which you will leave behind when you die.

Look how God deals with a wise man who acts a fool. (1) God ignores man's plans. While man speaks of building barns, taking his ease, eating, drinking, and being merry, God speaks of judgment. He is not bound to man's time schedules. (2) He upsets his timetable. Man speaks of “many years” upon the earth; God says, “This night . . .” Man has no guarantee of tomorrow, James 4:13-15. (3) He calls man to a sudden and unexpected accounting. Any hour may be the hour when one's stewardship opportunities end. What careful stewards he should be each hour.

III. AN APPLICATION, 12:21-23

Do not seek material wealth at the cost of spiritual prosperity.

Remember how Jesus' discussion of the subject of stewardship was called forth? A man interrupted His teaching upon other subjects to ask for help in settling a dispute over an inheritance. He was passing by spiritual treasures in his concern for material wealth. In his lust for earthly possessions he wasted his opportunity to hear Jesus.

Jesus warned that each person is in danger of making the same mistake. Anyone who “lays up treasure for himself, but is not rich toward God” is making the same mistake as the man whom God called a fool. Beware!

Live free from anxiety. Jesus said, “Take no (worry not) thought for your life . . .” verse 22. God is our Father. He feeds the fowls of the air; He clothes the lilies of the field; He provides for His children. Worry is an indication of lack of faith in His provision. Check Matthew 6:25-33 at this point.

A right attitude toward material possessions is to refuse to grow self-sufficient when you have them in abundance, and to refuse to be beset with anxiety when you have them in scant measure.

Keep the right sense of values in estimating material wealth, and spiritual wealth. Jesus said. “**The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.**” If a person had sufficient food and clothing, he still would not have the best thing in life. “**A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,**” verse 15b. Man needs bread to live. It is essential to his good health, but Jesus taught that “**Man shall not live-by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,**” Matthew 4:4b. Physical provision, to the neglect of spiritual needs, is only half living.

Material wealth should not become your hope of security. A constant danger lies at this point. Poor people are inclined to think that, if they could become wealthy, they would be secure. Rich people are in danger of placing confidence in their abilities and their accumulated resources. Such wealth does not offer security. Many older people who read these words can remember the great depression which came about a generation ago. When “the bottom dropped out,” many people lost their wealth. In a matter of days some who were considered prosperous were left without anything. Ask them if material wealth really offers security.

Real security is found only in God. He who belongs to God has physical and spiritual needs assured. It is safe to trust Him. “**I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread,**” Psalm 37:25.

Whom do you trust? Do you trust yourself or God? **“It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man,”** Psalm 118:8. Learn that lesson well. Live by its precept. You will never regret the course of life to which it will direct you.

Never permit wealth to stand between you and God. There is a great danger at that point. A Christian witnessed to a man who persistently rejected Christ. Finally, he explained, “I am a professional gambler. I have made a fortune this way. If I became a Christian, I would have to give it up.” What a tragedy! God would call that man a fool.

Jesus warned, **“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God,”** Matthew 19:24. A person who has accumulated or inherited great wealth can be saved, but the deceitfulness of riches” (Matthew 13:22) keeps many from faith in Jesus Christ as a personal Savior. Do not let it happen to you.

“Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,” Luke 12:15.

Do you want to be truly rich? You already are, if you know God in Jesus Christ! Remember that you did not bring any money into the world, and you will not take any with you when you die. You should be well satisfied so long as you have the necessities of life. People who long to get rich are tempted to do all sorts of wrong things to get money. The love of money is the first step toward all kinds of sin. It has even led some people to turn away from God. As a result, they have pierced themselves with many sorrows. If you belong to God through faith in Jesus Christ, you should flee such things. Set your goal to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness. He who is filled with those is rich indeed!

Questions

1. What is Christian stewardship?
2. What are the principles underlying the Bible's teaching on stewardship?