

Sermon Manuscript: Luke 12:13-21

Jesus' Financial Strategy

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – July 31, 2022

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" 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."

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

"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. 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."'

"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?'

"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."
[NIV]

In the history of pop music there have been many "one hit wonders." These are songs that were recorded by an artist who otherwise is mostly unknown. Some of the favorite songs from our youth are such "one hit wonders." They are the kind of songs that stick in your head. They might have a catchy tune or a clever lyric. They might catch the mood of a particular time.

Back in 1988 an artist who was mostly unknown in the realm of pop music recorded a song that people still quote today. The artist is Bobby McFerrin and the song is "Don't Worry, Be Happy!" Many of you can probably hear the tune that was whistled. You may remember the Jamaican accent of the singer. It's a song that tells the tale of being in tough financial circumstances that might cause worry. The simple lyric simply says, "Don't worry, be happy."

That might sound pretty naïve but if you have a reason not to worry, you can truly be happy. We have such a reason. It is our gracious and all-providing God. And because of him, we can truly be happy. Jesus shows us this today. From our lesson we will learn **JESUS' FINANCIAL STRATEGY**. It basically comes down to the lyrics of that one hit wonder ... don't worry ... be happy.

1. Don't Worry

Jesus was traveling along on his way to Jerusalem. Suddenly a man from the crowd has a request for the wise rabbi Jesus. He has a problem with his brother and an inheritance. It's a pretty common problem in our world. "Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." How many families have been torn apart over money and inheritances! People say, "Money

makes the world go 'round." But God tells us, "*The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.*" [1 Timothy 6:10] This man in the crowd was worried about money and getting what he thought was his fair share of it. He wasn't happy because he was worried about money.

Jesus teaches us to pray for our daily bread in the Lord's Prayer. We really only need enough to live for today. The problem is that when we are blessed with far more than that, the money and possessions can get too important. We get worried about our "disposable income." That's the money that we like to think we can use as we please. It is at our disposal.

This man in the crowd was worried about his disposable income. Jesus rejects the man's request to judge about money out of hand. Instead Jesus goes right to the heart of the matter. He warns the man and everyone else who hears his words about greed for disposable income. This man's financial strategy when it came to money was to get as much as he could. This is the world's strategy when it comes to wealth. Such an eager desire for possessions and wealth can consume a person's life. It would seem that was what was happening in this man's life. Wrangling over an inheritance was destroying his relationship with his brother. Greed can swallow a person. Jesus warns us that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Life isn't about having lots of disposable income.

Jesus gives a plain and powerful warning about our attitude toward disposable income – abundant possessions. Money is something that easily leads us to worry. My father once put it very well. He said, "The more money you have, the more you have to worry about it." Jesus wants us to see that our life is more than just material possessions and money. When we worry about such things and let greed get a grip, it is really over something that isn't so significant. Earlier in this chapter Jesus had said we don't need to be afraid of even those who might kill us because we are precious to God. He said: "*Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worthy more than many sparrows.*" [Luke 12:6-7] If we don't have to worry even about dying, we don't need to worry about having enough money.

We end up worrying like this man in the crowd when possessions take up a too-important place in our life. The first thing to do is to remember that our life is more than just the years when spend here in this material world. We are going to live for all eternity. So the Bible tells us about the relationship that is to exist between our life and our possessions. In Ecclesiastes Solomon speaks of the passing nature of money and possessions. It is all meaningless.

Money and possessions are merely tools that God gives to us as gifts to use here in this world. There is nothing inherently wrong or sinful about having wealth. We are to work to provide for ourselves. But we must remember that whatever we have comes from God who gives it to us. We are to use it according to his will and purpose.

Money and possessions are not an end in themselves. Paul describes the god-pleasing strategy in Philippians: *Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. ... As I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of*

Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. [Philippians 3:13b-14,18-20] Our goal is eternal life in heaven. The things we have to use here in this world are useful blessings. But they won't last so let's not set our hearts on them.

Yet the influence of this world and its financial strategy is very strong. There's a line from a not-so-one-hit-wonder, the Police: "We are spirits in the material world." Because we live among the material things of this world, they can become and do become very attractive for us. Wealth and possessions are what is all-important to the material world. The world's financial strategy is to grab as much as it can get.

Jesus, who is the Judge of hearts and spirits and not mere money, points us to a different financial strategy. Instead of being filled with worry over trying to get more and more material wealth, he shows us what is truly important. Life is greater than the possessions we are given to use while we're here. God's knows what we need and he will provide what he wants us to have. We can truly say, "don't worry" because we know God will take care of us. With this "don't worry" financial strategy that Jesus gives us, we will have a life that can be truly happy.

2. Be Happy

Jesus first gives a plain warning about greed. Then he provides a vivid parable to reinforce the point. He tells the story of a rich man who thought he had a plan to be happy. He had received a tremendously bountiful harvest. He was suddenly a very rich man. His plan was to carefully store and manage this wealth so that he could live comfortably for the rest of his life. The blessings that filled his barns were blessings that came from God. But the man made a mistake. He thought that all the bounty that filled his barns was his own to do with as he pleased. He thought of it as "disposable income" that he would use only to please himself. He forgot the true source of it all. He made plans for his life around all this wealth. He intended to use it to make a happy life for himself. In self-satisfaction he says: "*Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.*" [verse 19]

But all this planned happiness was suddenly replaced by the sorrow of a fool. God calls him that: a fool. A fool is literally someone who fails use his head. He doesn't think properly. He fails to see the truth of reality as it actually is. He failed to remember where all his wealth really came from. As Paul says: *People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many FOOLISH and harmful desires that plunge men into destruction. [1 Timothy 6:9]* The man's strategy is flawed. It is plainly foolish because it doesn't recognize the reality that everything we have comes from God. It never is truly "disposable income" for us to purely use as we want. Since he failed to recognize God as the source of his bounty, he also failed to give God thanks for it.

Jesus gives a different strategy for truly being happy. It is being rich toward God. It is remembering where all our blessings come from. It starts with us recalling how God has been rich toward us. ALL the blessings we have come from God. Job understood this. When he had

everything he valued in this life stripped away from him he said: *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.”* [Job 1:21]

The most important gift that God has given us is his own Son. Jesus gave up all wealth and power and authority to humble himself for us. He had no place to lay his head even though *heaven is (his) throne, and the earth is (his) footstool.* [Isaiah 66:1] Jesus subjected himself to abject poverty so that we might receive an eternal inheritance that we will share with God himself for eternity. Paul says: *You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.* [2 Corinthians 8:9] Jesus’ selfless sacrifice for us clears away all our greed and misplaced love for the things of this world. He cleanses us from all sin and hands us the deed to a mansion in heaven. With this inheritance assured as ours, everything else that God might give us in this world is only frosting on the cake. It’s over and above what we need and just the opposite of what we deserve. Through Jesus alone we can have true happiness. There is no room left in the barns of our hearts for the hoarding of things or worrying over wealth through greed.

We will truly be happy because in Christ we value an eternal life over the possessions that are a passing part of this temporary world. When it comes to believers, there doesn’t need to be any “preaching about money.” We know all our blessings come from God. We are filled with grateful hearts that will eagerly and willingly use his blessings for his glory and his work in the world. But we all still have sinful natures. We need to be reminded that our entire lives are God’s. All our wealth and possessions come from him. We need the lesson of Jesus’ parable of the rich fool so that we will continue to think straight. All our possessions – both physical and spiritual – come from God. It is a sin against the God who gives them to think otherwise.

We also need to see when we are using the wrong financial strategy. When we worry about possessions (and are overcome by the sin of greed), we need to be called back to the truth. We need to be led to repentance. When we think of our offerings to God as something that is difficult or a necessary evil, we need to have our view of things straightened out by the truth that it all belongs to God in the first place. We are only to be faithful managers.

Let’s remember Jesus’ financial strategy. Never let possessions and money become more important than love for God and our eternal life. When we follow this strategy, we will “be happy” because we will keep possessions in the right place – not in barns we build for ourselves but in grateful hands that hold them as blessings from God along with so many other gifts of grace.

Remember that one-hit-wonder, “Don’t worry, be happy!” Along with it, remember Jesus’ financial strategy: Don’t worry about possessions and wealth but be happy because of the life we have been given by Jesus. Amen.