

se7en: Greed

Reconnect – March 29, 2009

Text: Luke 12:13-31; I Timothy 6:17-18

Key Thought: Greed disconnects and destroys, but Jesus offers the antidote: a connection with God that brings health, life and joy.

...someone called from the crowd. “Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father’s estate with me.” Jesus replied, “Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?” Then he said, “Beware! Don’t be greedy for what you don’t have. Real life is not measured by how much we own.” And he gave an illustration: “A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. In fact, his barns were full to overflowing. So he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have room enough to store everything. And I’ll sit back and say to myself, “My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!”’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get it all?’” Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God. Then turning to his disciples, Jesus said, “So I tell you, don’t worry about everyday life – whether you have enough food to eat or clothes to wear. For life consists of far more than food and clothing... These things dominate the thoughts of most people, but your Father already knows your needs. He will give you all you need from day to day if you make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.” (Luke 12:13-31, NLT)

Pre-Intro: The Lotto Super Seven [video]

Intro: Surrounded by greed

- What do you think of when you think of “greed”?
- We’ve seen a lot of greed lately in the news
- In case you hadn’t heard, there’s a global financial crisis and a worldwide recession, in part due to the greed of some people in the world’s financial system, and in part due to the system itself
- And more than usual, there’s a lot of anger out there towards rich people and bankers
- Good thing there’s no bankers here today! We could tell them how we felt about them!
- (How crazy is it, by the way, that you’ve got a banker talking about greed in church today? Weird!)
- Maybe part of it is that we thought as a society that we were “past” greed – that the me-decade, the 80’s, had taught us lessons that we’d learned, that money wasn’t everything
- But it seems that everything old is new again – once more, greed is on our radar
- It’s popular to fight greed now – one of President Obama’s most popular decisions since taking office was to cap the salaries of Wall Street CEO’s at a half-million dollars a year, from the millions and millions that they were receiving before, even if their companies were going into the (gold-plated) toilet – another has been the US government’s decision to claw back millions and millions of dollars in Wall Street bonuses
- Big Banks – Big Oil – Big Auto – if it’s big, we’re suspicious of it, making money off the backs of us little people – those greedy billionaires among us, trying to make us think that they’re just like us, regular people, but really, they’re just like vampires, sinking their no-name teeth in our necks
- And it’s easy to fight that kind of greed – because it’s so easily NOT US

More to greed?

- The problem is, there's more to greed than just the stereotype – in fact, greed is an equal opportunity vice that is pleased to afflict the rich, the poor and everyone in between
- How can I say that? Because greed, at its cold, flinty heart, is simply, as Tomlin says, the desire to have more – money, stuff, whatever – regardless of how anyone else is affected
- If that's the case, then it doesn't matter whether you have an investment portfolio or an old green sock that you keep your money in, you too can be greedy
- Jesus seemed to think that way, too – maybe that's why he had so much to say about money to both groups, such as what's recorded in Luke's biography in the section we're looking at today
- Jesus is speaking to one of the largest crowds that he ever would – thousands of people are there, Luke records, jostling each other, stepping on each other – it's so crowded it's not even safe, a mass of bodies all trying to hear what Jesus has to say
- He has a captive audience – what will He make of that chance? What great spiritual truth will He speak about, in order to enlighten them? Turns out, He has a lot to say about greed

Read Text: Luke 12:13-31

...someone called from the crowd. "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me." Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" Then he said, "Beware! Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own."

- But not at the beginning – in fact, He moves on to the subject of greed when someone in the crowd asks him a question – or rather, is looking for an opinion from him
- Great religious teachers in that time and culture would get asked to rule on disputes – sort of as an arbitrator, to bring their wisdom to a situation – and they enjoyed doing it, because it gave them a platform for their opinions and an opportunity to teach
- So this person has been crushed in this crowd for hours, hearing about all of this great spiritual truths from the master teacher, and yet their mind has been a million miles away – on their stuff, and the family dispute that they're in the middle of – and they drop a bonehead question that just doesn't fit
- Jesus refuses to be used as a weapon, and instead speaks directly to the person, telling them that they've got a greed problem – "Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own"
- Another translation says this: "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions"
- As a banker guy, that makes me think of the multi-billion dollar worldwide fraud industry
- **Fraud** works because of the greed of people – we all want something for nothing, as anyone who has ever responded to an email with great news of treasure from Nigeria can attest – Ponzi schemes, like that of investor Bernie Madoff, work because people figure if they're getting rich, that they don't really care how it happens, as long as it does – that their life DOES consist in what they have, that it derives its worth from their level of success
- And all the heartbreak, all the loss, all the devastation of fraud could completely be stopped, if we could just figure out how to combat the greed of the people who get taken
- "Real life is not measured by what we own"

And he gave an illustration: “A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. In fact, his barns were full to overflowing. So he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have room enough to store everything. And I’ll sit back and say to myself, “My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!”’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get it all?’” Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.

- Is the farmer criticized for making a financial decision? No – the criticism is that in the moment of his greatest prosperity, he forgets about God and installs money as his God instead – his giver of security, his future, his hope – and instead of remembering God as the one who has given him all this productive land for example, he sets himself up as God, too, in charge of his future and all his prosperity
- In the original Greek, the man says “And I’ll sit back and say to myself, self, you’ve got enough stored away – and then God says, “You idiot! Your self is demanded from you – your soul – this very night, and you’ve got nothing else, because of your selfishness
- No doubt the people listening to Jesus are eating this up, being that most of Jesus’ followers weren’t the richest members of society, but the working classes – in a culture with a huge rich/poor gap, everyone would love to see the rich people get the shaft
- However, Jesus then turns about and speaks to the REST of the crowd – the blue-collar, working joes in the crowd

Then turning to his disciples, Jesus said, “So I tell you, don’t worry about everyday life – whether you have enough food to eat or clothes to wear. For life consists of far more than food and clothing... These things dominate the thoughts of most people, but your Father already knows your needs. He will give you all you need from day to day if you make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.”

- You can be poor and suffer from greed – greed is a preoccupation with money, and the thought that if you had more money, life would be complete and you would be secure
- I know that NEVER happens in Barrhaven – when your neighbours put in hardwood floors, or do some landscaping, or redo a bathroom – or when you’re trying to figure out how to put the kids in sports and make sure you have enough money to fix the car if it breaks down
- And once it has you, it doesn’t let go:
- “...greed always consumes. In particular, it consumes the person it takes hold of. It is never satisfied and is always hungry for more. A person who has given in to greed is always unhappy because they never have enough of anything. Whatever they do acquire is always less than what it might be. To get a 50 per cent pay raise leaves a nagging sense of disappointment because it wasn’t 60 per cent.” (Tomlin 147)
- And the fruit of greed isn’t security, like we think it will be – it’s actually worry – worry that someone will take what we have, worry that someone else will have more, worry that what we have will run out – greed doesn’t leave any room for joy
- Jesus gives a radical alternative – make God’s priorities your priorities, and let Him look after everything else for you – helping the people who need help, telling others about what He’s done in your life, living in such a way that you model His love to everyone around you, growing in Him daily

Getting Around Greed:

- 1) **Recognize your greed for what it is** - yearning for/worrying about money and its “power” as greed, and take stock of its power in your life – it can consume you – don’t let it, stop it in its tracks
- 2) **Decide to stop serving money** – Paul calls greed “idolatry” in the Bible – as in worshiping a statue – because you put your trust in what you have, not the god you serve – and in his mind and upbringing, there was no greater sin than idolatry
 - **III. – The Easy Button** - thinking that money will make everything easy – but look at the celebs that we worship, and all the struggles they have with the baggage that comes with money
- 3) **Give it away (now) (practice generosity)**
 - Do it secretly, do it joyfully, do it because it will help you too – you are giving away your chains
- 4) **Take a break from trying to get money (practice Sabbath)**
 - **Sabbath** – “Sabbath is a crucial antidote to greed because it is a regular weekly reminder that the purpose of life is not career, work, money, deals, degrees and all those things we fret over. It is the enjoyment of God and the good things He has given us... It is a day for walking in the country, sleeping in a bit longer, meeting with Christian friends and strangers for worship, reading books for the fun of it, dreaming dreams and enjoying food. Greed will make it hard for us to do this. The voice of greed inside us will tell us that there is a lot to do, that if we are going to achieve, to get the promotion, to expand our empire, we will need to keep working. But the voice of God tells us something different. That voice tells us to slow down, to be happy just to be, to slowly learn the great art of doing not very much and feeling fine about it. This takes some learning, but when we do learn it, it is one of the best antidotes to greed there is. (Tomlin 153-154)
- 5) **Learn to see everything you have as a gift from God.**

Key Thought:

**Greed disconnects and destroys, but Jesus offers the antidote:
a connection with God that brings health, life and joy.**

Tell those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone. But their trust should be in the living God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give generously to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them. **(I Timothy 6:17-18, NLT)**

Conclusion: A child’s view of money

- A Child’s View of Money:
 - 1) What’s the big deal? (when they trust you, they give it back to you – to hold, to keep, as a gift)
 - 2) Money gets us stuff (they watch us pay for stuff)
 - 3) Money comes from mom or dad (they don’t need to use their own money to buy food, clothes, etc.)
 - 4) If I want something, I should ask them for it (they don’t need to worry about money, hoard it, etc.)`

Response: Blessed Be Your Name (the band)

(Prayer time for those who want it)