

These have been really wonderful vision weeks for us. Thank you for being willing to do this. It is so important as a ministry that we're all on the same page or at least know where the page is. Next week, we begin a new series of messages. Its all about Jesus. We'll take what we learn about the Messiah in Isaiah 53, and compare it to what we see in the gospels as we study Jesus the teacher, Jesus the healer, Jesus the prophet and Jesus the redeemer. I'm excited about it and hope you will be here each week as we prepare our hearts for Easter.

Please find the insert in your worship flier. Today, we're using a translation of the Bible called *The Message*, so we've printed the passage there in your flier so you can follow along. On the back is a daily guide to help you in your study of the Bible. I hope you'll use it to help you get into the Word.

By Luke, chapter 12, Jesus is a rock star. By Luke 12, thousands of people are following him. People are trampling on each other to get to him. Looking for healing, asking questions. So this guy ... who doesn't sound like he's been paying a lot of attention up to this point ... decides to ask Jesus about something that's been on his mind. Maybe he thinks he'll get a better answer from Jesus than he's been getting from the legal system. So he calls out from the crowd (Luke 12:13) – "*Teacher, order my brother to give me a fair share of the family inheritance.*"

Like I said, it doesn't sound like this guy has been paying a lot of attention to the message of Jesus up to this point. He has just made it clear that his priority is personal wealth and his financial security is more important than his family relationships. Not a great statement to make in front of the Messiah ... and yet, somehow ... out of that crowd of thousands all clamoring to get to him ... Jesus has picked up on that question. Which means that now this

guy has the attention of someone who loves him enough to tell him the truth about who he really is.

Jesus says (Luke 12:14-15) - "*Mister, what makes you think it's any of my business to be a judge or mediator for you?*" (In other words, "Clearly, you see me as a judge. But are you sure you want my opinion?") *15Speaking to the people, he went on, "Take care! Protect yourself against the least bit of greed. Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot."* So Jesus picks up on a not-so-smart question and uses it ask a great one: If life is *not* defined by what you have, then what defines life?

I heard a statistic somewhere about families and church attendance. When a teenager comes to church, there is something like a two-in-five chance that his parents will end up coming with him. When a mom comes to church, there's about a 3-in-five chance that her family will follow her. But when a dad comes to church, the statistics tell us that nine times out of ten, his family will follow. The lesson in that statistic is that a father's spiritual influence over the family is significant. So now ... connect that thought with what Jesus has just said to this crowd. If life for a dad is defined by his buying power, what will that teach his children? If a man is known in his home as nothing more than a bread-winner, what does his family learn about life? By the same token, when a man is known in his household as a spiritual leader, what does *that* teach? "Protect yourself against the least bit of greed," Jesus says to this man. Because there is a ripple effect to this. If you define yourself by a paycheck, that's how your children will define themselves. How do you define life? And how would the people around you answer that?

In the margin of your worship flier, by that guy's request (Luke 12:13), write: "Greed disguised as injustice." Because that's what this guy's question was. It wasn't about fairness. It was about greed.

Move down to Luke 12:16-20, and as I read I want to ask you to circle all the self-centered words ... like "I" or "my" or "myself" or any words like that. Jesus says (Luke 12:16-20) - *"The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop. He talked to himself: 'What can I do? (circle that "I") My barn isn't big enough for this harvest.' Then he said, 'Here's what I'll do: I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll gather in all my grain and goods, and I'll say to myself, Self, you've done well! (you can circle these "you" words also, since he's talking to himself) You've got it made and can now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!' 20" Just then God showed up and said, 'Fool! Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods—who gets it?'*

Now, before we go "holier-than-thou" on this guy, let's acknowledge that on the face of it, he's not entirely wrong. Having the intelligence and skill to plant a successful crop is a good thing. And if you get a lot of grain, you have to put it somewhere ... so business expansion is a good thing. The problem for this guy is how he deals with the profit. Rather than filtering it through his relationship with God ... or rather than using it to promote justice and mercy ... he stuffs it in barns. Greed causes him to hoard his stuff. And the bigger his barns, the smaller his heart. A.W. Tozer wrote: "One of the world's greatest tragedies is that we allow our hearts to shrink until there is room in them for little besides ourselves." Greed does that. Its sort of like kudzu. You can't have just a little of it. Plant it in one area of your life and suddenly you find it popping up in the most unlikely places.

I heard an amazing story last week and was given permission to share it. He was a man who'd found success in real estate. He owned nearly a million dollars in property and had a decent amount of confidence in his financial security. In 1997, along with the rest of the world, he got the internet at home. He writes, "It wasn't long before I discovered pornography on the internet. There was that back and forth struggle. I would look and then I would tell myself this isn't right and I would stop. I could stop myself but I couldn't *stay* stopped. Each time I would go a little farther. Pornography became a destructive distraction. It was having a negative impact on my work and my marriage."

In the way addictions do, he began to lie to himself. He would tell himself, "Well, I might lose my marriage, but I have enough property that it won't destroy me. I'll be okay." Jesus talked about this very thing. He said (Luke 12:21) - "*That's what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God.*"

Somewhere along the way, he and his wife attended a Christian conference and it was there he became convinced something had to give. He didn't know how it would happen but he knew he was sick of living a lie. He said, "I own my own business and I am used to setting my own goals and pursuing them and achieving them. Why couldn't I stop this self-destructive behavior?" He began to pray for God's help. He came to see that he loved his wife and children more than he loved porn. A week or so later, a local TV station ran a story on internet pornography addiction and when they ran the story, they put a link on their website to a Celebrate recovery program in his area. He says, "I was literally led by prayer to the Celebrate Recovery Program. I don't doubt for a minute that God had a direct hand in my recovery."

Amazingly, two years after he began his recovery the economy crashed. What was worth a million dollars one day was worth a third of that the next. One day, he was willing to lose his marriage thinking he'd still have financial security. Today, his finances are gone but his marriage has survived. And Jesus says this is how it is with all of us. Barns don't last ... so if that's where all your stock is, you're buying a lie. There is no security in barns. In stuff.

In the margin next to verses 16-20, write "greed disguised as success."

Then jump down to verses 25 – 31 and in the margin write, "greed disguised as anxiety." Because right about here in Luke 12, you get the sense that maybe Jesus feels the tension in this crowd. From what Jesus says, you get the sense that folks have gotten anxious. You can almost hear them say, "Yeah, this is fine for rich people. But what about the rest of us? The ones without inheritances and big barns. You don't know what it's like, Jesus ... not knowing how the bills are going to be paid. Not knowing when or if you'll get laid off. You don't know what it feels like worrying about your kids' education and your mortgage payment and health insurance and when the next thing is going to break." Jesus hears the worry rising up and that's when he reminds this crowd that anxiety has no power. (Luke 12:25-26) - *"Has anyone by fussing before the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? If fussing can't even do that, why fuss at all?"* He's reminding them that just as selfishness has no power, neither does anxiety. But then he tells them where the power is. As I read this next passage, circle the word "God" every time it comes up.

(Luke 12:29-31) *What I'm trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with getting so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way he works (circle "he") fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep yourself in*

God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. The power, Jesus says, is in God. Which, to be honest, is not the easiest answer to hear ... because what we really want is for Jesus to just give us the key to financial security so we never have to worry again. And he *does*. But Jesus doesn't teach in the direction of where to find bread. He teaches in the direction of where to find peace. So there's your key to that question of what defines you. Will it be your financial security that defines you, or your ability to be at peace in any circumstance? If peace is the goal, then Jesus says you won't find it in the pursuit of stuff.

And Jesus gets it, that for most of us, there is this disconnect between what we know to be true and how we live. So he just keeps hammering at the truth. He says (Luke 12:32-34) -- *Don't be afraid of missing out. You're my dearest friends!* (most versions say, "Fear not, little flock.") *The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself.* (and here are the keys to that Kingdom. Here's how the abundant life is defined ...) *33-34"Be generous. Give to the poor. Get yourselves a bank that can't go bankrupt, a bank in heaven far from bankrobbers, safe from embezzlers, a bank you can bank on. **It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.***

Real life is not in bigger barns. It is in the ability to give with pleasure. If significance is what we're after, this is the answer. Paul says the same thing to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 9:10-15) -- *This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you.* (read this part together) ***He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God. ... Thank God for this gift, his gift. No language can praise it enough!***

Here's what Paul is saying: God gives, and he expects us to give. And a full, joyful life is defined by the capacity to give. We've seen from the examples in Luke 12 that greed separates. The antidote is giving. Giving is how we connect to what matters.

During both World Wars, but especially during World War II, average American citizens were asked to do their part to help win the war. This is one of the big differences between the wars we're fighting now and the two world wars. With these current wars, most of us are able to go on with our lives without any sense of connection to the war. But during World War II, every citizen was asked to contribute. They collected tin and rubber, and saved their money to buy war bonds. They carpoled and planted victory gardens. Boy Scouts collected newspapers. Even ordinary household grease was saved. Children collected milkweed. It was used to stuff life jackets. Because everyone participated, there was a great sense of unity and purpose.

In pretty much everything Jesus says about money, he's trying to get folks to get it ... that there is a war on ... a battle for our souls. And Jesus is asking for a wartime lifestyle from his followers. He gets it that unless we all participate, we won't all be unified around a common purpose. We *want* to go on with life as if the war doesn't exist ... or at least as if it doesn't require a lifestyle change. For the sake of comfort ... or numbness, actually ... we would rather treat the spiritual battle like it doesn't require our participation. After all, doesn't Jesus win in the end, any way? Yep. But here's thing: while we treat this war as if it has nothing to do with us, people are dying. The enemy may have lost, but he intends to take as many out with him as possible, before he surrenders. So ... flipping channels as if this has nothing to do with you is actually a very dangerous thing. The spiritual body count is rising.

So ... how do you take on a wartime lifestyle. First, be honest about that question: What defines life for you? God, or greed?

Second, inspect your barns. Are you quick to save, but slow to give? How much of your money are you investing in saving the lost and sending missionaries and feeding the hungry and dignifying the poor with work and care? Where are you putting your treasure?

Third, don't rationalize your anxiety. Anxiety is unbelief. If anxiety is your default mindset about money, ask God to give you more faith and confidence. Get in the battle at the heart level.

(MUSIC UP) This is a time of self-examination and offering. We are about to take communion together and remember again how Jesus did it ... giving everything for the sake of the Kingdom. This is a time when you also have the chance to bring an offering. Some of you committed for the first time last week to our Imagine Campaign, and today you'll be making your first gift. If you've been giving to this campaign for the last year, today is your opportunity to thank God today for his faithfulness in providing as you've given. Maybe your gift today is a way of acknowledging that you want to be in the battle. Or maybe it's your way of saying you're ready to stretch your heart.

As we prepare to come, I want to pray this prayer over you, written by Ralph Doudera ... a wealthy man who learned to give as well as he earned. If you're ready to enter that war and seek that victory over "self" in your own life, I want to invite you to stand where you are as I make this prayer on behalf of all of us: "How much I need you to change me, Jesus! I am without strength. But I feel as though I'm ready for a major victory over "self." I'm ready for a major death ... praise God! God, change me. Go deep within, yank out the ugly root of self

and help me to stop just toying with it. Remove it and fill the void with Jesus and his love. Help me to stop trying to be “Christian” from the outside in, but change me within so your works flow out of me.”