

The Gospel According to
Luke

“Wealth Not, Want Not”

Chapter 12:13-34

Introduction

Those who are **wealthy** always seem to want more.

Those who are **wanting** always seem to want more.

Both the *wealthy* and the *wanting* suffer from the same spiritual disease: Covetousness.

We could define covetousness, using a dictionary; but that wouldn't really help us to understand what it is, or how it affects us. We need it described for us.

It is described for us, by Jesus, in the verses we've read. He put His finger on it in verse fifteen; then He described it in the remaining verses.

1. He first described covetousness among the wealthy, addressing the brothers who were disputing their inheritance.
2. He didn't stop there. Turning to His disciples, who had given up everything to follow Him, Jesus described covetousness among those who are wanting.

Covetousness has nothing to do with the *largeness* or the *lack* of your possessions. It is a spiritual matter; it is a disease of the heart; it affects us all. We need to guard against it if we are ever going to experience real contentment on earth.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 If You Have Any Wealth, Beware You Are Not Possessed By Possessions, and #2 If You Have Any Want, Beware You Are Not Preoccupied With Possessions.

#1 If You Have Any Wealth,
Beware You Are Not Possessed By Possessions
(v13-21)

“Wealthy” is a term that few of us would apply to ourselves. We know wealthy people; *and we are not among them!*

It would be wrong, however, to ignore Jesus’ warning to the wealthy. You and I may not be rich, but we are among the wealthiest people in the world. If you’ve traveled outside the United States, especially on a short-term mission, you know that what I’m saying is true.

You may not be wealthy by certain standards, so let’s put it this way: Do you have any wealth? The answer is, “Yes,” and because it is, you should beware you are not possessed by the desire for more possessions.

Luke 12:13 Then one from the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

It was common for folks to ask their spiritual leaders to help settle their disputes. *It’s not a bad idea!* In the New Testament, the apostle Paul encourages believers to settle disputes among themselves rather than sue one another in open court.

Jesus’ answer sounded as if He wanted no part in settling the dispute:

Luke 12:14 But He said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?”

It wasn’t that Jesus thought settling disputes was a bad idea. You’ll notice that the man didn’t really ask Jesus to settle the dispute; he demanded Jesus tell his brother to divide the inheritance. Jesus was responding to the attitude of their hearts.

The attitude was covetousness; and Jesus exposed it in verse fifteen.

Luke 12:15 And He said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”

This statement is the basic principle regarding covetousness, applicable whether you have any *wealth* or any *want*. Jesus gave the principle; then He illustrated it among the brothers who had wealth, and the disciples who had want.

There are a couple of things we can say right away about covetousness and possessions:

1. First: Abundant possessions *do not* and *cannot* bring you spiritual contentment. Comfort does not bring contentment.
2. Second: Abundant possessions are not an indication of God's blessing your life. Wealth on earth is not a measure of your spirituality.

How can you tell if you are covetous and have become possessed by possessions? Jesus told a story to tell you how to identify covetousness:

Luke 12:16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.

Luke 12:17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'

Luke 12:18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.

Luke 12:19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry."

Luke 12:20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'

The farmer was not a wicked man; he was not evil. He didn't get wealthy by stealing, or cheating, or lying. He was a salt-of-the-earth, hard-working, good 'ol boy, workin' and livin' off the land.

Two things marked the farmer as covetous: He was selfish rather than sharing, and he invested in riches rather than rewards.

His selfishness was emphasized by the use of personal pronouns. Did you notice the repetition of the words "I" and "my"? "I" occurs eight times; "my" is repeated four times. He was being blessed with plenty, but kept it for himself rather than share with others.

It's OK to save; it's OK to plan for your future. It's not OK to be selfish, with no thought of sharing.

This is where you need the Holy Spirit to convict you. Do you have plenty? I don't know – **but God does**. I can't tell you how many square feet of living space you need; or how many vehicles; or how much clothing and accessories; or, in my case, how many books or coffee makers! I can say that most of us already have plenty of possessions, and we need to be careful about selfishness, and start sharing.

Then the farmer invested in riches rather than rewards. Sure enough, the farmer died. As always is the case, his earthly riches were left behind. In eternity, he had nothing stored up for the reward and contentment of his **soul**.

He told his **soul** to **take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry**. *Your soul isn't interested in earthly comforts!* Your **soul** is eternal and longs for spiritual contentment. Rather than accumulate riches on earth, you should store-up rewards in eternity.

By the way: This is the only mention of retirement in the Bible, and it's not good. Any retirement that lives for self seems to be unbiblical. If you retire, retire into Christian service.

Jesus made application of the parable to those who have any wealth, in verse twenty-one:

Luke 12:21 “**So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.**”

The brothers who disputed their inheritance ought to instead be striving to bring forth attitudes that better represented their love for, and dependence upon, God. Though one or both of them might miss-out on a portion of their inheritance, they would be **rich toward God** – first on earth, and forever in eternity.

Jesus was a thoughtful person. As He was finishing His response to the wealthy brothers, He was thinking about His wanting disciples.

They had given-up everything to follow Him; but Jesus knew that giving-up wealth does not automatically defeat covetousness!

#2 If You Have Any Want,
Beware You Are Not Preoccupied With Possessions
(v22-34)

It's easy to become preoccupied with possessions. If I had just a little more, I'd be better off and could serve God better. Just a little more money; or house; or vehicle; or business; or Church; or whatever.

Once again, I need to be careful, because you need the Holy Spirit to guard you in this area. Christianity is not communism, or even communal-ism. Sometimes you **could** use a little more of all those things, to the good of others and the glory of God. Again, it is the attitude of your heart towards possessions that must be submitted to God's plan for your life. Those who think of themselves as wanting rather than wealthy tend to become carnally preoccupied with possessions.

Luke 12:22 Then He said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on.

Luke 12:23 Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.

Worry is a key word in these verses; then you see the word **anxious** in verse twenty-six, and **fear** in verse thirty-two. **These are words that dominate our modern society!** We use the words "stress" or "depression" or "clinical depression" to make it sound more reasonable, then heavily medicate ourselves to cope. But the bottom line is that we are worried, anxious, and afraid.

Physically, these things are killers; emotionally, they are crippers; spiritually, they consume us. The prescription is not a *pill*, but *promises*; it's not *therapy*, but *trust*. It is to return to a place of trusting God with our lives, and living according to His promises.

We used to say, in the days of the Jesus movement, "*God loves you, and He has a wonderful plan for your life.*" It's biblical: God does love you, and He does have good works planned-out for you to discover as you follow Him by faith.

God's plan for your life is unique; it is special. It may involve **abundance**; it may involve being **abased**; it may fluctuate – with many ups and downs. He is with you all the way, in *plenty* and in *want*.

Plug all that back in to what Jesus said in verses twenty-two and twenty-three, and you would agree that there is no need to **worry** about the basic necessities of life. **That does not mean you will always have even the basic necessities!** It just means you need not **worry** about them, because God's plan for your life has taken them into account. He has rationed out those things along your way, and knows when you need to abound, and when you need to be abased.

Jesus next gave two illustrations, with an application inbetween them:

Luke 12:24 Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?

Luke 12:25 And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

Luke 12:26 If you then are not able to do *the least*, why are you anxious for the rest?

Luke 12:27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Luke 12:28 If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more *will He clothe you, O you of little faith?*

Let's look at the **ravens** first. God cares for them; how much more will He care for you? Agreed – but His care can be quirky, and this is where we get tripped-up in our thinking! You never think you need a trial, but God knows what it can accomplish, and He allows it for your good and His glory.

By the way, **ravens** are scavenger birds. They often settle for leftovers. Some of us feel as though our whole life, we've had to settle for leftovers. So what?

Next, look at the **lilies**. They are beautifully, yet effortlessly, **clothed**. God can provide you with whatever clothing He chooses. You could extend the idea of clothing to include all the externals that surround

you – house, business, etc. Again, you must put this in the context of the overall plan of God for your life. He knows what you really need, in order to become the person you really want to be.

In the middle of these illustrations, Jesus gave some great counsel:

1. First He said, **Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?** Under normal circumstances, there is nothing you can do about how tall you are. Your genetics determine things like stature. It's mapped-out in your cells. In a similar way, God has mapped-out your spiritual path. Rather than worry along the way, you can walk with Him and enjoy the experience of His grace and mercy as you head home to heaven.
2. Second Jesus said, **If you then are not able to do *the least*, why are you anxious for the rest? The least** seems to refer to adding a cubit to your height. *You can't do it!* It's set. Being **anxious** about it makes no sense. Just so, God has your life 'set.' Being anxious about it makes no sense, if you believe God is sovereign.

The remaining verses are a summary. They are addressed to those who have any wealth, and those who have any want. They are for all of us, so we will be content rather than covetous while on earth and headed to eternity.

Luke 12:29 "And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind.

Luke 12:30 For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things.

Luke 12:31 But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.

All this talk about seeking and not seeking can be understood by a word we commonly use: Priorities. Everyone sets priorities. If you don't know what your priorities are, just follow yourself through a day, or a week, and you will see them very clearly. Your priorities will either be mostly physical, or they will be mostly spiritual.

Jesus compared us as believers to the **nations** (or people) **of the world**. Their priorities are mostly physical. Watch the news and you get a good idea of what anxiety is! There's always a multitude of

crises – international, national, local, and personal. It's a wonder the world can exist another day!

We live within that society of anxiety, to affect others spiritually. We are citizens of heaven and can show the world there is no need to worry; no need for anxiety. **Jesus is coming back soon!**

I need to say a word about the phrase, **all these things shall be added to you**. It absolutely does not, and cannot, mean that God will add earthly wealth and health and prosperity to you if you seek Him. That would be the exact opposite of what Jesus was saying!

These things refers to spiritual growth. As you walk with Jesus on earth, and He takes you through God's plan for your life, He adds spiritual depth and character along the way.

Luke 12:32 "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

What is the **kingdom**? Of course, it refers ultimately to Jesus' return to earth to establish a real kingdom on the earth. While we wait for the literal kingdom, we experience the kingdom in our spiritual lives, partaking of its heavenly resources. In one place, the apostle Paul said, **the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit** (Romans 14:17).

Luke 12:33 Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys.

Uh, oh; are we blowing it? One commentator put this into perspective:

Since they had a kingdom bequeathed them by their heavenly Father, they should be so far from indulging an anxious care about food and raiment, that when there was a call in providence for it, and rather than the poor should go without a supply, it became them to sell their houses and lands, and whatever possessions they had, and relieve them (John Gill).

You see this in the Book of Acts. A wealthy disciple named Barnabas saw the want some of the disciples had; he voluntarily sold his property to provide for them. It's clear from commentary by the

apostle Peter a little later on that it's OK to own property, and there's no command to live communally.

Luke 12:34 **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

Whatever you cherish and desire, you will concentrate upon, think about, and focus your attention on. Make sure it's Jesus.

Conclusion

The Bible is its own best commentary. These words of the apostle Paul, from his letter to the Philippian Church, are how he understood this subject:

Philippians 4:11 ... for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:

Philippians 4:12 I know how to be **abased**, and I know how to **abound**.

Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

All of us have some wealth; all of us have some want. God has designed it that way, so that we could recognize and guard against covetousness, and find true spiritual contentment.