

Title: Don't waste your stuff
Text: Luke 12.13-21
Theme: a biblical theology of wealth
Series: Luke
Prop Stmtnt: Be rich towards God

I like a good bargain and old houses. So, I like to go to estate sales. Most of them are similar. There are old tools, old books, out of style clothes, shoes, ties, many dishes, old appliances, obsolete music equipment, holiday decorations, furniture and pianos. Then there is the stuff that has been used more recently: Canes, walkers, and personal products that give the unmistakable signs to all of us gawkers of what is in store for us. Someone lived, accumulated stuff that was meaningful to them, but they are gone and no one in the family wants it. So, they invite the public to come and walk through their home and in a way walk through their life, touch their stuff that is now selling for pennies on the dollar and in some cases, buying it to put in their houses so their kids will have to practically give it away.

I moved my parents from their home 4-bedroom home in KY to a 2-bedroom condo in MI. Then I moved my mom from a 2-bedrrom condo to a 1-bedroom apt. Then from an apt to a room. A few months ago, I cleaned out the room. This is sobering or liberating, depending on how you think about it. And Jesus WANTS you to think about it. But he wants you to think rightly about it. He wants you to know where the finish line is so you don't waste your life or your stuff.

Read Text:

1. **The Setting of this Warning.** (13-14)

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

Whoa! Hold the phone. What happens when one of your kids says, *"Hey mom, give me some fruit bites!"* Do you go, *"Ok, here you go, honey."* I hope you don't. I hope you say, *"Excuse me?! What did you just say? Do you think that you have the authority to give me a command?"* You are the child; I am the parent. You do not give orders. You are not in charge." This man who blurts out this order is so wrong. We do not give commands to Jesus. We don't order him to do what we want. Jesus did not bother with this, because this was not his mission. Actually, there were courts and judges that were set up for this and if this man was indeed wronged, there was a process for him to follow and Jesus wasn't going to get involved. But this demand by this man put an issue on the table that Jesus addressed. He may have been treated unfairly by his brother. However, he did not ask Jesus to investigate and render an informed opinion but simply to side with him and give him ammunition he could use to influence his brother. Jesus instead warned this man and us about a more important matter. Here Jesus illustrates the point he made earlier about getting the log out of your own eye. You claim to be concerned about your brother being unfair to you, but you need to be more concerned about the covetousness that threatens to destroy your life. That is the setting. V. 15 is the essence of the warning.

2. The Essence of the Warning (15)

There are two commands and a reason. Take care! Give attention to this. In fact, be on your guard against all covetousness (because) for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Covetousness has many forms and we need to be on guard of its multi-pronged attacks. As this brother's demand illustrates, greed is the cause of many family fights. The funeral is barely over and the posturing begins. Who gets what? Relationships between family can be damaged for generations over stuff. Jesus is issuing a warning here. He who dies with the most toys does not win. In fact, he misses the entire point of life. If your goal is to accumulate stuff, you are aiming at the wrong goal.

In the Paris Olympics last summer, the last race in the women's skiff boat race ended in chaos because the leaders from the Netherlands, were confused as to where the finish line was. Sadly, the U.S. team which was right behind them, followed their lead and made the same mistake. In both cases, the boats thought they were done, even though they did not hear the horn blast and they turned their boats around to watch the other windsurfers finish, many of whom went on past them to the real finish line.

What is the finish line and how does that affect your view of possessions? Or investing?

10 years ago, Jeff put \$10,000 down on a brand-new high-end vehicle that cost \$120k. His 10-year loan at 5% resulted in \$1,220 in monthly payments and higher insurance. After 10 years of payments that totaled over \$160k he had a used car that was worth about 8k. Meanwhile, 10 years ago, Sally bought a used car for \$10,000 and invested \$1,220 every month in a S&P 500 index fund. In 10 years, Sally had a used car worth about \$800 and an investment account that was worth over \$146k. Jeff was looking at day 1 as the goal. Sally was looking at 10 years. Sally's outlook illustrates the value of delayed gratification. There are good benefits to delayed gratification, but learning to live in a budget and discipline yourself to follow a good business plan in order to simply have more money is not the point. In fact, based on the story that Jesus tells, we could argue that this "rich man" became rich because he had a good plan and it looks like he worked it well. In the eyes of many, he achieved the dream. Now, he did not have to work. He got to the point where he could wake up and now had freedom to focus on what he wanted to eat, or drink or how to spend all of his free time. Isn't that the goal of life? If that is your goal, you have been sold a lie and you have bought it.

As you can tell from the text, this sermon is addressing the topic of money. If that makes you nervous then I should warn you that Jesus brings this up in the form of stories 3 more times in the near future. You might want to read ahead and then plan to skip those Sunday's so you can avoid the necessary tension that God intended for your good. Or, better, you might want to ask yourself, why does Jesus talking about money make me nervous? It is no secret that we get anxious about situations and conversations that get really close to what we trust in.

3. The Purpose of the Warning. (16-20)

As Jesus often does, he tells a story. In this story, the rich man has arrived at the very point that the man who shouts out to Jesus in v.13 likely wants to be at. In fact, this man looks just like the couple in all of the commercials for investment companies that show people traveling the world, visiting museums, eating fabulous meals, taking wonderful vacations with their grandchildren, winning the club's pickleball tournament and then the senior's golf tournament. This is the guy who has it all, it seems. From all outward appearances, he has been blessed by God. His fields had an exceptional year. He has so much produce that he does not have barns large enough to house it. There is no suggestion that he has cheated anyone or done anything underhanded. He simply has so much wealth that he does not need anymore. It is likely that there is no one in this room who has ever been in this situation. Therefore, he does not have any reason he can think of to be anxious because he has wealth and as we all know, wealth makes promises. So, why does Jesus warn us about the abundance of possessions? Because wealth makes promises that it cannot keep and Jesus does not want you to believe the lies.

- False sense of glory and ownership

Notice how many times this man says, "I" and "my." It starts with v.17, *"and he thought to himself."* He is the center of his world and he views all of this as his and he sees himself as the reason for his success. If you are surrounded by evidences of success, it is very common to believe that lie that you did it all. All of us are vulnerable to the Nebuchadnezzar virus. Daniel 4 says that *"he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and the king answered (as if the scene was speaking to him) and said, 'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?'"* Read from v.31 and on and see how that worked out for him. But we are all susceptible to that disease, no matter how small or large the accomplishment or possession, we are tempted to think that we did this on our own and that this makes much of us. Wealth promises fame for what, a moment? Wealth also promises you protection, but it cannot stop death.

- False sense of protection – cannot stop death

Look at v.20. *"But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"*

The Whitney Restaurant in Detroit on Woodward is the former mansion of David Whitney, a lumber mogul who lived in the late 1800's. It is stunning and sad. The house took 4 years to construct at combined cost in today's dollars of \$22.2 million dollars for construction, decorating, furniture and artwork. David lived in it for a mere 6 years and then he died. Edsel Ford built the magnificent Gaukler Point estate, now known as the Edsel and Eleanor Ford House. It is a fabulous piece of local history, art and beauty. Edsel lived there 15 years and died. Steve Jobs was reportedly worth about 10 billion dollars when he died. Steve was able to access the very best medical attention and treatments, but he still died. Money can buy many things, but it cannot protect you or anyone from death. That is what happened to this man. He had it all for one day, and that night, he died! What was the point of getting all of this stuff when you are going to die?

- False sense of security – cannot give you peace.

Wealth promises you security but it cannot give you peace because it cannot guarantee that your wealth is safe. It gives you a false sense of security. You may have noticed that in v.11 Jesus is assuring his disciples that when they get arrested and hauled in before the rulers and authorities because of their association with Jesus that they should not be anxious because the Holy Spirit will teach them in that every hour what they should say. Then in v.22 Jesus once again tells his disciples not to be anxious because they have a heavenly Father who will take care of them forever. Your security is not found in people thinking well of you, nor in having extra food, clothes, etc. In fact, I think there is a relationship between what Jesus just said and this in this way. You may be tempted to not identify yourself as a follower of Christ because it will hurt your standing on the team, scholarship opportunity, work promotion, or job interview. But trading in your standing with Christ for the promise of advancement and wealth is a terrible decision. Money and fame make promises they cannot keep. Jesus makes promises that he cannot break.

This story is not condemning wealth, but it is condemning the wrong perspective of it and the wrong use of it. Wealth and possessions are not your security. Whatever you have, it is your responsibility to use it in order to be rich toward God. When you are rich toward God, you have an eternal portfolio, meaning, you have investments that are eternal. Eternal investments are the ones that are forever secure. Cathi's grandmother worked for years for a company and when she retired, she was awarded a pension. However, the company went bankrupt and there was no pension. For those of you who are banking on social security, remember that our nations' debt stands at 36.2 trillion dollars. If you laid one-dollar bills end to end the length of just 1 trillion dollars is further than the distance of the earth to the sun. Our nation's debt is more than 18 trips back and forth to the sun. I don't have a degree in finance, but this level of indebtedness is really bad and would be scary bad if this was your ultimate hope. Do you have money in the bank? Who stands behind your bank? The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. The FDIC website says, "...in the event that an FDIC-insured bank or savings association fails. FDIC insurance is backed by the full faith and credit of the United States government." Is that a full-proof guarantee? Not on your life. Wealth also promises power.

- False sense of power – limited influence

Last year at this time, the presidential campaign was getting intense. Biden vs. Trump was all over the place. Joe Biden was in his last year of his 1st term and was aiming for a second term. When he made the decision to drop out of the race, it was as if he dropped off the planet. Overnight he was nobody. He temporarily occupied the office of president. He was treated as if he was influential and significant. But in a moment, it was gone and his fall was so fast and so far, that it is doubtful if there will ever be enough donors to give funding for a library in his name. On the tomb of Cyrus, the Great is the inscription, "*Here I lie, Cyrus, King of Kings.*" Well, that's ironic, isn't it? Dude, you ain't king of kings, you are dead! The maggots aren't offering moments of silence.

- False sense of identity – can't buy love

A few years ago I went to an estate sale that was located on a desirable piece of property, but the home just seemed sad. There were at least 25 different sets of dishes and china for sale (maybe more). Did they do a lot of entertaining? Was this a place for gatherings, laughter and many fond memories? I asked why so many dishes and was told that the recently deceased owner had no contact with her child, had no real friends and was lonely. So, in order to talk to people she would go to estate sales and would buy dishes. Apparently, if she bought things, then at least the people selling them would be nice and talk to her. But the pleasantness never formed real relationships. It was simply transactional. To her, it was better than nothing.

- False sense of purpose – ease

Jesus makes it clear from 21a, that his entire purpose for gaining wealth was so that he might live a life of ease. His stuff gave him the opportunity to be indulgent and he couldn't wait. His plan for self-glory, self-satisfaction, envy from others, was all coming true. There is no sense of stewardship. He does not see his wealth as being a blessing from God to be used to make much of God by being a conduit of generosity toward others. Adversity will humble your heart or harden it. The same thing is true with wealth. Some of you have been the recipients of resources and you are humbled by it, in fact, genuinely concerned about handling it properly.

4. **The Point of the Warning** (21)

The essence of the warning is in v.15. Be on your guard because wealth is lying to you and we need to be warned not to believe the lies, otherwise, the treasure you lay up for yourself is not yours to keep, but will end up being someone else's. Instead, be rich toward God.

This may seem like a perfect opportunity to challenge us to be generous in our giving to the church and no doubt, some of you need to hear that and take it to heart. But this challenge from Christ goes deeper than that. Even the church as a whole should take this to heart. Our mission is not to see how much property and wealth we can accumulate, but in a sense, see how much we can give away. We need to be generous. We want to be wise in having some savings, not too much because we need to always be dependent on God's people. And when we say, give away, what do we mean by that? What does it look like to be rich toward God?

The easiest answer is to look at Christ. How did Christ use his wealth and possessions? He paid his taxes. We know that. The disciples had a fund that was used to cover expenses. But the biggest investment of Christ was in people. He invested himself in people. Jesus gave away what he had in order to give us true wealth. 2 Corinthians 8.9 says, *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."* Christ invested his life for us to the point of death so that we could have eternal life. What he accomplished by his investment sets the pattern. I think it is godly and wise to earn resources in order to be a blessing. That's the gig!

Some of you use vacation time to go on ministry and mission trips. Some of you use your extra time in retirement to rehab church buildings, homes for pastors and emergencies like helping with the recovery efforts from the ice storms earlier this year up north. Because of you, this church has a wonderful reputation with many who have been blessed by you. Some of you do extra grocery shopping to help with our food pantry, mission trips, and VBS. Some of you use your time to help with funeral meals, landscaping and gardening. Some of you use your expertise and skill sets to serve on the Missions Team, Finance Team, Shut-In ministry, Recovery Ministry, giving rides, Counseling, Women's ministry, Men's Ministry, and more. Some of you make meals for others and visit people and serve in Children's ministries. People have invested in funding to help some of our guys get Bible college and seminary education. Those investments are paying dividends in other churches as well as here. There are so many examples that I am continually encouraged by your habits. I really thank God for you because I think that many of you get this.

I am aware of opportunities that we could invest in, in many places in the world. If you would ever want to talk with me specifically about some of those, just let me know. The Lord may want to use you. There are three things that may be coming up for us to consider. One of these days, I think we should take on the cause of translating the Bible in a language that has never had the Scriptures before. I also think that we need to add a lot of weight and momentum to establishing a healthy church on Manitoulin. Finally, we need to help with some more church planting, particularly in northern Macomb County. Just as it is good to carry some extra cash so you can bless a need when it arises, we can pray and aim to be prepared to meet larger needs as they arise.