

TEXT: Luke 12:13-21

THEME: WATCH OUT! BE ON YOUR GUARD AGAINST ALL KINDS OF GREED.

Dear Christian Friends:

In our lesson today, Jesus strongly warns us: **“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.”** We need to beware of greed. Greed is often a silent killer. We don’t even notice it doing its dirty work in our hearts.

Do you know any greedy people? Have YOU ever asked God to forgive YOU for being greedy? Can you come up with a simple definition of *greed* that others will understand? My dictionary says greed is “an inordinate or rapacious desire, especially for wealth.” Since that might not be too clear, it adds nine lines trying to explain that.

The original Greek word for greed gives us a good picture definition. Greed is literally “a desire to have more.” It doesn’t matter if you have a little or a lot, greed is the desire to have more. Greed is an attitude of the heart—an attitude of not being content with what God provides us. Greed is a sinful attitude that easily leads to sinful words of grumbling and complaining or to sinful actions like stealing.

Greed confuses what we want with what we need. We need food. Greed is my wanting a rib-eye steak—not meatloaf again. We need clothes. Greed is my feeling I must have an Armani suit instead of one from J. C. Penney. Now, it’s not automatically wrong to want something. When we make out our list for grocery shopping, we write down what we want—even need—from the store. But, **“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.”**

Yes, beware of greed because it’s a sin condemned by God in both the Ninth and Tenth Commandments (“You shall not covet...”). To not be content with what God provides us is to accuse God of doing a lousy job of taking care of us. You know where such thoughts come from—the devil whispering in our ear. Behind greed is the sinful attitude of “I deserve better than this.” Beware—greed is both deadly and damnable.

Greed is a sin, and only Jesus can save us from it. In our place Jesus obeyed all Ten Commandments perfectly. Bearing the sin of the world, Jesus suffered and died on Calvary’s cross. For Jesus’ sake, God has forgiven all our sins—including when we’ve been greedy.

Now, let’s look at the circumstances of our lesson today. A large crowd of **“many thousands”** had gathered around Jesus (Luke 12:1). Jesus was busy teaching the people, but one man in the crowd had something more important on his mind than learning the Word of God. He was worried that his brother was cheating him out of his fair share of the family inheritance. (We’re never told whether this was really true or not.) The man calls out to Jesus, **“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”** That led Jesus to issue his warning to beware of greed.

We usually think of greed as being about money. But watch out! Beware! There are **“all kinds of greed.”** Can you think of some?

We usually call greed for our neighbor’s spouse lust. We call greed for power or attention or praise pride. When you think about it, we can be greedy for just about anything. What about a little child who just has to have more candy? Or what about a person who just has to have a certain brand of clothes or shoes or the latest computer program or highest tech phone? What about being greedy for being popular and accepted at school or work? Yes, beware! There are indeed all kinds of greed!

No matter what form greed may take, there is only one cure for it—Jesus. Luke tells us that a man wanted Jesus to judge between him and his brother. But Jesus didn’t come here to be an arbiter in family disputes. Jesus didn’t come here to be our lawyer or financial advisor. Jesus came here to be our Savior from sin and guilt, death and hell. That is the ONE THING NEEDFUL, my friends, and we have the privilege of proclaiming and sharing it. In our place, Jesus lived the perfect life we never could—including always being content and satisfied with the way his heavenly Father was taking care of him. Then the sinless Son of God took the blame for the sins of the whole world and was punished in our place. Jesus suffered and died on Calvary’s cross to pay for all our sins—including all the many times we were greedy for...whatever. Greed may take many forms, but it’s only the blood shed by God’s Son that cleanses us from greed and all other sins. It’s only by trusting in Jesus, crucified and risen, that we have peace with God and eternal life in heaven.

But how can we be content and overcome the temptation to be greedy right now? Here’s God answer to greed—**“be rich toward God.”** If you thought it was difficult to define *greed*, try to define *rich*! To people in some parts of this world, the poorest among us are fabulously wealthy. Yet, how often don’t we sit around a dinner table loaded with food in our comfortable, air-conditioned homes and talk about bad economies and going through hard times?! We look at professional athletes or corporate CEOs and think they are rich (but not us!). So how do you define *rich*?

Start the definition with what we were without God. We were bankrupt! We were in debt over our heads. We owed God an absolutely holy life, perfect obedience to every one of his commandments. We couldn’t even make a down-payment. We couldn’t come up with one day of holiness, let alone a whole lifetime. God had every right to foreclose on us—to demand our souls and send us to hell.

Now look again at what we have with God. We have Jesus, the eternal Son of God, born as one of us, born as our Savior. We have Jesus taking our place under God’s law and taking care of everything for us. We have been given all the credit for Jesus’ perfect life. We now wear his robe of righteousness. We have Jesus’ innocent death on the cross as the full payment for all our sins. And it doesn’t stop there! We have Jesus risen from the dead on Easter morning. We may not know exactly when we will die, but, trusting in Jesus, we already know now exactly what will happen to us when we die. We’re going to heaven! We won’t hear God say, **“You fool!”** We will hear instead, **“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).**

It doesn't stop there either! We have God's Word with its precious promises and unerring guidance. We have God's sacraments to strengthen our faith and comfort our souls. We have Christ's promise to provide our daily bread and to **"meet all [our] needs" (Philippians 4:19)**. How rich we are when we are rich toward God!

Today we have another opportunity to gather here in God's house with our fellow Christians and are being fed with God's Word, receiving his sacrament, and singing his praises. Today God is making us even richer than we were yesterday! Yet heed our Savior's warning: **"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed."** Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Lord God, heavenly Father, you provide us with all things needful for sustaining our lives on earth. You have also made provisions for the salvation of our souls in sending your Son Jesus Christ. Accept our praise and adoration for your physical and spiritual providence.

Truly, O Lord, we do not deserve your kindness, for we have sinned against you and are no more worthy to be called your children. You have given us untold treasures on this earth, yet we are so busy collecting them that we often forget that they come from you. We often forget that our accumulated wealth and possessions cannot redeem our souls. We have often coveted earthly wealth to the neglect of your Word and sacraments. We have been selfish by not sharing our treasure with you and with others. Because of the competition for earthly things, we have often become angry with our neighbor and been guilty of slander. For these and all our transgressions against your holy will, including all the times we have been greedy, forgive us, O Lord.

Breathe within us a spirit of contentment. Having food and clothing, let us be content. Give us faith to share with you the fruits of our labor. Help us not to begrudge the good fortunes of others. Increase our awareness of the needs of others, and use us to alleviate the pangs of hunger so prevalent in our world today.

Breathe a spirit of contentment into the council of nations, and grant all a spirit of generosity. We pray in Jesus' name, who taught us to pray:

THE LORD'S PRAYER