

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 24

Read: Luke 14:31-33; Luke 18: 18-25

At certain times in our life most followers of Jesus wonder what he is saying to us in these two texts. “Sell everything you have?” “Give up everything?” Except for some of the exceptional missionaries that we read about in books, not many Christians we know take this literally. So how do we read it? I think we can say at least two things:

First, these and other texts in the Bible tell us that we must have a loose hold on our possessions. That means we must be generous with what we have. And in the Bible, the *benchmark* for generosity (certainly not the *limit*) is tithing—setting aside a tenth of our income, our firstfruits, for the life and ministries of the church.

Second, our possessions must have a loose hold on us! Many homeowners come to times in their life when they have some sense of their homes “owning” them, rather than the other way around. The same can be true of all our possessions. The Bible calls us to live *simply* and with a sense of *enough*. If God were to demand them from us for His purpose or for our sanctification, our answer must be, “Take it Lord, all that I have is yours.”

I know / find that hard. So, I must pray for a loose attachment to stuff!

PRAY: Pray for hands and heart that hold onto possessions loosely. And pray that God will reveal in our own lives when our possessions are holding too tightly onto us. Sometimes, without our knowing, we can become a “slave” to them.

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 25

Read: Job 42: 10-17

In a culture where materialism is a pervasive idol we must pray for strong discernment when we read this text. Having much does not necessarily mean God has blessed us. Perhaps our greed has gained it.

Having said that, we can also acknowledge with Job, that an abundance of possessions can be a blessing from God.

This week’s devotions have contained numerous cautions and warnings. That’s to be expected when talking about money. But possessions can and must move us to gratitude. Our homes, cars, and bank accounts can be a true blessing from the Lord.

So today, we must thank God deeply for all he has given us. And then, once again, surrender them back to Him.

PRAY: Turn that last paragraph into a prayer.

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 26

Read: Luke 14: 1-24 in preparation for tomorrow’s sermon.

Consider coming to morning prayer today in the sanctuary at 6:00AM.

WEEKLY DEVOTIONS GUIDE

FEBRUARY 20-26, 2011

BY: PASTOR ANDREW BEUNK

NEW WEST CRC

SERIES: A 'TANGIBLE DISPLAY' PEOPLE: JOURNEYING WITH JESUS IN LUKE

SERMON NOTES: “THE WRONG RESPONSE OF A DISCIPLE: LOVE OF MONEY”

LUKE 12:13-23; 18:18-30

PASTOR MICHAEL GOHEEN

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 20

KEY THEME OR TAKE-AWAY:

MONDAY FEBRUARY 21

Read: Luke 12: 22-34

The text that Pastor Mike preached on yesterday has startling words to say to those who store up things for themselves but are not rich toward God. Actually, the Bible says or implies a similar truth in many passages. Next to God and prayer, the topic of money or possessions is one of the most frequently mentioned topics in all of Scripture.

It seems to me that a godly posture with respect to money or possessions begins with trust. I appreciated these words when I first read them; they come from Marshall Shelley, editor of *Leadership Journal*:

"My wife's father is a Kansas farmer. He's spent a lifetime raising wheat, corn, milo, beef, and along the way some sheep and chickens. One morning while I followed him around the farm, we talked about the differences between city living and a rural lifestyle.

"Most city folks I know expect each year to be better than the last," he said. "They think it's normal to get an annual raise, to earn more this year than you did last year. As a farmer, I have good years and bad years. It all depends on rain at the right time, dry days for harvest, and no damaging storms. Some years we have more; some years we have less."

It was one of those indelible moments of stunning clarity. And that "law of the harvest"—some years being fat and others being lean—applies to much more than agriculture. Growing in spiritual maturity requires gratefully accepting the "seasons of more" and the "seasons of less" that God weaves into specific areas of our lives—our friendships, marriage, career, finances, ministry, and spiritual growth."

I don't think he's saying that farmers are more trusting than city or suburban folk. But relying on the weather does require trust. As we think about our relationship to money, God first calls us to trust Him... in all seasons.

PRAY: Think to yourself, or share with another, a time in your life when you experienced a strong sense of God teaching you to trust Him. Thank Him for that season and pray for even deeper trust.

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 22

Read: Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:13-15, 14:33; Luke 18:22-23

N.T. Wright helps us remember that there is a strong connection in Luke between loyalty to family ties and loyalty to possessions. In the life of the Kingdom, God calls us to surrender our loyalty to each of these placing God above all. This was most significant for those in Jesus' day for "possessions" most basically meant LAND. In the same way that Israel "inherited" their land from God, the most basic and cherished possession that a father could leave his descendents was land. And given that land was first inherited from

God, the land a father left for his descendents had deep *religious* significance. Land was not just an expected gift from a father, but it was a gift first from God, handed down through the generations.

Into that reality, Jesus says, "everyone of you that does not set aside all of his possessions cannot be my disciple." (Lk. 14:33) That language cut to the core, and was aimed at dethroning the idol that land and possessions had become.

In the life of the Kingdom, Jesus will not settle for competing loyalties. Even in our day, in the region where Jesus once walked, and in many other eastern cultures, there remains the temptation to make land an 'idol' and a 'right', rather than a gift and a blessing.

Acknowledging our money and possessions as simply a gift and a blessing is the beginning of being able to "set aside all our possessions" for the sake of the Kingdom.

PRAY: Thank God for the gift and blessing of possessions and land. Acknowledge the temptation to idolize them. Pray that your heart will not be divided concerning your love towards God and possessions.

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 23

Read: Luke 6: 20-22

The culture we live in operates on a different set of beatitudes, doesn't it? In an article titled, "Television Statistics and Sources", produced by the Catholic Education Resource Center, we read a substitute set of beatitudes based on the worldview presented by TV commercials:

"Blessed are those who fly to luxury vacation spots on tropical islands, where they lie in chaise lounge chairs, the only two people on an enormous white beach; for they shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are those who drink much beer, for they shall be surrounded by carefree, football-watching buddies and highly attractive, socially-gifted women in the first half of life; and they shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are those who have the latest smartphone, for they shall gaze on a screen swirling with color and shall get all the information they need just when they need it; and they shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are those who have outstanding kids. Verily I say to you, highly blessed are those who have a golden Labrador retriever bounding along on that slow-motion-videoed day of playing with the kids in the park, for they shall be the envy of real families everywhere; and they shall be satisfied.".... Yes, these are the beatitudes of our day. But they are counterfeit ones. Only those who hear and obey the Word of Christ are truly satisfied.

PRAY: Thank God for His blessing. And pray that we will not be tempted to long for the TV commercial blessing, more than God's.

GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR AND THE RICH

By: Pastor Mike Goheen

Luke has an interest in the poor and other marginalized groups. Jesus opens his ministry with the words 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor' (Lk.4:18) and this concern continues throughout the gospel. Particular categories of people are prominent in Luke—poor, women, tax-collectors, and Samaritans.

Closely related to his interest in the marginalized is Luke's attention to economic issues, like poverty and wealth as seen: 1) in the material that is unique to Luke such as Mary's words in the Magnificat (1:53), Jesus' words of blessing on the poor and woe on the rich (6:20, 24), the parable of the rich fool (12:16-21), the story of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31), and the exemplary conduct of rich Zaccheus (19:1-10); 2) in the way Luke edits the tradition handed on to him, for example, when John the Baptizer spells out the fruits of repentance in terms of economic relationships; and 3) in the language frequently employed by Luke to indicate need such as *ptochos* (poor), but also in the language of wealth such as *plousios* (rich) and *huparchonta* (possessions).

The 'poor' is primarily a social category, a collective term for all the disadvantaged or all who experience misery like the captives, the maimed, the blind, and the lepers. The word 'poor' either heads or concludes lists of the disadvantaged and describes those who have been deprived of dignity and selfhood, of sight, of voice, of health, and of bread. It may also have a spiritual nuance, of those who are devout and humble, and live in utter dependence on God but this is secondary. The term points to those on the margins, those who have been excluded for various reasons.

Luke also spends a great deal of time talking about the rich. 'Rich' is to be understood against the background of the 'poor.' The rich are greedy, arrogant exploiters, whose life's entire orientation is the love of money. They are the insiders, the powerful in the community who are 'not rich toward God' (Luke 12:21). On such folk, Jesus pronounces his woes (Luke 6:24f.). It is in light of this situation, where there are the insiders and outsiders, the poor and the rich, the marginalized and those who belonged, that Jesus announces a reversal that has come about in Jesus (Luke 1:51-53, 4:18; 6:20-26, 16:25).

Such themes are clear but what is Luke's purpose? A key phrase of Senior and Stuhlmüller is helpful—'the boundary-breaking ministry of Jesus.' Jesus' ministry was inclusive, to all Israel. It is this boundary-

breaking thrust of Jesus' ministry that is to be carried forward in the mission of the church. Luke is concerned for inclusion of the poor and marginalized, but also the rich in the church. Schottroff and Stegemann also ask about the significance of this theme in Luke. They argue Luke had in view a particular situation in which there were tensions between the rich and poor. Luke tells the story of Jesus to address this tension and to foster 'solidarity between rich, respected Christians and poor, despised Christians.' Jesus announces a 'reversal of the dismal fate of the dispossessed, the oppressed, and the sick by calling on the wealthy and healthy to share with those who are victims of exploitation and tragic circumstances.' Luke 'wants the rich and respected to be reconciled to the message and way of life of Jesus and the disciples; he wants to motivate them to conversion that is in keeping with the social message of Jesus.' The church is to embody eschatological salvation today so others might see. The church Luke writes to is to be a community that embodies economic justice, generosity, solidarity between rich and poor, and economic repentance on the part of the rich. Luke's controlling motif is that God's salvation has broken into history in Jesus, and the communities to which Luke writes must embody that good news in their social and economic lives.

Luke carries this out in a number of ways. He contrasts Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10) with the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-30). The repentance of the disreputable Zaccheus' is demonstrated when he gives half of his possession to the poor while the upstanding young ruler refuses Jesus' call to conversion because he was very rich. Further Jesus includes in his Sermon on the Plain, material which differs decisively from Matthew (Luke 6:30-35). This material 'is shot through with references to what the conduct of the rich ought to be toward the poor.' The rich are to renounce large portions of their possessions and waive the recovery of debts. Finally, Luke speaks of almsgiving as an expression of the mercy and justice of God's inbreaking salvation. In light of this, Bosch concludes, Luke cannot be called an evangelist of the poor but more correctly an evangelist of the rich.

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