

## **ALL I WANT IS A LITTLE MORE**

**LUKE 12:13-21**

Jack Benny was one of the great comedians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Part of his comedy persona was to cast himself as a tightwad – someone who just hated to part with a dollar. In one sketch, he’s walking along a street and someone holds him up. The thief sticks a gun in Jack’s ribs and demands, “Your money or your life!” There’s no immediate response from Jack; in fact, there’s a very long and telling silence. Finally, the thief repeats his demand, “Well, what’s it going to be – your money or your life?” Jack responds, “Be patient. I’m thinking.... I’m thinking!” For some people, it’s hard for them to say what’s more important: money or life itself. And that’s no laughing matter.

This month I’m considering with you what the Bible says about money, generally, and its effect on marriage, specifically. Money problems in a marriage are like a nuclear reaction. What’s the number one reason for most divorces? Money! Money affects your life in so many ways. Money affects every relationship in your life – particularly your marriage. Money even affects your relationship with God. Therefore, what the Bible says about money ought to be of great interest to everyone here: married or single, young or old, male or female. Today I want to focus on what the Bible says about greed and contentment. I can’t think of a better definition of greed than the message title today: all I want is a little more. I can’t think of a better story about greed and its effects on you and me than the one Jesus told. Let’s start off by trying to answer this question:

### **WHAT IS GREED?**

First, greed is one form of materialism. Materialism is any approach to life that puts supreme value on physical things rather than on God. People usually think of materialism as an obsession with money or the things that money can buy. That’s true, but there are other examples of materialism in our culture. Visit the magazine aisle at your local grocery store and see how many are devoted to giving your body just the right look: washboard abs, a muscular tush or bulging biceps. When working out and the way your body looks become your primary concern, that’s materialism. Or how about all the other magazines and books devoted to dietary supplements and eating just the right foods? If diet and keeping your body healthy becomes a preoccupation, that’s materialism. But, true enough, when the Bible talks about greed, more often than not it’s referring to an obsession or preoccupation with money and what money can buy.

Second, greed is a deadly spiritual enemy. Jesus implies that in this story, “... ‘Beware! Guard against every kind of greed....’” (Luke 12:15 NLT) Greed is a universal enemy. Everyone is affected by greed: young, old or middle aged; rich, poor or middle income; male or female; married or single; every race or ethnic group; Christian or non-Christian. Because greed is so ingrained in every culture and every society, you can’t help but be influenced by it in both obvious and hidden ways. It’s a powerful enemy simply because it’s perfectly natural for

you to be greedy. No one has to work at being greedy. A little boy named Brian blurted out at a birthday party, "I want the biggest piece of cake!" His mother was appalled and scolded him, "Brian, it's not polite to ask for the biggest piece!" Brian looked at Mom in honest confusion and asked, "Well then, how do you get it?" You have a sin nature and greed is just a part of it. Because it's such a universal and powerful enemy, you must consciously recognize and resist greed by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's your only hope of ever defeating greed.

Third, greed is about your heart attitude towards things not the number of assets you possess. The balance in your bank account tells you precisely nothing about whether you struggle with greed. Financial author Ron Blue was in Africa visiting with a missionary. When he drove up to the missionary's mud hut, he saw the missionary's two year old daughter playing on a trash heap. Her only toy was a used D-size battery. As they talked, Ron asked, "What's the greatest barrier to getting people to trust in Jesus in this part of the world?" Without batting an eye, the missionary answered, "Materialism." "How can that be?" Ron asked. "The people here live in abject poverty. Your daughter's only toy is a used battery." "Well, it's quite simple," said his missionary friend. "If a man has a manure hut, he wants a mud hut. If a man has a mud hut, he wants a stone hut. If his hut has a thatched roof, he wants a tin roof. If he has one cow, he wants two cows. If he has one wife, he wants two wives." Materialism affects everyone.

Fourth, greed is practical atheism. In Jesus' story, we read, "But God said to him, "You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?" Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God." (Lk. 12:20-21 NLT) I don't know if the rich man was a philosophical atheist. But, he was certainly a practical atheist meaning he was living his everyday life as if there was no God. How you live every day reveals the truth about what you really believe about God far better than what you say you believe about God. When money or the things money can buy become the focus of your life – as it was for the rich man in Jesus' story – you are, in fact, an atheist. And, you should also know, God says you are a fool.

I'd like you to imagine greed as an enormous, ugly and terrible monster intent on eating you alive. That image isn't so far-fetched. What are some of the signs that you're about to get eaten by this monster that the Bible calls Greed? Things take the place only God should have in your life. What does that mean? To be more precise, you live as if things make you happy. No matter how many times you hear it being dismissed as not true, as a culture, we still believe the myth that greed preaches: money equals happiness and more money equals more happiness. If you live as if money and the things money can buy will make you happy, you deny God His rightful place in your life. Also, you live as if things give you security. As many of you know, the stock market has been rebounding recently from an historic fall a few years ago. Some 11 years ago, the stock market took another dramatic fall. That time technology stocks were hit hard. In one day, Bill Gates, the world's richest man, lost \$11 billion. In one day! The

Bible says, "In the blink of an eye wealth disappears, for it will sprout wings and fly away like an eagle." (Prov. 23:5 NLT) If you put your sense of security in money or what money can buy, you deny God His rightful place in your life.

If you live as if things can give you significance, you deny God His rightful place in your life. Very few people will ever honestly admit that they chase things in order to provide themselves with happiness, security or significance. But how you live every day reveals the truth. What would make you happier today – discovering some new, powerful truth about God in the Bible that you never knew before or getting a raise at work? What would you rather live without – your home or a personal relationship with God – if you had to choose? What provides you with a greater sense of accomplishment – making a lucrative business move of some kind or leading someone in prayer to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior? Oh, you've never actually led anyone to Christ? Hmmm! What does that tell you about what you truly believe makes your life happy and significant?

Watch out! Beware of the Greed monster! You struggle constantly with anxiety, envy and jealousy. Instead of managing your money, you fret and worry about it. You look at what others have and feel resentment that you don't have it, too. Here's yet another warning sign: you're ungrateful to God for what He's already given to you. There's an absence of gratitude in your life. Thanksgiving is just a national holiday instead of a way of life for you. Either you feel like you deserve everything you have or you feel that what you have isn't good enough and you need more. Truth be told, enough is never enough.

Yet another warning sign is when money is an area of constant conflict in your marriage. If money issues are the number one reason why couples get divorced, it only stands to reason that it's the number one cause of conflict in many marriages – even the ones where folk stay together. Why is money such a tough area in many marriages? There's a simple answer. Greed is all about ego and self-centeredness. Did you hear the prominence of the personal pronoun in the rich man's words? "He said to himself, "What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops." Then he said, "I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones."'" (Lk. 12:17-18 NLT) Show me a couple fighting over money issues and I'll show you a couple where one or both people in that relationship is struggling with the monster of Greed. Greed destroys trust between husband and wife. Someone's trying to pull a fast one on the other one or is telling less than the truth. Greed puts my needs before my relationship with my spouse. Greed erects obstacles against healthy communication. Greed prompts power plays and attempts to manipulate or control the relationship.

John and Roberta, a married couple, bought a new home that was paid for out of Roberta's income. This was a fact she felt she needed to remind John about constantly. She would say things like, "John, if it weren't for my money, we wouldn't be here." John didn't say a word. One afternoon, a truck delivered a load of new furniture – furniture paid for from Roberta's income. After this

magnificent new furniture was put in place, Roberta reminded her husband, “John, if it weren’t for my money, this furniture wouldn’t be here.” Again, John was silent. Later that same afternoon, another truck came with a special piece of furniture – a combination stereo-TV-computer center all wrapped up in one along with all the equipment itself. Roberta had paid for it with her own money. Once it was unpacked and put in place, she said, “John, if it weren’t for my money, all this beautiful stuff wouldn’t be here.” Finally, John spoke: “Honey, I don’t want to make you feel bad, but if it weren’t for your money, I wouldn’t be here either!” Greed will not only devour your life, it will also devour your marriage if you let it.

Here’s a final warning sign today that greed is about to devour you: you find little joy in giving to the Lord. Whatever you give to the Lord’s work feels like a burden. You resent giving it. You fantasize about all the other ways you could spend the money you give to the Lord’s work. Messages like the one I’m preaching today irritate you: “That’s the problem with churches today! They’re always after your money! Why can’t we just hear about loving others and heaven’s streets of gold?” Was it a joy to put your offering in the plate today? Really? If giving to advance God’s Kingdom in this world is losing its thrill, you might be about to get eaten by the Greed monster. Another question:

## **WHAT IS CONTENTMENT?**

The opposite of greed from God’s perspective is something called contentment. First, contentment is God’s will for you concerning money and things. Yes, I do believe tithing invites God’s financial blessing on your life, but it doesn’t guarantee it. Nowhere in the Bible does God promise or guarantee tremendous financial wealth to anyone. Instead, God’s will is for you to find contentment with what He provides. The Bible says, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” (Heb. 13:5 NIV)

Second, contentment is a powerful spiritual blessing. The Bible says, “Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can’t take anything with us when we leave it. So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.” (1 Tim. 6:6-8 NLT) How is contentment a blessing? Well, only a follower of Jesus can ever truly possess contentment. Why? Because only a follower of Jesus possesses the true source of contentment: Jesus – His love, His forgiveness, His grace, His promise of eternal life. Someone who doesn’t know or follow Jesus can have moments of contentment, but not lasting, perpetual contentment. Contentment is a blessing because it’s ultimately a gift of the Holy Spirit. Contentment doesn’t come naturally to anyone. You can’t produce contentment on your own. You can’t earn or deserve it. No, contentment is found and maintained as a kind of byproduct of seeking first and foremost God Himself.

Third, contentment is a matter of heart attitude not the number of assets you possess. Paul, the great apostle, gives us a wonderful picture of what Holy Spirit-inspired contentment looks like. He says, "...I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." (Phil 4:11-13 NLT)

The comedy movie "Cool Runnings" is about the first Jamaican bobsled team to go to the winter Olympics. John Candy plays a former American bobsled gold medalist who becomes a coach for the Jamaican team. They grow to like their American coach and give him the nickname, "Sled-god." Later in the story, the coach's dark history comes out. In another Olympics after winning his gold medal, he broke the rules by putting illegal weights on the U.S. sled bringing disgrace on himself and his team. One of the Jamaican bobsledders couldn't understand why anyone who had already won a gold medal would cheat. He asked his coach to explain. "I had to win," he said. "I learned something. If you're not happy without a gold medal, you won't be happy with it."

Fourth, when God is in His rightful place in your life, you will be content. What did Jesus mean in this story we read today about being "rich towards God?" Well, the Bible says you can be rich in faith. "Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him?" (Jam 2:5 NLT) The Bible says you can be rich in good works or acts towards others. "Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others." (1 Tim 6:18 NLT) Being rich towards God is seeking Him first in every area of your life. That will inevitably result in you developing generous attitudes and actions towards those who are in need. Contentment is the result of living for what is eternal and for what matters.

If we imagined Greed as a terrible monster waiting to devour you, then let's think of Contentment as a beautiful destination. Each of us here today is at a different stage along a spiritual road, so to speak, to a place called Contentment. Where are you on that journey? What are some signs that you're making progress? One, you think about money and the things money can buy biblically. Ron Blue, that Christian financial advisor I mentioned earlier, points out that money from a biblical point of view is a tool. So here's the question. Am I using my money – this tool God gave me – in the way God wants me to? Money is also, biblically speaking, a test. So, here's the question. Am I serving God or serving money? Money is also, biblically speaking, a testimony. So here's the question: do my spending and giving decisions bring glory to God or not?

Two, you are following God's financial plan. You pay God first – the tithe or 10% of your income goes to the Lord's work. You pay yourself second – another 10% goes to savings or investment. And, then, you pay your bills – the leftover 80%.

Each of us will struggle with greed in one way or another until Jesus comes back or you go to heaven. I believe the most effective weapon against that monster Greed and the quickest way to that place known as Contentment is to tithe. Can you tithe and still be greedy? I suppose you can, but it's a whole lot harder to be a victim of that monster Greed if you tithe.

Three, you are growing in gratitude for what God has given you. Thankful people are usually content people. Thankful people usually enjoy freedom from anxiety over money and experience a consistent joy and peace in their walk with the Lord and in their relationships with others. Patrick Morley made this insightful comment, "The great secret of contentment is not getting what you want but wanting what you get." Thankful people want what they get. They're content.

Four, money issues are a "conflict-free" zone in your marriage. Every marriage has its conflicts and some of it's even healthy. But chronic, unresolved, continual conflict over money will threaten this most precious of relationships. Here's what I know: if together you think about money biblically, if together you follow God's financial plan, if together you're grateful for what God has given you, will not fight over money. And in so doing, you will effectively eliminate one primary weapon the devil uses to destroy marriages. You will enjoy victory in one area of life where so many couples experience failure.

The Rittenhouse family was on vacation traveling down the highway when they saw a suitcase fly off the top of a car going the opposite direction. They stopped to pick it up but the driver of the other car never noticed the lost luggage and never stopped. The only clue to the driver's identity was a \$20 gold piece in the suitcase inscribed with these words: "Given to Otis Sampson at his retirement by Portland Cement Company." After some extensive research, Otis Sampson was located and contacted about his lost suitcase. He wrote a letter to the Rittenhouses asking them just to throw away the suitcase and its contents, but – by all means – to return that special gold piece. Otis Sampson used the phrase "my most precious possession" several times to describe that gold piece. Mr. Rittenhouse did so but took the opportunity to write Otis Sampson a letter telling Otis about his most prized possession: Jesus Christ. A year later, Mr. Rittenhouse received a Christmas package. In it was Otis Sampson's \$20 gold piece and a letter. Otis Sampson wrote this message, "You will be happy to know we have become active members of a church. We want you to have this gold piece. I'm 74; my wife is 72. You were the first one to tell us about Jesus. Now He is our most prized possession."

That's pretty much it in a nutshell. When Jesus is your most prized possession, that monster called Greed will never trouble you much less devour you and you will have reached an exceedingly beautiful place in life. The name of that place is Contentment.