

Going Further

Sermon Series: “A heart of thankfulness”

Sermon #3 Redistributing Treasures

1 Chronicles 29:1-20

Luke 12:13-34

Warm Up

Questions >>

- Glancing at your diary/calendar for the past week or month, consider which person(s) or organization has commanded the most of your time in that period?
- How much of your decision making has been influenced by that person or organization?
- What is the most valued possession you own at this point in time (ie not primarily in financial terms, but in terms of how much of your attention and time it receives)?

Looking at the key texts

1 Chronicles 28 and 29 marks the occasion (introduced in chapter 23) of the assembling of the leaders of Israel by the King in 970B.C. (26:31). It gives us the last instructions of the great King David (23:27). David's purpose was to inspire the whole nation to the great task of building God's temple in Jerusalem as the place where the Ark of the Covenant would be housed, and hence the presence of God would dwell.

David's inspiration to the people comes not merely in words, but by example as he gives of his own wealth towards the project in extraordinary proportion. In doing so, David has left for us a profoundly alternative view of possessions and wealth to that of our contemporary world. It is one which is consistent with the message of the Bible as a whole (e.g. Psalm 24:1; Proverbs 3:9-10; Romans 1:25; Colossians 1:16, 17).

Consider >>>

- What do you think of the four statements below which describe some common attitudes to wealth today? Do you see these attitudes at work in your daily experience?
 - Rich people are more successful than poor people.
 - Wealthy people are more important than poor people.
 - Well-to-do people are more sought after to serve on civic boards and commissions, since they bring status, money, and presumably have wisdom.

- Well-off people are more believable in court than the poor.

Discuss >>>

- What is the prevailing attitude to wealth and possessions in society today?

With the above discussion in mind, compare the faith and understanding of King David in our Old Testament reading today.

- >everything we have comes from God (1 Chron 29:12)
- >since our property is God's property (Psalm 24:1)
 - > and since we only hold it temporarily and in trust (1 Chron 29:15-16)
 - > it should therefore be used for God (all of it)

From verse 11 of King David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29 we get the last line of the version of the Lord's prayer printed in the Book of Common Prayer: "for Thine is the kingdom". His words sum up the fundamental statement of praise God is worthy of receiving from his people. The parable of the rich farmer in **Luke 12:15-21** provides a stark contrast to David's view. It parallels the worst of the 21st century's world-view. The man in Jesus' parable had good fortune in a fertile field and decided to build bigger barns (17-18). His goal was to get far more than he would ever possibly need. Jesus doesn't criticize the man's business acumen, but exposes his real sin: his independent and self-centred attitude:

1. The man in the story gives no acknowledgment to God for the good crop that is produced (16-18); and,
2. His purpose and philosophy is clearly ignorant of any other than himself as his goal for life is to "eat, drink and be merry" (19)

Read >>> Psalm 53 and consider God's view of those who live deliberately independent of Him (note the view of the Apostle Paul in Romans 3:10-12)

Prior to the telling of the parable in Luke 12, Jesus provides a stern warning:

15 *Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."*

The story about a rich man is connected with the verses that follow about possessions (desiring more than what is needed) by the use of the Greek word *psyche* (in v. 19 twice, v. 20, v. 22, v. 23). This word is often translated "soul" or "life" in these verses. We of the 21st century frequently use the word "self" for *psyche*. *Psyche* is what makes me 'me' or you 'you'.

Verse 15 spells out a warning about life; about you, and me. The grammar used in verse 15 calls for continual action: "continually watch out (for)" & "continually guard yourself from". Perhaps as with conditions like alcoholism, some people are never cured of greediness. There is such a powerful hold on some, that it's as if they are always in recovery -

- always in need to watch out for and guard ourselves from this evil power in our lives. The Greek word for greed or covetousness (*pleonexias*) is used in verse 15. It is explained by one source as:

(1) "A strong desire to acquire more and more material possessions or to possess more things than other people have, all irrespective of need." The word is usually translated in English as greed, avarice, or covetousness.

(2) "taking advantage of someone, usually as the result of a motivation of greed." The word is usually translated as exploitation.

Greed can never be satisfied. Notice that Jesus warns not just against greed, but against "all kinds of greed" (Greek *pas*). It's no surprise that greed is first identified clearly as the Tenth Commandment, "*You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor*" (Exodus 20:17). Covetousness is the desire for something that one doesn't have a legitimate right to, something that which belongs to someone else.

Jesus gives the reason for this warning when he says: "because one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (12:15). This is one of Jesus' big themes, such as in his quoting of the Old Testament at the occasion of his own temptation by the devil in the wilderness: "Man does not live by bread alone" (Luke 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). In the records of the four Gospels Jesus speaks more about this subject than about prayer or about sex or about church politics.

Jesus' word to his first disciples is a radical statement; so too for us in the Twenty-First Century: "One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." This runs contrary to worst examples of how our society and our economy tends to shape our thinking and values and priorities.

Consider the question of Jesus in Matthew 16:26: "*What good will it be for one to gain the whole world, yet forfeit one's soul? Or what can one give in exchange for one's soul?*"

Alternative Therapies for a 21st Century disease

The rich farmer had more than enough; he no longer needed to strive to get more; he was living the "easy life," but according to Jesus, it was not real living. By contrast, Jesus wants us to "be rich towards God" and that comes from.... Wait for it ... giving away possessions, relying on God rather than self, looking to the future that God has prepared, and not merely living for the present.

How do you become rich toward God? In the Gospels we see a contest between the common quest of laying up treasures on earth in direct opposition to the quest to lay up "treasures in heaven."

Listen to Jesus' alternative therapies to the problem of greed and independence from God. I've collected the verses from the passage that follows our parable in Luke 12:

22 *Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.*

23 *Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.*

Discuss >>>

- What does it take to live according to Jesus' teaching "do not worry"?
- If "life is more than food, etc." what is it about, and how should we treat possessions and material needs to be in step with Jesus' teaching?

29 *And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.*

30 *For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.*

Discuss >>>

- The word for "worry" in the original Greek literally means "up in the air". Jesus exhorts us not to be in suspense about how daily needs may be provided.
- What does verse 30 suggest about the attributes of the God we worship and God's ability to supply our needs?

31 *But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.*

Discuss >>>

- Put into your own words what it means to "seek God's kingdom" (you may like to look to a passage like Colossians 3:1-17)

33 *Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.*

Discuss >>>

- Jesus does not say "sell **all** your possessions". However, there are other occasions where Jesus seems to encourage a life which displays a freedom to give away what one has. Look up the following references and consider your own attitude to possessions and the poor:
 - Matthew 6:3
 - Luke 6:30
 - Luke 18:22-27
 - Luke 19:8, 9
 - Luke 21:1-4
 - Acts 2:42-47
 - Acts 4:32-37
 - 2 Corinthians 9:7, 8

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

Consider >>>

- What's in your treasure chest?
- How would you go about putting God in His rightful place in your life?
- Look at Matthew 6:19-21. What do you think it means to "lay up treasures in heaven"?

Prayer

In your group, or on your own, use the prayer that King David prayed to set your heart and mind on the right attitude and understanding of how we should view our "treasures" before God:

**Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.**

**Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the
glory**

**and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.**

**Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head
over all.**

**Wealth and honor come from you;
you are the ruler of all things.**

**In your hands are strength and power to exalt and
give strength to all.**

**Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious
name.**

1 Chronicles 29:10-13

Practical Application Exercises

(choose one or two of the following exercises)

1. Consider the following bio:

Sir Hans Sloane- Collecting charitably
Sloane was born in Killyleagh, Ireland in relatively modest circumstances. Inspired by a childhood interest in natural history, he studied medicine in London and France. It was said of him by William Stukeley, the antiquary, that he was "an instance of the great power of industry which can advance a man to a considerable height in the world's esteem with moderate parts & learning..." His career as a collector really began when in 1687, as personal physician, he accompanied the new Governor, the Duke of Albermarle, to Jamaica, having concluded that study of exotic flora and fauna would be of use in his career. Sloane's expectations were fulfilled and he collected some 800 species of

plants and other live specimens to bring back to London. An account of his travels was published in 1707 and 1725. On his return to London in 1689 Sloane set up a successful medical practice at his home in No. 3 Bloomsbury Place - coincidentally just along the street from the present British Museum building. He had a good bedside manner, accumulated wealthy and aristocratic patients among them Queen Anne and Kings George I and II, but also participated in charitable work. He promoted inoculation against smallpox, the use of quinine and the health-giving properties of drinking chocolate mixed with milk (Cadbury's original formula!!). He became President of the College of Physicians in 1719 and in 1727 succeeded Sir Isaac Newton as President of the Royal Society. However it his collecting ability for which he is remembered. He absorbed complete collections made by others, among them William Charlton (Courten) (1642-1702) and James Petiver (d.1718) and also received objects from friends and patients. One wit called him "the foremost toyman of his time". His collection thus outgrew the house at No. 3 Bloomsbury Place and Sloane was obliged to purchase No. 4. In 1742 he moved with his collections to a manor house he had bought at Chelsea. His time there is still commemorated by such place names in London as 'Sloane Square' and 'Hans Crescent'. Sloane died at the age of 93 in 1753 and was buried at Chelsea Old Church. His collection then amounted to some 71,000 objects! In addition to a preponderance of natural history specimens, the collection included 1,125 "things relating to the customs of ancient times or antiquities" and 23,000 coins and medals. There were also 50,000 books, prints and manuscripts, together with a herbarium. Hans Sloane's will and last testament gave over his significant collection to the general public of the whole of Britain. It formed the basis of today's British Museum. He insisted that the museum always be free to the public, and so it is today. The only conditions on entry to view the collection was that one must be sober and of good character!

Discuss >>>

- What have you collected in your time on earth thus far?
- Which of your collected "things" might be of value to others?
- What plans do you have for your possessions now? ...when your time is up?

2. Engage with the pervading attitudes today

- a) "Preoccupation with Possessions." We may declare, "Whoever has the most toys when he dies wins," but how would you explain to someone the Bible's warning about the emptiness of such a materialistic life-style?
- b) "Security in Self-sufficiency." The rich man in Jesus' parable needed no one else. He assumed that he could take care of himself. What could one say to a self-sufficient person to engage them in a conversation about the Gospel?
- c) "The Grasp of Greed." Possessions (or the desire for more possessions) can possess one's life according to the teaching of the Bible. What practical

- d) "The Hollowness of Hedonism." How many of us dream of the day when we can be freed from our work and "eat, drink, and be merry?" That life, which we may think is "really living," appears to be less than living in Jesus' parable in Luke 12:16-21. How do you cope with the temptation to take the easy road in life, and instead choose to serve God, even if it means hardship for the benefit of others?
- e) "Practical Atheism." It is possible that rich fool in Jesus' parable had always believed in God, but when it came to managing his life, dealing with possessions and planning for the future, he lived as though there were no God. The parable, therefore, probes our basic commitments. What difference would a 'living' faith in God make to your pursuit for material wealth and possessions?

3. Consider the following verses and discuss your views:

*"Give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread.
Otherwise, I may have too much
and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?'
Or I may become poor and steal,
and so dishonor the name of my God." (Proverbs 30:8-9)*

"Give us each day our daily bread." (Luke 11:3)

4. Discuss the following questions about your money and God

- How do you go about deciding how much money will be given to:
 - ❖ Your local church?
 - ❖ Other Christian missions?
 - ❖ Spontaneous requests for financial assistance?
 - ❖ Disaster appeals?
- What happens to any extra money you might earn above your expected earnings (no matter how small your earnings)?
- How do you use your material possessions be used for God's purposes?
- What about those in your church community who may struggle financially? What practical measures or policies could be set up in your church or small group help them?

5. Test your motivations and responses

God's promise of eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is adequate motivation for anyone calling himself or herself a Christian. At times we are moved to give but too often we are unmoved and disconnected.

Diagnose >>>

- What motivates people to give?

Dr. Ken Callahan identifies five internal motivations for giving that are a part of our personhood. Rate yourself from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) on each of the following motivations for giving:

1. **Compassion:** sharing, caring, giving, loving, serving, supporting
2. **Community:** good fun, good times, fellowship, affiliation, belonging, a sense of family and home
3. **Challenge:** accomplishment, attainment, achievement
4. **Reasonability:** data, analysis, logic, and thinking that it makes good sense
5. **Commitment:** dedication, faithfulness, duty, obligation, vows, loyalty

All five motivations are gifts of grace according to Dr. Callahan, and he says that although two of these motivational resources are generally predominant at any given time during a person's life pilgrimage, no one is locked into the same two resources forever. Our motivations may change as our circumstances change and our journey progresses (from *Giving and Stewardship*, pages 65-66).

Which of the following best describes your approach to financial giving for God's work?:
(choose more than one if appropriate)

1. *Cheerful Givers:* Give what you have decided in your heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver
2. *Proportionate Givers:* Give as God has prospered you
3. *Faithful Stewards:* To whom much is given, much is expected
4. *Planners:* Plan your giving

6. Consider the following statement and discuss your view:

"Although God operates from a *theology of abundance*, we often operate from a *theology of scarcity*. Someone once said that the question we need to ask is not "How much of what I own should I give?" Rather, the question we should ask is "How much of what belongs to God am I willing to let go of?" Tithing (percentage giving) is a useful tool, a measurement. As a tool it helps us measure our stewardship progress, but it should not be the end objective. If we center our hearts and minds on Christ, the rest of us, including our money, will come along. But Christian stewardship is about more than money. It isn't just about making an annual pledge decision or a weekly offering decision. It's a life-long journey. It's a way of thinking and acting, a lifestyle. We need to let go and let God work in our lives. When we do, giving (of all kinds) will feel good and right. If giving doesn't feel good, we probably are still too inwardly focused. Ultimately, Christian stewardship is about our relationship with God. Gifts given during lifetime and upon death are expressions of the depth and strength of our relationship to and love of God, and serve as powerful faith statements to loved ones."