**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**BATTLING GREED**

**Luke 12:13-34**

**INTRODUCTION**

One of the headlines that’s dominated the New Year so far has been the controversy surrounding one of Canada’s most iconic brands.

When the calendar turned to 2018, Ontario’s minimum wage went from $11.60/hour to $14/hour, an increase of about 20%. To compensate for this wage increase, certain owners of Tim Hortons locations, including the wealthy children of the founders of Tim Hortons, decided to take it out on their employees by eliminating paid breaks and dramatically decreasing their benefits.

This has led to public outcry across the country. Premier Kathleen Wynne, who spearheaded the minimum wage increase, called these owners “bullies”. Canadians from coast to coast are boycotting various Tim Hortons locations and organizing protests to support Tim Hortons workers in Ontario. Many articles are being posted online slamming these Tim Hortons owners for what they’ve done.

Why is everyone so upset? It can be summed up in one word: greed. The owners are being accused of being greedy. They’re accused of wanting as much money as they can get, and if something like a minimum wage hike threatens that, then they’ll do whatever they need to do to protect their own financial interests, even if it hurts others.

There’s something in all of us that knows that greed is wrong, not only because we know it can hurt others, but because we know it can hurt us. Greed is harmful to the soul, and yet, so many of us still fall into its trap. We want to be content with what we have, but we struggle with not being content but always wanting more. We want more gadgets. We want more house. We want more in our bank accounts. And no matter how much we accumulate, we’re never really satisfied.

That’s the thing about greed. It makes you pursue “more”, but the “more” never satisfies. There’s always more after the more. Greed keeps promising us that, if only we had more, then we’d finally be happy. But when we finally get the more, we realize that happiness hasn’t arrived. Greed was lying to us all along. But then greed regroups and makes another promise, the promise that if only we had more of something else, or if we only had more of the original more, then we’d truly be happy. And you know what? We tend to believe it. Greed puts us on an endless cycle of promise, belief, disappointment, repeat.

Jesus wants to guard us from greed, because he knows not only how destructive it is to our souls, but how it compromises our hearts for God. He says, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” He doesn’t want us to be greedy for worldly treasures, because he doesn’t want our greatest loves to reside here in this world. He wants our greatest loves to reside with God. That is why he wants to help us leave greed and its broken promises of happiness behind, so that we can be truly happy in God.

The title of this message is **Battling Greed**. It’s the second of three warnings that Jesus gives to his disciples in Luke 12. We saw the first one last Sunday in the message titled **Battling Hypocrisy**, and we’ll see the third one in a few weeks when we resume our series on Luke.

My aim today is to show you that **Freedom from Greed Comes from Faith in God.** We will have three points today:

1. The Futility of Greed
2. The Cause of Greed
3. The Remedy for Greed

(1) **THE FUTILITY OF GREED**

Our text today begins in verse 13 with a man in the crowd saying to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” It appears that this man was having a financial dispute with his brother. Their father just died, leaving them an inheritance, but there was no agreement as to how to divide that inheritance.

We don’t know anything else about this dispute. We don’t know if the man in the crowd was actually wronged or if he was just greedy. It doesn’t matter, because Jesus flatly refuses to grant the man what he wants in verse 14 when he says, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”

The answer is no one. The man wasn’t one of Jesus’ disciples. He was just a random person in this crowd of thousands who wanted to benefit from Jesus without taking up any of the responsibility. He wanted to use Jesus to get what he wanted. But Jesus won’t have it. He didn’t come to be used. He came to call men and women to believe in him and become his disciples, so that they would follow him as their lord, learn from him as their master, and worship him as their God.

This little introduction in our text confronts us with the question of whether we see Jesus this way as well. Do you see Jesus as the one who owns your life? Or do you see him merely as the one who solves your problems? Jesus isn’t a genie in a lamp whom we can summon whenever we have a problem, and once that problem is solved, we say, “Ok, you can go now. I’ll call you when I need you again.” If that’s your mentality towards Jesus, Jesus is saying to you today, “Who made me your problem solver? No one. You don’t know me, and I don’t know you.”

But even if the man were Jesus’ disciple, I don’t think Jesus would have granted him what he wanted. You see, Jesus is the ultimate pastor. He doesn’t just look at circumstances, at the fact that this man may have been deprived of financial benefit. Jesus does what all good pastors must aspire to do. He looks at the heart. And when he looked into this man’s heart, he sees something troubling. He sees greed. So, he begins to pastor him, and this group of people, about the dangers of greed.

He begins in verse 15. “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

What’s covetousness? The simplest definition of covetousness is it’s “the desire to have more”. It’s the opposite of contentment. A covetous person is always looking at what he wants, whereas a content person is always looking at what he has. It’s really no different from what we understand to be greed. Covetousness is a desire for more that’s never satisfied, and yet it’s so powerful that people’s lives can be completely driven by it.

Jesus says, “Be on your *guard* against covetousness.” Do you know what guards do? They protect something valuable from enemies. Palaces have guards who protect kings and queens. Military bases have guards to protect the rest of the army from attack. And here, Jesus tells us that our hearts are to be guarded from an enemy called covetousness. Covetousness, or greed, is so powerful, and so deadly, that we must be on our guard against it.

Why? What’s so deadly about it? Jesus tells us in the next half of verse 15: “for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” What does this mean?

Imagine you’ve just been summoned to represent Canada at the winter Olympics. You’re shocked and honoured at the same time. It’s a chance to not only compete on the biggest state in sports, but to represent your country while doing so. You take this invitation very seriously, so right away, you begin training. Day and night, you’re running for miles. You’re lifting weights. You’re making yourself a more explosive athlete. You make sure you’re as strong and as agile as you can possibly be.

Finally, after months of training, the time has come. You fly off to Pyeongchang in South Korea and you settle in at the Athletes’ Village. You can’t wait to compete. But when you’re finally brought to the arena, you’re met with a shocking surprise: you’re not competing in skating, or skiing, bobsleigh, or any sport that requires explosiveness and agility. Instead, you’re competing in curling. Suddenly you realize that all your training was worth absolutely nothing. You shouldn’t have been running for miles and lifting weights. You should have been practicing your curls.

What a foolish mistake! What a waste of time! You should have asked what sport you were summoned to compete in. But now that you’re at the Olympics, it’s too late. You’ve wasted your opportunity to compete, and now it’s too late to do anything about it.

Living a life that’s driven by greed is exactly the same. If you devote your life to the accumulation of money, property, and things, it’s like you’re training for the wrong sport. That’s not what life is all about. Jesus says life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions! Life is about living for God, not living for yourself. It’s about storing up treasures in heaven, not heaping up trinkets on earth. If you let greed grab a hold of your life so that you spend an entire lifetime for more, more, more, then at the end of your life, when you reflect back on how you used your life, you’ll realize that it was all wasted. Greed leads us to make decisions that ultimately lead to a futile life.

Jesus tells a parable of his own to illustrate the utter futility of greed in verses 16-21. In this parable, he describes a rich man who owned land that, one year, produced so much grain that he didn’t know what to do with it all. He ends up settling on the idea of tearing down his old barns and building larger ones, so that he has room to store up all his grain and goods.

I don’t think there’s anything wrong with what the rich man did. There’s nothing wrong with having a bountiful harvest, and there’s nothing wrong with storing it up so that you can preserve it. That’s what Joseph did under Pharaoh in Genesis 41. Saving and storing up is often a matter of wise stewardship.

The rich man’s problem wasn’t his wealth or his planning. His problem was that he was saving up all his wealth for himself. Commentators immediately notice how prominent first person pronouns and singular verbs are in this parable, starting in verse 17: “What shall *I* do, for *I* have nowhere to store *my* crops? *I* will do this: *I* will tear down *my* barns and build larger ones, and there *I* will store all *my* grain and *my* goods.” Then, as he looks around at all his wealth, which he intends to spend on himself, and himself alone, he says to himself, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”

This rich fool believed that he had finally arrived. He had reached the pinnacle of the meaning of life by accumulating vast goods and resources for himself. But here’s the problem. He’s going to die. God says to him in verse 20, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

The man is going to die, and when he dies, he can’t take any of his stuff with him. In fact, he won’t even know who it will belong to. God asks “who will your things belong to?” rhetorically, because the man will never know who will inherit his wealth. And when he stands before God and faces judgment, having devoted his entire life to the selfish accumulation of passing, earthly wealth, none of it will do him any good.

This is what awaits the one who is driven by greed: a wasted, meaningless, futile life. This is the fate of those who lay up treasures for themselves and are not rich towards God, as Jesus says in verse 21. So, we must be on our guard against covetousness, protecting our hearts from the endless pursuit of things, because life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions.

(2) **THE CAUSE OF GREED**

But how do we guard against greed? How do we battle against it so that it doesn’t take root in our lives? Here’s the answer: we need to learn to identity it in our lives in seed form before it matures, grows, and starts directing our lives. We need to snip it in the bud. This leads to our second point: the cause of greed.

After the parable of the rich fool, Jesus launches into his famous discourse on anxiety in verses 22-31. Most Christians are very familiar with the parallel account in Matthew 6. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’ teaching on anxiety forms part of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount”, which is one of the most significant texts in Scripture that describe what it means to live as a follower of Christ. And within the Sermon on the Mount, this text on not being anxious about anything is one of the most memorable portions of that sermon.

What most people miss about this text on anxiety, however, is the context. Do you know what comes right before the “do not be anxious” text in the sermon on the mount? These words:

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. *Therefore* *I tell you, do not be anxious about your life…*” (Matthew 6:24-25)

Jesus is saying, “Don’t serve money, because if you do, you can’t serve God. You need to guard your heart from the love of money, and to do so, you need to stop being anxious.” So what’s the cause of greed? Anxiety. Anxiety is the root that gives growth to greed. If we are to guard ourselves from greed, we need to start by addressing our anxiety.

We see the same connection between greed and anxiety in our text in Luke. Verses 13-21 are all about guarding against greed, because greed leads to a meaningless life. Then in verse 22, Jesus says that *therefore*, we are not to be anxious about our lives.

Have you seen this connection in your own life? When we’re anxious about whether we will have enough money to do all we need to do in the future, what do we do? We hoard all our money for ourselves. And when we do give money away, we do it with a frown on our face because it’s setting us back financially and keeping us from obtaining the things we’re anxious about

Anxiety paves the path for greed to enter our hearts. We see this even in the parable of the rich fool. After his bountiful harvest, he says that now, he can finally “relax, eat, drink, be merry” because before the bountiful harvest he *wasn’t* relaxed and merry. He was anxious. And so, when he finally got what he wanted, his anxiety led him to greed, and his greed led him to selfish, me-first hoarding.

So let me ask you: are you anxious today about anything? Anxious about your job? Anxious about your retirement? Anxious about the housing market? Anxious about your children’s education? If so, then our text has a warning for you: greed is crouching at the door of your heart. It’s waiting to slip in unnoticed, so that it can slowly lead you to stop loving God and to start loving money.

Anxiety is the root of greed. That much is clear. Anxiety is like a little shoot that grows up into greed. But our text doesn’t end there. It takes us one level deeper and shows us the root of anxiety itself.

It comes while Jesus gives his disciples a number of reasons to not be anxious in verses 23-27. He uses two lesser to greater arguments to convince us that we don’t need to be anxious. In verse 24, Jesus says that if God feeds birds, then how much more will he feed you, a man or woman made in God’s own image and infinitely more valuable than birds? Then in verses 27-28, Jesus says that if God clothes the grass in beauty, which is here today and gone tomorrow, how much more will he clothe you, a being who will live forever?

But then, at the end of verse 28, he gives us a little nugget of truth that reveals the true problem for the anxious person. It’s that they lack faith. Jesus says to those who are anxious, “If God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, *O you of little faith*!”

Now we understand our true problem. We start coveting because we struggle with anxiety, and we struggle with anxiety because we lack faith. It’s all becoming clear now isn’t it? We start selfishly hoarding for ourselves because we’re anxious about not having enough, and we’re anxious about not having enough because we doubt whether God will provide. Lack of faith is the root of anxiety, and when anxiety has festered in your heart long enough, it becomes greed.

This shows us that greed isn’t just a money problem. It’s a faith problem. If we’re going to guard our hearts against greed, we have to guard our hearts against unbelief. The fight against greed is the fight for faith. We won’t stop coveting until we start trusting.

(3) **THE REMEDY FOR GREED**

Some of you may be feeling discouraged right now. You may have been aware of your struggle with anxiety, but now you see that your real problem is lack of faith. A big problem just ballooned into a massive one. You know what? Lack of faith is indeed a massive problem. The Bible says that, without faith, we cannot please God. We need to take lack of faith seriously, but that doesn’t mean that we have to be discouraged. The reality is that all of us, without exception, struggle with lack of faith at different times in our lives. We need to help each other to trust God more, so that lack of faith, anxiety, and greed can all be weeded out of our lives. But the best news in our text is that God wants to help us as well. He wants to gently and lovingly lead us from doubt to faith, and our text is going to show us how. This leads to our last point: the remedy for greed.

What’s the remedy for greed? Well, if greed comes from anxiety, and anxiety comes from lack of faith, then we must address lack of faith. Otherwise, we’re only treating the symptoms instead of destroying the virus that’s causing them. But how do we address lack of faith?

I’m going to give you the answer up front, and then I’ll show you where I got it from our text. The remedy for lack of faith is knowing and trusting God’s promises, which are secured for us in the gospel. It’s not rocket science. Indeed, this is something our church is quite familiar with. If we are to move from doubt to faith, we must have a stronger grasp of God’s promises.

We see Jesus pointing us to God’s promises over and over again in our text. Are you anxious about what you will eat? Then consider the ravens in verse 24. “They neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!” Jesus couldn’t be clearer. We don’t need to be anxious about food, because God has promised to feed us.

Or perhaps you’re anxious about whether you’ll have clothing to wear. If you are, then consider the lilies of the field in verse 27. “They neither toil nor spin, yet…even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you?” We don’t need to be anxious about clothing, because God has promised to clothe us.

We don’t need to be anxious about whether we will have enough, because God has promised that we will. I think if we’re honest with ourselves, however, we have to admit that we’re often anxious about other things that God hasn’t promised. Singles get anxious about whether they’ll ever find a spouse. Professionals get anxious about whether they’ll get their dream job. People-pleasers get anxious about whether everyone will like them.

God doesn’t promise any of these things in Scripture, and yet, these are the sorts of things that cause people to doubt God the most! We need to stop expecting God to do what he has never said he will do, and we need to believe that what he has promised to do is what we truly need to be happy.

But how do we know that God will keep his promises? What assures us that God is worthy of our trust, that he will do what he says he will do, and that we don’t need to be anxious?

The answer is that, for those who trust in Christ, God isn’t just an abstract or aloof deity who just so happens to think about you once in a while. God is your father, and he loves you as a father loves his children.

We see Jesus highlight the fatherhood of God as our text progresses. In verse 24, Jesus refers to “God” feeding the birds. Again, in verse 28, he says that “God” clothes the grass. But then in verse 30, Jesus says don’t seek what you are to eat and drink, for your “Father” knows that you need them. Then again in verse 32, Jesus says “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

The Christian can be sure that God will keep his promises, because through your faith in Christ, God himself is your Heavenly Father. If you trust in Christ, believing that he lived, died, and rose to pay the penalty for your sins and to make you righteous in God’s eyes, then you’ve been adopted into God’s family. He will provide for all your needs, because he’s your loving father, and he will not fail to provide for his children.

If you’re here and you haven’t yet put your trust in Christ, I want you to know that you can do that at any time. Today, you can say, “I believe that Jesus died for my sins, and that his death was the only way I could become right with God, and I acknowledge him to be the lord of my life and saviour of my soul”. That’s how people are adopted into God’s family. It’s not by being born into a Christian family or living a good life. It’s by faith in Christ.

And when you are adopted into God’s family, you finally have the resources to put greed to death in your life by trusting in God’s loving provision for all your needs. That doesn’t mean that he’ll give you everything you want, because not everything you want is good for you. But it does mean that God will provide everything that you need to live a truly happy life for him in this lifetime.

Jesus closes this section of teaching with two final promises that are far greater than what he promises to do for us in this lifetime. In verse 32, Jesus says “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”, and in verse 33, Jesus says “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.”

There are promises for this lifetime that free us from anxiety, but there are also promises for the life to come that free us to be radically generous. We don’t need to hold on to worldly possessions, because it’s our Father’s good pleasure to give us his very kingdom. Why live as if we were building our own kingdoms in this world when the Kingdom of God awaits us? And why hoard up treasures in this life that grow old, that are stolen, and that are destroyed, when we can store up treasures in heaven that will never be lost?

Jesus wants us to store up treasures in heaven, because where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also. Jesus wants us to hate greed so that we can love God. He wants us to be radically generous with our resources in this lifetime so that we can more deeply long to be with him in his kingdom forever.

**CONCLUSION**

Summary chart of what our text has shown us about greed:

Lack of Faith Faith in God’s Promises

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Anxiety Peace

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Greed Radical Generosity

So what can you do today if you struggle with greed or anxiety? You need to address your lack of faith, and you do that by looking to two things: the promises of God, and the gospel. You won’t know what to believe if you don’t know what God has promised. Start by using “Take Words With You” regularly, a prayer resource Pastor Tim has created that is full of God’s promises. Identity your anxieties and memorize promises that address those anxieties. And whenever you feel anxious about something, pray those promises to God and remember that all of God’s promises have been secured for us through the gospel.

The promises of God are trustworthy, and the promises of God are exceedingly precious. So let us know what God has promised, let us trust what God has promised, and let us love what God has promised, that we may be free from greed and free for radical generosity.