

For The Love Of Money

Luke 12:8-19, Ephesians 5:15, Ephesians 5:10

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In September of 2008, god died. Who would have guessed? He seemed eternal.

People depended on him for their future. What were they supposed to do now? I remember it being on national news. Weeping. Wailing. Gnashing of teeth.

I even saw my 401(k) lose half its value, but it's not like it's the first time this has happened, the last time god died like this was in the 1929. It was called Black Monday.

So many people had put their hopes and their dreams in him. They were counting on him to take care of them.

They were counting on him to give them significance. They were counting on him to keep them safe and protect them.

Now where were they supposed to turn? For so many people, their god, money and wealth, died in the midst of a collapsed economy.

The god of money has been around forever. Before our time, people knew him as heads of cattle. He was also known as animal skins, crops, spices, or anything that they could trade.

These days he still has a lot of names: bread, bacon, capital, cash, etc. For others he doesn't have the name of cash, but rather a little piece of plastic called a "credit card," or maybe a file or bookmark on a computer named "Portfolio."

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This god of money isn't a new idol. He's always been around, but I'd argue that his power today is unparalleled to any other time. There were times in the past when he was just your typical run-of-the-mill false god.

In medieval times, wealth was important, but the monarchs had most of it. Castles were surrounded with droves of serfs and laborers.

For these serfs and laborers, there was no hope or means of ever acquiring any large sums of money, or many personal possessions, but as time passed, the world began to change.

As the world changed, so did the influence of the god of money. Democracy arose and it created a more level playing field.

Western culture began to develop, and with it a term called "*The American Dream*" and people began talking about the "*pursuit of happiness*."

When we talk about the "*American Dream*" and the "*pursuit of happiness*," the god of money knows we're just in the pursuit of him.

One of the prominent authors in the 19th century was a man by the name of Horatio Alger Jr. He wrote more than 100 stories in his lifetime that were published by more than 70 different publishers.

These stories helped the population of the United States believe the myth that anyone could work hard, become rich, and become the "*self-made man*."

Money is one of the things that has grown so unbelievably dominant in our culture that it's difficult for any of us to mentally stand far enough back to get a true perspective of it.

Many times, it's like no matter what we say we're going to do, we live as if the pursuit of wealth is the real goal in life.

Then we're told that *"money can't buy happiness,"* but come on, we know what's really going on there.

All the super-rich people just got together in a private meeting and agreed to just say that so that the rest of us would feel better about not having very much.

I love this quote by Mark Twain: *"Some men worship rank, some worship heroes, some worship power, some worship God, and over these ideals they dispute and cannot unite - but they all worship money."*

They all have one thing in common: they all worship money.

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In Matthew 10, Jesus was teaching to a crowd of thousands. The people were captivated as He challenged them to be faithful to God.

Jesus told the crowd, *"But the one who denies me here on earth will be denied before the angels of God."*

Then, in Luke 12, we learn of a man in that crowd who isn't thinking about heaven.

Luke 12:13, *"Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."*

Think about it. Jesus was teaching the importance of confessing Him before men when He was interrupted by an individual yelling out, *"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."*

It's almost like the guy was on his phone instead of listening to Jesus. As the younger brother in the family, he was concerned about his inheritance.

In Biblical times, the law stated that the first-born son was entitled to two-thirds of his father's estate while only one-third would go to the younger son.

As outlandish as the question was, Jesus didn't skip a beat. He quickly responded, *"Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"*

Now here's how I picture this. Jesus is teaching to thousands when a stranger stands up and interrupts Him.

Notice that this interruption isn't a question but rather a demand for Jesus to confirm something that he had already decided.

Jesus then turned His attention back to the crowd armed with this teachable moment; a warning for the crowd.

Luke 12:15, *"Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.'"*

Cutting right to the heart of the matter, Jesus paraphrased the tenth commandment, *"You shall not covet."*

Have you ever thought about why God, in His infinite wisdom, included a law against coveting in His top-ten list of commandments?

R. C. Sproul in his commentary on the book of Luke gives this insight, saying: *"Perhaps God knows something about what leads to stealing, about what leads to jealousy, about what leads to murder and to war."*

When we covet what someone else has, we want for ourselves what God in His wisdom has graciously given to someone else.

Or, it could be said like this, *“Covetousness is the opposite of being content with the goodness of God.”*

Christ took this opportunity to make the point that the focus of life shouldn't be about money or possessions.

He makes it clear, in this teachable moment, that the idol of materialism is often one of God's main competitors for our heart.

I want to make it clear; money isn't the problem. Money isn't bad, in and of itself. In fact, I'd argue that when used properly it's good, but the love of money is the problem.

1 Timothy 6:10, *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”*

The danger is that money holds a vast amount of potential to become a substitute for God.

When we place the importance of money in an ultimate position, when it takes center-stage in our hearts, it's time to look inward and consider that an idol may be forming.

It's interesting that during the Sermon on the Mount, the only mention of idolatry is in relation to money. Maybe Jesus knew that this would be the easiest thing to become an idol in our lives?

Matthew 6:24, *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”*

Like the man in Luke 12, who interrupted Jesus to have him settle a family dispute, we too can easily let our emotions become controlled by our bank accounts.

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Then, after warning the crowd about covetousness, Jesus began to tell a story known as the Parable of the Rich Fool.

Luke 12:16-17, *"And he told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'"*

We see that the man is rich and has more than he needs. He's living in abundance. He has even surpassed what was expected for the year.

So, what's the game plan, give the rest away? Help someone less fortunate? Help someone in need? No!

Luke 12:18-21, *"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"* *"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' 'This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.'"*

This is a description of someone who's worshipping the god of money. Or, as the seagulls in *Finding Nemo* would say, *"Mine, Mine, Mine."*

Look at the middle three verses of this story and count the number of times that he refers to himself.

Luke 12:17-19, *"He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"*

Across just three verses, he refers to himself 14 times. But zero is the number of times he recognized the Giver instead of the gifts.

Who gave him the good crops? Who gave him the ability to acquire everything he had? Never did it occur to the man that all he had was because God provided it.

Archbishop John Tillotson, in the 1600s, said this: *"He who provides for this life but takes no care for eternity is wise for a moment, but a fool forever."*

One of the first words we, and many children learn is "mine." I think, if we were to get 20 two-year olds and put them in a room together they would play with each other without hardly any disputes.

But, if we gave them just a few toys, just enough to where it would be fun, but few enough to where sharing was required, the room would sound like that flock of seagulls in *Finding Nemo*.

We all know more words now, but *"mine"* is still one of them. Even though we don't say it, how often do we live it?

When we approach our finances, from the perspective of those seagulls in *Finding Nemo*, *"Mine, mine, mine,"* just doesn't work.

Like we talked about last week, one of the most loving things you can do for others in your life is to move them off the throne and restore Christ to His rightful place.

The key to keeping money in its place is the same. Dethrone it by keeping it in perspective. It all belongs to God. Solomon reminded us of this exact thing in Ecclesiastes 5.

Ecclesiastes 5:15, "Everyone comes naked from their mother's womb, and as everyone comes, so they depart. They take nothing from their toil that they can carry in their hands."

David said the same in Psalm 24:1, *"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."*

Here's a way to think about it. You haven't been on a vacation in years.

Money's pretty tight, so it looks like those couple of weeks you get off are going to be spent at home. The highly acclaimed "staycation."

Then you get a text from a family friend, *"Hey! Hope all is going well. We were just thinking of y'all today and wanted to let you know, we've got a house down in Florida that we're not going to be using this month. Why don't y'all use it?"*

You're ecstatic! A free house in Florida! The next day they drop the key off and you head out. You're so excited, you drive all day and get to the house that night.

Upon opening the front door, you flip on the light switch in the entry way... nothing happens? Flip. Flip. Flip. *"Well, I guess the bulb's burnt out."*

You turn on the flashlight on your phone and head to the kitchen. Opening the fridge, it's empty.

"There's not even any water or soda in here! Who are these people?"
You think, *"You know what, it's late, we should probably just get to bed."*

You head over to the bedroom and lay down. The bed's like a brick and the pillow is all lumpy and weird and the beach is 2 miles away. Hardly walking distance.

So, you get on your phone, and text your friends, *"The lightbulb's burnt out in the entry way, there's no food in the fridge, and what's with the bed? Who lives like this? What're you going to do to fix it?"*

I don't think the norm is for anyone to respond that way. If someone just gifted me a beach house for the week, some inconveniences here and there aren't going to get in the way of the awe I'd still have in their generosity.

So why do we treat God like that? Philippians 4:19, *"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."*

It's important to realize that God has given us the use of His resources for just a minute's span of time while we're here on earth. How much in that small span of time do we have to be grateful for?

Here's an exercise that all of us can try: Go through your day and recognize what's God's.

You wake up and get out of the bed that was made from materials that God provided by a person to whom God gave life.

You walk into your bathroom, turn on the shower and use God's water. Then you put on God's clothes, eat God's "Impossible" sausage and eggs, drink God's orange juice, all before getting in God's car and leaving for the work God has provided.

When we start to see the things that we have in this life as God's resources, it helps us to dethrone that love of money, and instead instill an attitude of gratitude that leads to worshipping Him.

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With so many idols, the reason they end up taking the throne is because of the promises they make that we believe. They claim to do the very things that God wants to do for us.

In Luke 12, there are three divine attributes that the man in the parable seeks to find in his money that only God can truly provide.

The first is that his wealth is the source of his security. The man tells himself that he's good for years, *"And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."*

The idol of money tells us the same thing. *"If I could just get enough money, build up enough wealth, then I'll be set. Then I'll have no more worries."*

Idols are "good things" elevated to an ultimate position in our lives. Being a wise steward of our money by saving, preparing for emergency situations, providing for our family, are all "good things."

But when we look to money as the primary source of our security, then it becomes an idol. It becomes an idol when that's where we put our hope and dependence.

Here's the real danger, though. Praying can become something that's nice, but ultimately not that necessary because we can meet our own needs.

When a root idol of power or success manifests a source idol of money, thoughts like *"I can take care of everything myself. I can handle all my needs, whatever the world throws at me,"* can start popping up like weeds.

Second, the man in the Rich Fool parable views his wealth as his primary and ultimate source of satisfaction in life. *"I'm almost there. If I could just get a little more, then life would be easy. Then I could just sit back, relax, eat, drink, and be merry."*

Notice this... the good crop in the parable is the one that caused him to build bigger barns. That means he was already wealthy, but he still wanted more. Just a little more, then he would be satisfied.

Let's say this parable didn't end there and he built the bigger barns. What if they weren't big enough? *"Maybe if they were just a bit bigger, then I could take it easy. Actually, wait. Just a couple more barns. Then I'm done."* Sound familiar?

Ecclesiastes 5:10, *"Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless."*

In other words, the more you feed the idol of money, the hungrier it gets.

Scripture doesn't contradict itself. Having money or wealth isn't bad. It's great when God provides that in our lives. But it's the love of money, the love of wealth when things become out of order.

Like we talked about last week, God is to be that top button in our lives, buttoned first, so that all the other buttons fall in line in the proper place.

Lastly, the man in this parable viewed his wealth as the primary source of significance in his life. His focus was totally inward. It was totally self-serving and self-consuming.

His focus was on how much he was able to accumulate. So much so that he needed bigger barns. His identity was in his things. His identity was in those bigger barns.

The danger, in our primary source of significance being found in money or wealth, is that we could say something like, *"I live so much better than so-and-so."*

Or maybe it's the opposite, *"Well, I live pretty modestly compared to so-and-so."* You can reason and think like that no matter how lavishly or modestly you're living.

But when our significance is found in Jesus, the comparison game is over. Our ultimate worth is found in Him, and Him alone and it doesn't get any better than that.

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Conclusion

There's a story in Billy Graham's autobiography, *Just As I Am*, where he had a meeting with one of the richest men alive. It reads like this:

"Some years ago, Ruth and I were on an island in the Caribbean. One of the wealthiest men in the world had asked us to come to his lavish home for lunch. He was 75 years old, and throughout the entire meal he seemed close to tears.

'I am the most miserable man in the world,' he finally said. 'Out there is my yacht. I can go anywhere I want to. I have my private plane, my helicopters. I have everything I want to make my life happy, yet I am miserable.'

We talked to him and prayed with him, trying to point him to Christ, Who alone gives lasting meaning to life, but to no avail.

Then we went down the hill to a small cottage where we were staying. That afternoon the pastor of the local Baptist church came to call.

He was an Englishman, and he too was 75, a widower who spent most of his time taking care of his two invalid sisters.

He was full of enthusiasm and love for Christ and others. "I don't have two pounds to my name," he said with a smile, "but I am the happiest man on this island."

The lie that Satan would have you believe is that your significance in life comes from what you're able to make of yourself, but it's never enough.

The world teaches us to measure ourselves and others by their bank account. The more we make, the more important we are. So often it's not even money that we're chasing, but rather the affirmation it gives.

Our true identity is to be in Christ. He has already claimed us as His own and that's what gives us significance, satisfaction, and security.

Our value is found in Him, and in Him alone. Our value is solidified in Christ.

What makes us more valuable than anything we could ever purchase, more valuable than anything we could ever earn, was determined when Jesus died for us on the cross.

If you were to rank the things that cause you the greatest stress in life, where does money land on that scale? Is it above health? Is it above family?

Maybe your financial situation is causing you a ton of stress. That happens, but I would also ask, are you continually bringing that burden before the Lord?

Paul talked about giving thanks in all circumstances, and financial stress is included in that phrase, "*all circumstances.*"

Whether he was well fed or hungry, Paul learned the secret of being content: giving thanks to God in the midst of hard times. Recognizing what's God's, placing the giver above the gifts.

Don't let the symbol of our worship be a dollar sign when it should be a cross.