

The Rev. Charlie Holt:

We ask that the preaching and ministry of it would be Your Word for the sake and glory of Your Son Jesus. In His name we pray, amen. Please.

It was my junior year of college. I was just trying to become a stronger Christian, so one of the mistakes that I made was moved into the fraternity house, which wasn't very smart for encouraging the Christian faith, but I started to go to Bible studies and I began to read the Bible really for the first time in my life, and I was working my way through the gospel of Luke, and one of the things that's in this gospel that we just had our reading from are a lot of things about counting the costs of following Jesus.

He says things like, "If you want to be my disciple, you must pick up your cross and die daily and follow me." And so over and over again, Jesus is encouraging disciples,

true followers, to really analyze their relationship to material things and the things of this world and put their hope and their faith and trust in Him and in the kingdom of God, and that's hard because we have a lot of attachments to the things of this world, and so part of what Jesus is trying to do in our lives and working in all of our lives now is getting us to detach from the stuff of this world and attach to Him.

So at that time, I was getting the message reading through the gospel of Luke. Is this a little bit loud? No? Okay, sounds loud to me, but...

So I was working my way through, and I started to take some stock. How much of my stuff am I really willing to give up for Jesus? And I began to do an inventory of all the things in my life,

and so I didn't have a lot of things at that time. I had a big yellow car. It was a 1970 Delta 88 Oldsmobile. Do you remember that car? Really, really big yellow boat, and my friends loved the car. They called it the Chuck Model 1,

and I could fit a lot of people in there, and we had a lot of fun with that car, but it was one thing that was a little bit precious to me, but I thought to myself, "You know, Jesus, if you asked me to give up this car, I could do it. I could do that," and then I didn't really have a lot of clothes or material things, but I started just working my way through all the stuff that I had, and I got to one item, which was a 50-gallon fish tank,

and I had this from high school, and I took it to college with me, and I set it up in my fraternity room, and it was magnificent.

I made a native Floridian fish tank, so I had an eel from the St. John's River in it. I had a black bass, and it was such a cool thing. I mean, you could drop little minnows and things in there and watch these carnivores just crash on these fish, and it was just beautiful, and it actually

had a lot of conversations, and even girls kind of like coming into my room and talking about the fish tank, so it was something I was thinking about. I don't think I could ever give this to you, Lord, and it was interesting, and I realized for the first time, this is the power of attachment.

I loved that, but I don't know that if God had asked me to give it away, I could do that. Well, fast forward a little bit, and I had met Brooke, and I was our first year of marriage. We were living in this little bungalow in Orlando, and I still had the fish tank, and I was called to go off to college to Chicago, and we had to cram all of our things in a little moving truck, and what we were moving to was a lot smaller than what we were in, a little

student-led student housing, and so Brooke said, "You've got to get rid of the fish tank,"

and the Lord made me, for the sake of pursuing my calling and faithfulness to Him, give up the one thing that I had in my heart said that I couldn't give up. It's very interesting how He does that.

A little bit later, Brooke and I moved back to Orlando, and this is just some of the rest of the story. I had given the fish tank away to this young kid and his family, and we moved back seven or eight years later, and I got a call out of nowhere that said, "Hey, are you Charlie Holt?" I said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, did you have a 50-gallon fish tank?" and I said, "Yeah, how do you know?" and I said, "Well, I actually have it in my garage, and we don't want it anymore, and if you want it back, I was told that if we took the fish tank to always look out for Charlie Holt, and if he comes back, give him his fish tank back," and sure enough, the Lord took it away, and then He gave it right back to me. Isn't that amazing?

The things that are in our lives, whether we're talking about money or fish tanks or cars or houses or boats or big bank accounts or stock market stuff or whatever it is,

all of these things can become idols, and that's what Paul says in his letter to the Colossians is that covetousness or greed, it's another way to put it, but covetousness is really just idolatry. It's taking something that is really part of the created order and elevating it to the position of ruling our lives and saying, "This is something that my life has to be connected to," and what that does, no matter what the idol is, whatever it is, whether it's a lot of money or if it's just something small like a fish tank,

whatever the idol is, that is taking primacy over faithfulness to the Lord,

and what God would want us to do with all of our idols, every single one of them, is to make those idols subservient to Him,

and the hard thing is that sometimes our grip and our grasp on our idols is so strong that the Lord will actually strip them away from us, and that can be kind of a painful process, as I've experienced over and over again in my life, not just about that.

So here were two people, this is the gospel story, we're two brothers actually,

and they were fighting over the family estate and their family inheritance, and one brother says to the other brother, "Give me my share of the inheritance," and they bring this conflict to Jesus.

This is actually quite a familiar conflict. I have seen it over and over again in the lives of families of the church. In fact, after preaching the sermon earlier this morning, I had several people come

up to me and say, "I am in the midst of this kind of conflict right now with my siblings over inheritance," and it is so sad, actually,

and I think you can see the sadness of it, and most of us can.

Why is money or possessions, or this thing, more important than your relationship with your family?

And what used to be a loving and united group of brothers and sisters now are divided and at each other's throats over stuff.

It is so sad, and one of the things that

Jesus, and we often think of Jesus as loving us and just wanting to bless us, and he does,

but we often will come to Jesus with improper motives,

and if we come to the Lord with a posture of greed and ask him to intervene in our greed and help us to fulfill our greedy and covetousness desires,

he may not be on board with that, and that is what these two brothers found out about Jesus. They come to Jesus and say, "Jesus, settle this dispute for us. I want you to be like Moses and solve this problem," and Jesus' response to them is, "Who made me judge an arbiter over you?"

And then he challenged them with something that hopefully would liberate them from the conflict itself, actually. He said to them, "Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness." Apparently, there's more than one type of covetousness or more than one type of greed, but Jesus says, "I want you to be on guard against all the different types of covetousness." And then this wonderful line, "For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Wow.

How many people live life as if life consisted of the abundance of possessions?

Life does not equal stuff.

Have you ever known people that didn't have a lot of things? That seem to have tremendous fulfillment in their life, and even though they may be poor and materially impoverished, they seem to know God, love God, and have joy and meaning and purpose.

Have you ever known people that have all the money and stuff in the world and can buy whatever the heck they want and seem miserable and don't seem to have any joy or purpose or meaning or love?

Yeah. Why? Because life does not consist of an abundance of possessions. It's a very simple truth, but one for some reason that we keep buying into, and it's a lie of our culture and a lie of the evil one, we see one commercial after another that shows us beautiful things and beautiful

destinations and locations and people seemingly fulfilled and happy with their lives and in their relationships because they have a lot of money to spend on these things. But life does not consist of that.

Jesus said, "I have come to give you life and life abundant, but he didn't mean I came to give you a bunch of stuff."

So Jesus tells them a story.

He said, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, what shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops." He says, "I'll do this. I'll tear down my barns, build bigger ones, and I'll store all my grain and my goods there." And I'll say to my soul, "Hey, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry."

I want to retire one day, and I'm sure many of you are working towards retirement, where you're trying to store up ample goods to be able one day to stop working and enjoy the things of life.

And I read something like this, and I think to myself, "Is Jesus against retirement?"

Because he kind of sounds like he might be.

But I think there's something more nuanced than that in this than Jesus doesn't want you to ever retire.

Nor do I think that what Jesus is saying is being rich is bad and being poor is good.

If you really think about what's happening with this particular man and the way that Jesus is telling the story, is that here's a person that is wealthy. He has a lot of land, and he's blessed with a particular bumper crop for some reason. And so he has an abundance of things, of stuff, of money, and he is given the luxury to be able to tear down barns and do some building to make room for all of his new grain and give himself some margin to go ahead and retire,

eat, drink, and be merry.

But what was this guy's problem?

Not one time in the story does the man acknowledge the Lord.

The whole conversation with this man is completely within himself.

He says to himself, "What should I do?"

Oh, I know what I'll do. Everything is personal pronouns right through this. I know what I do. I will build bigger barns." And then after I build my bigger barns, I'm going to say to myself, "Soul,

who is this man's God himself?"

And that's the point that Jesus is trying to make, is that there was no consideration in this person's life of, "The Lord blesses you with an abundance of whatever it is." The first step is to give thanks and to say, "Thank you, Lord. You have

poured out the floodgates of heaven in my life, and you have given me all of this material blessing and wealth." And then a second question might come to mind.

"What should I do with it, Lord?

I am your steward, and everything that I have is yours.

The entire planet, all that is yours, including my life and my things.

How would you have me steward these things, this wealth, this abundance?"

It's a different posture and a different mentality, and effectively, this man was living as if God did not exist or didn't matter in his life.

And the irony of it in the story is that he was going to give account to God the very night he was having a conversation with himself.

And talking to his soul, he was going to meet the God who he should have been praying to.

But God said to him,

"Fool, this night your soul is required of you,

and the things that you have prepared, whose will they be?"

The word "fool" actually has a very specific definition in the Scriptures. Proverbs 14.1 says, "A fool says in his heart, there is no God."

And essentially, a fool is somebody who

or somebody who lives like an atheist.

Most of our day and age, our culture actually encourages us to live foolishly.

It encourages us to live with a secular mentality and a secular worldview. And what that means is to live as if God and the kingdom of God is a non-issue in our life, something that we don't have to give a moment's thought to or to contemplate at all with the way that we conduct our businesses or commerce or our affairs. We can just go about our day-to-day life and never, ever, ever have to think about the Lord.

And what Jesus is saying very pointedly and reminding us is that that is the height of foolishness.

In fact, the opposite of it, wisdom in the Bible, just to complete the circle, is the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

And so, if being a fool is to live without God, to be wise is a person that is always asking the Lord,

"What is your will? How can I join you in what I'm doing and what I have and where I'm going in my life?"

It's a humble submission, not to the idols,

but to the Lord.

And that's what Jesus would have these two brothers do.

Can you imagine what that relationship would have been like if they had been putting God first instead of themselves first when it came to the family inheritance?

James says, "What causes fights and conflicts among you? Do they not come from your desires that battle within you? You want something, but you can't have it, so you kill and you come it. You do not have because you do not ask. And when you ask, you ask with wrong motivations to spend it on yourself." In other words, the reason why you're asking is out of greed.

And what James would go on to encourage is you need to repent of that greed in your life, that idolatry.

Wail it, grieve its loss like giving up a fish tank.

Just let it go. Like, what is that song in Frozen, right? "Let it go." Just let it go and allow the Lord to heal you of the idolatry and the covetousness because it is a poison to our souls.

Jesus would go on to say

to the two men,

"So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God."

I ask you, maybe some of you today might have things that you would have a hard time letting go of, or places in your life where covetousness might have a hold.

And what is the solution to it? Well, one is the repentance of the idolatry. It's the changing of the mindset. And Randy Alcorn used to talk about living for the dot and living for the line. And the way that he described in his book, *The Treasure Principle*, is that we all sort of have this finite world that we live in, which he calls the dot. But eternity is what we're made for, and there's this line that goes out up into eternal life with an arrow. And our being, our souls, are made for eternity. And the relationships that we foster should be fostered for eternal relationships.

You know, those two brothers were going to outlive the stuff that they were fighting for, if they belong to God.

And so what Randy Alcorn says is, "Don't live for the dot, live for the line."

And when you do that, that totally changes your perspective about the way that you think about the things of this world, but also the people of this world, because those are the things that last.

And the way that you think about even your own soul care will be totally revolutionized by just living for the line and not the dot.

Another practical thing that can help disconnect us from covetousness is actually tithing.

Tithing is something that is throughout the pages of Scripture, starting in Genesis, the call to give a tenth of what we have been given back to God as a way of saying, "Lord, this stuff is not my God, but you are my God." And so the Lord is consistently called His people to tithe. And tithing is actually, in my mind, a lot harder when you're poor than when you're rich.

When you are only making, you know, say \$100 a week and you tithe \$10,

\$10 doesn't seem like a lot. I mean, it may have all you have is \$100,

but if you're making \$1,000, you have to write it for \$100 or \$10,000, and all of a sudden it's \$1,000. And those checks start to get bigger and bigger because, why?

Because the Lord has been blessing us with more and more.

And so that 10% is painful enough to where it's a sacrifice, and we actually literally have to believe in God in order to write that check, because people that don't believe in God and being faithful to things like a tithe will have a very hard time just giving away 10% of their money.

So it is a check on our belief, but it also is not enough to break us in a sense, because the Lord says you have 90% to live on after that.

And so tithing is one way that I have seen consistently to break the cycle of idolatry in our life, and I would commend it to you as a discipline.

I want to end with a passage from the book of Timothy where Paul encourages us in our ways of thinking about money and stuff.

And Paul says to Timothy, "Godliness with contentment is great gain.

For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing with ease, we will be content.

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, and to a snare, and to senselessness and harmful desires that can plunge people into ruin and destruction. Be careful about that. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.

It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."

He goes on to write to Timothy, "As for the rich in this present age, it's not a bad thing to be rich." I hope you aren't hearing that, but he has encouragements for the rich. He says, "As for the

rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything that we enjoy.

They are to do good, to be rich in works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasures for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which truly is life." In other words, live for the line, not the dot.