

The American Nightmare

Luke 12:13-34

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” ¹⁴Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” ¹⁵Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” ¹⁶And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ ¹⁸“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. ¹⁹And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ ²⁰“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?’ ²¹“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God. ²²Then 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. ²³For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷“Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ²⁸If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. ³²“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[Introduction from JP] Good morning, church! How are we doing? Hey, I love the enthusiasm. There are some “Woos” over here. You guys are just better than the 9 AM and that’s the truth. I’m just kidding. I’m joking. Hey, good morning.” We are coming from a series, “The Good Life” and moving toward a series, “It’s Complicated.” Today is the first day of Advent. Advent is a word that comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “preparation” or “the coming.” This is a time where we begin to tune our hearts and our minds to think about the coming Savior to prepare for Christmas. The way that we’re bridging those gaps is that I’ve invited a friend to come and share from God’s Word this morning. I believe he’s one of the most gifted communicators on the planet Earth, but I may be biased. His name is David Marvin. You’re going to meet him in just a minute, but I want to let you know kind of what’s going to happen is that David’s going to open the Word with us here in just a minute. Then, I’m going to jump back up and give you guys just some updates and share some stories from the body that came out of last week. Then, we’re going to wrap up this transition time—of going from one series to the next—by taking the Lord’s Supper. The reason we’re doing that this morning is kind of as a bridge

between changing our minds: turning from a series about stewardship into a series about all of the chaos and the hectic nature of this time when peace on Earth and the Lord—our Savior—came. It can be a time where stress levels amp up. You start thinking about shopping, start thinking about family, start thinking about all of the things. So, our Advent series is going to be one very practical in nature to help you navigate that season. Without further ado, would you guys help me welcome my dear friend, David Marvin?

[D. Marvin] Thank you! What's up, guys? Good morning. How's everyone feeling, coming off of a Baylor loss? Oh, man, I'm an Aggie, so we got our highlight of the season—of being 5-7. It is such a treat to be here. Like he said, JP and I had a chance to work together for 10 years and I sat underneath his leadership. I think you guys have one of the best leaders alive, in the church, leading here. To be able to come and pop in is really a treat because of the stories and the ways this body is impacting lives that I get to see after they graduate or relocate to Dallas. They talk about how Harris Creek played a pivotal role in their walk with Jesus. So, it's a treat to be here. Thank you for the ways that so many of you are doing that.

Let me tell you a little bit about myself. I've been on staff at Watermark for 13 years. I've been married to my wife, Callie, for 10. Here's a picture of our family. We've got a 6-year-old boy, a 4-year-old girl, and a disgruntled 9-month-old in that picture. Around February last year, the "snow-pocalypse" hit Texas. When that happens and you have young kids, it's kind of a treat, because you do what you do with young kids when there's snow, or ice that resembles snow, on the ground. You go outside and you build a snowman. So, we went outside. We're building a snowman. I'm trying to teach my son—like I said, there's so much ice that we had to go get water. We're trying to compact it and trying to get three big balls together, but, eventually, we made it work. We had three concentric balls. Our snowman was built. We got the arms: two sticks in the sides. We needed a face, so I told my son, my 6-year-old, "Hey, go inside and ask Mom for two Oreos and bring them outside." He goes in and comes back a little bit later, not with Oreos but with raspberries. I said "No, we need Oreos to be the eyes. Raspberries just aren't going to be good for anybody." He says, "No, red is my favorite color. I'd like to do raspberries." I said, "Son, you're not going to like how this ends up. We're going to need those Oreos. Just go ask Mom for a couple Oreos. We can do something else with the raspberries or we can eat them." He said, "No, Dad, red is my favorite color. I'd like the eyes to be raspberries." I knew what was going to happen, but I said, "All right, son, I don't think you're gonna like it, but let's do it." So here is our snowman with raspberry eyes (A picture is projected on the screen of a snowman with red eyes that have "melted" onto the face.) that looks like Olaf wandered into the Blair Witch Project and, like I said, you're not gonna like how this ends up.

Now, what does that have to do with what we're talking about this morning? Nothing. I just wanted to tell that story. No, in a very similar way, Jesus is teaching and He's going to tell His audience: "Hey, if you don't embrace the perspective I'm giving you as it relates to finances, your time, your life, your money – you can do that; you're just not going to like how it ends up." He's going to say some things in particular as it relates to how you and I are to see this life and to be on guard against the dangers of accumulating what many of us would call "The American Dream." By American Dream, I don't mean that anybody can start anywhere and climb to the top. I don't mean an attack on our country. I love America; I love our country. But this idea of life is about getting the right job, living in the right neighborhood, finally getting the marriage and the 2.5 kids, and the golden retriever, and the white picket fence, and driving certain cars,

and retiring at an early age. Man, that's the epitome of the Dream. Jesus would say it's a foolish way to think about life. We're going to see that here in a second. He's also going to say that, if you embrace the world's mentality as it relates to those things, you can do that, but you're just not going to like how it ends up – both in this life and for eternity. You're going to experience a lack of purpose, and a lack of peace. He brings up anxiety.

So, like JP said, we're in this transition where we've been walking through the Good Life: how to steward, and what it looks like to be faithful stewards of things that God has given us. Before we dive into the next series, I just wanted to punctuate what Jesus says about how you and I are to think, and the perspective to have as it relates to money, stuff, this life. It's probably as appropriate of a time as there ever has been. We're coming out of Thanksgiving and, even as Americans, we have one day of being thankful and then quickly rush into buying and sales. I know that, at least for myself, we live in this world where we're so inundated with not having enough, and what we should wear, and what we should drive, and where we should work, and how much we should make. Jesus would say, "That type of mentality will rob you of your purpose and rob you of peace."

We're going to be in Luke 12, like I said. If you don't have a Bible, it'll be up on the screens. I'm going to move quickly through, in the next 25 minutes, three different truths Jesus would say about why living for the accumulation of things – or the American Dream – is too small of a thing to live your life for. He starts in verse 13. Jesus has been teaching already. We're diving into a sermon that He was giving to a crowd around Him. He's been teaching about Heaven and Hell and the Holy Spirit. In the middle of the crowd, in the middle of the sermon, imagine somebody standing up and asking a question in here. A man stands up and he says, "All that stuff—Heaven, Hell, that's great, the Holy Spirit. Hey, Jesus, I've got a request." Here's what the man says, ¹³**Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."** Jesus is preaching a sermon. This guy stands up and says, "Hey, Jesus, I would like you to come with me and tell my brother—the older brother, at that time, would have gotten the entire inheritance or the lion's share of the inheritance—would you tell him to divide up some of that and to give me some of our parents' money?" It's not a crazy request. It doesn't even sound that out of balance of what's a reasonable request. ¹⁴**Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"** ¹⁵**Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed;"** The imperative "be on guard" is to be very careful. Make sure that you are keeping watch against all kinds of greed. The desire for more. **"... life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."** It's a very interesting turn. The man just says, "Hey, can you tell my brother to give me some of that money?" and Jesus says, "Hey, everybody needs to be on guard against the desire for more and more things, because life doesn't have anything to do with how much you have." It's a kind of a subtle jab at the man in the crowd. Jesus says you and I are to live lives where we're constantly on guard and protecting against greed.

This is not something you hear or talk a lot about in church, at least in my own experience. It's not something I proactively and generally wake up and think, "Man, I need to proactively fight that today." Jesus would say you should. In other words, I've been doing ministry the last 13 years. I've had a lot of conversations where people confess things, bring things out ... "I've never shared this before." I've never had the conversation of somebody coming down front and saying, "Hey, I just need to confess: I feel like I've really been struggling with greed. Black

Friday hit Amazon with all kinds of discounts.” Jesus would say, and He's going to say, “Few things compete for your heart like money.” You and I are to be on guard.

Then, without missing a beat, He launches into a story. He says, “All right, let me tell a story.” **16And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest.”** The man’s got a field and crops—lots of crops—come back. **17He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’** **18“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.** **19And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”** Now, if Jesus had ended the story there, his audience would have been thinking, “That guy has reached the dream, not the American Dream, but the Jerusalem dream. This dude just retired early, he’s got amazing crops, he’s got enough to live off for a long time in a very poor agricultural society. This guy has reached the pinnacle,” His audiences would go, “Tell us how he was able to do this. It’s a story of incredible success.” But Jesus doesn’t end there. He says, **20“But God said to him, ‘You fool!’”** It’s the only time in the Bible God calls someone a fool. **“This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”** Jesus then gives the point of the story: **21“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”** The first idea I want to talk about from the text is living for the American Dream, or the accumulation of stuff, living for this life, makes you a fool, according to Jesus.

1. Living for the American Dream makes you a fool.

It’s really strong language. What did the man do wrong? I mean, he had an amazing harvest and crops came back. Jesus said he lived his life only focused on himself, his own comfort, his own ability to retire. His life was not rich towards God. Jesus would say that living this life for the accumulation and your own comfort makes you a fool. It’s as though He’s recalibrating part of the purpose of life.

My kids will often play games, and there are a couple of games that we play really regularly. They both have two entirely opposite goals. One is the game of Monopoly. You guys remember Monopoly? What’s the point of Monopoly? The point of Monopoly is to acquire as many properties as possible, to get as much stuff as you can, to get as much money as you can. Whoever does that in the end wins. Then, we’ll play another game called Uno. Remember this game? Grandparents play it. Uno is a game – if you haven’t played – where the entire point is not to accumulate cards, but to get rid of them. The winner is whoever gets rid of their things in their hands the fastest. Jesus would show up, two thousand years ago, and He taught about money over and over. All of His teachings indicate that life is a lot more like Uno. It’s not about how much you’re holding in the end, but how much you’ve been able to give towards God’s kingdom. Life is a lot more like that than it is Monopoly. You and I live in a world that communicates the opposite. You’re going to leave here, and I’m going to leave here, and go to different stores and different environments and different places and interact with different neighbors, and they’re going to communicate the exact opposite. Jesus would say that type of mentality is foolish. The point of life is not about how much you and I can acquire. When I say “inundated,” I really do think we are unaware of how inundated, and how much we have, and how it's not enough.

There was a Russian missionary who came and hung out with our staff, probably six years ago. In Dallas, at the church, at Watermark, we have a staff meeting once a week. We sit around in a circle. He'd been gone for 10 years. He was an American, and he went to Russia, was doing missionary work, and he came back for sabbatical. We had a chance just to catch up and hear how life was. Somebody asked him, "What has changed the most about America since you left?" His answer took your breath away and confused you because, without missing a beat, he said, "Oh, easy: all the storage units." And it was like, "Wait, what?" "Yeah, they're everywhere." I remember having the same experience that maybe you're having right now where you think, "No, they're not. They're not everywhere." Then, I drove home that day and realized he's right. They're everywhere. The number of storage units in the United States has exploded. By storage units, I mean the places where you have so much stuff that you can no longer fit it inside your house, so you say, "We need to buy a little house, that we'll rent from month-to-month, and we'll move some of it in there." That has grown so much that it exceeds all of Europe combined, in the United States. Not only that, there are more storage units – and, by that, I mean franchises, not individual lockers – there are more of those in the United States than McDonald's, Starbucks, Walmart, Walgreens, CVS, and 7-Eleven combined. If hoarding was an Olympic sport, the USA takes the gold year after year.

Yet, it's clearly not working. Jesus would say that life focused on having the right house, living in the right neighborhood, wearing the right clothes, driving the right car, retiring at the right age, making the right amount, is a foolish way to live life. Because living for the American Dream makes you a fool. Conversely, living for eternity or living richly towards God or being generous towards God, leaves you filled or full. It satisfies. Candidly, I know that, inside of this room, there are a lot of people that get this. I've been amazed, and so encouraged, hearing through the leadership of the ways that God is unleashing generosity through this Body. Whether it is moving resources to pay off different debts so that more resources can go to other Kingdom needs, or providing \$250,000 to go to caring for foster children, is amazing. To those of you that are doing that, that is amazing, and God is clearly using it to work through many of you. But, in any of our hearts, to whatever degree that we think, "Man, life really would be just better if only I had _____," Jesus said, "You're wrong, because life does not consist in what you have."

He continues, and he brings up anxiety. **"²²Then 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. ²³For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴Consider the ravens:"** He looks up and ravens fly by. **"They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷"Consider how the wild flowers grow."** He points to the flowers and the field around them. **"They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ²⁸If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰For the pagan world" – people who don't have a Heavenly Father or know their Heavenly Father – "runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well."**

Jesus brings up anxiety. The second idea I want to talk about is that mentality that living for the American Dream – the mentality of accumulating and getting more – leads to anxiety. It leaves you anxious.

2. *Living for the American Dream makes you anxious.*

Often, I think the solution to my anxiety, to some of the anxiousness I feel, is more money. Jesus is saying that the solution to that anxiety is having a right perspective on your Heavenly Father and on His provision. The mentality of what you don't have, and what you need to have, and when you are going to have it, is only going to leave you anxious. It's amazing how there are so many examples. Even in society, we can see people who have accomplished and have everything, so it seems they've reached the pinnacle of their career. They're a celebrity, and yet, they're overwhelmed with anxiety – as though Jesus is right. Accumulating and having more and making more is not a solution for anxiety.

In 2019, a young lady named Chelsea Crist won Miss USA. Chelsea has an incredibly impressive resume behind her. She's a lawyer who graduated from Wake Forest, was a D1 athlete, and had her MBA. She was Emmy-nominated for the TV show *Extra* or a correspondent on *Extra*. On top of all of that, she was Miss USA. Eight months ago, Chelsea tragically took her own life. She was overwhelmed with anxiety. You look at that and go, "Man, you have everything. You've got the looks; you've got the law degree; you've got all of the success that anyone would want, and it's left you empty and anxious." Because Jesus would say financial success and success from this world is not a solution. It leads you towards anxiety. But, living for Eternity – "God, I'm going to live for your Kingdom" – will lead towards peace.

He brings the final point in Verse 32. **"So do not be afraid little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."** Think about what He's saying. He's looking into the eyes of a crowd that had only known poverty – that had wondered, that morning, whether they'd have food to eat through the day. Many of them, if not all of them, had one or maybe two outfits of clothing, which was common in the day. He hears this man say, "Hey, tell my brother to give me some of his money." Jesus says, "Hey, hey, guys, everybody be on guard against greed. You can trust you have a Heavenly Father and He will provide. Don't spend your life chasing after everything the world is chasing after, and having more things, making more money, having more security." Rather see God's kingdom." Then, He says, "And when you do, don't be afraid." Don't be afraid to do what? To **"³³Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."**

It's a pretty convicting, powerful statement at the end of all of that. He tenderly says, "Little flock..." He's speaking and looking into the eyes of this crowd and He says, "Hey, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid to live for God's Kingdom, to generously give, to generously live. Invest not in your life, in this kingdom. Not where you're going to live, and how much you make, and what you're going to drive, and where they're going to go to school, but to generously give for God's Kingdom. You won't regret it. On top of all of that, by the way, wherever you put your treasure, whatever you treasure, your heart will be there." In other words, the thing that is competing more for your heart, and for my heart, in this life, more than anything else, is money.

The third idea that Jesus says and why He's saying, "Hey, don't be afraid go all in. Generously live for God's Kingdom. Sell and, when you do, you're going to get rewards that will never fade and never fail and that will be for all of eternity yours. You'll invest in the only kingdom that will last." The third reason the American Dream, just living for more and nicer houses and newer cabinets, is foolish, is because, as Jesus says, that type of mentality will lead, if somebody lives for that, it leaves them eternally bankrupt.

3. Living for the American dream leaves you bankrupt.

The idea of the heart, it begins to make sense why Jesus, more than anyone else, talks about money so much. There are 2,000 verses on money from Jesus. He talked about it more than He talked about Heaven and Hell. Why? He just told us. Because there's a connection between your treasure and your heart. Nothing competes for your heart, and my heart, like having stuff. This is, candidly, where it just gets really dangerous. The reality for all of us, as Americans, who live in, I think, the greatest country on Earth, but also the wealthiest country in the history of the planet, is we have a real danger that surrounds us to which we're probably naive and unaware of. If nothing competes for your heart and my heart like money, then it makes sense even more that you and I are, in Jesus' words, to be on guard against the desire and need for more and more things. We're people who live in the wealthiest environment in the history of humanity.

I remember there was a guy on our staff who, in Dallas, had moved his family into a poorer area of Dallas, socioeconomically. They just decided, "Hey, we're going to go and live on mission there." I remember somebody asking him a really understandable question, "Hey, aren't you concerned for your kids? That it's not that safe?" His response was jarring. He said, "Safe? You think the affluent suburbs of Dallas are safe? You think raising your kids in an environment where everybody gets a Range Rover when they turn 16? Where everybody always gets a car? Where they've got the new gadgets and new phones, and you think that's safe? It's every bit as dangerous as an area that has a little bit higher crime rate. In fact, it may even be more dangerous for your kids." Why would that be true? Because what Jesus said is right. Nothing competes for your heart and for your faith, and for my heart and for my faith, like finances and money. Jesus' point is not trying to get anyone's money. He's trying to make sure that you and I don't miss out on life, and on purpose, and on peace. He's attempting to help this man see things again. The man in the audience says, "Teacher, tell him to give me some of his money." Jesus is attempting to give the man an accurate perspective on life.

I'll close here. In the 1990s, something was created called the Hubble Telescope. If you were alive then, you may remember when this was launched. It was an incredible feat. It was going to allow for images of the world around us to be transmitted back to Earth and to be seen clearly. It was the 1990s and NASA spent \$2 billion creating this camera that would float through space. There was a lot of excitement. We were going to have images of the world and galaxy for the first time like never before. They launched the Hubble Telescope, and it went out into orbit. When they got the very first images back, they were blurry. They were unable to make out, with clarity, what was there. They realized, "We've got a couple options. We could either make another one that would be \$2 billion – that doesn't sound great – or we could have it come back to Earth. But, by the time it came back through the atmosphere, it could have destroyed it. So those aren't options." But somebody had the right idea: "I know what we'll do. We will create

giant contact lenses and we will take them to space and attach them to Hubble.” And it worked. They were able to bring images into focus and allow the world to be seen more clearly as it is.

Jesus’ entire attempt on teaching with money for you and for me is to say, “Hey, you’re focused and your perspective is blurred. It’s just off.” He’s not angry; He’s not attempting to get anything from you. He’s helping you and helping me see the world more clearly, as it is, and come into focus. Think about even the man in the audience with the question. How small is this man’s perspective? He is sitting there, eyeball-to-eyeball, with the Savior of the world, the Son of God, perfection in sandals walking around, the One very few people ever got to talk to, Jesus. The percentage of humanity – 0.0000000001% – of people who ever lived got a chance to speak to Jesus. He’s got one shot. “I’m gonna shoot my shot. I’m talking to the Son of God. What do I want? Tell Him to give me some money.” How much was the inheritance? Five grand? One hundred grand, which would have been astronomical at that point? Yet that’s his ask, because his perspective is off. Jesus’ whole point is to attempt to help you and help me not spend your life and spend my life chasing the American Dream and wasting it at the expense of living for the only Kingdom that will last. This is why He says, “Don’t be afraid. Go live generously,” like so many of you have. If that’s who you are and that’s what you’ve done and that’s the way that you lived, keep going because Jesus would say it’ll be worth it. Don’t be afraid. Be generous. Live for God’s Kingdom. Invest in the only one that will last. To those of us who aren’t, He would say you are wasting your life building a kingdom that will not last. To those of us who are, He would say, “Keep going.” He puts life into perspective. Living for the American Dream is too small of a thing, He would say, but living for God’s Kingdom is what you and I were made for. When we pursue and live towards that, we experience purpose, and peace, and satisfaction.

Let me pray. Father, I thank you for the men and women here, and the ways that you have unleashed so many generous hearts, for the impact they are having all over the city. We ask that you would multiply their kind. Multiply their love for you, their faithfulness to you. Father, we ask that you would help all of us. Help me to live more in line with the perspective that you call us to remember – that life is not about us. Eternity is real. Focusing on accumulating is a waste. Would you help us, God? Thank you that you, ultimately, are the most generous Giver who gave your own life on a cross so that any of us, by faith, who trust in Jesus, could have eternal life. I pray that anyone who has never accepted that or trusted in your son, Jesus, the Savior of the world, that this morning, above anything else, that they would come to a place of trusting in that. We love you. We worship you now in song. In Christ’s name, amen.