

Grace to you and peace from God the Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen..

Our scriptures begin this week with word from the teacher in Ecclesiastes, “Vanity of vanities...All is vanity.” Basically, you work hard and die and everything you worked so hard for will benefit someone else after you’re gone. And then the psalms repeated this message, that all people, wise or foolish leave this earth. Then Paul tells the secret—“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” And from the gospel Jesus says, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

John Macarthur, Jr said: Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables of Jesus deal with money. Scripture offers about five hundred verses on prayer, fewer than five hundred on faith, and over two thousand on money. The believer's attitude toward money and possessions is determinative.

Billy Graham said, “We are rich in the things that perish, but poor in the things of the spirit.

We are rich in gadgets, but poor in faith. We are rich in goods, but poor in grace.

We are rich in know-how, but poor in character. We are rich in words, but poor in deeds.”

How much money do we need to live? How much "stuff" do we need? In the mid-seventies, the average new house was 1700 square feet. In 2016 the average new house was 2700 square feet—a 60 percent increase in only 40 years. One man sold his house—a nice house by any standards—and moved into a 4,000 square foot house. His children were grown, so it was just him and his wife. When asked why he needed so much space. He said that for his entire adult life he had stored lots of his stuff at his parents' home. He needed 4,000 square feet to get all of his stuff under one roof. We have become a nation of hoarders. Have you ever noticed how many storage unit places there are?

I have a family story to tell. This happened over thirty years ago. My dad’s cousin Millie lived in Des Moines, Iowa. She was a collector. She collected dishes, ceramic animals, angels, wall hangings, you name it. And then she ran out of room and started putting things in boxes. And boxes were stacking up. And finally her husband, Duane had had enough and gave her an ultimatum. “Either this stuff goes or I do!” So one day while he was at work she took care of it. He came home, the stuff was gone, he was happy and life was good.

A few months went by and one day when he was home, he got a phone call from a local storage unit place asking him to come down and inspect his unit since it had been burglarized. He informed the man he was calling the wrong number. The man then asked if

this was the Horner residence and said it was. But Duane was insisted the man had the wrong number and about that time Millie had figured out what was going on and came over to take the phone and inform her husband, that yes, they did have storage unit and she would take the call.

Are we better off today? We are, without doubt, richer than ever. We are among the richest people who have ever lived. We use the phrase "better off" to mean financial prosperity, and we are, indeed, better off financially than ever before.

But I would suggest to you that being truly "better off" involves more than money. True prosperity has other dimensions that we dare not ignore. True prosperity includes good health. An unhealthy person isn't truly prosperous, regardless of how much money he or she might have. None of us would trade places with a rich person who is also really sick.

True prosperity also has a spiritual dimension. Some wealthy people have lives that revolve around making and spending money. In our Gospel lesson today, a man came to see Jesus. He wasn't rich, but he had money on his mind. The father had left his estate to the two brothers jointly. This man didn't want to be tied to his brother. He wanted to be free. So he said: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." That wasn't a question. It was a command. He was telling Jesus to do his bidding. Before this man came onto the scene, Jesus had been engaged in serious teaching. But this man interrupted Jesus' teaching with this request. He said: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus stopped what he was doing to tell this man what he needed to hear—not what he wanted to hear, but what he needed to hear. Jesus said: "Beware! Keep yourself from covetousness, for a man's life doesn't consist of the abundance of the things which he possesses".

Then Jesus told him a parable. A rich man had a great harvest. The harvest was so great that the man had to tear down his small barns so he could build big ones. He didn't thank God for his prosperity. He didn't give his workers a bonus. He didn't offer to feed the poor. His only thought was of himself. He said: "What will I do, because I don't have room to store MY crops? This is what I will do. I will pull down MY barns, and build bigger ones, and there I will store all MY grain and MY goods". Then he concluded: "I will tell MY soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease, eat, drink, be merry'".

But God said: "You foolish one, tonight your soul is required of you. The things which you have prepared—whose will they be?" And Jesus concluded: "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God".

Allow me to draw your attention to a small but important detail in this parable. The New Testament was written in Greek. When the man said "SOUL, you have many goods laid up for many years," the word translated soul is the Greek word PSYCHE. That was the word for "soul." But then God said, "You foolish one, tonight your SOUL—your PSYCHE is

required of you." It's the same word in both places—but our gospel today also used the word “life”. The man was going to die that night, and there was no telling what would happen to his barns full of grain.

Please note that Jesus did not say that it's bad to have money. Bill and Melinda Gates are using their money to fund medical research to save lives in Third World countries. Andrew Carnegie used his wealth to start the public library movement in this country. Alfred Nobel used his money to endow the Nobel Prizes—to encourage excellence and to promote peace. Dolly Parton—Gives away millions of books to children through her foundation the Imagination Library. Elton John—has supported at least 57 charities. Metallica, Bon Jovi, Oprah Winfrey, Paul Neuman, Warren Buffet and many others share their wealth.

A school janitor in St. Louis, Missouri-- George Love and his wife started giving a \$500 scholarship to students going to college. In 2019 others joined them to give over 34 scholarships worth of total of \$20,000.

We can be generous whether we're rich or poor. If we do that—if we do all the good we can and help all the people we can—our lives will be blessed whether or not we're rich. And actually, you can say you're not rich but on the global scale of things compared to the rest of the world—we are rich.

But if we are fixated on accumulating wealth—or things—if our primary concern is bigger houses and more toys, then we need to hear Jesus' warning. He told the rich man that he would die that very night, and warned: us that so it is with those who store up treasures for themselves, but are not rich toward God."

So how do we get rich toward God? Jesus said that two things sum it up:

- The first is to love God.
- The second is to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The secret to happiness is helping others. Science has proven that helping others increases your happiness and improves your own physical and mental health. Volunteering your time is one of the best ways to be generous. Giving blood is generous and life-saving. Donate to church and support its role in our community. Donate the things you no longer use or need to charitable organizations. Love and Generosity will change the world and then all will not be vanity.

Christ is the answer. The question is “Will we Love God and our neighbors and be generous in sharing what we have with others? John Wesley put it this way. He said: "Do all the GOOD you can, By all the MEANS you can, In all the WAYS you can, In all the PLACES you can, To all the PEOPLE you can, As LONG as ever you can." Amen.