

February 25, 2018

The Seven Deadly Sins
The Deadly Sin of Greed
Luke 12:13-21

Opening words: Here is a statistic you should never forget! 100% of people have sinned. That statistic did not come from the Barna Research group, or the Gallop Research group. That statistic came from the word of God, the Bible. Romans 3:23 says, *"All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God."* That fact is not open for debate. Sin is real, and we are sinners. Sin is not just reserved for the bad people we see on the evening news. Sin did not just happen in another time or place. Sinners are not just found in the Bible. Sin is real, and sin is as close as your next breath. There is no way around it, you are a sinner! Here is the Good News:

Lent is a time of spiritual renewal. It is a time to rediscover the person God intended you to be from the very beginning. Lent is not just a time to identify your sins, it is a time to take steps to eliminate your sins. Never forget it, we are striving toward perfection. On Ash Wednesday, I began my new sermon series, *The Seven Deadly Sins*. On that evening, I preached the first sermon in this series, *Taking Sin Seriously*. Last week, we looked at the first of the deadly sins, lust. Today, we look at the second deadly sin, greed. The question you must answer today is this one: How much is enough? Let me call this message *The Deadly Sin of Greed*. Our Gospel reading for today is Luke 12:13-21.

Luke 12:13-21 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

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; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

¹⁶ And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He 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. ¹⁹ And 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."

Greed has been defined as, *An intense and selfish desire for something, especially for wealth, power, or food*. Can I ask you a question? Do the people in your life consider you greedy? If you hope the answer is no, say, **"Amen!"**

We find Jesus today in the Gospel of Luke. Do you remember the background of this Gospel? We have looked at it several times. It was written approximately the year AD 60 and is the companion to Acts. Luke tells the story of Jesus until his resurrection. Acts tells the work of the Holy Spirit after the resurrection of Jesus. Both Luke and Acts were written to Theophilus, a lover of God. Theophilus is not a single person. Theophilus is anyone who loves God, including us. Personally, I enjoy this Gospel because no one can tell a story like Luke. Today's story is no exception.

We are in the twelfth chapter of Luke. The Master is teaching in Judea. The chapter begins by saying it clearly. Thousands gathered around Jesus. There were as many stories as there were people. Some came because they heard about the miracles. Some came to hear Jesus teach. Some came because Jesus was a celebrity. Some came to have their personal problems settled. That is the case in this story. That was not uncommon in Jesus's time. Rabbis, or teachers, were often called upon to settle personal family disputes. The heart of this family squabble was money. (Some things don't change.)

A man sought out Jesus because he had been fighting with his brother over his inheritance. At that time, birth order was a big deal. The law clearly stated the eldest son would receive a double portion of the inheritance. The younger brother wanted more, so the younger brother asked Jesus for justice. We understand the story, because people in our time still are fighting over the family inheritance. They say the situation will only grow worse. Did you know, according to Forbes, \$30 trillion will be inherited in the next thirty years? Everyone wants their fair share. How would you feel if you were one of real estate mogul Leona Helmsley's children? When she died in 2007, she left her children nothing, but she did leave her dog, a Maltese named Trouble, \$12 million. You know the truth. There is more to an inheritance than money. There is a surplus of emotions. However, this is not a story about money; it is really a story about priorities. Just think about it for a moment. The man was standing in front of Jesus, but he never heard a word. He never heard a word, because he was distracted by money. Jesus knew money was important, but he knew there were and are more important things than money. One of the things that is more important than money is salvation. If you agree that salvation is more important than money, say, "**Amen!**" Jesus tells a story to underscore his point.

Jesus's story comes in parable form. Remember, a parable is a story which comes from everyday life to make a single divine point. According to Jesus's parable, a rich land owner produced a bumper crop. That was a good thing and a bad thing. The good thing is, the man made some money. The bad thing is, the harvest was so bountiful the man had nowhere to store it. The solution was obvious. The man tears down his old small barns and builds new, bigger barns. It was a wise business move. The man's accountant is happy, but Jesus sees the flaw in the man's plan. Jesus knows, there is more to life than the here and now. While the man was preoccupied with his temporary needs in this world, he forgot about eternity. The man was a business success, but he was a spiritual failure. If it can happen to him, then it can happen to us. Life must be

lived in balance. If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" The unnamed man in the parable is not alone.

History is filled with greedy people. How many examples do you need?

Genghis Khan (1162-1227) had a single goal in life. He wanted to own everything, and he just about did. At the time of his death, his empire stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the Adriatic. The driving force in his life was his possessions. He had little interest in human beings.

William Vanderbilt (1821-1884) was one of the richest, most powerful people of his time. He made his fortune when the American railroad system was being built. I have never thought of him as greedy; I have always thought of him as successful. However, he once said, "*The public be damned. I only care about my property.*"

William M. Tweed's (1823-1878) fortune totaled \$8 billion in today's money. He owned a vast amount of property in New York State, but he also owned railroads, banks, and hotels. His generation knew him for what he was, greedy!

Charles Ponzi (1882-1949) created the racket that still carries his name. I have never exactly understood it, but he doubled his victims' money in the first three months. However, in the long run, they lost it all. His greed was immeasurable.

Imelda Marcos (1929) was the first lady of the Philippines from 1965-1986. It is said, she and her deceased husband, Ferdinand, stole over \$5 billion from that Asian nation. The symbolism of her greed was her shoes. When she left the Philippines, she left 3,000 pairs of shoes behind in the royal palace. Her extravagance is beyond acceptable limits. There is no other way to say it. She will always be remembered for her greed.

I could go on, but I won't. History is filled with greedy people. If you will agree greed is part of history, say, "**Amen!**" For those people, there was never enough. But, what about you? How do you answer the question? How much is enough?

Many believe, America has changed since the end of World War II. Many believe, the American dream has changed since the end of World War II. They say our dream has shifted from *doing* something, to *owning* something. Are your dreams based on doing something in your life, or are your dreams based on owning something in your life? This shift is not just limited to one generation. Everyone's dream seems to have shifted. I read years ago, 70% of Americans consider shopping to be recreational. That figure may be higher today. Shopping has become an American way of life.

It has been said, America has been inflected by two diseases. The first is called **affluenza**. What is affluenza? It is the accumulation of more stuff. We no longer keep up with the Joneses, we want to have more than the Joneses. Have you ever been to this church on the first weekend in May? The fellowship hall is filled with people's

unwanted items. Our homes are filled with wanted items. Have you ever gone to a yard sale and bought something you didn't need? If so, you have affluenza. It has become a pandemic. Did you know the average home built in 1973 was 1660 square feet? The average home built today is 2600 square feet. One of the reasons we need bigger homes is, we need more room to store our stuff! One of the fastest growing industries in America today is self-storage units. It is estimated that there is 1.9 billion square feet of self-storage space available in America today. Why? Because our big homes aren't big enough to hold all our stuff. Let me ask you the question again. How much is enough? The first disease infecting America is affluenza.

The second disease infecting America is something called **credit-itis**. What is credit-itis? It is when you are addicted to credit. It is the price we pay for living in an affluent country. You know the truth. Americans are not known for their patience. We want it now, and we buy it on credit. In other words, we borrow tomorrow's money today. There is nothing wrong with credit when it is handled correctly. However, when credit is handled incorrectly, it is a nightmare. Did you know, according to USA Today, the average American owes \$5,551 in credit card debt? Let me ask you the question again. How much is enough? John Rockefeller once said, *"Enough is a little more than you have."* He was worth \$340 billion in today's money. Maybe he spoke for us all? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"** How much is enough?

Leo Tolstoy once wrote a story about a successful peasant farmer who was not satisfied with his lot. He wanted more of everything. One day he received a novel offer. For 1000 rubles, he could buy all the land he could walk around in one day. The only catch in the deal was that he had to be back at his starting point by sundown. Early the next morning, he started out walking at a fast pace. By midday he was very tired, but he kept going, covering more and more ground. Well into the afternoon he realized that his greed had taken him far from the starting point. He quickened his pace and as the sun began to sink low in the sky, he began to run, knowing that if he did not make it back by sundown the opportunity to become an even bigger landholder would be lost. As the sun began to sink below the horizon, he came within sight of the finish line. Gasping for breath, his heart pounding, he called upon every bit of strength left in his body and staggered across the line just before the sun disappeared. He immediately collapsed, blood streaming from his mouth. In a few minutes he was dead. Afterwards, his servants dug a grave. It was not much over six feet long and three feet wide. The title of Tolstoy's story was: How Much Land Does a Man Need? Greed has been defined as, *an intense and selfish desire for something, especially for wealth, power, or food.* Can I ask you a question?

How much is enough? Eric Fromm once said, *"Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without reaching any satisfaction."* This is the question you must answer: How greedy are you? Never forget it. Greed is one of the seven deadly sins. This is Lent, a time to repent. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**