

## **Draft 2 Inner life and riches**

### **Building up our interior life: the antidote to riches**

**Col 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21**

#### **Sentence:**

'Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul; and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?' So it is when a man stores up treasure for himself in place of making himself rich in the sight of God. [Luke 12:20-21 Jerusalem Bible]

#### **Collect for the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Generous God, you give us many gifts to lead us into the fullness of life; keep us from clinging to what is fleeting, and help us to hold firm to all that lasts; through Jesus, the Way, who is alive with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

### **Building up our interior life: the antidote to riches**

#### **Prayer**

Lord take these words of mine and make them your words. Please use them to challenge and encourage us in our Christian walk. Draw us closer to yourself and renew us in your image , we pray. Amen

#### **Intro**

Our theme today is Building up our interior life: the antidote to riches. The Bible has plenty to say about money and riches:

1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.

Hebrews 13:5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have.

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

It seems that it is not riches per se that are the problem more the relationship we have with them and this is what Jesus was warning his followers about in Luke 12:15: 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed,' Jesus says.

#### **Greed – the dangers**

The problem with riches is we never seem to have enough. When John D. Rockefeller, one of the richest men in the world, was asked by a reporter: 'How much money is enough?' He replied: 'Just a little bit more.' We may laugh at his reply and think to ourselves that we are not so naive as to think that money will bring us happiness or that

accumulating bigger and better 'stuff' is what life is all about, but greed is endemic in our society and it is hard to escape.

Some of you may remember the film *Wall Street* and the famous 'Greed is good' speech made by Gordon Gecko. Greed is seen not so much as a sin but as necessary fuel for our capitalist, consumerist society. And we are only now beginning to realise the full extent of the damage this attitude has done on a global scale. For example, the over consumption of resources by rich nations has led to the social and economic inequalities which are fuelling the current migration crises in N. America and Europe. And, as you are aware, we are witnessing the pollution and destruction of the environment on a scale never seen before.

These are all serious issues but Jesus was more concerned with the damage greed can do on a personal and individual basis. If we are honest, the problem is that the pressure to acquire more, or the latest whatever, is so pervasive in our culture that it takes a conscious effort not to allow it to creep into our lives.

John Stott defined materialism as: 'a preoccupation with material things so that they smother our spiritual life.' Remember the parable of the sower where the seed that fell among thorns represented people who are choked by life's worries and riches and pleasures so that they do not grow to be mature Christians. They don't have the time – they are too busy working hard to acquire not the necessities of life but 'stuff.' And this 'stuff' can distract them so that it is hard for them to grow spiritually.

So, what do we do about this? How do we so order our lives that we do not let the world squeeze us into its mould as Paul says in Romans 12:2. We need an antidote to greed – a way of counteracting its poison. One way in which we can do this is to build up our inner lives and we will look at that in a moment but first we need to take a look at the root of the problem.

You probably already know that scientists and medical researchers spend a lot of time studying the virus or disease they want to cure so that they can find ways of attacking it. Know your enemy. So let's look at the problem of greed is by taking a close look at Luke 12:13-21.

### **Luke 12:13-21**

Jesus is on his final journey to Jerusalem. He is teaching his disciples with a large jostling crowd of people listening in. Then one guy interrupts him and calls out: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Now, it was not unusual for people to ask a rabbi

or teacher to intervene and settle these sorts of disputes. But Jesus seems to avoid getting involved in this situation –wise move– ever been involved in disputes over a will?

But Jesus doesn't ignore it. He is more concerned with the attitudes of the heart that lie behind the man's request; so gives the crowd a warning, and then tells them a parable to drive home his point home.

'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions' Jesus warns. Then he tells the story of the rich farmer. To the crowd around Jesus, God was already blessing this guy. He has plenty of land-and productive land at that – and he would have been the envy of all the peasant farmers in the crowd. Then he has such a bumper harvest that his barns aren't big enough to store it. Now, at this point it is important to notice that the farmer doesn't appear to have done anything wrong. His surplus is a gift from God, not the result of ill-gotten gains. But it is what he does with this unexpected windfall which reveals his heart-attitude, his mindset, if you like.

He wonders what to do and decides to build bigger barns; then he can take life easy for a while. Only trouble is, that night God shows up and tells him his life is demanded of him. "Now who's going to get all the things you prepared for yourself?" says God. And if the crowd were feeling happy that the farmer has got his come-uppance, Jesus looks around and says : "That's how it is with anyone who stores up things for himself and isn't rich towards God."

So, what do we learn from this story that reveals the inner life of the rich farmer. Well, not only is he not rich towards God, he seems to have no room for God at all. He doesn't need God to be part of the equation – and that is the reality of the way that most people live today. The farmer does not thank God for his bumper harvest; and he doesn't see himself as accountable to God for what he does with his surplus. He lives in a bubble of self and self-interest.

You see, greed is not just about having more; it's about what is mine. Look at the number of times the rich farmer refers to I, me and mine – my crops; my barns; my crops; my goods; my surplus. The only person he considers is himself – he thinks to himself; says what shall I do; I will do tear down barns; I will build bigger ones; I will store up my surplus; I will say to my soul – take it easy, eat, drink and be merry. His life centres around himself.

May be it's for this reason that Aquinas sets up greed as the vice opposite to the virtue of generosity. What I find fascinating is that Aquinas uses the Latin word: liberality. – This comes from the same root as liberty or freedom. So the opposite of greed is freedom from an attachment to money and what money can buy. A free and open attitude to money contrasts with the greedy person's tight-fisted grip on money as *mine*.

Greed undermines the virtue of generosity. We want to hold on to what we've got, 'just in case.' It also leads us to ignore the claims of justice. And justice –having a concern for the needs of others is central to the kingdom of God. St Basil, an important 4<sup>th</sup> C bishop and theologian wrote a sermon on the story in Luke 12. In his sermon on he comes down hard on the greedy for their injustice. He says: "It is the hungry one's bread, that you hoard; the naked one's cloak, that you retain; the needy one's money that you withhold. As many as you have wronged, you might have succoured." Things were just the same back then and today I'm sure we can put Basil's examples into our own context.

Another problem with greed is that it tempts us to think that if we have enough, whatever that is, we can be self-sufficient – that we can solve our problems on our own. We can use money to make ourselves comfortable and secure – though that is a false security as the rich farmer found out – and we think we can find satisfaction in our possessions.

But greed distorts what life is all about – it is not about things; not about me. As Jesus said: "Your life doesn't consist of the sum total of your possessions.' Instead real life is life that is rich toward God.

What does it mean to be rich towards God? Well, I see it as being rich in the things God cares about; the things that count with God. We could think in terms of having two piles important to God/not important to God; lasting/not lasting; advancing the kingdom/not advancing the kingdom; heaven focused/earth focused. I wonder what our lives would look like in terms of how we spend our money or our time; what we find ourselves thinking about?

But these are just the outward expressions of what is essentially an orientation of one's heart. Our inner life. The only real way to be rich towards God is to treasure him above all else. So let's begin to think about that.

### **Building up your inner life: Col 3:1-11**

If greed is a disordering of our heart or inner being, then the antidote to greed has to come from within. In the previous chapter in Colossians Paul has argued that the Christian life is not about keeping a whole load of rules and regulations – that may curb some of our more obvious excesses, but it hasn't dealt with the root problem.

The secret, says Paul, is living in the reality of who we are now in Christ. What does he mean when he says we are in Christ? Well, back in June John and I went to the Founders Book Fair. When we got home, I was leafing through one of the books we bought and a photo fell out. It looked as though it was a class photo taken in the hall of the Boy's College. That photo ended up in our house because it was in the book. Where the book was, the photo was. So, just as Christ died, was raised from death, is now in heaven, seated at God's right hand, and will come again with glory as our Creed says, so we too, because we are in Christ, have died to the things of this world and are part of the new creation, ready to be revealed at the end of time.

Our life is now hidden in Christ with God so we need to live as people of the new creation that God is bringing in to replace the old one, a process that has already begun but which will not be fully realised until Christ returns.

This is a really important part of Paul's thinking. In v5 he tells to put to death whatever parts of us are earth focused, including greed which he calls idolatry because it puts something else in the place that rightfully belongs to God. Put off your old self and put on your new self he says in vv8-9. In other words start living differently.

Since, in Christ, we are part of the new creation, says Paul, you need to live in your new self; seek the things that are above; set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Now this doesn't mean being so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. No. it means that we are focused on the things that are important in heaven and surely one of these has to be establishing God's kingdom on earth. Seek first the kingdom of God and his saving justice (Matt 6:33 NJB) Jesus tells his disciples in Sermon on Mount.

But how do we develop and maintain this heavenly mindset. Our contemporary culture is plagued by the passion to possess and accumulate. So often we measure our security, our status by what we possess and we often look to our possessions to give us satisfaction.

How can we encourage one another to live with a counter-cultural mindset? Because it not just an individual thing – we can create a communal mindset. Maybe develop a Tui culture – Yea right – to the promises of the ads on TV and the lure of designer labels.

Paul writes: ‘Seek or search for those things that are above.’ Some versions have ‘set your heart on,’ but the Greek word is much stronger than that. “Seek or keep on seeking those things above.” This does not happen by accident; it only happens if we are intentional about it.. If you are not actively seeking things above, then you won’t be thinking in a heavenly manner. This is what Paul said in [Romans 12:2](#): “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” If you are not seeking things above, you are already in danger of being pressed and moulded to look and think like the rest of the world.

What resources can we draw on to help us do this? One thing we could do is to turn to the rich tradition of Spiritual disciplines. Some people don’t like the word discipline but really it is just a way of ordering our life so that we get where we want to be, like putting in the hard yards to wear the All Blacks jersey. And I would suggest there are a number of practices or disciplines that can act as an antidote to greed.

Gratitude  
Simplicity  
Contentment

Gratitude is a recognition that we have no independent existence outside of God. It is an acknowledgement that all we are and all that we possess comes from God. All that we have we have in trust, on loan from God and we are answerable to him for the ways we make use of what we have been given And gratitude should always lead us to a place of thanksgiving and praise.

Simplicity is an inward attitude of the heart that can be seen in our outward lifestyle. Christian simplicity frees us from the rat race – it allows us to see material things for what they are – goods to enhance life, not to oppress life. We learn that people matter more than things. It frees us up to focus on the important things in life. Many of the great saints of old sought to live simply. John Wesley, for example, decided early on how much he needed to live on and however much he earned he kept to that sum. Anything else he gave away. Simplicity frees us up to be generous.

Contentment—1 Tim 6:6-8 says: 'Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world; and we take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.'

Phil 4:12 Paul writes: 'I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.' John Wesley had 4 silver spoons; 2 Bristol 2 London.

Contrast that with life today when advertising; make-over programmes etc. can give rise to heightened expectations and lead to a spirit of covetousness. In our own inner dialogues we can find it easy to rationalise our expenditure. Sometimes we have to be firm with ourselves: do I want it or do I need it? Some of us are better at that than others!

There are just two more things I would like to add. They are both there in Colossians 3. The first in v10 is the reminder that our new self is being renewed in the image of its Creator. We are called to live as God would live, to reflect his loving care for those around us in all that we do, say or think. Remember the WWJD bracelets. They were a bit of a fad but a good reminder of our calling to be what we are *imago dei*.

The second thing is this: we are to live in the light of eternity. What will last? There is a lovely song sung by Robin Mark: 'When it's all been said and done.' It goes like this:

When it's all been said and done  
There is just one thing that matters  
Did I do my best to live for truth  
Did I live my life for You

When it's all been said and done  
All my treasures will mean nothing  
Only what I've done for love's reward  
Will stand the test of time

Lord Your mercy is so great  
That You look beyond our weakness  
And find purest gold in miry clay  
Making sinners into saints

I will always sing Your praise  
Here on earth and ever after  
For You've shown me Heaven's my true home

When it's all been said and done  
You're my life when life is gone  
(Repeat)  
Lord I'll live my life for You