

## “Bigger Barns”

Sundays after Pentecost

Luke 12:13-21

August 1, 2010

Sociologists discovered when an infant is given a mobile with only two objects the infant will be content. But if you give that same infant another mobile with five objects the infant will not play again with the mobile that has only two. Even when we are in the early stages of life we learn to crave more. We reach our goals and then want more. We want bigger barns!

We have trouble believing our barns are large. To own a car places us in the world's upper class. If you own a home you are wealthier than 95% of the world. To be able to buy incidentals such as books, CD's, TV's or cameras puts us among the wealthiest in the world.

I am not saying this to make you feel guilty. I am telling you this to help you to see yourselves in an honest way. I am hoping that you can admit to yourself that compared to the world's population we own large barns. Once we can admit this to ourselves we then are able to move forward and rethink our attitude about wealth.

I believe the heart of the issue regarding money and wealth is not the money per se. Instead, I think the heart of the problem is our attitude towards money. It is not about what we own but why we own it. It is not about how much we earn but how we view our income, what it means to our self-image, pride, and attitude towards others. It is about our desire to build bigger barns!

Jesus once said, “To whom much is given, much will be required.” I find that verse rather unsettling. I find it so because I believe I have been given a great deal, as we all have. All too often we choose to talk of our wealth in relative terms. This is called comparative poverty. Since I do not have a vacation home, and since I do not send my children to private schools, and since I do not vacation in exotic places around the world I can claim relative poverty. That is, compared to those who do such things I am poor. We hear such language all the time. People talk of things they cannot have, so in their minds, they see themselves as poor. We desire to have bigger barns!

Did you know that Jesus spoke of money more than any other subject except the kingdom of God? That money was addressed both in positive and negative ways?

On the negative side Jesus said, “Woe to you that are rich”; “You cannot serve God and mammon”; “Do not lay up treasures on earth”; “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to inherit the kingdom of God”, and “take heed, and beware of your covetousness.”

On the positive side we hear things like, “how Zachaeus was freed from the slavery of money; how the anointings of Jesus were seen as extravagant and also praised; and of how the good shepherd used money generously drawing close to the kingdom.

Then add to these teachings such as Jesus allowing well-to-do women to support his ministry, that he ate with the rich and privileged, as well as joined in the lavish wedding in Cana. Their barns were plenty big. What is at the base of both is the role of wealth and its power. Our lesson, at its heart, is about our attitude toward money and the power it wields.

In 1923 some of the most successful men met at the Edgewater beach Hotel in Chicago. Those assembled were the president of the largest steel corporation, the greatest speculator, and a man who was to be president of the New York Stock Exchange, a member of president's cabinet, a smart investor on Wall Street, a future director of the World Bank for international settlement; and the head of world's largest monopoly.

A few years later this was their fate: Charles Schwab died in debt; Arthur Cutten died abroad in obscurity; Richard Whitney became insolvent and did time in prison; and Jesses Livermore, Leon Fraser, and Ivar Kreuger all committed suicide.

All learned how to make money. None of them learned how to live. All the bulls became lambs and perhaps Charles Schwab's bleating was the worse of all: "I'm afraid; every man is afraid. I don't know, we don't know whether the values we have are going to be real next month or not."

Bigger barns are not the answer!

The rich farmer believed this and looked what happen to him. The seductive nature of money leads us to believe that it can offer lasting security, in a limited way maybe so. Certainly it can provide security with regard to food, clothing, and shelter. But with regard to life itself, having a sense of meaning, understanding of people and of God, money cannot help. It is transient, temporal, and deceiving.

Only when we recognize its ability to both lift up as well as tear down, to reinforce and to ruin, to give meaning and to destroy meaning will we be able to combat its influence.

Believing that only God is lasting and real can help us to see money in its proper perspective. Maybe then we then can resist the temptation to build bigger barns!

AMEN