Because of You

# (Luke 12:13-21)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. I’m so excited to share this message with you all because it’s Compassion Sunday and I believe that the word that I have for you today is going to be especially meaningful, impacting hearts, and changing lives.

The big idea of today’s message is to encourage each one of us to have open hands and hearts, living in such a way that we’re rich toward God. And so, my hope is to stir you to reflect upon your priorities, like I have to do all the time, because I’m continually accumulating, saving, and treasuring stuff as if I’m building a kingdom on earth. When the reality is that as followers of Christ, we want to be useful and available in the kingdom of God. And so, it’s important that we recognize this and begin opening our hands and our hearts so that we can let go of the stuff that keeps us from living a life that would be honoring to God.

The problem is that our culture teaches us to hold on to what we’ve got, to save, and to store up our treasure. And so, even though we have all of this stuff, we’ve been taught that it’s what we don’t have that’s what we really need.

Mark Twain once said that civilization was "a limitless multiplication of unnecessary necessities" and I believe he was right.

In fact, many of us are infected with this mindset and don’t even know it. We truly believe that whatever it is that we don’t have, is what we need to be happy, to be fulfilled, and to be complete. I know because I grew up believing that there was always something else out there that I needed, that more was always better, but I discovered that the Bible teaches us something different.

In Ecclesiastes chapter 4, King Solomon with the wisdom of God, said this in verse six,

“Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 4:6).

In other words, it’s better to have less of what doesn’t matter so that you can have more of what really does matter.

Several centuries later when Jesus came on the scene, he made it very clear that neither life, success, or security comes from the abundance of things. In fact, if you’d like to follow along in your Bible, reading from Luke chapter 12, a man approached Jesus hoping that he would help him resolve a family dispute. And in verse 13, Luke tells us that this man said to Jesus,

“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me” (Luke 12:13).

Now, this was common in that day, because rabbis were often called upon to help settle legal matters. However, Jesus wisely refused to get involved, recognizing that no answer he gave would help resolve the real problem. And so, instead he replied in verse 14,

"Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between the two of you?" Then knowing their hearts, he addressed the real issue saying, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed…” (Luke 12:14-15).

And so, he warned them with an intensity, “Watch out!” Because he knew that there was something dangerous, there was something lurking around the corner, not as much of a physical danger as it was a spiritual danger. He warns them because he knows that time is too short, life is too valuable, and our God is too good to waste our lives on stuff that doesn’t matter.

## 1. Life is More Than Your Stuff

And so, Jesus tells them, number one, life doesn’t consist of your stuff. And he refused to get in the middle of this argument because he knew that the real problem was greed and as long as there was covetousness in the hearts of these two brothers there’d never be a satisfactory settlement. He made this point telling them,

“…a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).

In other words, life is more than your stuff, and then in verse 16, he proceeded to tell them a parable to reveal the dangers of that unquenchable thirst for more and more of something that we think that we need in order to be truly satisfied. And so, Jesus told them this parable, he said,

"The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' (Luke 12:16-17).

In verse 18 he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry” (Luke 12:18-19).

Now of course, there’s nothing wrong with having a successful business or even saving for the future; but this wealthy farmer only saw his prosperity as an opportunity to please himself. He wasn’t being a shrewd businessman, he wasn’t saving for the future, and it’s obvious from the repeated use of personal pronouns that he was just being selfish, he was taking care of number one. And so, God said to him in verse 20,

"You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” (Luke 12:20).

And so, God didn’t see this farmer enjoying a life of leisure, he saw all the opportunities he’d missed while he was thinking about himself, ignoring God and others. And it was because of his obsession with his stuff that he was in danger of losing that which his money couldn’t buy. Therefore, Jesus warned these two brothers in verse 21,

"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21).

Jesus was warning of the dangers of greed. It’s about perspective or priority, because our stuff can create snares and temptations, choking the Word of God, and giving a false sense of security. This parable was an illustration of a man who was living with his hands closed tightly around his possessions and who was facing an eternity without God. It’s for that reason that Jesus warned in verse 15,

"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15).

You see, he wants us to live our lives acknowledging that everything that we have comes from God, that he’s a generous God, that he blesses us with lots of stuff, but he doesn’t want us to become enslaved by our stuff. You could say that in God’s economy it is to be enjoyed and employed at the same time.

In other words, we’re to be “rich toward God” making every effort to use what God gives us for the good of others and for the glory of God. And now, I know that some of you are like, “Well, I’m not rich.” And maybe right now you’re not feeling very rich, but when Jesus told this parable, when he said,

"Watch out! Be on your guard…"

He wasn’t talking about Jeff Bezos (BAY-zos), Bill Gates, or Warren Buffett. He wasn’t referring only to those with bigger salaries, better cars, or nicer homes than you or I. He was talking about us; he was talking about the abundance of our possessions.

In fact, if you go to a website called “Global Rich List” and you enter in your salary, it tells you where you rank on the list of the world’s richest people. And I found this to be rather encouraging, because if you earn $13,750 annually you’re in the top 10% of the richest people in the world based upon your income. In fact, if you make $32,000 a year, you’re in the top 1% right there with Jeff Bezos (BAY-zos), Bill Gates, or Warren Buffett. And so, I’m hoping that encourages you, that some of you are feeling better about your financial condition and the goodness of God, because here in America we’re blessed. But, we need to be on guard, not letting our stuff define who we are, but recognizing that Jesus has defined who we are, he’s created us for a purpose, and number two, he’s called us to care for those in need.

## 2. Caring for Those in Need

This is so important, because right now, right here in America, there are over 400,000 children that don’t have families and are in need of a home. In fact, right here in Maryland there are almost 4,000 children in the foster care system that need a home. And I hope you can feel this, that you can get this in your spirit, because there are so many, but I’d also like to remind you that there are far more professing Christians in the world than there are children who need homes.

In fact, I believe that if you saw their faces, if you heard their names, and you heard their stories you’d want to do something because you care. You see, right now there are so many needy children around the world, and every single one of them has a face, every single one of them has a name, and every single one of them has a story. Many of these children are living in extreme poverty, their living on the sidelines, watching economic growth and prosperity pass them by. In fact, statistics tell us that nearly 4 billion people live with a household income below $2.50 a day, but did you know that over and over and over again God calls his people to care for those in need?

One of those passages is found in Psalm chapter 82, where God said,

“Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalms 82:3-4).

And that’s the will of God for each one of us individually, to love others, to care about those who are in need. And yet, when I think about all of the problems in the world today, it’s those who didn’t cause the problem, those who don’t have the ability to solve those problems, it’s the children that are paying the highest price. And maybe that’s why God told us in the New Testament,

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27).

God calls us to care for those in need, looking after orphans and widows, because he cares about the oppressed, the impoverished, the helpless and the lonely more than we can even imagine and he’s calling us to care for them as well. Now, I don’t know each of your situations, but I know that we can all do something, and some of you may consider adoption, or foster care, or others of you to simply share your love through sponsoring a child with Compassion International. But it’s as we care for those in need that we draw closer to God, closer to his heart, because the Bible tells us that God is:

“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. And God sets the lonely in families... Psalms 68:5-6).

And so, we can all share the love of Jesus this way, and I’d encourage you to pray and ask God how he wants you to be involved. You see, some of you have already responded to God, you’ve already reached out and cared for the needy, you’ve gotten involved in the lives of those kids and God has used you in such a powerful way. Today I’m believing that “Because of You” God is going to use us as a church to set the lonely in families. And I know that we can’t do everything, but number three, I believe that all of us can do something.

## 3. All of Us Can Do Something

This is something that is very close to my heart, because Dana and I have been sponsoring children through Compassion International for over 15 years. We know that we can do something, and we’ve done foster care, respite care, and adopted children as well. We know the heartbreak, the struggles, and the challenges of caring for the least of these. We know that is not easy, but we also know that all of us can do something.

Some of you today, the Holy Spirit is speaking to you, and you feel a significant tug on your heart to do something. Maybe you’ve got a name, but it’s someone in need, maybe a child, maybe a widow, even a single mom, but you could help them get around, go shopping, finding or maintaining a place for their family to live? Maybe you know some children you would consider being a father figure to?

You don’t even have to work within the county or state system, because you can just work within God’s system. You make yourself available and when you see a need you let God use you to make a difference in the life of the unborn, the life of the baby, a child, a teenager, the single mom or dad, the widow, or the impoverished. All of us can do something and since all life matters to God it should matter to us too.

We care about all life, each one needs a family, and each one needs a spiritual family. They need to know the love of God in the church, and so you can be their spiritual family, you can do something as simple as sponsoring a child today. And I promise you, if you make a difference in the life of a child, you probably won’t change the world, but you will certainly change his or her world.

I can tell you because I have sponsored four children through compassion International, and the youngest one is a young boy named Solomon. He lives in a very poor part of Ghana and I have been sponsoring him for several years. I believe so much in sponsorship, and in Compassion, that I want to invite you to sponsor a child as well.

Video…

Isn’t that amazing? It’s hard to believe that those Christian adults were once children struggling with hopelessness and abuse. And it’s unfortunate, but today there are too many children living in poverty who face similar struggles. And that’s why the opportunity we had today is so precious and so important, Karolyn has a table set up in the reception area showing information about children who are waiting for sponsors, waiting for people like you who can speak hope and truth into their lives.

It’s why Dana and I sponsored Solomon, Bishnu, MaryAnn, and Eyob and today we’ve had the privilege of seeing them come to Christ, to mature, and for the older ones, MaryAnn serving in her church, and Eyob finding a way to contribute to his culture. And it’s always been such a joy to receive their letters, to hear about their studies, listening to them tell about Jesus in their lives, as well as the excitement of receiving gifts and care through their local church. The ministry of compassion international is such a blessing to the children and such a blessing to us.

Sponsoring children has helped me to better understand God’s heart for the poor and suffering just as Jesus said in Matthew chapter 25,

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25:35-36).

And this is what Jesus calls each of us to do. We can all do something, and that’s why am inviting you to sponsor a child today. Your sponsorship is unique, you choose the child, you’re able to exchange personal letters with that child, and you can give gifts that directly support your child. Would you consider releasing a child from poverty today?

Following the service would you see Karolyn at the sponsorship table in the reception area? She has 25 children from all over the world who would love to say “I am who I am today because of you.” It’s amazing, and I want you to be part of it. God has certainly used my sponsorship through Compassion International to change me and I know he would use it to change you as well. Let’s pray together.