

“Divide the Inheritance with Me!” or “A Case Study in Covetousness”

Sermon 39 in the Luke Series

Luke 12:13-21

It’s been a few weeks since we have been in Luke.

There are some aspects of context we need to note to fully understand what is happening here.

CHRIST’S AUDIENCE

At first Christ was addressing the people as a whole.

Then, after preaching to the crowds, Christ goes, in private, to a Pharisees house, where Christ confronted other Pharisees and Lawyers about their secret, inner sins, all the while maintaining a spiritual-looking exterior.

Then, Christ goes back out to the swelling crowds, who according to v. 1 of chapter 12 are now numbering in the 1000’s and are literally trampling one another in their desire to get close to Jesus.

BUT CHRIST – unexpectedly – ignores the crowd and begins to teach his own inner circle of disciples.

He is addressing the disciples – but He does so in a way that the entire crowd can hear what He is saying to them. **v. 1**

This whole section is concerned with **ATTITUDE**, **HYPOCRISY**, and **TRUE SPIRITUALITY** before God.

I. The Interruption 12:13

Christ is teaching His own.

He is addressing His disciples as disciples in verses 1-12.

Suddenly, and maybe even RUDELY – He is interrupted by someone in the crowd.

What could possibly be so important that someone would disrupt Christ while He was speaking?

It's the matter of an inheritance.

This man had no doubt come that day to address Jesus on this very issue.
He wanted justice.
He believed he was being treated unfairly.
The issue of INHERITANCE – which was strictly covered by Jewish Law was at issue.

In Jewish Law – according to the OT and Jewish Traditions:

The first born son would receive a DOUBLE PORTION of the inheritance.

But, with that extra wealth came responsibility.
HE was responsible to care for his mother and unwed sisters along with any others that could care for themselves.

Jewish goals were different than in the West.

Usually, if a home is owned, it will be sold, and the proceeds will be divided equally among the children.

In Jewish Society -- the first-born would receive all the property – or if the holdings were large, MOST of the property, and the other heirs were paid monetary settlements.

The goal was to keep the land within the family.

In fact, you can see that demonstrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

The Eldest Son was heir to all the property.
The Prodigal Son took his inheritance in cash – and spent it all on foolish living.

We don't know all the details about this man who interrupted Christ.

1. He probably was the younger son.
2. He felt he hadn't been treated fairly.
3. He wanted Christ, as a Rabbi, to use His authority and intervene.

Christ had a lot of options:

1. He could investigate the case more closely.
2. He could wax eloquent on the different interpretations of Jewish inheritance law.

Instead

II. A Question Addressed to the Man 12:14

It was a HARSH answer the man received.

In fact, Jesus addressed him as **αυθροπε**

It is the vocative form of "MAN" and not the usual way you would address someone.

The man had addressed Jesus as **διδασκαλε** or teacher – showing respect for him as a respected Rabbi.

Christ answers back with a harsh word, instead of many of the softer forms he could have used.

Plummer makes a cogent point here.

The man really didn't want Jesus to arbitrate the situation.

What the man really wanted was for Jesus to decide AGAINST the other brother.

There was a ROOT SIN HERE – a sin that Jesus – because he is the Son of God knew – and a wise person could probably GUESS from the circumstances.

Did Christ have the authority to address this issue?

Of course he did – as the perfect Son of God.

But there was NO NEED for Christ to do so.

There was already in place, in Jewish society, the vehicle this man could use to have his grievances heard.

Judge – he decides the point of law

Arbitrator – literally (he who divides) is the one who sees the sentence is executed.

That was not the mission of Jesus – nor would He make that His mission.
BUT – He did use it as a teaching example.

As the man has addressed Jesus in front of the entire crowd,
Jesus now addresses the entire crowd with a lesson to be learned.

III. The Opportunity Taken to Teach a Spiritual Truth (DO NOT READ YET) 15-21

Here is one of the most famous parables from the lips of Jesus.

Luke has many of these – and the teachings stay with you in a powerful way.

Read 15-21

We are all going to die.

We came into this world with NOTHING and we will leave this world with NOTHING.

The writer of the Song of Solomon falls into depression when he thinks about this. He has worked so hard to get so many things – and yet, when he dies, he will leave it all behind – and who knows – it may be left to a fool, who will simply squander everything.

This man in the parable was content.

The parable doesn't say he is an especially wicked man.

The parable doesn't say he got his wealth in some kind of crooked way.

He's simply a lost man – living THE GOOD LIFE as a lost man.

Very satisfied with his life.

Looking forward to retirement.
Looking forward to the day he can STOP WORKING and ENJOY
what he has gathered.

But, that day never came.
THAT NIGHT – his soul was required by God.

IV. The Root Sin Addressed – Covetousness

Christ's point should be obvious.
The man who came to Jesus was asking for justice.
What he really wanted was MONEY.

Christ saw the covetousness of his heart.

Covetousness is probably the least considered sin of the Ten
Commandments.

There is a reason for that.
Covetousness is a secret sin.
It is very hard for us to detect this sin in others.

Of course, Christ knows all things – and gets right to the root of the
matter with this man.

Exodus 20:17

1. Defining the word

Covet = Lit. "to delight in"

Do not take great delight in your neighbor's house.
Do not wish you could have your neighbor's wife.

2. This sin is a root sin.

Covetousness is the desire to possess something that belongs to another.

It is not wrong to seek to purchase your neighbor's property.
But, if he will not sell, you cannot continue to lust after it.

OLD SAYING

"Forbidden fruit is the sweetest".

That thing that we cannot or should not have is the thing we crave.

III.

Ahab - He was the King of Israel.

He had just about everything a man could have.

He had more than any of his contemporaries.

But a man named Naboth had a vineyard.

It was a good vineyard.

Naboth was a hard worker

and because he worked hard his vineyard was very productive

and very desirable.

Ahab tried to buy this vineyard, but Naboth wouldn't sell.

Naboth had a nice vineyard because he worked hard.

What should Ahab do?

Work hard.

He had 100's of vineyards.

With the resources he had at his disposal, and the good care his servants could provide, and a little hard work of his own, he could have 100's of productive vineyards.

But instead, Ahab did the opposite.

He got mad and started to pout.

He made himself sick and went to bed.

He refused to be comforted, until he got what he wanted!

You know the story.

Jezebel had Naboth falsely accused of blasphemy against God.

(Remember, this is Jezebel, the Baal worshipper!)

Blasphemy against God and speaking against the king.

He was convicted.

He was executed.
His property was confiscated.
And Ahab got what he wanted.
 Just what he needed!
 Another vineyard to go with his 100's.

Another Example

David had many wives.
 Oh sure, Bathsheba was beautiful as he spied on her bath.
 We can understand the lust that might arise in the heart of a man.
 As he refuses to look away and feeds his lust and plays with the
 situation in his mind, he kindles a fire that begins to burn out of
 control.

But he had plenty of wives, and his sin is absolutely without excuse as
he took another man's wife into his own embrace.

Prov 6:30-32 -- *Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is
hungry;
But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house.*

You might understand WHY a hungry thief would steal.
You cannot condone the fact that HE DID steal.

32 -- *But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth
it destroyeth his own soul.*

No one falls into the sin of adultery.
 You have to think about it first.
 You play with it in your mind first.
 A woman can be raped, but that isn't adultery.
 She has to give herself to adultery.

Men if your mind is where it should be, and your thoughts are
centered on the Lord, you will not fall into the sin of adultery.
The famous pastors and the not so famous church members
who have fallen into this sin – gave themselves over to it in
their minds – first of all.

3. Covetousness is not the same as legitimate desire

Desire is allowed.
Desire can motivate us.
Properly channeled it is a good friend.
Our American Free Enterprise system is based on DESIRE.

Desire makes us work hard to get ahead.

- It makes us go to work when we'd rather stay in bed.
- Desire drives us to do things we would rather not do because we need to do them, and they need to be done.
- Desire helps us to set goals and strive to achieve them.
- YOU CAN profit by the work of your hands – which makes work sweet instead of absolute drudgery or slavery.

But, because we are so sinful – we can easily take DESIRE which is good, and turn it into LUST and COVETOUSNESS.

Covetousness lives deep within our sinful hearts.
Covetousness can twist and warp everything we do.

4. Covetousness is a sin that only YOU and God know for sure.

You don't have to be rich to be covetous.
It is a special problem and trial for the rich – but plenty of poor people are covetous too.

No one can know.
We might GUESS from a person's lifestyle they are covetous.
We might SURMIZE from the way a person talks, they are consumed with this sin.

But, it is not the kind of sin you can easily bring church discipline against.
It's a private sin – between the person and God.
It's a secret sin.

It is way down in the heart.

It grows like a cancer and springs up to destroy you from the inside out

5. Which of us has kept this commandment perfectly?

Not a single one.

We can too easily think SOMETHING is going to give us Happiness, joy or peace.

The man who asked Christ to arbitrate thought his problems would be solved by getting a better inheritance.

Christ who knows all things addressed his INWARD problem.

We fool ourselves so easily.

If only I had that raise I'd be happy.

If only I had that new car...

If only I had that new house

If only I could win the lottery.

The old saying goes, "How much is enough?" JUST A LITTLE BIT MORE!

The Bible puts it this way in **Prov 30:15** -- *There are three things that are never satisfied,*

yea, four things never say, It is enough:

the grave -- the barren womb -- the earth never gets enough water -- the fire

It's a picture of covetousness.

Unless God convicts men, they do not worry about coveting.

"My thoughts are my own business".

Rom 7:7 -- *What shall we say then? is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law:*

for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

Paul had been a self-righteous Pharisee.
He was sure HE would be saved because of his works.

Then, he was slain by the power of the Holy Ghost and the law of God.

I AM A COVETEOUS MAN!

Lost Friend -- I have bad news for you.

You too have broken this commandment.

You have also broken the other 9, but we'll just deal with this one now.

This one is enough to send you to Hell -- and you are guilty!

Unless you are found in Jesus Christ at the last day, you will spend an eternity in Hell.

There is no hope for you.

There is no salvation to be found in any other for there is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we MUST be saved.

Christian -- I have good news for you. I bring you the gospel. Your sins are covered.

The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth you from all sins.

The Work of Jesus Christ has made you acceptable to God, You will hear that "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

Not because you are good.

Not because you are faithful.

Not because you are the model of self-control.

Not because you have perfectly kept your thoughts in check.

But because He is infinitely good.

and He is absolutely faithful.

and He is absolutely holy.

PRAY

HYMN 550

Benediction: Luke 12:15

II. This Commandment in Relation to the Other Nine

This is not the least important of all the Commandments.

This is the mother sin of all the commandments.

God's commandments are like a big circle.

It begins with the importance of God.

It ends with the sanctity of our thoughts.

Our thoughts are known by God and we are accountable to God for them.

1. No other God's before me.

Mammon becomes a god.

Material possessions consume our souls.

We love ourselves more than we love the living God.

2. No idols.

Col 3:5 -- Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain?

Absalom wanted to rip the kingdom from his father David.

He talks of going to pay his vow to God -- when theft was in his heart.

This is taking God's name in vain.

Modern religion appeals to covetousness and breaks the 3rd commandment.

God wants you to be rich.

Have enough faith and you CAN HAVE ANYTHING!

No understanding of the sovereignty of God.

No recognition that HE is the Lord.

No acceptance that His kingdom ruleth over all.

No belief that the judge of all the earth will do right!

4. The Sabbath

Why do we have a hard time with it?

Because we want to do our own thing.

We don't want to give a whole day to God.

We want it for ourselves.

Financially it hurts us to close when others are profitably operating.

We have our own recreation and pleasure to pursue.

Go to early services at church -- you'll have most the day free!

Wait, better yet go Saturday night -- you'll have the whole day free.

No, even better, go Friday night -- You'll have the whole weekend free!

Covetousness.

It's a shame when the church of God is an accomplice in our crimes.

5. Honor your parents?

The Pharisees dedicated their entire estate to God. WHY?

So that when their parents needed help they could say, "Wow Mom, Dad, I would really like to help, but I don't have anything. I gave it all to God."

God didn't get it until they died.

God just happened to let them use it all their lives.

But they didn't have to give it because it wasn't theirs. They gave it all to God.

Covetousness takes many ugly forms.

6. Murder

It led to murder with Ahab

7. Adultery

It led to adultery with David

8. Stealing

Every theft has covetousness at the heart.

No one steals suddenly and without some forethought.

If you accidentally take something, you can make it right.
It takes forethought to steal something from your neighbor or from a store.
You must covet it first and come to the conclusion that the prize is worth the sin.

9. Bearing false witness?

Why do men do it?

For personal pride or personal gain.

Coveteousness is a root sin and it has 3 close sisters:

Envy, discontent and bitterness.

III. The Penalty Prescribed by God's Law

There was none.

All the other nine carried governmental sanctions, but not this one.

The death penalty was prescribed in some instances for breaking Commandments #5, 6 ,7 and even the first table for leading people to worship false gods.

There is no penalty prescribed in the OT for coveting.

That's because this sin is between YOU and GOD.

In the NT you can't really exercise church discipline on a man for being covetous.

You can see the symptoms of covetousness.

You can see the results of covetousness.

But the sin itself is a secret sin.

Way down in the heart.

It grows like a cancer and springs up to destroy you from the inside out

Remember, "You're likely to do ALL that you imagine doing".

No I won't.

"Would you dare think it? It's likely you may do it!"

John Calvin, *"He who allows his sinful propensities to rule uncontrolled will know no end to his lusts."*

IV. The Application of this Commandment to All Men