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“The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 19”

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Luke 12:13-15:

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, command my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus replied, **“Man, who made Me a judge or an arbiter over you?”**

Then [Jesus] said to them all, **“Watch out! Be on your guard against greed of all kinds. A person’s life is not the sum total of his possessions.”**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

In our last lesson, I tried to make the point that the things of this world and the activities in which we participate are neither good nor evil in and of themselves, but the good or evil associated with these things comes from our motivation, rather than from the things themselves. I contrasted the parable of the rich young man whom Jesus instructed to sell all of his possessions, give the money to the poor and then become a disciple of Jesus to the Law of Moses which tells the Israelites how they should behave once they receive the riches that God has planned for them when they reach the Promised Land. Abundant possessions are part of both the parable and the law, and in neither case are the riches themselves the point. The riches are neither good nor evil, but the goodness or the evil is in the motivation of the person controlling the riches. Jesus makes the point once again in our text as He responds to a request from one that is following Him, in **Luke 12:13-15:**

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, command my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus replied, **“Man, who made Me a judge or an arbiter over you?”**

Then [Jesus] said to them all, **“Watch out! Be on your guard against greed of all kinds. A person’s life is not the sum total of his possessions.”**

Jesus points out the problem of greed, which the Bible also calls covetousness, the inordinate desire to acquire something owned by someone else. I’m reminded of the story of the banker that was taking advantage of a poor widow on a real estate deal because he had the upper hand and was able to do so. One of his peers in the real estate industry said to him, “This widow has nothing except her house, and you could give her a good deal, but you are pushing, trying to get everything from her that you can. You have so much, and she has so little. Why are you pushing so hard? How much more do you want?”

The banker responded, “Just a little more...just a little more.”

The banker had a need that could never be met, and lost sight of his place in humanity in order to indulge his “just a little more” mindset of avarice. In **Luke 12:16-21**:

Then [Jesus] told them a parable: “A rich man’s land yielded an abundant crop. So he asked himself, ‘What should I do? I’ve run out of room to store my crops.’ So he said, ‘I’ll do this: I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That’s where I’ll store all my produce and my possessions. And I’ll tell myself, ‘You’ve stored enough away to last you many years. So take it easy—eat, drink, and be merry!’”

Since God gave the man the abundant harvest, there was no problem with the abundance of the harvest. The problem was with the way that the man chose to use the harvest. God gave the man such abundance that the storehouse in which the man normally was able to store his crop was not of a sufficient size to store this particular crop. His crop was actually several times larger than the man required for a year, which is why the man said to himself, **“You’ve stored enough away to last you many years.”** But harvests are an annual event, and God wanted the abundance with which He blessed the man to be used, in part, to bless someone else. The man, however, chose not to share, but to hoard.

Our problem with possessions comes from our misconception that the things that we have actually belong to us. When I went to grammar school, parents did not have to buy textbooks for their children. The school district bought the textbooks and issued them to the students at the beginning of the school year, and the students returned the textbooks to the school at the end of the school year. I still thought of the book that I was loaned as “mine”, although the book actually belonged to the school district. I would say, “My books are in my room”, rather than “The books that the school district loaned me are in my room.” The decision as to whether or not something was mine became dependent upon whether or not I was using it, rather than whether or not I actually owned it.

In the same way that the school district loaned us textbooks, God loans us our bodies and our possessions to use for a certain period of time. **1Corinthians 6:19-20** tells us:

19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

People develop a problem with possessions when they forget that their possessions are a loan from the Lord and begin to think that they own them. Our possessions, as well as our very lives, are a loan, as Jesus says to the man with the abundant harvest as He completes this parable in **Luke 12:20-21**:

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is to be taken from you. And then who will enjoy the things you have hoarded?’”

“That is the way it will be for everyone who hoards treasure for himself but isn’t rich toward God.

If we don’t use our possessions in the way that God ordains that we do so, there is a good possibility that God will find someone else to use His possessions in a manner more in line with His will. Jesus’ parables concerning reaping abundant harvests and increasing our riches are actually talking alluding to our efforts to increase the size of the Kingdom of God. The rich young man was to follow Jesus and help spread the Gospel of the Kingdom. The rich man with

the abundant crop was to share that which he had in order to draw the crowd to whom he could spread the Gospel of the Kingdom. Since God's kingdom is not a physical kingdom, the Lord does not want to increase the size of the geography of His Kingdom, but Jesus' point is that we need to use our material possessions to increase the number of people that know about and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The physical attributes of our earthly kingdom have no eternal significance. **Revelation 21:1** says:

1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

In the end time scenario, the size of your earthly estate will become irrelevant, because earthly reality, as we know it, will no longer exist. This is analogous to the man who stored up enough possessions for many years. The possessions that he stored became irrelevant to his situation, because he had no use for them after death.

Jesus explained this reality to His disciples, using that which we know as the parable of the ten talents. A talent, in this parable, is a brick of precious metal worth a large amount of money. **Matthew 25:14-15** records:

14 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.

15 And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.

In the parable, the man represents God and we are the servants. God gives us the material possessions that we have based upon that which He perceives as our ability to use them. The parable continues in **Matthew 25:16-29**:

16 Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents.

17 And likewise he who had received two gained two more also.

18 But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.

In the parable, all three men have the ability to invest the talents, but the third man decided not to do so. Two men increase the money, which is equivalent to increasing the number of souls in the Kingdom of God, while the third simply preserved the money, which is equivalent to doing that which preserved His own soul, but not working to increase the number of souls in the Kingdom. So two men caused the Kingdom to appreciate while the third simply preserved the Kingdom in its present state. The parable continues in **Matthew 25:16-23**:

19 After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

20 "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.'

21 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

22 He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.'

23 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

The rewards in Heaven are for those that work to increase the number of souls in the Kingdom of God. The Lord exposes us to an assurance of the Gospel, and expects us not only to

believe it, but to do that which we can to convince others of its' truth, and to present an attractive church, not meaning one that has attractions, but one that is genuine and sincere about living the Christian life and providing an inviting example to those who are outside. Jesus told the parable of the abundant possessions to the crowd, which tells us that Jesus drew a crowd. The definition of being a faithful servant is doing that which both projects the Gospel message and attract others. But the man with the one talent speaks in **Matthew 25:24-23**:

24 "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'

The concept of 'lift' is an extremely interesting concept having to do with spiritual Christians. Lift is the concept that the more spiritual that a person is, the less likely that person's contacts do not include people that do not know about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, the more able you are to witness for the Lord, the less likely you are to come into contact with people to whom you can witness on a social basis. The principle of lift is based on the adage; "Birds of a feather flock together."

Christians tend to hang out with other Christians rather than with the unsaved. Christians hang out at prayer meetings and choir rehearsal, while the unsaved hang out at the club. And if the Christians go to the club, they tend to be embarrassed to talk about their Christianity, because Christianity is not generally thought to be a good topic of social conversation at the club. And listen to how the "saved people" react to someone that is supposed to be religious but that hangs out at the club, as **Matthew 9:10-13** describes:

10 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.

11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

12 When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

See? The Pharisees, representing the saved folks, don't really want to invest their talents. If you are a Christian that hangs around with other Christians and has little evangelistic contact with non-Christians, you are actually not investing your resources, but hiding them in the ground. After all, how does your light shining have any significance in a room full of light? In order for your light to make a difference, you need to go somewhere where it is dark. Jesus did not hang out with the righteous. When Jesus chose his disciples, He did not call the Levites, those who were in training for the priesthood, or those who were in the religious leadership parties; Jesus called fishermen. When Peter, the chief disciple, found himself in a tight spot, he cursed, swore and pulled his knife. Not the kind of fellow with whom you would expect the Lord of Glory to be hanging out. However, that is who Jesus called, because, in many cases, the folks who claim to be so saved are only saved on the outside. **Matthew 23:27-28** says:

27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.

28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Paul tells us, in **Romans 3:23**:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

And, as the Old Preacher said, all means all, because the meaning of all is all. Those who self-identify as Christians commit sin, just as much as those who do not. According to statistics, the divorce rate among those who self-identify as Christians is roughly equivalent to the divorce rate among those who do not. If being a Christian can’t influence us to show love and be devoted to the one to whom we have vowed to do so, of what value is our Christian commitment in practical application?

So, as Christians, if we understand the Plan of Salvation but do not at least talk to the unsaved about their eternal salvation, we are analogous to the man with the one talent who dug and hid the talent in the earth. When we get to heaven, we will have the talent, we will be able to confess that we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, but we will not be able to point to anyone that received the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior because of our witness. And Jesus says, in **Acts 1:8**:

8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Thus, one of the characteristics of receiving the Holy Spirit is the duty to tell those that cross our path that do not know the Lord Jesus Christ in the pardon of their sins that although the wages of sin is death, that the Gift of God is Eternal Life in Christ Jesus our Lord. If we have constructed our path so that no one that does not know the Lord crosses it, we have the responsibility to go into the world and find someone to tell. That is the definition of investing the talent of which the parable speaks. However, the servant fails to do so. Listen to the verdict of the Lord about the servant that failed to invest, in **Matthew 25:26-29**:

26 “But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.

27 So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.

28 So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.

29 ‘For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

According to the parable, participation in the witnessing ministry is not optional. We read last week that Jesus said, in **Luke 12:8-9**:

8 “Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God.

9 But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

In my exposition of this passage of Scripture last week, I mentioned that the devil has no power to pluck saved folks out of the hand of the Lord, but that he will do all that he can to get us to jump out on our own. The devil can’t really suppress the truth of the Gospel if a witness

wants to proclaim it, but he can ridicule the Gospel, he can intimidate those who are witnessing for the Lord, and he can try to embarrass those that witness by pointing out their sins in order to weaken their resolve to talk about the Gospel. The challenge for Christians is to understand that we are not hypocritical when we warn others to avoid sins of which we have repented and turned away; we are only hypocritical when we condemn others for sins that we are currently committing ourselves. We ought not be embarrassed or feel condemned when the devil points out our sinfulness, because the fact is that we are all sinners. Jesus Christ died that our sins might be forgiven, and it is exceeding silly for us to try to pretend that we have no sin. **1John 1:8-10** says:

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, [Jesus Christ] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

This understanding should allow us to invest in the Gospel message with the ability to endure embarrassment about our past sinfulness. God makes it clear that all have sinned, and that there are no perfect people to do the witnessing.

Jesus has come to change the thinking of religious people. Religion has almost always been about providing an exclusive club for those that believe in God. In the Old Testament, eligibility for church leadership was based upon ancestry, and the Jewish religious leadership did all that they could to keep the Jews separate from other groups and their negative influences. But Jesus' Gospel is about an inclusive kingdom that Jesus expects to spread out and encompass the entire world. He expects us to facilitate this by getting out of our comfort zone and investing in the Gospel. But, we ask, if we leave our safe little cocoon, what will happen to us in the big, wide world? Jesus addresses the issue in **Luke 12:22-34**:

22 Then [Jesus] said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on.

23 Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.

24 Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?

25 And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

26 If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest?

27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

28 If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith?

29 "And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind.

30 For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things.

31 But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.

32 "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

33 Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth

destroys.

34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Now we have a reason to witness. Jesus assures us that seeking to increase the influence of the kingdom of God among men rather than increasing the size of our stash of personal possessions should actually be our motivation for our daily struggles. And Jesus also warns us that our joy or disappointment in the next life is dependent upon our ability to do God's will in this one, as **Luke 12:35-40** tells us:

35 "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning;

36 and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately.

37 Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching.

Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.

38 And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.

39 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.

40 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

There is a blessing in being ready for Jesus when He comes back. We do not know whether or not Jesus is coming back during our earthly life, but we do know that He is going to return eventually and that we should be ready for His coming. He tells us, through the pen of the Apostle Paul, in **1Thessalonians 4:14-18**:

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

The call to discipleship is clear. Salvation is a wonderful thing to have, but for those of us that are aware of the salvific effectiveness of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the actual mark of our belief in Jesus is the urgency that we feel to tell others about Jesus Christ. His life, death, burial and resurrection is the greatest event in the history of the world, and it has more relevance to each individual in the world than any other event. Our witness ought not be a parochial attempt to indoctrinate others to our style or manner of worship, but it should be all encompassing, as was the ministry of Jesus, who affected the Roman Centurion as much as He affected Peter, James and John. This is the response that Jesus gives to Peter's question in **Luke 12:41-48**

41 Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?"

42 And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?"

- 43 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.**
44 Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.
45 But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk,
46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.
47 And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.
48 But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.
- So, now you know what the Lord requires of Christians. Before you take on this Christian role, prepare yourself, and recognize that the people that you most expect to be supportive may not be, as Jesus says in **Luke 12:49-53:**
- 49 “I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!**
50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!
51 Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division.
52 For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three.
53 Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

Those closest to us may oppose our devotion to the Gospel. Familial and religious separation have a long history in our world, and there is nothing that people tend to like more than to consider themselves superior to someone that holds a different view of life than they do. But Jesus makes it clear that we have no personal superiority; our role is only to get with God’s program and spread His Gospel with thanksgiving and humility, because although we are all sinners, and the wages of sin is death, God’s gracious gift is salvation. Jesus Christ paid the price that you owe and that I owe for the sins that we have committed on the cross of Calvary, and nothing in the world is more important than the acquisition of that knowledge and disseminating it as far and wide as possible.

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