

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Life Does Not Consist in an abundance of Possessions*

SERIES: *FATAL*

SCRIPTURES: *Luke 12:13-21*

SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*

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**Credit to Scott Scruggs series from “Sanctuary”; Tony Campolo “Seven Deadly Sins”;
Ron Sider*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you in this room and to so many gathered on-line, at home, tuning to the live stream.

Believe it or not this morning we come to the end of our series on 8 fatal vices
(SERIES TITLE SLIDE).

We have talked about Sloth, envy, deceit, anger, pride, lust, gluttony and one final message this morning. One more vice, that can enslave, dominate, control our lives and if we're not careful can rob us of the life Jesus wants us to have.

This morning we want to talk about **greed**.

And while greed can be applied to many areas of our lives this morning we are going to focus on greed as it is related to our money, our wealth and our possessions.

I'll just warn you from the start, this will be a little uncomfortable. There may be times you want to cringe this morning.

But I also want to make a personal confession when it comes to this issue. I am in the battle. You know how the Holy Spirit convicts us of certain things, this happens to be one of those areas where I just really feel convicted. So please don't hear this message as, "*Boy, Shaun is really upset at those people or that group of people or us.*" Rather, if I'm being perfectly honest, I'm so hard on this vice because I find it so prevalent in my own life and I find myself falling far short of Jesus expectation.

I also want to say, this church, so many of you are incredibly generous. We have always said around here, when needs arise the people at Five Forks step up and are so generous. And it's part of the reason we are able to do the ministry we are doing. At the same time, it's good to be challenged.

So with those words of warning in mind...let's dive in to greed, let's allow ourselves to be challenged by the teachings of Jesus, by his life so that we can begin to follow him in this most important area of our lives.

And I'd like to begin by asking a two-part question that I read, that has challenged me personally, deeply. And throughout the message this question will keep coming back to us.

Why do so many starve while others have unprecedented wealth... Now let's add the second part, **...and what does God expect us to do about it?**

I. Understanding Greed

Stories related to greed, wealth, the danger of money and materialism abound in Jesus' teachings.

Let's take a look at one of those stories found, in Luke 12. Jesus was talking to a crowd of people and...

Luke 12:13-21 - ¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

¹⁴ Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”

Ok, so just to help you understand a little bit about what may be going on in this story...

In Hebrew culture, when the father passed away, he would leave most of his possessions (inheritance) to his oldest son and then smaller portions to the younger sons.

It is likely the person in the crowd, calling out to Jesus, is a younger sibling who is concerned about making sure he gets his part of the family inheritance.

Now, Jesus response is kind of surprising. Jesus doesn't address this man's concern about making sure the family possessions are divided rightly. Listen to Jesus' response.

¹⁵ Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

Greed is when we begin to believe that life consists in an abundance of possessions.

Greed is that little voice that whispers in your ear more money can solve your problems. If you had THAT item (fill in the blank), you would be happy. If you could buy whatever you wanted you'd be content. If you won the lottery you'd be so generous.

I heard a story about a wealthy man who went to his pastor over a concern about tithing. He said: *"I have a problem. I have been tithing for some time. It wasn't too bad*

when I was making \$20,000 a year. I could afford to give the \$2,000. But you see, now I am making \$500,000, and there is just no way I can afford to give away \$50,000 a year."

Pastor thought about wealthy man's dilemma, then said: *"Yes, sir. I see that you do have a problem. I think we ought to pray about it. Is that alright?"*

The wealthy man agreed, the pastor bowed his head and prayed with boldness and authority. *"Dear Lord, this man has a problem, and I pray that you will help him. Lord, reduce his salary back to the place where he can afford to tithe."*

Now quick clarification, Jesus does not say that possessions are immoral. And Jesus never calls money evil.

This is why Jesus never says that "you can have a certain amount of money and that's ok, but once you pass this barrier you're now greedy." He never says, how many pairs of shoes, how large your house can be...because this is a heart issue.

He just says, when money and possessions become the focus of your life, if you start believing that's what will satisfy you, make you content, give you security...then your heart is in the wrong place.

Think about it like this...

Pride is when I put myself in the place of God in my own life.

Lust is when sexual fulfillment takes the place of God in my life.

Gluttony is when food takes the place of God in my life.

Greed is when money/possessions take the place of God in my life. It's when I begin to believe that my sense of security is in money.

So how do I know if greed is working its way into my heart? A couple indicators...

A. When I have enough to share, but don't.

¹⁶ And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

¹⁸ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.””

Greed is when I start to have enough, more than enough, and so I start to build bigger barns, to store my surplus.

Some of us are sitting here thinking *“Well, I’m not really that wealthy.”* Isn’t that what we tell ourselves? That’s what I tell myself. That’s why greed is so sneaky, it’s always telling you to compare yourself to someone who has more. When it comes to money and wealth, I always compare myself to those who have more than I do. (Stats from closer to 2000.)

- **If you earn \$32,400 a year, your family is in the top 1% of wealthiest people in the world!**
- **80% of the world lives on less than \$10 a day.**
- **Less than one per cent of what the world spent every year on weapons was needed to put every child into school by the year 2000 and yet it didn’t happen.**
- **1.4 million children die each year because they do not have access to clean drinking water and adequate sanitation.**
- **The Dallas Cowboys Stadium uses more electricity than the country of Liberia**

- **American's spend more on Halloween, than the entire world spends on malaria (a disease killing many people)**

There's a famous story about Gandhi (**PIC OF GANDHI**) who was once invited to an important meeting with British royalty. But when he arrived he was wearing his usual rags, the typical attire of India's poorest. A news reporter stopped him and noted his clothing...asked him "Why weren't you wear more clothing, and something nicer knowing you were going to meet the King?" Gandhi replied to him with a smile, ***"I knew he'd have enough clothes for both of us."*** (Claiborne 259).

It's a humbling story for me to read. And it's easy to think, yeah (**PIC OF BRITISH PALACE**) the wealthy king of England he would have enough to share. It's a little more disturbing when I remember that 99% of the people around the world could say the same thing coming to visit Shaun (**PIC OF MY HOUSE**). *"He has enough to share with both of us."*

Why do so many starve while others have unprecedented wealth and what does God expect us to do about it?

"What shall I do with all of my surplus?" There are millions of people in this world who are starving, people who don't have clean water to drink, people who are dying from curable diseases because they don't have access to medical supplies. There are millions of children who do not receive an education but spend their days doing what little work they can in inhumane conditions to help feed their families.

Greed is when Shaun has enough to share and doesn't. Second,

B. Greed is often marked by a sense of entitlement.

When it comes to my money and my wealth, I often justify it by saying, *"Well, I earned it. I deserve it. It's my paycheck, my wallet, my money."* The problem with that kind of thinking is that it's just not Biblical.

If that's how you think there's a chance greed is working its way into your heart.

There's a humorous little story about a scientist who challenges God to a contest of who can make the better human being. God tells him that he's on. So the scientist in great delight, bends over to pick up some mud to begin the process of making his human being. God immediately stops him and says, 'No, no ... you go and find your own mud.'

And it's not just the mud, it's everything. The life you have, the breath you breathe, gift from God.

“The earth is the Lord's and everything in it...”

“You are not your own, you were bought at a price...”

It's God's money, God's wallet, God's paycheck, God's car, God's house, God's breath. It's God's time. Everything is God's mud.

Do you know I let myself off the hook? I give 10% to God, to help ease my conscience...and then I tell myself that the other 90% is mine. That's what greed does. Meaning I get the other 90% and I can stretch my quality of living to the brim. Buy the biggest house I can. The nicest car I can. The newest phone I can. Best vacation I can.

Do you see the problem? That 10% was actually intended as a reminder that all 100% belongs to God. But I'll confess, that's not how I often think about my own money and my own possessions.

And it's not just in our individual lives where this kind of greed shows up. Back in Jesus day it was empires and nations...a sense of entitlement. *“This is ours, we earned.”*

C. Institutional Greed

It was Babylon and Mesopotamia and Greece and then it was Rome. Building empires of wealth and power, tearing down their barns and building bigger ones to store up their surplus and then take life easy, eat, drink and be merry...

“The globalizing economy in the first-century Roman Empire was exploitative and unsustainable.”

In fact, Revelation (chapter 18) has a pretty harsh critique of these ancient world powers....

**“Woe! Woe to you, great city,
dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,
and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!**

**“Woe! Woe to you, great city,
where all who had ships on the sea
became rich through her wealth!**

Now, in our world today we could probably point out several nations that dress in fine linen, purple, scarlet have the precious stones and pearls, right? China, Saudi Arabia, Australia...lots of Europe...but certainly our own country is near the top of the list.

And yes, in those times where we have aided and sent aid to help those who have less, we have done the right thing. But let's not let ourselves off the hook so easily.

Remember I said earlier, most of us are in the top 10% wealthiest people in the world. You ready for this? The top 10% wealthiest people in the world, control 85% of the world's wealth. The other 90% of the world's population share the remaining 15%.

TWO CHARTS AT THE END OF THE SERMON ON PG. 15

In a text I am publishing soon I will be looking at the research that studies how much the place of birth matters for people's material prosperity: The short answer is that where you live isn't just more important than all your other characteristics, it's more important than everything else *put together*.

Yes, our own hard work and life choices matter. But as we will see in the data, these matter much less than the one big thing over which we have no control: where and when we are born. This single, utterly random, factor largely determines the conditions in which we live our lives.

(Max Roser – Global Economic InEquality)

So, why is this happening? And I realize the world is a complex system, but to be honest at the very heart of it, I believe the answer is GREED.

Our culture is telling us its ok, we earned it, we deserve it. It influences our attitudes and thoughts as we walk through shopping malls, scan amazon, as we buy our groceries, and gadgets, as we think about Thanksgiving and Christmas, it influences what we teach our children.

And that leads to point number four related to greed.

D. Greed causes us to overlook the poor.

Its interesting Jesus tells many parables in the New Testament. And in almost every parable, the characters are unnamed. The Prodigal son. The Good Samaritan, the Levite. The Pharisee and the tax collector. No names. Did you know there is only one character in all of Jesus parables that is given a name? Ready...

19 “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

The one character given a name in all of Jesus parables was a poor man, who laid by the rich man’s gate.

22 “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

25 “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.

There was plenty to go around, but the rich man’s wealth blinded him to his poor neighbor.

Folks the sad reality is that when our lives begin to consist in an abundance of possessions it is often at the expense of the poor in the world.

“The God of greed calls out to you and me...How could we buy cheap shirts without the sweatshops of Honduras? How could we get cheap fast food without the migrant tomato farmers in Florida?” (Claiborne 190)

And let’s just go one step further. The founder of World Vision, Richard Stearns wrote this...kind of wrecked me when I read it the first time.

“If all of the people in the US, who called themselves followers of Jesus would tithe 10%. There would be enough money to end world hunger, solve the worlds clean water problem, provide access to medical supplies for millions of people, eliminate the 26,000 child deaths that occur each day, garantuee education for all of the worlds children, and provide a safety net for the 10’s of millions of the worlds orphans.” (Whole in our Gospel pg. 219)

I’m not telling you this easy to hear. I’m not telling you, I’ve got this figured out. I’m not telling you there aren’t good and generous people and countries. I’m just telling you, when I hear this kind of stuff it leaves me humbled and broken and I know something isn’t right?

“...the holiness of life” is not compatible with an exploitative economy. You cannot know that life is holy if you are content to live from economic practices that daily destroy life and diminish its possibility.”

II. What we do about greed?

First,

1. We turn to Jesus.

As we turn to Jesus, and look at his life and his teachings, we are reminded that life does not consist in an abundance of wealth and possessions.

The eternally existent one entered time and history. The divine became human. God became a baby. He was born in a stable, among the animals. He worked as a carpenter. He lived as a refugee (no place to put his head.) His crown was made of thorns. His weapon was a cross, but he hung himself there in your place.

When he taught and preached he told his followers...**“Do no store up treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy...Do not worry about life what you eat or**

drink or about your body what you will wear, is not life more than food and the body more than clothes?”

You cannot serve both God and money. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

In fact listen to how Jesus concluded his parable about storing up surplus...

¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."

²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

²¹ "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God"

Folks sometimes, more often than not, I wonder if the one thing that is keeping many of us, Americans, from truly following Jesus is our wealth.

It becomes hard to follow Jesus in any sense if we do not first follow him economically.

And how true that statement is. You hear the message this morning about our greed and materialism and exploitation and it hurts and it's painful and convicting and we almost refuse to accept it. We don't want to think that in order to follow Jesus we might have to give up certain aspects of our way of life. Trust me, I'm there with you.

2. Start small with our money and our possessions.

“Probably the most urgent question now faced by people would adhere to the Bible is this: What, for Christians, would be the economy, the practices and restraints, or right livelihood?” (Claiborne 191).

I was reading stories about folks who are putting into practice, rather storing up and building bigger barns for themselves, folks who are using their resources and careers to fight poverty. I was reading about a robotics engineer, who used to make robots to impress people and made lots of money doing it. But then he started thinking about his purpose as a follower of Jesus. He’s still a robotics engineer but of a different kind. He designs robots to dismantle land mines. So kids in countries like Afghanistan can play without worrying about getting blown up. Before the robots, many of the land mines were being dismantled by kids who were paid next to nothing and often had hands blown off.

I was reading about a massage therapist. She could be making \$100 an hour giving massages to rich folks. But she says there are plenty of message therapists who do that. She lives near the poor and homeless. She knows plenty of people whose feet are their transportation, and she is friends with women involved in sex trafficking who walk the red-light district all night long. Every week, she opens her home to them, washes their feet with the most delicate and deliberate touch and gives the best foot massages money can’t buy. (Credit to Shane Clairborne & Chris Haw for these amazing stories! PG. 242 Politics of Jesus).

Alright maybe we aren’t at the place where we can make such major changes, but my encouragement to you is this week...start with something small that is part of your daily life. Your favorite shirt. Your Iphone. Become informed. Find out where it comes from, how it’s made and how it get’s to you.

Learn about the name of a community or a person who is part of the process of that item coming into your life. What do the people around the world look like who are allowing us to live the lives we live. And pause and look into their eyes of all those

around God's great big world. Be reminded that this is one of Jesus precious children.

Ask yourself. Is it ok that I have this item? And, as a follower of Jesus is the process by which I received this item in line with the character of Jesus.

And then you may possibly consider...what would it look like to eliminate that from your life? And again, what would be your motivation to do such a thing?

Why do so many starve while others have unprecedented wealth and what does God expect us to do about it?

Pray...

Benediction:

It turns out that these 8 fatal vices are common to the human heart. We don't need training in how to put them into practice.

If you don't follow Jesus, in some ways there's no real motivation to remove them from your life. And if you try to find the motivation somewhere inside yourself or in the wisdom of the world, I suspect you'll be left looking for answers.

It turns out the place we find the answer to the fatal vices, is the Jewish Carpenter from Nazareth...who being in nature God did not regard equality with God as something to be used to his advantage but made himself nothing. And as we turn and give our lives to him and model our lives after him, we find freedom from the fatal vices of this world.

A study was done in 1998, the amount of money spent on certain items.

Global Priority	\$U.S. Billions
Cosmetics in the United States	8
Ice cream in Europe	11
Perfumes in Europe and the United States	12
Pet foods in Europe and the United States	17
Business entertainment in Japan	35
Cigarettes in Europe	50
Alcoholic drinks in Europe	105
Narcotics drugs in the world	400
Military spending in the world	780

And compare that to what was estimated as *additional* costs to achieve universal access to basic social services in all developing countries:

Global Priority	\$U.S. Billions
Basic education for all	6
Water and sanitation for all	9
Reproductive health for all women	12
Basic health and nutrition	13