

I read an article last week that was so shocking,

I thought it might have been a joke.

It was about a billionaire who stood to gain millions of dollars from the new tax laws.

She got rich by owning several real estate firms.

She has four homes, enjoys skiing, fine wines and long trips to Europe.

Now, that's not what shocked me.

It was when she said that she didn't want any of the money
that the new laws would give her.

Here's a direct quote:

"At some point, it starts to feel wrong.

It starts to feel excessive... it just doesn't feel good."

And here's the part that really hit home for me as a pastor, she said:

**SCREEN: Imbalanced is really not good for anyone,
even if you're on the positive end of that imbalance,
because it's unsustainable.**

Wow!

A really rich person telling us that it's actually possible to have too much -
too much money, too many possessions, too much 'stuff'.

Maybe you're thinking to yourself,

I only wish that was my problem.

Because it's not, is it?

Most of us are facing the opposite -
we're seeing our income, resources, and benefits shrink.

Today's readings warn us about the dangers of having too much
and tell us how God wants us to use the things of this world.

So, let's get started.

Our first reading came from the Book of Ecclesiastes.

It's part of a group of books in
the bible called the Wisdom Writings.

I would describe them as the original how-to-books because
they provide practical advice for daily life.

They were written thousands of years ago,
but their message really stands the test of time.

Today, Ecclesiastes described what happens to
the person who makes life all about work and making money, asking the question:

SCREEN: what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart
with which he has labored under the sun?

The answer is nothing!

Because in the end, he can't take it with him when he dies.

This was written more two thousand years ago,
but it echoes what that billionaire said.

Making your life all about the pursuit of worldly stuff results in an imbalanced life.

See, here's the thing about material wealth:

it's not that money and possessions are inherently dangerous,
it's the attitude people can have toward them.

Not the money or possessions but the attitude.

Which is Jesus' point in today's gospel.

He told a story about a rich man who had so much stuff
that he ran out of room to store it.

He thought he had an ingenious solution:

"I'll just tear down my barns and build bigger ones."

But that very night the rich man died.

Sadly, there was no one to inherit his fortune because he was all alone in life.

How do we know this?

Because there was no one else mentioned in the story.

The entire conversation took place in his head.

First he asked himself, *'What shall I do?'*

Then said to himself,

'This is what I'll do....'

Then it was, *"I'll say to myself eat, drink, be merry!"*

All in his head....all alone.

His greed had isolated him from everyone else.

Which is why Jesus gave this warning:

**SCREEN: take care to guard against all greed,
for though one might be rich,
one's life does not consist of possessions.**

Our faith refers to greed as a deadly sin.

A deadly sin - meaning it has the power to kill one's relationship with God and others.

Remember last weekend when I talked about the Lord's Prayer?

Jesus wants us to praise and thank God because
everything in creation comes from him.

When it comes to our money and material possessions,

God lends them to us for a time -

he's made us stewards of creation.

But he wants us to use them wisely to build His Kingdom.

It's *His kingdom come*, not our kingdom.

The rich man forgot all this and it's why Jesus condemns him.

Jesus was not against wealth or rich people, but the attitude that riches can lead to.

He's saying, *'be careful, don't fall into the trap of the rich man.'*

When it comes to this parable,

the tendency for many churchgoers - maybe even you -

is to tune out, deciding, *"this doesn't apply to me, I'm not rich!"*

But is it possible that you've fallen into the trap of the rich man in other ways?

Think about it - hundreds of times every day through

TV, radio, and the internet we're told to shop, buy, and spend.

That the latest device, a new car, new shoes,

or remodeling your home will make you happy.

And this pursuit can lead to deep debt,

financial hardship and stress.

Jesus's parable today teaches

that it also hurts our relationships with God and others.

Here's something that Pope Leo recently said about this:

SCREEN: Wealth often disappoints and can lead to

**tragic situations of poverty — above all the poverty
born of the failure to recognize our need for God
and of the attempt to live without him.**

That's the person in Jesus's story.

He thought all his stuff would make him happy; *eat, drink, be merry*.

But it was all an illusion.

That's where greed can lead.

And, that's you and me anytime we
make our lives about something other than God and others.

We've all heard it said that money can't buy happiness.

We also know that no one is promised tomorrow.

I know that doesn't sound very uplifting.

But Jesus's final line in today's Gospel tells us why this is good news.

He tells us to:

SCREEN: be rich in what matters to God

Be rich in what matters to God.

Here's how this message applies to you.

I began this message asking the question,

"Can you ever have too much stuff?"

So let me ask, what are the things you need to leave behind
in order to follow Christ?

Or to borrow a metaphor from Jesus's parable
about the rich man with the bountiful harvest,
what have you 'filled your barns' with?

What have you made your life all about?

Is it stuff...always needing the newest and latest thing?

Is it your career, or a certain relationship?

How about certain attitudes that can
become prized possessions like pride, always having to be right,
or being self-centered or isolated from others?

What is it for you?

Whatever it is, name it.

And then, be willing to let it go.

This was St. Paul's advice in the second reading today, he told us to:

SCREEN: Put to death the parts of you

**that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire,
and the greed that is idolatry.**

He's telling us to stop running after things that can't make us happy.

Stop devoting time and energy and resources to chasing them down.

And instead, be rich in what matters to God.

Not wealth, or pleasure, not the desire for power and control -

which all flow from greed -

but be rich in faith and sharing our blessings with others.

SCREEN: gratitude

One of the best ways to avoid the deadly sin of greed

is to develop an attitude of gratitude.

What I mean by that is, be thankful for what you do have.

The riches of your relationships - your family and your friends.

And the treasure of your faith.

Cultivating a daily practice of gratitude for what God has already
given you will keep you from feeling like you need to buy the next best thing.

You won't spend yourself into debt or see your relationships struggle.

Daily gratitude helps you line up your life with God's vision for your life
and helps you discover true happiness.

So this week I challenge you to do two things.

First, identify what you need to let go of so you can grow closer to God and others.

And second, take time each day to reflect on all the ways God has already blessed you.

Two weeks ago I introduced you to Matthew Kelly's Prayer Process.

It's a simple process that you can use every day to grow in faith.

And one of his steps is gratitude - taking a moment each day
to reflect on what you have to be grateful for.

If you haven't already, you can take a pocket sized version

of his Prayer Process from the tables at the exits.

It's also available on the summer message series page of our website.

I started this message sharing this piece of wisdom from a billionaire:

SCREEN: an imbalanced life is not good for anyone.

In this coming week, let us resolve to remain balanced by reflecting on our lives.

And let's take time each day to thank God for all the blessings he has given us.

Amen. +