

Abundance

A Christian friend of mine was fond of a saying about all the many provisions that this life has within it. He liked to say that it is far easier to manage the matters of life from a condition of need than it is to manage life from a condition of abundance.

And I have come to agree with him. When I had very few possessions to contend with, I had far fewer problems. But as I've gained more and more possessions, I've had to spend more and more of my time and energies caring for, managing, and protecting those possessions, leaving less and less time for the things of life that really matter.

And here in the passage of scripture that we'll consider today, the Lord Jesus gives us His wisdom concerning our possessions. Read and follow along with me, first beginning with Luke chapter 12, verse 15 and then we'll continue on beginning with verse 22. Verse 15,

¹⁵And He (the Lord Jesus) said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." (Luke 12:15)

And then verse 22,

²² And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, 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 are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

³² “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Luke 12:22-34)

As you and I go about life each day, there seems always to be contrasts and consequences that our human mind and our human will does not take notice of, only to have those same matters emerge later as either great blessings or difficult curses.

Here in verse 15, Jesus uses a special word that’s intended to focus our attention upon the possibilities and the nature of those contrasts and those consequences. And that word is “abundance”. And while we might not at first realize it, within “abundance”, there truly is the possibility of either blessings or difficulties, and often, even both. Verse 15 again,

¹⁵ And He said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” (Luke 12:15)

That word, abundance is often captivating to our minds and to our desires. The thought of abundance causes all sorts of potential possibilities to well up within us, especially good things. And those possibilities can reach really high, limited only by our own imagination.

But here in these words, Jesus lovingly reminds us that along with and interspersed within all those “good things” that abundance will bring to us, comes also other possibilities and consequences, difficulties, that we had not counted on.

And here, Jesus is simply, but firmly calling us to carefully examine our souls and to examine the desires that well up within us for the things around us, and to beware of the pitfalls that might be intermixed into our abundance.

And again, in words that I’ve read to us often from 1st John 2, we are given a strong warning about having unbridled desires for the abundance of things, and for the perceived advantages that the world uses as it lures us into its ways. Listen to these words were the Lord tells us to,

¹⁵Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

And then to add to those words about not loving the things of this world, the Lord Jesus cautions us here in today's passage saying,

²⁹"And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. ³⁰For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. ³¹But 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. ³³Sell 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. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:29-34)

If we will only listen with a receptive heart, we'll be able to clearly hear the voice of the Holy Spirit telling us about the possibilities that are hidden within our desiring and having an abundance of things, because both good and evil really can live and thrive there in that abundance.

That is why, time and time again throughout these scriptures, we find that God has interspersed warnings in with His promises of blessings. I'm reminded immediately of the words of Deuteronomy 30 where we're told,

¹⁵ See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, ¹⁶ in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you . . . ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I announce to you today that you shall surely perish. . . . ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; ²⁰ that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He *is* your life and the length of your days. (Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

These words were given to the Israelite people just before God was about to give them the greatest gift of “abundance” those people could ever imagine, the “Promised Land”. And God knew that His people would need to guard their hearts carefully as they took possession of this great gift, else they would go astray and squander this great opportunity.

This is a very serious matter that God is warning us about, folks. Our very lives and even our eternity can depend upon the choices we make as we go through the days of our lives. And sometimes, perhaps often, the choices we encounter can be confusing to us, good can look like it is evil and evil can look like it is good, and both can be within either.

And it doesn't help our dilemma of choices that our heart comes into this life with a foundation of deceitful wickedness, a sinful nature that is within our souls from birth that is as natural to us as breathing.

And here, Jesus brings these Old Testament truths forward into the New Testament times as He again gives full recognition to the manner in which the human heart desires, covets and seeks after the things and the ways of this world.

And Jesus also knows full well that the lusts that build up within our flesh are not driven solely by our own desires, but are also fueled by the incessant battle that comes from the demonic world to win our souls over to their will and to their ways.

The devil is crafty, and he knows that as the constant cycle of seeing, wanting, coveting, seeking after and possessing the things of this world is allowed to occupy our thoughts and efforts, we have very little time left for pursuing after the kingdom of God and of His righteousness.

Let's consider these words that I've just said for a moment. It is really a very clever plan that seems to work very effectively most of the time. It does not require that we be caught up in things and circumstances that are “blatantly evil”. We need only to be “caught up”, mesmerized, preoccupied with thoughts and desires for the things of this world.

Those words of Jesus again in verse 15,

15. . . . "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." (Luke 12:15)

Within the context of our modern daily pursuits of life, probably the most demanding desires come to us in the matters of jobs and salary levels and home ownership and the vehicles we buy, all very needful things and not at all sinful within themselves.

But as we think back on an earlier message about covetousness, there seems always to linger the question, "when is enough, ever really enough?"

But also, even when we are relatively content with those bigger things, smaller, seemingly insignificant pursuits move in to keep us "caught up" and preoccupied.

One of the cleverest ways that this world takes possession of our affections is in matters involving our children and grandchildren. In our "abundance" we can easily get caught up within an incessant whirlwind of activities, especially the mothers and grandmothers, spending every waken moment shopping for and buying our children the latest fashions in clothing, carting them to and fro to soccer games, baseball and softball games, dancing lessons and music recitals.

And it can all seem so innocent while it is taking place. But folks, we need to accept this warning just as Jesus is giving it. If the demands of daily life take us beyond a reasonable boundary, then our "abundance" is working us harm.

Any mesmerizing, preoccupation with the things and activities of this world that keeps us from having a surrendered relationship with the Lord Jesus has accomplished the purposes that our enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil intend. Isn't that clever?

But with all that being said, I would like for us to also focus some of our thoughts today on the other side of the "coin of abundance", the perspective that is in God's mind as He showers us with all of the many blessings that He provides for us.

Because it is a fact that we really do need a lot of the things and opportunities and stuff that occupy this world around us. And it is not necessarily a wrong thing for us to have need of them. Jesus said so in verse 30,

³⁰For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things.(Luke 12:30)

Here, Jesus acknowledges that everyone, even the worst of the pagans of this world have need for food to eat and clothes to wear. And you and I, God's special children, are no different. We hunger and we thirst and we have need to go out into the public world dressed in appropriate clothing.

God is not insensitive to our needs. He created us to be exactly as we are and to have those needs.

The problem that He speaks about here begins to arise when we become anxious and begin to worry about where the provision for our daily needs will come from, when we stop trusting Him for our provision and begin to want, and to covet, and then to reach for those things on our own. And then especially when our desires and coveting reaches out and involves things that belong to other people.

Thankfully, God is truly a loving and giving Father. He not only knows that we have need of the things of daily life, it actually gives Him great pleasure to give those things to us. Verse 32,

³²"Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.(Luke 12:32)

The provision that God wants to give to you and me actually gives Him great pleasure to give them to us. And is that not so with you and me! When we are able to give a very special gift to one of our children and we know that it brings them happiness, great pleasure wells up within our own hearts.

But note here also the full extent of the gift that God wants to give to us. It gives Him good pleasure to give you and me His entire kingdom. Consider what that can mean!

First of all, it means that we are true children of the King, true sons of God. We are not just hired men, or servants, or friends of the family, or visitors. We are set into the family as true sons of God. With a new bloodline that now runs through our veins. We inherit and own a son's portion of the kingdom of God.

Isn't that an amazing gift and provision! Why in the world would we so foolishly desire the scraps and the crumbs that fall from the table of this world? Why would we want to desire and covet and pursue after those meaningless and worthless things?

It brings to mind an occasion when a friend went on a mission trip to Mexico. There, he visited with people who lived their whole lives inside the great city trash dump of Mexico City, seldom venturing outside of its fences. They spent their days sifting through the trash that everyone else had thrown away.

The provision that Jesus is speaking about here is far and beyond anything that we could ever hope for or imagine from the things of this world, leaving nothing more to be desired.

So then, what is our problem? Based on the authority of these words, I believe that we simply have our expectations set too low. We are far too accustomed to and satisfied with living off the crumbs that fall from the world's table.

Our fleshly desires are being satisfied by the things, the activities, the behaviors, the entertainments, and the corrupt distractions that are available to us.

And our enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil keep us just hungry enough to make sure our eyes stay focused on and satisfied with the lusts of this world. And we become blinded to the finer things that God intends for us to have.

Has Jesus not declared to us, "I came that you might have life and have it abundantly? Folks, the abundant life that Jesus promises spans across every need that we could possibly have in this life, yes, food, and clothing, but especially to the eternal salvation of our souls, reaching out into an endless eternity of unimaginable blessings in heaven.

And I am convinced that if you and I would do exactly as these words tell us, if we would seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, then all that we could ever want, desire or need would be added unto us.

It is a simple, but profound promise. And God is faithful. He will fulfill all that He has promised to us.

Let me close with these words. Verse 29,

²⁹“And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. ³⁰For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. ³¹But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.

Let's pray.