

“Cast Away by the Seven Deadly Sins: GREED”
Genesis 13:5-13; 1 Timothy 6:6-11

A woman decided to have her portrait painted. She told the artist, “Paint me with diamond rings, emerald bracelets and a gold necklace.” “But you are not wearing any of those things,” he replied. “I know. It’s in case I should die before my husband. I’m sure he’ll remarry right away, and I want his new wife to go crazy looking for the jewelry.”

Today, we consider the second of the Seven Deadly Sins: *Greed*. With greed, our immediate response to a situation is to lay claim. Greed instinctively reacts to claim money, possessions, power – any & all of the fleeting things of this world. And the ugliest part about it, greed lays claim at the exclusion of others! It proclaims: “This is for me; there’s only so much to go around; I got to make sure I get mine.”

Greed at its core is self-seeking – which is completely opposed to the call of Christ. Jesus says, “If anyone would come after me, he must *deny himself*, take up his cross, and follow me ... What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?” (Mat. 16:24-26). Greed knows nothing of self-denial, only *self-indulgence*. And Jesus warns us, self-indulgence can be deadly – which is probably why it’s so common with the other *deadly* sins.

You may have heard the quote: “If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace, you are among the top 8% of the world’s wealthy.” Puts things in perspective, doesn’t it? The danger with greed is to think that it’s only about the *active pursuit of more*. But that’s only part of its poison. Greed is also an *unwillingness to share what we already possess*.

And now for our Gilligan's Island Moment ... So who gravitated toward greed? Thurston Howell III was so wealthy that he took tens of thousands of dollars and several changes of clothing with him for what was intended to be only a 3-hour boat tour. On the island, Howell is forced to interact with his social inferiors. But what Thurston continually fails to realize is: All of his wealth is now useless! [Pause] You can't have greed without selfishness. And *selfishness*, simply put, is wanting to use what we have (or can get) for ourselves.

Let's consider our Old Testament passage. Lot fell into greed when he responded to Abraham's offer [*Gen 13:10-11*]. With Greed, the DEAL is never as good as it looks. Several years ago, a Wal-Mart cashier was accused of buying merchandise using credit-card numbers she had copied from customers. Investigators said the cashier had made their job easy. She identified herself on the fraudulent receipts to make sure she got her employee discount! [Pause] A deal drenched with greed will start out sweet, but it will soon turn sour.

With Greed, the DANGER is it leads us into even greater sin. In verse 11, Lot went to the plains. Then in verse 12, he moved his tents in the direction of Sodom. And by Genesis 14, he had made his home within the city itself – a place where the people were "sinning greatly against the Lord" (13:13). Lot's greed had led him right into the worst possible place he could be. Greed is dangerous because its focus is on the world, and the desires of the world. James 4:4 says, "Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." Greed chooses the world over God. That is why it is deadly. [P]

And after all is said and done, we find out *greed is worthless*. **The object of our greed** will only last a short time; then, it **will be DESTROYED**. In the end, all that Lot had was destroyed by fire – his wealth, his house, his flocks – all gone. Both in 2 Peter 3 and Revelation, we’re told about the last days – that this earth will be consumed by fire. But this should not cause fear in those who believe, for this destruction is what will pave the way for the creation of the new heavens and earth. What this warning should produce in us is a detachment from all this world has to offer.

A certain pastor puts a special tag on his possessions: “Soon to be burned.” This is the mentality that the Word instructs us to have: “If we know it’s not going to be around long – don’t invest in it!” Why hold on to that which is fleeting? Rudyard Kipling once said to a graduating class: *“One day you will meet a man who doesn’t care much for wealth or fame. And then you will realize how poor you are.”* Greed can string us along for years – it can enslave us for life. But in the end, all our toys, treasures and trinkets will be no more.

We can reduce ourselves to a small and cold desire to accumulate more ... But it should be far beneath our dignity as human beings to enslave ourselves to objects of our own making. Yet this is the situation in which many people live. It is said that, in some ways, our possessions may come to own us. The humbling truth is, *if we are destined for eternal glory, then laying claim to the temporary trinkets of this life is simply absurd*. [P]

The Word of God offers plenty of cautions and warnings against the sin of greed. Why? *Greediness goes against the heart of God*. It is the exact opposite of His character. Greedy, stingy – those are not words that we use to describe our God – because our God delights in giving! 2 Cor. 9:6-8 – *“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and*

whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

God loves a cheerful giver – because He is a cheerful giver! He makes His grace abound in us and through us! [Pause] And the greatest blessing is that our generosity reflects our becoming more like Christ! In his book *Uprising*, Erwin McManus says, “Our generosity guarantees that we will more marvelously reflect the God who created us. The more good we do, the more good we are able to do.” [P]

Part of trusting God is ***trusting in His delight in giving***. In our daily living, is our typical attitude one of scarcity or abundance? Scarcity thinks, “If I give, will I have enough?” Abundance thinks, “God will provide; He is more than able.” The attitude of scarcity is rooted in fear. The attitude of abundance is rooted in trust.

Consider when Jesus fed 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish. It’s a story of outrageous abundance. That miracle displayed Jesus’ power – it pointed to the truth that He indeed is the Messiah. But it also revealed to the crowd something about the nature of our God – He is not a God of scarcity, but abundance! Jesus was teaching them a lesson – trust that your God will provide – trust that He delights in giving!

We are to trust in God’s delight in giving – but we are also to **share in God’s delight in giving**. Since we trust God’s giving, we give! We become cheerful givers ourselves, rather than stingy people. And when we live generously, we inspire others to live generously. Growing up, when we went to a restaurant, I began noticing my parents tipping patterns. From my experience, I thought it was customary to leave a couple

dollars, no matter how large the bill. On average it was around 5%, 10% if they were lucky. It wasn't until I was an adult that I noticed the generosity of one of my friends. And his overall attitude of generosity, lived out again and again, inspired me to try to embody the same in my life.

The same holds true when it comes to giving back to God. Children may never hear their parents talk about tithing – what it is or why we do it. Instead, they may just witness their parents' pattern of giving. If their parents model an attitude of scarcity, they often develop an attitude of scarcity. If our children have not been told of God's command to give, and if they have not witnessed generosity modeled in our lives, how can we expect them to live generously? But if our words and actions display an attitude of abundance, we will inspire them to live the same way. [P]

Our willingness to share – cheerfully, gladly – touches the heart of God. God wants us to know *the wealth in giving* – now this is something we can be greedy for! There is wealth in giving – a wealth of freedom, a wealth of joy – all because when we give, we imitate Christ! Our means might be small, and we might not be able to give much – but be encouraged that God will use your generosity to bless others. Mother Teresa said, *“You can do no great things, just small things with great love.”* And God loves to use small things with great love to show His abundant grace. [P]

When we give to others, we send the message: “You are more important than my possessions.” That is why greed is so ugly – it can't make that statement. When it comes to greed, possessions come before people. But when we share in God's delight in giving by giving ourselves, it brings us together – it gives us a wealth of connection, a wealth of relationships. It opens doors and bridges gaps and strengthens the family of God!

And if that wasn't good enough, our generosity results in praise to God! 2 Cor. 9:12-13 – “This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God ... Men will praise God for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.” Why does our giving to others result in gratitude to God? Because, in giving, we experience God’s heart for us – His generosity to us! And what a great joy that is! To know that God, who owns everything, delights in giving!

And we must never forget God’s greatest act of giving – when He gave us His Son. No one gives us a greater example of generosity than Jesus who sacrificed His own life. Jesus gave himself for those who would in return give nothing. And yet, when we receive from Christ his love and his life, he moves us to become a people of generosity – to be givers. [P]

What will we choose – to be greedy or to be giving? [P] There are many areas in our lives where greed can creep in. But the only way to truly deal with it is to put our trust in the God who *delights* in giving; and to share in that delight by being givers as well. For when we do, we will experience the wealth of God’s extravagant love. Amen.