

True Comfort And Security

Real Life – November 2nd, 2007 – Ben Hutton

Cornell Campus Crusade for Christ - www.cornellcru.com

How To Get The Most Stuff Now

There's another message I could be giving here tonight - one I'm far more qualified to give: "How To Get The Most Stuff Now." Step 1: Get your parents to pay for college. Step 2: Get your grandparents to give you an insane high school graduation present, then blow it on toys. Step 3: Web Design. You want a lucrative, contract job? Build websites. Then go blow the money on toys. Step 4: Engineering Coop. Your annual salary will rival a recent college grad's salary, and trust me, your expenses don't. So, go blow the excess money on toys. Step 5: Don't give anything away. Well, give away the bare minimum to appease yourself and your parents. Think up some great excuse like, "oh, in a few years I'll be making a ton more money. Then I'll have enough to blow on toys AND give away."

And you see, because I didn't drink or do drugs or smoke or swear or sleep around, I thought that I was living a different enough life that people would start asking me why I was different. And sure, I got into a good argument with our floor alcoholic freshman year about why I don't drink, but that didn't really go anywhere. Sure, I wasn't placing my hope in substances, but then again, neither were my friends who did them. Our hope was really in our money. Our hope was in our future, secured by our money, and in the present, made comfortable by our money.

But as it turns out, God wanted to start changing me. I went away on engineering co-op to earn money and buy toys, and to gain experience so I can get a better job so I can earn more money and buy more toys. And by his grace, that's where God started to hit me with the Gospel in a new way. That Jesus became poor so that I could become rich - in Him. That he's giving to me so that I can be giving to others. That he's so much more satisfying than the toys and the job and the job security. That he longs for me to rely on him, not rely on myself. That his definition of what I need is so radically different from mine.

So really, I'm just speaking to myself here. Because the things of this world are so tempting, and it's so easy for me to be captivated by them, instead of captivated by Christ. And so it takes radical, God-glorifying, Christ-exalting, self-denying demeanors and decisions, that we can't make on our own - only by God's grace - to show to the world, and to each other, that Christ is precious. So this message is what I need to hear, and, I pray, what you need to hear - that life is short, that Christ is satisfying, that God gives us money so that we can give it away to spread his glory and his fame. That to live is Christ and to die is gain because I get more Christ. That my heavenly Father has delighted - delighted - to give me His kingdom - which is so much better than the things of this world. The point is not to guilt you, to appeal to your pride, or to appeal to your fear, but to show you Jesus and to appeal to the Gospel.

PRAY.

Don't Live For Money

We're going to talk tonight about money. And it's fitting, as Jesus talked a lot about money. Analysis has show us that about 15% of Jesus' words recorded in the Bible were about money - more than his teaching about heaven and hell combined. So money must be a very, very important subject. It's something everyone has, or at least everyone needs. It's certainly something everyone wants. It's what you'll spend much of your life doing - earning money and then spending it.

Let's start looking at Luke 12. From here I will draw two conclusion: that life is not about our possessions, and that life is not about the pursuit of possessions.

(13) Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

(14) But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?"

(15) Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."

(16) And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive.

(17) "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?'

(18) "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

(19) 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, 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 anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

We see first the warning about possessions. Two brothers are arguing about their inheritance, and Jesus perceptively calls them out on greed. The problem? They were defining their lives by their possessions, and so they cared more about getting things than loving each other and loving God. Each would rather keep his own share of the inheritance and look out for his own interests. Jesus warns, "beware", which can also be translated "be discerning". He's saying to them - you're so blind you can't even see the greed in your own life. You think this is just an issue of fairness - each one getting what he deserves. But it's really an issue of greed - each one desiring what he thinks he deserves more than God. How often do we do that - deceive ourselves into ignoring greed in the name of fairness? Fairness is an external thing - greed is a heart issue. Fairness is how you relate to other people - greed is how you relate to God.

The second warning is about the pursuit of possessions. A wealthy man is about to get even more wealthy and apparently that's causing him some problems. His solution: knock down the old ones and build some new ones. His goal: so after a little more work, he can say to himself, "Soul, you have many

goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." God's response to him: life is short and hell is real. You're going to die tonight - then what? Everything you've been living for will have been in vain. Live for a comfortable eternity, not just a comfortable next 50 years. Because you don't know if you'll actually have 50 years - it might be 5 years, or 5 minutes. But you do know that you have eternity. This wealthy man misunderstood why God gave him money, and so he sought to use it for himself - to "take his ease" and "be merry". And so God called him foolish and demanded his life. How then should we live? The answer is clear from verse 21 - be rich toward God.

Why God Gives Us Money (John Wesley's "Triangle")

God gives us money so we can give it away. Ephesians 4:28 explains, "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need." John Wesley, a 16th century theologian, talked of a triangle - the three sides being gaining, saving, and giving. The first step was gaining. Christians should be employed, earning money using the time, strength, and talent that God provides. You're all Cornell students, and many of you will get very lucrative jobs when you graduate. Don't run away from them just because they are lucrative. This doesn't mean that you must earn a lot - Paul was a lowly tentmaker, and most of Jesus' disciples very poor as well, but there is nothing inherently sinful about earning money. 1 Timothy 6:10 clarifies that it's the love of money, not just money itself, that is the root of all kinds of evil.

That last point is very dangerous, though - it is vitally important to hear what I say next, lest you be overcome by greed. Wesley's second step is saving. Note that this is NOT barn-building. It's not stashing away your wealth someplace safe, padding your retirement account so you can go chill on some beach somewhere until you die, then pass down a nice, fat inheritance check to your kids, confirming them in their worldliness. Far from it! When he said save, he meant "be frugal. Don't indulge yourself in the pleasures of this world. Don't go out to eat every night, buy expensive clothes, buy an expensive house or an expensive car." Be frugal. Be thrifty. Don't be extravagant. Here's an excuse I hear, and use, often - I might as well have invented it, but I know many of you use it too - "I can afford it." That's not good enough. How does your new mansion make Christ look great? How is the goodness of Christ in your life displayed through your new Benz? How does your new iPod or cellphone or laptop show to the world that those things aren't your treasure - Christ is?

Why all the gaining and all the saving? So that we can give, and make Christ look great by giving! Luke 12:33 commands us, "sell your possessions and give to charity." It sounds radical, and we like to dilute it tremendously. It's so easy to get into a tithing mentality - "oh, I give the church my 10%. that's enough. that makes God happy." But it's even possible to do *that* sinfully. 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Not just cheerful and a giver. But one who gives cheerfully, not under compulsion.

When you hear "compulsion" you probably immediately think of some outside influence forcing

you. Someone holding a gun to your head as you write out a check and drop it into the offering plate. But there can be less severe things that compel us, that appeal to our pride or to our fear. Don't give simply to impress or appease men. Don't give for the praise of men, but for the praise of your God, who gave you the money in the first place.

What's more, the New Testament radically redefines giving for us. Old Testament tithing was a law to be fulfilled, just like any other law. With the coming of Christ, Christian giving became so much more. Luke 12:33 says, "sell your possessions and give to charity." 2 Corinthians 9:6 says, "he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." And in Ephesians 4:28, we see why we work: "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need." To quote Randy Alcorn, "God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving." God gives you money, so that you can give it away, cheerfully. And to what extent? Listen to this description regarding John Wesley:

To Wesley money was for giving. You made it, you saved, so you could give it. In fact, on this third point of his trilateral he actually switched the wording by the end of his message from "give all you can" to "give all you have." He meant it.

And he lived it too. In the year Wesley earned today's equivalent of \$1.4 million, he lived on 2% of his income and gave 98% of it away. He did. He "tithed" 98%. In fact, during Wesley's lifetime he earned the equivalent of \$30 million. When he died, left behind only a few miscellaneous coins and a couple of silver spoons. He had given away the rest. He practiced what he preached.

He practiced what he preached and so displayed the worth of his God and promoted the work of his God.

Why Give It Away?

God gives us money so we can give it away. But, as with all things, there is a purpose to that - a purpose designed to maximize our joy in God as we rely on him in all circumstances.

To Root Our Hope In A Sovereign God

First, God gives us money to root our hope in a Sovereign God, and not in money. Throughout Luke 12, the refrain is, "do not worry", "do not worry". Why do we not need to worry? Because God will take care of us. He takes care of the birds of the air and the grass of the field - and you're so much more valuable than them! He knows every little thing that we need, and it's trivial for him to give them to us.

Luke 12:30-32 - "For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom." God knows you need simple,

physical things to keep you alive, and he'll give them to you, but he also knows that what you really need is HIM - the rest are just additions. Notice the word choice in this verse.

"your Father" - you have a heavenly Dad who, unlike earthly dads, will never let you down and is 100% for you. He's caring for you and looking out for your best interest. He wants to keep you safe and secure and comfortable and happy, and he knows precisely how to do that...

"has chosen" - it's an active decision that he's made. he could have withheld it from us, but he didn't - he chose to give it to us

"gladly" - this is the Father's attitude - he doesn't do this begrudgingly or expecting repayment, but with the delight that you would expect from a loving gift-giver

"to give" - this is the Father's action - he doesn't withhold it from you, and he doesn't lend it to you and expect repayment - it's a gift

"flock" - the Father is also called the Good Shepherd. As Christians, we are part of his flock, under his watchful care, protection, and guidance.

"little" - our relationship to the Father. He is big and powerful, and we are small and weak. But because he is good, he cares for us and protects us.

"the kingdom" - The kingdom of God is what is referred to here, where the King - Jesus - reigns. Matthew 25:34, in the middle of the parable of the sheep and the goats, says "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" The Kingdom of God is the ultimate blessing for those who love the King, because we get to be *with* the King forever!

"Do not be afraid" - we don't need to fear not obtaining the kingdom, because it's the Father who has chosen to give it to us. What he decrees will happen will happen, so we need not be afraid.

Your Heavenly Father holds you safely and securely in his arms, gladly giving you the best thing - Himself - along with everything else you need to live. And so our hope is rooted in a Sovereign God, instead of ourselves, and instead of money, to provide us with comfort and security. And with the Father securing us, and providing for all our needs, we can give generously and with compassion and broken-hearted care, not begrudgingly, with uncertainty, or fear. And the more we give, the more we trust his sovereign goodness as HE is unmistakably the one providing for our every need and we're not looking to ourselves for a secure future.

To Show That Christ Is Our Treasure

Second, God gives us money to show that Christ, and not money, is our treasure. How do we know that a treasure is great? By what one is willing to give up to gain it.

Matthew 13:44-46 says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."

The greatness of the treasure is displayed by what these men were willing to give up to gain the treasure. And the nature of treasure-finding would cause them to say, "it was no sacrifice. It was well worth it!" It's easy to see from Philippians 3 that Christ was Paul's treasure: "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ." Paul just finished talking about his pedigree - how he out-Jewed all the Jews of his day. He was at the top of the religious elite. There were a lot of things that were gain to him. But compared to Christ, they were nothing. And the real test: what happens when he loses everything? It doesn't change a thing - they were rubbish - something he was more than willing to get rid of - compared to Christ.

Christ was Paul's treasure. Paul had such a vision of Christ that made such significant sacrifice and suffering no sacrifice at all, because Christ was so much more satisfying. Christ sustained him through prison, through beatings, through torture, through rejection, through shipwreck. Christ didn't remove those things from him, but sustained him through them, so that Paul would put his hope in Christ. God gives us hard times - pain and suffering, sickness, death of friends, financial hardship, spiritual darkness, natural disaster - falling bridges and raging fires - so that he can say to us, as he said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." By perfecting his power, God isn't saying that his power is lacking somehow, except in presentation. In our weakness, God chooses to show himself as strong and mighty to save. He chooses to reveal himself in our lives in ways that cause us to treasure him.

Is Christ your treasure? Is he the one you're living for? Then show it through your finances. Show it through a hazardous liberality - give all you have because Christ gave all he had - making himself nothing, becoming a human, and then dying the most gruesome death he could have died. Give all you have because Christ is so much more satisfying, so much better than cash, than barn-building. Show to the world, "this isn't what satisfies me - Christ is."

Luke 12:30 gives us Christ's insight into society: "For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek." **THIS IS HOW WE ARE DIFFERENT.** Everyone else is pursuing money. More than that, everyone else is putting their hope in it. This is a huge way in which we are called to be different. This is a huge way in which we are called to show Christ to our friends. When you are trusting in the exact same things they are trusting in, why would they ever ask you for the "reason for the hope that you have", as 1 Peter 3:15 talks about? Your hope looks exactly the same as theirs. They collect wealth, you collect wealth. They build barns, you build barns. They worry about how to take care of themselves and their families, you worry about the same thing. They don't ask you why you have the hope that you have - they know the answer - MONEY! You both have the same hope.

And it extends past money. We're surrounded by 13,000 Cornell undergrads heading straight to hell, and we're helping them on their way there. Our sinfulness causes them to think Grey's Anatomy, our iPods,

and our classes are better than Jesus... because we do. We're not showing them love, we're not showing them hope in something better, and we're not showing them the Gospel. I'm not showing them the Gospel, and that's something I need to repent of.

The Gospel

The Gospel is this: Christ died so that we can live. God is glorious, and he has displayed that glory to the world through creation so that we would be satisfied in him and him alone. But in our sinfulness, we started looking for satisfaction in other things. In sex, in alcohol, in our jobs, in our schoolwork, in money. And then there's pride - looking for satisfaction in yourself. Romans 1:25 notes that "they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator." That's what sin is - worshiping creation over creator. Romans 3:23 clarifies the scope of the problem - "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Nobody is sinless. Everyone is guilty. Romans 6:23 explains the consequences: "the wages of sin is death." Not annihilation, but eternal life in hell - eternal, conscious torment. In fact, the biblical imagery is "fire" - Matthew 25:41 says, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

The first of the 10 Commandments is a very simple yet profound one - "You shall have no other gods before me." You shall have no idols. You shall not worship creation over creator. For so many of us, money is a huge idol - the pursuit of it, the spending of it, the joy in it. We build our identity around our possessions instead of in Christ. We place our hope in our possessions instead of in Christ. And so we've sinned, and deserve hell.

But Romans 6:23 doesn't end there - "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." You see, because we sinned against God, in his justice he must punish us for our sin. But in his mercy, he punished his Son, Jesus, in our place. Jesus took our sin upon himself, and the Father punished the Son instead of us so that we can have eternal life with the Father and the Son, instead of eternal death in hell. We deserved death and punishment, and Christ deserved life and God, but instead Christ took our death and punishment - dying on a Roman cross of all things, and we got what he deserved - life and God.

And so we're now free - those of us who are in Christ, who trust him to save us, who are satisfied by him. We're free from sin, free from death. Free from our bondage to money and possessions and worldly comfort and security and free to make Christ look great. Freedom from sin means that sin no longer has victory over us. Not that we will never ever sin, but that we are no longer bound to it - it is no longer our master. We are no longer slaves to sin, to our idols, to our money. We can have victory now, because Christ defeated sin when he died on the cross. Christ died to defeat the sin in our lives and to be the treasure in our lives. More valuable than gold, or silver, or diamonds, or all the riches that this world has to offer. Christ died to give us God.

And if you don't yet trust Christ to save you, do it now, not tomorrow. You don't know that you'll be alive

tomorrow. You're not trusting Christ so that you can join a stuffy, extremist religion full of archaic rules and rituals - that's not what Christianity is at all. No, you're trusting a sovereign and satisfying Christ, who says to you, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Christ wants you to live the best life now you can possibly live, in him, for him. Don't settle for lesser treasures. Settle for *the Treasure* that's worth giving your all for.