

Trinity 15

First Lesson: Ecclesiasticus 5:1-10

¹ Set not thy heart upon thy goods; and say not, I have enough for my life.

² Follow not thine own mind and thy strength, to walk in the ways of thy heart:

³ And say not, Who shall control me for my works? for the Lord will surely revenge thy pride.

⁴ Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath happened unto me? for the Lord is longsuffering, he will in no wise let thee go.

⁵ Concerning propitiation, be not without fear to add sin unto sin:

⁶ And say not His mercy is great; he will be pacified for the multitude of my sins: for mercy and wrath come from him, and his indignation resteth upon sinners.

⁷ Make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day: for suddenly shall the wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed, and perish in the day of vengeance.

⁸ Set not thine heart upon goods unjustly gotten, for they shall not profit thee in the day of calamity.

⁹ Winnow not with every wind, and go not into every way: for so doth the sinner that hath a double tongue.

¹⁰ Be stedfast in thy understanding; and let thy word be the same.

Second Lesson: Luke 12:13-21

¹³ And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.

¹⁴ And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?

¹⁵ And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

¹⁶ And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

¹⁸ And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

²⁰ But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

²¹ So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.

Introduction

Anyone who has owned an iPhone, a Macintosh computer or watched a Pixar film, owes a lot of the experience to Steve Jobs. Steve Jobs was an individual who evoked strong emotions in many people when learning about his life. Frugal and brilliant, the late Apple co-founder was also commonly seen as abrasive, harsh, cheap and discounting of people. He routinely did not pay for his child support on time, and unlike most other billionaires, Jobs didn't donate to charity for moral, ethical, or even tax break reasons. Despite his wealth being close to ten billion dollars at the time of his death, he seemed obsessed with creating more wealth and not concerned about helping anyone else. He is said to have explained to his daughter his disdain for charity, stating, "What matters in life is only what you do with your own hand"¹

Despite this enormous amount of wealth and his influence among the community, Steve Jobs died of pancreatic cancer in 2011. Although it has been disputed, there are several reports that indicate Steve Jobs had a change of perspective as he knew death was close. While it may have been paraphrased, it does seem to make a lot of sense from the perspective of a man who had massive wealth and power yet was powerless in changing his life trajectory.

¹ Walter Issacson. "Steve Jobs", *Christian Today*, Aug. 2024.

In a referenced online post, he is quoted as saying, “In other eyes, my life is the essence of success, but aside from work, I have a little joy. And in the end, wealth is just a fact of life to which I am accustomed.”

“At this moment, lying on the bed, sick and remembering all my life, I realize that all my recognition and wealth that I have is meaningless in the face of imminent death,” it goes on to say. “You can hire someone to drive a car for you, make money for you but you cannot rent someone to carry the disease for you. One can find material things, but there is one thing that cannot be found when it is lost, life.”

“Your true inner happiness does not come from the material things of this world. Whether you’re flying first class, or economy class, if the plane crashes, you crash with it.”²

During his life, it is reported that Jobs struggled with believing in God and at times, outright rejected Christianity. He proclaimed to be a Buddhist for most of his life, although in an interview with Walter Isaacson shortly before his death, he began to question the meaning of life and think more about the existence of God.

"I remember sitting in his backyard in his garden one day and he started talking about God," recalled Isaacson. He said, “Sometimes I believe in God, sometimes I don't. I think it's 50-50 maybe. But ever since I've had cancer, I've been thinking about it more, and I find myself believing a bit more. I kind of maybe think it's because I want to believe in the afterlife.”

Perhaps Jobs realized, in the end, that money and wealth did not provide the inner peace or confidence to face what lies ahead. Facing death, he was terrified and realized how empty his life had been. However, for those of us who believe, for those of us who no longer trust ourselves, but have placed our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, we can be assured that despite our sin, we will have a place with our Father in heaven. John 3:16 tells us “*that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish but have eternal life*”. When death comes, we know what will happen as our faith gives us the assurance and confidence of what lies ahead. Jesus tells us, “*I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death*” (John 8:51).

² Walter Isaacson. “Steve Jobs”, *Christian Today*, Aug. 2024.

Body

(Luke 12:13-15 Jesus is asked by two men to settle a grievance as to how their inheritance should be split. Jesus rebukes them and warns against covetousness, reminding them that life is not about possessions.)

In our Gospel reading from Luke, Jesus discusses this same topic of wealth and the accumulation of possessions. We see that Jesus is confronted by two men who disagree in how their inheritance should be split. In those days it was common for men to seek the counsel of a Rabbi in these types of situations. Jesus rebukes them and tells them that they should “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15).

Jesus warns us about the danger of covetous behavior. God included in the Ten Commandments a law against coveting. Maybe God knows something about what leads to stealing, what leads to anger and strife between His children. Maybe God, in His infinite wisdom and love for us, knows something about what leads to jealousy. Maybe God knows something of what leads to murder and war. God knows, because of our fallen human nature, that we will want and desire what is not given to us. Through greed, selfishness, and anger we covet other people's homes, money, possessions and even spouses. Covetousness reveals something about the darkest part of our fallen humanity and our sinful and selfish nature. No one can honor God and have a heart full of gratitude to Him and be covetous. Covetousness is the antithesis of contentment with the goodness of God. When you see something that you want and do not possess, you begin to covet that item or that person. In essence you are saying, “God, I'm not grateful for what you've given to me. I want more and more.”

Covetousness is the father of greed, of wanting more than you actually have.

(Luke 23:16-21, Jesus discusses this concept through the use of a parable that describes a rich man who uses his wealth to create more wealth, and in the end is rebuked by God who tells him that once he has passed from this life nothing he has built is of any worth, and “not rich toward God”)

Jesus goes on to teach them an important concept through the use of a parable. In this parable, we hear the story of a rich man who although has great abundance insists on finding ways to create more and more wealth. He further states that with this wealth he can “take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 23:19).

God rebukes him and lets him know that all the riches and wealth we accumulate on earth feeds our own flesh and is “not rich toward God”. God is not interested in our earthly gains but instead wants our love, our obedience to his commandments, our faith, and for us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-39). These faithful responses to the love God have poured into our hearts provide us with a blessed assurance that no accumulation of wealth can provide.

Let us consider what does the parable of the Rich man tells us and what does Jesus impart to us when we hear it?

The Rich Man’s Greed

The first thing that is clear about the rich man is that he was greedy. No matter how great the crop was, no matter how much he had in storage, he wanted more. We see this in our lives today. So many people are not satisfied with what they have, they seek and work to have more. More money, more property, and more wealth. Most of us are never content with what we have. We want more. No wonder greed is historically considered to be one of the seven deadly sins. Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount “do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven” (Matt. 6:19-20).

The Rich Man’s Selfishness

The second thing we learn about the rich man is that he was unbelievably selfish. There is not a hint in Jesus’ parable that he wanted to share anything out of his abundance with other people. For him, charity was not an option. All he could think about was how he could keep everything he had earned. Scripture tells us in the Gospel of Mark, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36).

A Christian is by nature a generous person. Every Christian exists and moves only by the grace and generosity of Almighty God. “*For in Him we live and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:28). What do you have that you have not received from God? But the selfish person does not see his fellow man, he does not see the state of the world and how he can help, he only sees his own gain and wants. Jesus warned people about selfishness. That kind of selfish attitude is sinful and will lead to other behaviors that are abhorrent to God. “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there you find disorder and every evil practice” (James 3:16).

The Rich Man's Foolishness

Worse than being greedy and worse than being selfish, the third thing that we notice is that the rich man was incredibly foolish. Listen to what he said in verse 19, "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."

Jesus then applied the parable in this manner: "So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." The person who lays up treasures for himself, no matter how great that treasure is, but is not rich toward God, has nothing. He is poverty-stricken and empty. "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (money) (Matt. 6:24). He who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God is like the rich man: greedy, selfish, and foolish. God, our loving heavenly Father, who created us in His image, desires so much more than this for His children.

Action

Like the rich farmer, we are tempted to think that having large amounts of money and possessions stored up will make us secure. Sooner or later, however, we learn that no amount of wealth or property can give us true security in our lives. No amount of wealth can protect us from a deadly, incurable disease, or from a tragic accident. No amount of wealth can keep our relationships healthy and our families from falling apart. In fact, wealth and property can easily drive a wedge between family members, as in the case of the brothers fighting over their inheritance at the beginning of our reading today.

Most importantly, no amount of wealth can secure our lives with God. In fact, Jesus repeatedly warns that wealth can get in the way of our relationship with God. "Take heed and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. (Luke 12:15)

I think it is important to note that it is not that God doesn't want us to save for retirement, future needs or enjoy our lives. It is not that God doesn't want us to "eat, drink, and be merry" and enjoy the many things God has given us. We know from the Gospels that Jesus spent time eating and drinking with people and enjoying life. Jesus enjoyed spending time with people so much so that he was accused of being a "glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners"

(Luke 7:34). It is also important to remember that He was also clear about where His mission was and what His truth was all about.

For us, it is all about having priorities and being thankful to God for all we have. It is about knowing who God is in our lives and who we worship and make a priority. It is about how we focus and invest our lives and use the gifts that God has given us. It is about how our lives are fundamentally aligned: toward ourselves, our passing desires and covetous behavior, or toward God and our neighbor, toward God's mission to bless and redeem the world. The Apostle Paul tells Timothy that:

“those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

Conclusion

Steve Jobs was by all earthly measures a successful man. He spent his life achieving a lot of earthly success but missed out on accumulating his heavenly riches. He died one of the richest men to ever live and yet it did nothing to secure his salvation or buy eternal life. As he faced death, he began to believe in God and was contemplating this truth more and more. It is interesting, that at the end, at the time of his death, Jobs had a very poignant reaction. In an interview with his sister Patty, she told how, “right before he died, he'd looked at his sister, then for a long time at his children, then at his life's partner, Laurene, and then over their shoulders past them,”

She said Jobs' final words, monosyllables, repeated three times were:
“Oh wow. Oh wow. Oh wow!”

Perhaps our Lord, in His infinite grace and love, saw a change in Steve's heart and an acceptance and belief. Perhaps the first thing that Steve Jobs saw when he left our world was the glory and magnificence of what spending the rest of eternity in the presence of God looks like. In our earthly minds and with our limited ability to understand, I am sure it would be a WOW moment.

To the only wise God our Savior. Be glory, majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

