

### Title Slide

One's life isn't determined by one's possessions says Jesus. Well, growing up in the 1980s as I did, you could have fooled me. Before I wanted to become a pastor, I told my mother that I wanted to be a young corporate executive. Now, I didn't know what that meant, except that I would get to wear a sleek suit, work in a high-rise building, and make lots of money.

**Where did I get such an idea?** Alex P. Keaton—that's where. Michael J. Fox's character on *Family Ties* was my hero. The show was set in a city I'd never heard of called Columbus, Ohio. Alex was the son of two hippies, but he did not share his parents' worldview. Above all else, Alex wanted to make money, and I wanted to be exactly like him: funny, smart, good looking, and rich. That was the ideal male of the 1980s. It wasn't about character or healthy relationships. It was about getting and staying rich.

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Today we hear a story of siblings and inheritance, two themes that Luke returns to again and again. Two weeks ago, we heard of a dispute between Mary and Martha who were siblings. The week before that we heard the parable of the Good Samaritan, which begins with someone asking Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Inheritance and siblings. Today we get both and not for the last time. There are few things more damaging to our relationships with people than our relationship with money. How many families are torn apart by resentment over inheritance? And it's not just biological families either. Our relationship to money can divide us from our relationship to people.

I'm not sure how often we consider the fact that we have a relationship to money, but we do. Left unchecked, our possessions do not remain possessions, but instead, they come to possess us. That's what Jesus is concerned about because Jesus wants us to be free. From the crowd, a man says to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus responds, "Man, who appointed me as judge or referee between you and your brother?" I love it when Jesus gets testy, don't you? He really was human. Now, you might hear his response and think, Jesus, aren't you the judge? The creeds say that Jesus will one day come to judge the living and the dead. Why does Jesus balk at this man's request?

The Gospels make it clear that Jesus had an extraordinary ability to diagnose the human heart. There's a prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer* that I have always loved that says, **"Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name."** I think Jesus sees this man's true desire is not for justice but for money. He's allowed his love of money to divide him from his deeper aspirations. In the end, I think we all want the same things in life, to use our time and energy to give a worthwhile gift to the world, to have meaningful relationships in which we can love and be loved, to have a roof over our head and food to eat, and I think we want a world that works for everyone. We don't want children to starve or war to ravage communities. We want a healthy planet where people can flourish. These are our deepest and best aspirations, but along with them come our fears, our insecurities, and our greed. These get in the way of our better selves.

So, Jesus warns us, "Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed. After all, one's life isn't determined by one's possessions." You see, Jesus knows that wealth isn't a neutral force in our lives. I like the way the older translations use the word "mammon" instead of

wealth. Mammon has a will of its own and wants to possess us. Mark Kinney said, **“Money is like an iron ring we put through our nose. It is now leading us around wherever it wants. We just forget that we are the ones who designed it.”** How much of our lives is controlled by money, this fiction that we have invented? It has no inherent value, other than what we collectively imagine it has, and yet influences almost everything we do. Why do we let a fictional invention rule our lives and divide us from our deepest aspirations?

To illustrate his point, Jesus tells a parable, “A certain rich man’s land produced a bountiful crop. He said to himself, What will I do? I have no place to store my harvest! Then he thought, Here’s what I’ll do. I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. That’s where I’ll store all my grain and goods. I’ll say to myself, You have stored up plenty of goods, enough for several years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.” This is one of those parables that appears simple, but the more you sit with it, the more it works on you. Notice the man starts out rich. He’s already wealthy, already has more than enough. Then the land produces an excess harvest. Who’s responsible for this surplus? Is it the rich man, or is it the land? And who do you think worked the land to bring about this excess? Was it the rich man out there working the fields, or the poor workers he hired and perhaps exploited?

With an excess he didn’t work for much less need, this man has a conversation about what to do with this unexpected blessing. Notice, he doesn’t ask his family or his friends. He doesn’t talk with trusted advisors. He simply talks to himself and envisions a future of himself alone with his money. Martin Luther described sin as humanity is curved in on itself, that despite our best efforts to love and serve others, self-interest often gets the best of us. This man is fully curved in on himself. While he may be materially wealthy, he is otherwise empty and alone. He is pitiable, yet if we’re honest, how many of us look at this man as living the good life? How many of us bought a Mega Millions ticket this week in the slim chance we might become this guy? Yeah, me too. Our values are all mixed up.

**In her incredible book, *The Soul of Money***, Lynne Twist says scarcity is the great lie of our world. The lie of scarcity says there’s not enough, that more is better, and this is just the way it is. This lie affects rich and poor alike. You can have more money than you know what to do with, or you can be barely making ends meet, yet you can be equally bound by this fear. And make no mistake, fear is always at the heart of greed. If it’s true that there’s not enough to go around and that more is better, then acquiring more makes sense, but what if what if it’s not true? What if we’ve been sold a lie meant to keep us afraid and keep us buying more and more things? Jesus wants to set us free.

Jesus finishes the parable with the rich man dying before he could build his bigger barns, and then importantly, Jesus points us to sufficiency and balance of the natural world. There we can learn how to be free from the lie of scarcity. After all, the ravens don’t build barns, yet they seem to get along just fine, don’t they? And consider the lilies. They don’t work themselves to the bone, yet who is clothed more beautifully than they? God knows what you need, so you are free to live in the blessed assurance that there is enough.

**When is enough, enough?** That’s a question we can ask of ourselves individually and corporately? When you are on your deathbed, what will you wish you had more of: possessions or loving relationships? Only one of those is worth living for. Over the course of my lifetime, we’ve been consuming more and more, running faster and faster, building bigger and bigger barns with higher GDP and corporate profits than the world has ever seen. Are we better for it,

happier, healthier? Are we more in balance with the natural world? When is enough, enough? That's not a question intended to shame, but one that has the power to set us free, so we can live from our deepest aspirations, to love and be loved, to live in a world where everyone has enough. Isn't that what we all really want?

A man came to Jesus asking him to side with him against his brother so that he might get his share of the inheritance. Jesus invited him to see that the only inheritance worth living for are the relationships we have to each other. That's what Jesus lived for. That's what he died for. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be too. You are the treasure of Christ's heart. You are the inheritance Jesus lived and died for, worth more to him than all the power and possessions of heaven. Your life isn't determined by your possessions, despite what I learned from Alex Keaton or from our consumer economy. Your life is determined by God's love for you and all creation. Knowing that allows you to live in assurance rather than fear, sufficiency rather than scarcity, balance instead of opulence. God will provide for your needs, which means you are free to live with open hands instead of clenched fists. Rest in the good news that there is enough.