

## SEVEN Deadly Sins - #2 Greed

Last Sunday, we started talking about a list that is commonly called "The Seven Deadly Sins!" This list was first drawn up by Pope Gregory 1st, and has been around for about 1500 years. You won't find an actual list of these seven, so called "deadly" sins in the Bible but they do represent, I think, the key sin areas where Christians most struggle in their daily lives, even today. Here they are: PRIDE, LUST, GREED, ENVY, SLOTH (LAZINESS/APATHY), WRATH (ANGER) & GLUTTONY

We looked at the sin of PRIDE last week. This morning we're going to think about GREED as a deadly sin. We all know what GREED is, don't we? The dictionary defines it as *"a selfish and excessive desire for more of something than is needed."*

Now we often think that GREED is only about having more money, but in fact it could be about having more of anything - more possessions than we need, more food than we need, more power than we need, more of the world's resources than we need. In popular culture, GREED can be summed up in that phrase we sometimes hear, *"The one who dies with the most toys wins!"*

Now it's really easy for us to think that we are immune from the sin of GREED because we're not as wealthy as Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey or Warren Buffet. So it is easy for us to conclude that GREED isn't a problem for us. So let's do a reality check! According to Stats Canada the average Canadian gives only 0.8% of their annual income to charity. In fact, if you take the "medium" amount - that is the midpoint of all donations to charity - Canadians who filed income tax gave only \$123 a year to charitable causes. By the way, religious people give more, and the more religious you are, the more you give. In fact, Stats Canada has suggested that the reason fewer Canadians are giving to charity is because fewer Canadians are religious!

And according to the United Nations Economic Commission, Canadians have the tenth highest monthly average wage in the world at \$4,134. Now compare that with Hungary at \$1,067 or Bulgaria at \$627 or Albania at \$379 or Afghanistan at \$213 as a monthly average wage.

The reality is that compared to most people in the world - in terms of income, access to social services, education, and health care - you and I are amongst the richest people on the entire planet. And even the poorest people in our society are much better off than the poorest people in other

countries. So listen to this Scripture, Ephesians 5:3: **"Let there be no . . . . GREED among you. Such sins have no place among God's people."**

I wonder, have you ever read the New Testament and suddenly thought, "Wow Jesus really was a radical." While you and I tend to revere the rich and want to be like them, Jesus didn't have many good things to say about the wealthy, and most of what he said about money and possessions and greed come to us in the form of warnings. For example, Luke 12:15, **"Then he said, 'Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.'"**

Those are really hard words to hear in our society, aren't they? We've been taught that material things matter. So we pay crazy amounts of money for brand name clothes. We trade in perfectly good smart phones just to get the newest and improved model. We buy homes we can't afford. Hey, been there, done that! Did you know that Adam Smith, the great eighteenth century Scottish economist, said that the root of a consumer driven economy is GREED. Now, folks, if a Scotsman says that, you know greed is a really serious problem!

Today we read from Luke Chapter 18. It's the story of a rich person who came to Jesus asking an age old question. **"What do I have to do to receive eternal life?"** Jesus responds by telling him to keep the commandments. This answer really pleased the rich young ruler. You can hear the relief in his voice. **"I've kept them all for as long as I can remember."** (Msg). Now maybe that's the first hint that there is a problem here. He's so proud of his religious achievements that he can't see his own faults and failings. So Jesus quickly moves to the real issue in this person's life. **22 "When Jesus heard that, he said, 'Then there's only one thing left to do: Sell everything you own and give it away to the poor. You will have riches in heaven. Then come, follow me.'"**

Now listen to what happened next. **23 "This was the last thing the official expected to hear. He was very rich and became terribly sad. He was holding on tight to a lot of things and not about to let them go. 24-25 seeing his reaction, Jesus said, 'Do you have any idea how difficult it is for people who have it all to enter God's kingdom? I'd say it's easier to thread a camel through a needle's eye than get a rich person into God's kingdom.'"**

OK. Think back to those statistics I gave you earlier. In relationship to most people in the world we are that rich young ruler. We have it all. That's why it is so important that we don't let GREED consume us, because as Jesus

points out here, it is a barrier to us entering God's kingdom. GREED is deadly to our relationship with God.

Isn't it true that what really lies behind the sin of GREED are issues of trust and control? We want to be in total charge of our own lives and we see acquiring money, possessions, power and influence as the way to do that. And as we all know, some people will even sacrifice their own family relationships for the almighty dollar, or for success or fame or position. Indeed, isn't it true that in our pursuit of material things, we tend to forget that God is the Owner of all things, and that all we have ultimately comes from him. We are not Owners. We are simply Managers or Stewards of God's gifts. That's why Jesus was so clear when he said in Matthew 6:19-21, **19-21 "Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being."**

The reality is that the sin of GREED is one that is fed continually by our consumer society, and that GREED is a particular problem in North American and Western culture. So how do we deal with it? Well the very first step is to acknowledge that greed is as much a problem in our lives as it was for that rich young man who came to Jesus. Remember what Scripture said about him, "**He was holding on tight to a lot of things and not about to let them go.**" Are we willing to confess to God that we do that a well? Are we willing to loosen our grip?

The second step is to admit to God, and to ourselves, that a lot of our problem with greed is really a trust issue. Proverbs 3:5 says, "**Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own.**" Why is that important? Because when we try to figure everything out on our own, when we try to become independent and self-reliant we become guilty of the sin of PRIDE that we talked about last week. PRIDE feeds the sin of GREED. So you'll hear people say, "*I want it all, and I want it now*". So either God is God, and we need to trust him by listening to what he says about GREED or he is not! That's the real issue behind the sin of GREED.

If you were here last week, you'll remember that when the list of the seven deadly sins was first developed 1500 years ago, another list was laid alongside it. That list is called "*The Seven Holy Virtues*". So the sin of PRIDE is balanced by the virtue of HUMILITY. And the sin of GREED is balanced by the virtue of GENEROSITY.

Why is generosity such an antidote to greed? Three reasons. First, when we are generous we are acknowledging what James the brother of Jesus said (1:17 GNB), **"Every good gift and every perfect present comes from heaven"** Generosity is our practical acknowledgment that God is the Owner and we are Managers or Stewards of what God provides.

Second, generosity is a way for us to minister to Jesus who said to us in Matthew: 25:35, **'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things** (e.g. feed the hungry, give the thirsty drink, give the homeless a bed, help those poorly clothed, minister to the sick, visit prisoner); **"Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you failed to do it to me.'**

Third, God Himself is generous and we are made in his likeness. Generosity is a God like characteristic. The Lord's Supper that we share today is all about the generosity of God. In Jesus, love conquers all. Mercy replaces condemnation. Forgiveness overcomes sin. Death becomes the gateway to eternal life. When you eat the bread, and drink the wine, you are witnessing the God's generosity to you so you can model it to others.

Let's go back to the rich young ruler and his conversation with Jesus. He had a problem when Jesus told him to be generous by giving away his riches to the poor. So I wonder what would have happened if Jesus had said to him, **"Keep your riches, and lay down your life for me"**! I would have no doubt that he would have walked away as well. You see that's the problem with GREED. We hold on tight to a lot of things and we're not willing to let them go, even for God. That's why it's on the list of deadly sins. GREED can kill your relationship with God faster than most things. So this week, I challenge all of us to examine our lives and to identify those places where greed is an issue for us. Then I challenge you to find ways where you can replace greed with generosity.

Jesus, by the way, was very clear that greed and generosity are spiritual issues. Do you remember what he said in Mark 8:36, **"And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?"**

The Lord's Supper now begins, and the generosity of God flows into our lives.