

## **“THE DEADLY SIN OF AVARICE”**

Midweek Lenten Round Robin Sermon

Lent, 2011

Sermon Text – Romans 6:23

In the name of Jesus. [Amen.]

**The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (Rom. 6:23)

Tonight we have our next look at one of “The 7 Deadly Sins” as defined by the Church during the Medieval Era.

Each of these sins is considered “deadly...” because each is so very insidious; that is, these sins sneak up on people... and sort of lull them into a trance. And in that trance, they think that nothing is wrong. No one is getting hurt, *so they think*, by what they’re doing – not themselves nor anyone else... *and certainly not God!*

But in the end, these sins... as in all sin... these sins bring hurt. They bring eternal death in hell, which is to be apart from the love of God forever and ever.

And so, now we get to tonight’s “deadly sin...” the sin of Avarice... better known as “greed.”

You’ve heard it said: **“Money can’t buy happiness – but it sure helps a person to enjoy his misery!”** Thus we try to laugh away the sin of avarice or greed, which is defined as: **“a sinful preoccupation with money and the accumulation of things.”**

Sure, laughing at something *may* help you overlook it, but it doesn’t remove its danger. And greed *is* dangerous, so dangerous that it’s included in the listing of *The 7 Deadly Sins*.

St. Paul wrote about greed when he said: **“The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”** (1 Tim. 6:10, NIV)

Let’s be clear about this, the Bible gives warning after warning regarding the deadliness of greed: Paul wrote, **“People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction.”** (1 Tim. 6:9, NIV)

Our Lord wants us to know that if our goal in life is simply to get rich... well, then... we’re pursuing the wrong thing. Do you remember the story when He said: **“It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”** (Mark 10:25, NIV)

Using such words, Jesus gives clear warning that those in “hot pursuit” of money and wealth will have a difficult time of taking up residence in heaven when their time on earth is completed.

This deadly sin of greed that’s before us tonight seems to be with us from cradle to grave. Consider these facts:

1. An infant will relentlessly cry until it gets what it wants.

2. A child will beg: **“Please, Daddy... please, please get that for me!”**
3. The surly teenager... when asked to do something asks: **“What’s in it for me? Are you going to pay me?”**
4. And the adult can almost always be counted on to look out for Number One.

Not only does greed infect humans of all ages, but also greed easily crosses social class lines. Speaking of greed, Jeremiah tells us: **“From the least to the greatest... *all are greedy for gain.*”** (Jeremiah 6:13, NIV)

In the Old Testament, King Ahab had it all – power, money, property; and yet, he wanted more. His obsession with Naboth’s vineyard ultimately led to his wife, Jezebel, conspiring to have Naboth killed, so that Ahab could have *even more*.

And, as we see once again during this Season of Lent, Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus’ 12 disciples, all of whom were relatively poor, Judas allowed his love of money lead him to betray Jesus unto His death on the cross.

And so we see, if a person has great wealth (as Ahab did) that doesn’t eliminate greed. And, being in poverty can also be a breeding ground for greed!

The problem *isn’t* so much how much you have or how little you have. No. The problem... as in all sin... the problem is found in the sinful human heart.

As much as any other sin, *and perhaps more so...* greed gets in the way of a person’s knowing and worshiping God. It has a deadening effect on a Christian’s ability to fully live a life a faith and discipleship. Remember Jesus’ words: **“You cannot serve God and money.”** (Mt. 6:24, NIV) We serve one or the other – “both” is *not* an option!

Here’s an example of how greed can squeeze God out of a person’s life: Take this dollar bill. When it’s held out at arm’s length, it’s just a small part of the total scene taken in by one’s eye.

But if I were to close one eye and then draw the dollar bill closer and closer... it blocks out more and more of what else you can see. This continues on and on until you can’t see anything *but* the money! You see, the money consumes one’s entire vision and focus.

This is what happens when we don’t ride herd on our sinful hearts. God calls us to keep our hearts in check so that they don’t seek to satisfy the inbred greed that’s there, and thereby make money to be the lord of our life.

When greed makes its deadly approach to our hearts and minds it’s often there before we’re even aware of it. And... if that’s so... what can we do about it?

Do this: Pray each day for the gift of contentment. Pray that God would help you to be content with *what you already have*.

Years ago, when all of our kids were still at home, one evening we were in the midst of our family devotions. We were discussing money in the context of our life as Christians. I mentioned to my family that each day I prayed for the gift of contentment.

I no sooner said that and one of the kids immediately burst out: **“Well, no wonder we never have enough money!”**

Our child was confusing a desire to improve oneself (with which there is nothing wrong) ... the child was confusing a desire to “get ahead...” with the all-consuming sin of greed – where the desire to improve one’s financial position becomes *the focal point* of the person’s entire life.

In other words, a person *can* desire to “get ahead” in life *without* being greedy. They can work hard. Expand their education. Ask the boss for pointers on how to become a better worker (and thus be better equipped to receive a promotion with an accompanying pay raise). A person can seek to improve their position in life by doing such things.

The deadly sin of greed, however, comes into play when the desire to get ahead crowds everything else out of their life – including God! In fact, greed *becomes* god for such people... and ultimately nothing else matters to them!

Dear Christians, recognize first and foremost that greatest gift that you’ve been given – faith in Christ Jesus, which grants forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Thank God *every day* for the gifts that you *do* have. Thank God *every day* for His love for you that continues even when you allow such a thing as greed to have its way in your heart.

And, if in your mind there’s a perceived need... go to the Lord *first* with your thoughts on the matter. Because, sadly, all so often, we go to our Father in heaven last – *if at all*.

Pray that He would provide that need, if it’s His will. And again, pray for contentment that you might be patient until He would grant your request or until He would take away your desire for it.

When you busy yourself with thanking God for His gifts that you *do* have... you’ve gone a long way toward the practice of Christian contentment, which is, by the way, the most effective antidote to greed.

While in prison St. Paul wrote to his friends in Philippi, **“I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”** (Philippians 4:12, NIV)

And the basis for contentment is being focused on the cross of Christ Jesus, where true riches are to be found and where true perspective on life is to be realized.

This secret of contentment is essentially spiritual. Jesus said, **“You cannot serve God and money.”** As Christians we won’t find the antidote to greed – contentment – until Jesus becomes the Lord of our money.

No joking will remove the danger of the deadly sin of greed. But Christian joy, rooted in the Cross of Christ, will replace deadly sin with life-giving grace.

So rejoice this day that Jesus died for all your sins, including the sin of greed. Give praise to him for the blessed fact that the Holy Spirit constantly opens your eyes to the true treasure to be had in this world, His Son, Jesus Christ! For Jesus’ sake, and in His holy name. [Amen.]