

“When Dreams Become Nightmares”

Luke 12: **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, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" **15** And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." **16** Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. **17** And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' **18** Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull 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 ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' **20** But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' **21** So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Samuel Johnson was such a scholar that for generations people in the Western world would say, “Dr. Johnson” and everyone knew the man’s work. Until the Oxford English dictionary, his was considered the best scholarship the world had seen. In it, he is credited for being the first to define the word: nightmare.

The word has some interesting roots: night is obvious, mare less so. The word mare has long and deep roots pointing to the belief that a frightening dream was caused by evil, through a demon, witch or spirit resting on one’s chest in the middle of the night. And it makes sense if you think of the experience. In a time of sleep something horrid and unimaginable happens and it’s as real as this moment. The victim wakes up, terrified, perhaps screaming, crying or perspiring. Gasping for breath often accompanies the episode as if the chest were weighted down.

From time to time we’ve all had these experiences and sometimes they’re visited on some individuals with more frequency. One of my children suffered from more frequent nightmares and that child would seem to be fully awake, with eyes wide open and filled with terror, yet seeing and experiencing something none of the rest of us could see. It was frightening for us.

And I have my own reoccurring “preacher” nightmare! Mine always revolves around not being prepared or missing some service I’m supposed to do! Always, I’m either at a service and hear while there, that I’m expected to preach and I’m totally unprepared. In the nightmare I usually slip off to a bathroom or closet and try and make notes. Or, the worse nightmare for me, finds me driving up to Mt. Zion and a wedding or funeral is in progress and I was expected to be conducting it, though much earlier. Just sharing those makes me nervous. My suspicion is we all have nightmares that reoccur from time to time.

Jesus told the story of a man whose dream-like lifestyle turned into a real nightmare. The setting is best understood when we remember that the Word teaches that while we see the outside of people “the Lord sees the heart”. Jesus saw that a man seeking a pretty typical rabbinical task from him was motivated by greed. Out of crowd this man asked for Jesus ruling about dividing an inheritance. The laws were clear: the older brother received it all and then gave a third to the younger brother. A simple open and closed case. Except, Jesus knew the question was asked not for justice reasons but out of

greed so he told a story to illustrate 2 great dangers for us all: greed and a belief that life consists in having many possessions. In the story a man's land produced well. The fellow thought he was living the dream life and engaged in a soliloquy repeatedly using the words: me, mine, my.... This gives us some important clues: This fellow has forgotten or ignored the fact that God is the owner of all that and that our design as humans is to love God and our neighbor. The price was high as we shall see. With his focus totally on himself, the man in the story decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones to store all his land produced and then sit back and live the dream. But that night the dream became a nightmare, the soul, which the man also called "my soul" (implicating ownership and power over) was required of him and the things he had would be left behind to no one, for no one else seems to have mattered to this person. His dream life became a nightmare.

We too, in a sense, have seen the American dream become a nightmare in the last 12 months. Let's look at the dream, the nightmare and the Lord's solution.

**I. The America Dream.** We are the most blessed people, I believe, who have ever lived on the face of the earth. And no matter how tough things may get for us, we are blessed incredibly by living in this great free land. The American Dream at many levels, with the care and stewardship of her citizens will live on. Think of what the American dream is at its roots; many of our forbears could tell you. Many of our forbears lived in lands where starvation and tyranny marked daily life. Some came from lands where they had no choice in where and how they worshiped. Others escaped from evil rulers and places where the common good of all was ignored. Many came from lands where rulers ruled by force or inheritance of the throne and voting and democracy were thwarted. Still others came from lands where a person would be mired in a social class or occupation forever and no freedom was allowed to try one's own business. To these and more, the American dream meant freedom: freedom to choose leaders; freedom to succeed or fail due to one's own effort; freedom to move wherever and whenever one chooses; freedom to worship as one pleases and yes, even the freedom not to worship at all. The ultimate American dream is of a democracy and of freedom in this bounteous land.

But the American dream also is one that believes a person should be fairly rewarded for hard work. In our nation, we've been people who have thought that a person ought to be compensated for hard work and from that compensation be able to provide for the basic necessities for their family. I suppose that why so many are angry over, not the truly needy, not the unemployed who can't find work, but those who are able bodied and could work, but won't and instead "game the system". Too, the same sense of fairness also causes some revulsion when some lead their company's to government bailouts and yet gets hundreds of millions in bonuses. But the American dream also believes that working hard means having shelter, transportation, clothing, food, and yes, being able to see the doctor for the hard working American. My guess is we all aspire to these basics of the American dream. But something has gone wrong, especially since we all heard about a year ago this week that our government was bailing out a large insurer and Lehman's was going belly up. Since then, in some ways corporately and for many individually, a nightmare has come about.

**II. The Nightmare.** It came about over several decades. After WW2, some economists believed our great industrial machine that led to world freedom might collapse into itself into another depression unless Americans began buying. So, we began buying fervently and in many ways advertising took off. Some have cited bride's magazines from the era telling brides how patriotic they would be if they bought washing machines and other appliances. In order to keep many factories open, a lot of goods people used to make at home became widely available from manufacturers. Think back, some of you who lived in and through that era. Think of all the things your family used to make and provide for themselves and how they nearly all became "store bought". And somewhere along the way the desire for more and more and having it now, crept into our lives at all levels.

People began to suffer from an economic disease that some have termed as affluenza. Affluenza is defined as: the constant need for more and bigger and better stuff – as well as the effect that this need has on us (Hamilton, Enough, pg. 15) Think how this has affected many. Estimates are that by the time a person dies they will have given a year of their life to hearing, reading or watching advertisements. And what do advertisements do? Basically lead us to believe that something we want is a need. That we need a new car, an item of clothing, a luxury of some sort and many ads often appeal at a deep level with who we perceive ourselves to be and what we perceive others will think of us. If. If we drive a particular car, dress a particular way, live in a particular house or in a certain neighborhood. Too, many ads subtly give us the rationalizations we're looking for to get what we want. In one experiment consumers we're given identical shirts from Wal-Mart. Into one shirt had been sewed a high-priced designer label. The shirt with the designer label was always ranked as higher and a better quality, longer lasting product than the same one from Wal-Mart (The Overspent American). We now think we need more and more things to live comfortably. And if you have more and more things what else do you need? More space. Miniwarehouses have been a booming business for the last 30 years and houses that are newly built feature huge amounts of storage space. Here's a little quiz. There are a lot of 3 car garages in our area. The square footage of a 3 car garage is: a. the size of a basketball court. B. the size of an average McDonald's restaurant or, C. the size of the average American home in 1957. The answer is C, the average home in 1957. Affluenza has been a bug that we've caught strongly.

Affluenza also leads us to a second disease: credititis. Credititis is the opportunity to buy now and pay later (Hamilton, pg. 16). We have a large group of the world's greatest generation in our church and for the most part they would delay getting something until they could pay for it. They didn't believe in having debt unless it was for a house or maybe education. Many of them would pay cash for a car. But somewhere along the way, folks began to go into debt for almost everything, not just a house or education. As you know mortgage loans were offered to folks who everybody knew wouldn't pay them back. Unscrupulous institutions and some unscrupulous consumers matched up. These loans were often bundled and sold. All kinds of permutations of loans were out there including, "you pick the payment" ones. Credit card debt averages \$9000 a household and that average includes those who never carry a debt, so the actual amount for those who do could be higher. Some minimum payments have been lowered to 2% of the balance and our Joy through

Simplicity and Generosity booklet indicates that making the minimum payment on 9000 dollars at 18% apr would take 240 years to pay off. So, companies collapsed. Bailouts came. Stimulus packages were passed. Mortgage defaults and bankruptcies set records. Unemployment is rampant. In the midst of all these worries, there is still military combat in two nations, terrorist suspects rounded up in NYC and Denver and now, immense worry over health care wars. Its like many aspects of the American dream have lately become the American nightmare. I think the Bible teaches there are spiritual roots for this. Let's consider the real problem of which the nightmare is but a series of highly publicized symptoms.

**III. The Problem: our created desire for the Lord has been sidetracked with a desire for things.** Let's return to our story a bit. The parable of the rich fool doesn't have him losing his soul because he's rich; there is nothing wrong with being rich if one knows that one is blessed to bless others. The wealth alone wasn't his problem; his being a fool was. You see, he fooled himself on many levels: that he owned it all instead of just holding his wealth as a trust from God with the high expectation of one to whom much had been given. He fooled himself in that he thought his life's highest goal was to eat drink and be merry, to care for the physical part of himself ignoring the spiritual. He was a fool in not considering others existed in the world and that God gives abundance so that God may give through us to those who are truly in need. He was a fool in that he believed true life consists in the abundance of possessions. He was a fool in being greedy.

And therein are the roots of some of our problems. You see we were created to have as our highest desire in life, a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and we've been fooled to believe that spiritual hunger and longing can be fulfilled through things. The devil has sidetracked our desire for God into thinking things will give us peace. It won't work. It will only lead to annihilation as in the story of the rich fool. Our study book's author, Adam Hamilton wrote: In side us there is brokenness; the Bible calls it sin. Our souls were created in the image of God, but they have been distorted. We were meant to desire God, but we have turned that desire toward possessions. We were meant to find our security in God, but we find it in amassing wealth. We were meant to love people, but instead we compete with them. We were meant to enjoy the simple pleasures of life, but we busy ourselves with pursuing money and things. We were meant to be generous and to share with those in need, but we selfishly hoard our resources for ourselves. There is a sin nature within us. (Hamilton, pg. 21). There is only one cure, one answer, one hope. Let's look at it.

**IV. The Answer: the Presence of Christ in our Hearts.** Whether we accepted Christ at confirmation, at the end of a Billy Graham service or on a quiet walk on the beach, the moment we did that Christ changed our heart and soul's direction. But in a sense, Jesus knew that we needed help each and every day with all of our struggles. That's why He promised to be with us always, even unto the end of the age. And in the form of the Holy Spirit He is. We can call upon Him in our times of struggle with desiring things more than Him. We can learn what His desires are through the Bible, His Word. And that is in essence what we hope to provide for you over the next several weeks of this series. We're going to give you the opportunity to turn more to Him in everyday life and living and have some helpful things to give you to assist you. And we're

going to look at some financial matters from a Biblical perspective. It is at this point I offer a simple plea: be the kind, loving community of Christ you are! We likely are going to be offering some pragmatic, Biblically based guides for finances that many of you may have practiced for years. You may be tempted to grouse about it because you don't need it. But listen carefully, let that go and pray for the person in the pew in front of you, that young couple, that new widow for whom the practical lesson may be a lifeline from God. You just don't know, so instead of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, pray that you have what you need and others receive that which they need to have the best life they can have in Christ. Next week, we get very practical and consider the Bible's advice for our finances in a sermon entitled: Wisdom and Finances.

We will close each service during this series with something I hope this series helps us get too, for I suspect that many of us long for it: Simplicity. We're going to (reflect on) sing simple gifts, a hymn of a Christian sectarian group, no longer extant called the Shakers. Simplicity was a Christian virtue they aspired too, and so can we. Look at your bookmarks as I read the words as our prayer of dedication.