

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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“Attention of the Heart”

Luke 12: 13-21

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Jesus does a great job at doing what systems therapists call “self-differentiation.” He doesn’t let himself get defined by others or by the conflicts around him. He’s never sucked into the debate or the family squabble.

“**Tell my brother to quit being such a jerk and give me my fare share of the inheritance.**” He doesn’t take the bait... “**I don’t do family mediation... ‘s not my thing. I will, though, be glad to offer you some spiritual teaching free of charge... take care... Watch out.**”

And he’s not just sort of hollering “duck” here. He’s not saying, “**You better watch out, I’m telling you why, Yahweh’s coming to town.**”

He’s offering him a spiritual teaching.

He encourages the man to engage in something that is absolutely necessary for spiritual health. Every spiritual tradition has some way of saying, “**Watch out...**” It’s called by different names,

“**Watchfulness...Nepsis**”

Or the “**inner observer**”

Or “**awareness...**”

Specifically, “**Awareness of the heart.**”

Some call it “**cleansing the mirror of the heart,**” the assumption being that we’re looking into a fogged up mirror. Doing life that way is like trying to get a good shave just after you shower. You’ll miss some places... maybe cut yourself... trying to see something in a fogged up mirror.

Or as Paul says, “**It’s like trying to make out who God is but we can’t because the window pane is dirty from all that fireplace smoke.**” We can’t see all that well. We need to clean it so we can see.

Remember Jesus talking about having “eyes to see?” He’s talking about watchfulness... about attention of the heart.

In the parable which follows the one we read, it’s all about being ready... being alert... He talks elsewhere about having lamps lit. And it’s not really a teaching about not missing some rapture... it’s about being able to see and see God and the assumption is... we’re in the dark.

Seeing is a big deal for Jesus and here he just says emphatically... “**Watch out.**” The assumption being... we’re not paying enough attention.

Watchfulness has to happen if spiritual health is to happen. Really... if just living well is what we want... being alive as we’re meant to be alive and not simply existing for a season here in time and space... just doing time... or worse, making things worse.

We have to learn to watch ourselves! We have to because we have this incredible capacity for self-deception. When we’re just living at the level of what spiritual teachers call, “ordinary awareness,” what Paul calls (I think, anyway) “**the flesh...**” when we’re living there, we don’t see all that much.

We see what we want to see...

What we’re conditioned to see...

We see what we expect to see...

And even if we’re trying... we’re rarely seeing all that clearly. So... we get in fights with our brothers about our inheritance. We fuss with some sister about getting our way... and we won’t really know why we’re

fussing... We just are... we just do. We get scared... and we don't know why. We get busy and busier and our lives get more and more cluttered... and we build barns everywhere for all our clutter... and we don't really know way.

When we're not watchful, we won't be alert to our inner world.

Nor will we be awake to the outer world. It's not just that we're blind to our own stuff but the world's too. And not the world in the sense of the cosmos... the creation, but "the world" that is the culture... that broken, fallen thing out there that seems to be spinning out of control. That thing we're supposed to be in, but not of.

Jesus knows we need to watch out not only because we've got all sorts of stuff yanking our chains from the inside but because the culture out there is trying to do the same. The environment we live in isn't neutral. There are influences coming to bear and they are living things. They eat... they grow... they're out there. Let me say it another way, **"There are realities in your world that are toxic to your spiritual health."** That's also why Jesus says, **"Watch out..."** because there are things to watch out for.

Modern materialism is not benign to your spiritual health... That we are driven to acquire, that acquisition is the default mode of our society, is not neutral.

An over-sexed society isn't incidental to your well-being.

Bigotry and ingrained injustice and violence are not concepts... they are negative forces that have an influence on us.

Political meanness... Angry talk radio... demeaning commercial after demeaning commercial... isn't just filling our airwaves, they are filling us. Or more precisely, they're like J.K. Rawlings dementors.... They are sucking the joy out of us. Don't think it doesn't matter. We have to watch out.

The frantic pace of our calendars...

The obsession to upgrade... always upgrade... **"must upgrade...."**

This world, shaped so by beauty pageant comparisons...

All of it is propelling us... and we are foolishly unaware.

We're like that fool who had a great harvest... We're like a lady who got a big raise. And she thought to herself. **"I've got a ton of money... more than I could ever spend."**

And she kept thinking to herself. **"I know what I'll do... Except for the little bit I use to remodel my house, I'll put all of this in a mutual fund and then I'll sit on my new porch, in my new chairs, listen to my new outdoor sound system and I'll say to myself, 'Self, you've got it made in the shade. Now, just sit back and consume'."**

She sure does think a lot to herself... and she says things to herself. There's no one else around apparently... No community, no friends... She's out on the veranda by herself... pretty foolish... being propelled along by a need to have a better deck outside and she really doesn't know why?

And she's just talking to herself. "Hey, I have a lovely veranda," "Yes, you do – best in town." "Want another mint julep?" "Don't mind if I do." She says to herself. There's a little clue... a big clue actually. We tend to think of folks who talk to themselves as psychologically unbalanced. And we're right. But... really... we all do it. So...I guess we're all a little off, huh?

Ever catch yourself talking to yourself in the car? And then you stop at the red light and realize you're still doing it... Guy next to you is looking at you like you are psychologically unbalanced. So you act like you're really on a cell phone call.

We all do it... maybe not out loud but we do and it's a really big clue to the greed going on in our lives. Much of the talk is about greed in one of its forms.

See, greed isn't just about bigger barns... It's not just keeping up with the size of the Jones' barn.
“Watch out, there are all kinds of greed.”

Some of us covet excitement... And he said to himself, **“I know what I'll do... I'll take all that Christmas bonus and spend it all in Cozomel.”** It's not just about barns, is it? It's often about being entertained... new iPods, more books, high-def life. We're greedy for it. We believe as an American we have a certain inalienable right to never be bored.

Some of us are greedy for comfort... because it's also just wrong that I should ever suffer... at all. And so we say to ourselves... **“This place is so inefficient... that cashier is incompetent. I should never be inconvenienced.”** That's the greedy self-talk that happens in the grocery line. There are all sorts of greed.

Watch out!

Anyone know what it's like to be greedy for affirmation? Can't get enough? We thought along the way, if we just affirmed folks enough they'd get their fill and not be in want but we created “approval addicts” in the process. And so she says to herself, **“No one really thanked me for all I did to make the event go so well.”**

We can be greedy in all sorts of ways.

Not that it ever happens in a university town but... anyone here ever greedy for notoriety? Ever catch yourself saying to yourself, **“Why did she get that recognition I deserved?”** Probably not... I know it's so rare in an academic setting that anyone would be greedy to be “noted” and quoted... but just thought I'd ask.

Are you greedy?

For significance?

Attention? Control?

For perfect kids?

A Stepford Spouse? **“And he said to himself... and she said to herself... that woman, that man, is driving me crazy.”**

To be greedy means I am unsatisfied. To be greedy means I'm hard to please... I always need more... More barns... more flattery... more food... more pleasure... more security. Your fooling yourself, by the way, if you think that talking to yourself will go away just because you get your barns full. He said to himself, **“I'll live a loving life once I get my 401k where it needs to be... won't be unbalanced anymore.”**

When greed has us... it has us... And it can have us in so many ways. Did you know we can be greedy spiritually? Got to have one more high? Got to be wiser than the next wise guy? The desert fathers say it is any ultimate kind of temptation. God must give me more and more...

“Watch out!!!!!!”

We'd better wake up...

We'd better start seeing.

Every greed that gets us, really does get us. When something other than God has you, you won't be rich toward God. Greed gets you.

It takes time to build new barns. Got to get some new barn plans... put out some new barn bids... make all sorts of choices about if you're going to put in the latest and most advanced grain shoots... We'll probably take out a prescription to Barns Today. Spend time in the evenings on some barn web sites. Might even check the height of the Jones' barn next door. We don't have greed... it has us.

Greed looks like we're consuming but the truth is, we're always the one being consumed. It's not neutral. It's toxic. Anxiety about or anger about our frustration about, what we don't have hurts us... it's a foolish waste of our lives.

“Therefore...” It's the way Jesus starts the next section – the next teaching. Remember the one that's so beautiful about not worrying. Remember? About how the flowers don't toil and spin yet they're so lovely.

Then after the poetry Jesus states his spiritual teaching succinctly. **“Don’t set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.”**

It’s such a pretty passage, isn’t it... But it’s also pretty hard to take seriously, huh? I mean, if after four years of college my son comes home and I say, “what now” and he says, **“I dunno dad... Jesus tells me not to worry about it... remember the lilies dad... they don’t work.”**

If he says that, I’ll be saying... well... I can’t tell you exactly what I’ll say... but I won’t be quoting scripture.

It’s a hard teaching to take seriously... in a dog eat dog world... Or just in a world where getting ahead seems to be what it’s about. Or...just surviving takes such effort.

But you know... if after four years of college... and a few years of work ... or especially after lots of years of work and life... I see my son frantically chasing after something less than what is real... If I see him talking to himself... I think I’m going to be quoting Luke 12. “Be rich towards God.” **“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be.”**

The heart tends to follow... it just does. Your heart, your center, will come to rest where your treasure is. That is... in the basket where you’ve put most of your marbles.

- time
- thought
- energy
- money

They’ll lead and you and your heart will follow.

The mystics often say it this way, **“What you worship, you become.”** Every alter takes you... every alter shapes you.

So... watch out... wake up... It’s not simply a decision; there is work to be done... Specific inner work that stills the heart so it can pay attention. But still, you can begin by saying **“I’m ready to awaken.”** Try talking to yourself that way.

Say to yourself, **“Watch out!!!”** Say to yourself, **“Watch out!!!”** Go on... say it! **“Self, watch out.”** And then... start watching.

Amen.