

“Deadly Sins: Greed”

Date: March 6, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Matthew 6:25-34; 1 Timothy 6:6-10

Occasion: Deadly Sins series

Theme: Greed

We continue our series on the Seven Deadly Sins today. So far we’ve looked at pride, envy, anger and sloth. Today we look at greed.

Lee Atwater was a political strategist under the first President Bush. He died of a brain tumor at the age of 41 in 1991. Reflecting on his life just before he died he said, “The 1980’s were all about acquiring wealth, power and prestige. I know.

“I acquired more wealth, power and prestige than most people ever dream of. But you can acquire all you want and still feel empty. What power I wouldn’t trade for a little more time with my family.”

I wonder what Mr. Atwater would say about the bumper sticker that says, “The one who dies with the most toys wins.” My guess is he would say, “That’s wrong. It’s a terrible lie.”

Greed is the attitude that is never satisfied with “enough.” Greed says “*More* is better, because you can never have enough.” Greed does not see life as a gift from God to be appreciated; it rather sees life as a competition to get more stuff:

A bigger bank account, a fancier car, a bigger career position. Greed means trying to accumulate as much stuff as we possibly can. But the problem with greed, as Mr. Atwater learned, is that you can acquire all you want and still feel empty.

Emptiness is not the only problem with greed. Greed also leads to boredom. So many people are bored and dissatisfied with their

lives. For many people, the solution is to fill up their lives with more things – more vacations, more electronic gadgetry, more clothes.

Just as people are addicted to drugs and alcohol, many people are addicted to shopping and spending money – not because they *need* things but because they're trying to fill up a spiritual vacuum inside themselves.

And like an addictive drug, it takes more and more to get the same level of excitement and fulfillment. "I need more; I want bigger. If I only had this and this and this, then my life would be satisfying." But when they get those extra things, they find that they need more.

When will enough ever be enough? Some of today's professional athletes – football, baseball, basketball – are earning multi-million dollars a year in their contracts. And they're holding out to get even more? Why? - Because someone else got more.

The apostle Paul said, "The *love* of money is the root of much evil." Now notice, Paul didn't say "*money* is the root of evil," he said "the love of money is the root of evil." What he meant was the consuming desire for money creates evil in people. Why?

Paul may have been reflecting on Jesus' comment that you can't serve two masters. You can't love money *and* God, and serve them both equally. Greed corrupts.

The love of money will win out over the love of God. Love for money creates in people a desire to have more and more, so that nothing, not even God, will stand in their way.

Greed promises us a full and happy life. That is the lure of the lottery. Play the game and win, and all your problems will be solved.

But as we remember from Mr. Atwater, you can have it all and still feel empty.

Having possessions is not the problem. We all need to own a certain number of possessions. Jesus said, “Your Heavenly Father knows that you need these things – such as food and clothing and shelter.” And he told us not to be anxious about getting these things.

Greed, however, is having our needs met, and yet never being satisfied. Sadly, we have made money our idol. We have put our trust in economic security above our trust in God. We have taken God off of His throne, and put money in His place.

In John 10:10 Jesus said, “I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly.” Most of us have gotten it all wrong. We chase after abundant possessions instead of abundant life. What we do with our possessions, and how we think about our possessions reveals the true spiritual condition of our heart.

On another occasion Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” So I ask you, Who, or what is on the throne of your life? Is it God or money?

How then do we change our attitude about money and possessions? I have a couple of suggestions. First, I believe we need to develop grateful hearts and learn to say “Thank you” more often. In our prayer life, instead of always asking God to give us something, what if we were grateful for what we already enjoy.

Gratitude is a sure-fire way to counter-act greed. Appreciate what you already have, and stop hoping for more and more.

A second way to combat the sin of greed is to develop a contrary attitude towards having more and more. It’s choosing to live

a simple life, and living with less. Rev. Curtis Fussell got a phone call that said, “How would you like to double your income in the next year and become financially independent in five years?” The pastor replied, “I’m sorry, that really doesn’t interest me.”

The response on the other end of the phone was dead silence. Why? – because the one making the sales pitch expected his listener to buy into this concept of “having it all and taking life easy.” But there are Christians choosing to say “No” to the lie of greed. It’s not easy and it’s counter-cultural, but I believe it’s the way of Jesus.

Personally, I’m not interested in playing the lottery, or getting involved in some get-rich-quick scheme. Because love of money can’t buy abundant life. Abundant life comes from a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Love of God is more important than love of money.

There is a third strategy for combatting greed, and that is to be more generous in our giving. We teach our children to earn money, to save money and how to spend money. We also need to teach them about giving. It is by learning to give that we grow spiritually.

Greed thinks only of oneself. Generosity is learning to let go, to not hold on to things too tightly. As it says so eloquently in the beautiful prayer of St. Francis, “It is in giving that we receive.”

Greed wants more. A generous heart finds joy in giving. May the Lord deliver us from the sin of greed, and make us both more grateful and more generous. May God bless us all as we put our trust in God and trust Him more. Amen.