

Recycling Greed
Prov 31:10-31, Mark 6:32-44

Well brothers and sisters, today we wrap up this series on recycling the seven deadly sins, and learning how to use what the Holy Spirit produces from that transforming work, to help build Christian community.

And I think it's helpful as we wrap-up to quickly recap some of the main points that we've been working with in this series, because it's important that they become part of how we think about and understand our Christian life.

So first – Sin is much deeper than specific actions and behaviors that are wrong, SIN is a state of being for us and it is parasitical in nature – warping and twisting that which is good.

Secondly, Christ not only forgives our specific actions and behaviors that are wrong, but He has poured out His Holy Spirit upon us to change our state of being from SIN to Holy.

So a helpful way to understand what the Holy Spirit is doing to us and co-operate with Him is the idea of “recycling Sin.”

Third – in our daily struggle with our Sin-state of being we want to be encouraged not to simply try harder to avoid these deadly sins, but to understand that something good is being twisted and to put our energy towards co-operating with the Holy Spirit to un-twist it and recycle it.

So, just as old worn out metal is melted down and recycled into something new – our Sin of pride becomes power, lust becomes intimacy, sloth becomes renewal – and we can use these capacities we have to build Christian community.

And lastly, it's important that we identify which particular Sin we struggle with so that we know which recycled energy or capacity we can bring to the Church to help build community - and that we learn how to do that and... DO IT!

So there is a lot going on in this series that I'm praying we start to make this the way we think about being Christians.

So with that in mind brothers and sisters, let us look at the last of these deadly sins this morning – the deadly sin of Greed.

And perhaps I'm showing my age here but I can't think about Greed without remembering this famous speech by Gordon Gecko from the 1987 movie "Wall Street." (show clip)

Now let me contrast Mr. Gecko's speech with another fable that also deals with greed.

A man fell asleep and had a dream –and in his dream he was met by an angel who led him down a hall and showed him a room at the end of the hall. In this room was a massive dining table filled with all sorts of delicious food.

The only problem was this table was so big that the food could only be reached by a 10' spoon.

So the people in this room were miserable and starving, and lonely – in spite of all the food, because while they could

reach the food in the middle of the table... the spoons they had were too long to feed themselves.

The angel then lead the man back down the hall to its opposite end and showed him another room. This room too had a massive table filled with all sorts of delicious food.

However the people in this room were happy, well fed and enjoying each other's company because while the spoons were too long to feed yourself with they were the perfect length to feel someone else across the table.

The angel turned to the man and said – this is heaven, that other room – that was hell.

So if we take Mr. Gecko's definition of consumeristic greed, where each person only looks out for themselves - we can see that such an approach does not lead to any benefits in a situation where you only have a 10' spoon.

Looking only to your own interests in such a situation leads to suffering and misery and loneliness.

And so brothers and sisters, in this fable we see clearly how it is that the deadly sin of Greed wrecks relationships and destroys community, and causes us to experience hell on earth.

Now fast forward from Gordon Gecko and Wall Street in 1987 to Wall Street in 2008 when the global financial crisis hit. Do you remember that? Do you remember how devastating the fallout was to people, to communities, to countries?

People lost their jobs, their life savings; there were families who had to walk away from their homes...

Long standing companies went bankrupt, entire industries – like the auto sector – had to be bailed out by the gov't or risk going out of business. This in turn affected the tax revenues of towns and cities who went bankrupt and had to cut essential services like policing and fire and emergency

response and in this was communities were literally destroyed.

Now hearing about it on the news is one thing, but seeing pictures of abandoned subdivisions and golf courses down in the US, the reality of destroyed community really hits home.

Now forensic accountants can give us the specific technical explanation for the 2008 stock market crash and why it had such a devastating effect across the globe...

But you and I know that the economic crisis was so destructive was because it was based on the Sin of Greed.

Mortgage Lenders who were greedy for more profit approved loans for people who really couldn't afford them; the people who couldn't afford the loans accepted them anyways because they were only thinking about short term gains...

These risky "investments" were then sold up the financial chain to other investors who were looking for a quick profit on

their money. Eventually when the people who couldn't afford their mortgages couldn't keep paying and defaulted - the whole thing collapsed, taking down banks, businesses and economies all over the world.

It took years to recover from it and a very large part of our current national debt comes from our gov't having to spend money in an attempt to stimulate the economy.

And at this point friends, our society has finally began to question Gordon Gekko's famous quote that "*greed – for lack of a better word – is good!*"

People no longer trust that greed will save us – which when we say it out loud sounds preposterous, but for so many years that was assumption.

The sad truth brothers and sisters is that people have to get hurt, communities have to be destroyed, national economies have to teeter on the edge of bankruptcy before we begin to

understand this is false, the deadly sin of Greed is not good – it is in fact hell on earth.

But what's the solution? Do we renounce money, do we renounce banks and financial institutions? Do we renounce profits? Do we renounce Wall Street and march in protest with a reactive movement like Occupy Wall Street and denounce the greedy 1%?

Brothers and sisters, this is why it's so important that we understand the whole notion of recycling Sin – because once we recognize that Greed isn't good anymore, we're not really sure what is?

You might have picked up on this in Gekko's speech if you notice he says "Greed – for lack of a better word ."

You see friends once we realize Sin for what it is, or what we think it is, and what it does - our instinct is to try and destroy it and the tragedy in that is we end up destroying something that should be recycled because it was intended for good.

Can you imagine the devastating effect it would have if in attempting to destroy greed we destroyed money, profit, banks, the stock market and financial systems?

Mr. Gekko may not be able to articulate it – but somehow he knows there is something good behind what he can only describe and understand as greed.

So, brothers and sisters – while greed is not good, something good is being twisting by Sin - so that it turns into greed.

So let us look at our passage from Proverbs 31 to begin to get a sense of what good thing God intended to have bless us that gets twisted into greed.

Now Proverbs 31 describes a most industrious wife who excels at providing for her family. Not only is she a hardworking talented tradeswoman and an effective administrator, but she's got a nose for business and making a financial profit.

“She considers a field and buys it” (vs 16) “She sees that her trading is profitable” (vs 18) “She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes.(vs 24)

Then she takes her profit and uses those them to create more income-generating-opportunities which increase her estate. *“out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.” (vs 16)*

So you can bet that her family will enjoy fruit, wine, and that she will be selling some of that fruit and wine at a profit and re-investing that profit again in other profitable opportunities.

And the writer of Proverbs holds her up as an example of wisdom personified, someone who is very skilled at providing all that is needed to sustain a family, someone who contributes what is needed to build a community, to give people jobs, to store up for hard times, and to have enough left over to help others in need and He praises this ability of what I'll call *“sustenance.”* He says *“Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.”*

Furthermore this is not a “worldly activity” but it is an integral part of what it means to be Godly and spiritual. He continues on saying *“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.”*

So what she does is good and it is done to honor God – it is not greed.

So we see that it is our good drive to produce and provide sustenance that is warped by sin to become Greed... and what we must consume and own to sustain ourselves begins to consume and own us instead.

And it does so in two different ways – we either begin to accumulate for the sake of accumulation - more possessions, more money, more more more! and we boast about how much we have.

Like the foolish farmer in Jesus’ parable who says *“This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to*

myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”” (Luke 12:18-19)

Or... we become miserly and cheap, and like the third servant in Jesus’ Parable of the Talents. We squirrel away what we have and we boast about how little we spend on things. You see this is a form of Greed as well.

And this servant reveals what drives this kind of greed when the master comes back to collect his money and the servant says to him *“‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.”*” (Matt 25:24)

In other words he says “you’re not going to get a handout from me.” This servant is not going to allow anyone else to benefit from himself or his work in anyway – even the one who gave him what he had – that’s the essence of miserly greed.

And to be honest friends – in light of what our society experience in 2008 and more recently for us in Calgary with the 2016 drop in oil prices and the resulting job losses and economic insecurity that has created in our city and province..

We need to be more cautious of miserly greed than accumulative greed. *(Though if our political situation changes and once again favors investment and development and export of the oilsands, that could change quickly.)*

You see it's easy to be generous, to help out, to give to charity when the economy is booming and we are prosperous.

But once we realize that resources are scarce, jobs are scarce, gov't funding is scarce, that prices are low and market access is not as accessible as we thought....

It's so easy to become miserly and tightfisted and greedy with what have because we believe it might not be enough to look after ourselves...

Why would we give anything away for others to benefit from when we're not sure if it will be enough for us?

So brothers and sisters, the only way out of this, the only way to begin to recycle greed and get back to that healthy drive to produce and provide sustenance which builds community... is to ensure that we really believe the truth about provision.

So from time to time when greed gets ahold of our hearts brothers and sisters – we can recycle it by reminding ourselves of the truth; It's not our job, it's not the economy, it's not the gov't, it's not capitalism, it's not even pipelines with tidewater access which provide what we needs for life... it's our Heavenly Father.

As Jesus says in Matt 6:31; *“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

Friends the wife of Proverbs 31 is a wonderful example of someone who seeks God's kingdom, because all the wealth and possessions and profit she gains is used to serve others, to create opportunities for others, to help others...

Friends Greed creates hell on earth – but the Kingdom of God is Heaven on earth.

And if you are someone who knows that your particular deadly Sin is Greed, then be encouraged by the good news that you are someone God has created to have a high capacity for sustenance and provision.

The good news in dealing with your Greed is that it's not about forsaking money, possessions, business opportunities, investments or profit making – instead it's about recycling your Greed so you can use these things to serve others.

To build them up, to care for the needy, and to give people meaningful work, which allows them and ourselves to fulfill God's original command to Adam and Eve...

“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Gen 1:27)

Friends Recycling Greed, both in its accumulative and miserly forms bring us back that original stewardship that we were created for – it's nothing less than our original purpose.

And once we believe the truth that all we have is supplied by our Heavenly Father, and that our purpose in this world is to be His stewards in developing the creation - we can take some first steps towards making that a reality in our life.

And a good place to learn that from is the story where Jesus tells the disciples to feed the five thousand.

You see the disciples are looking around at all the people who have come to hear Jesus preach and they realize that they are way out in the country and its starting to get on in the day and if Jesus doesn't dismiss the crowds soon they won't be able to get back to towns to get something to eat.

First step friends – becoming aware of and recognizing a need that is around you.

So the disciples go to Jesus with this need to ask him to do something about it... but Jesus takes this opportunity to teach them that they are ministry partners with Him. So He tells them *“you give them something to eat!”*

Second step friends – is coming to the realization that we are God’s Stewards, we are His people, we are his church, we are to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ to the world!

This seems like an overwhelming task for the disciples. They immediately think of it in “Greedy” terms – “are we to spend eight months wages to get all these people some bread?”

But Jesus reminds them they are partners with him – so he asks them instead *“How much bread do you actually have?”* Turns out they have five loaves of bread, oh and two fish...

Step three friends – Remember and believe when faced with the overwhelming needs that you see around you, that Jesus is our partner – we’re not expected to be able to produce enough sustenance to meet all the need – just start with what we have.

So, you know how this story turns out. Jesus gives thanks for the food – starts to divide it up among the people and it just keeps multiplying, and multiplying, and everyone ends up with something to eat and the disciples gather up twelve baskets of leftovers. In the end, if we count women and children there was probably over 10,000 people who were fed.

So step four – take what little you have and give it to Christ in partnership to meet the need that you see, and let Christ worry about the multiplication to meet the need.

So we can give; we can work to produce and provide sustenance without worrying about running out because Christ can miraculously multiply it!

We are seeking first the Kingdom of God and all that we need is being added along the way.

Friends Christ is God and God is unlimited... God never runs out, God never runs dry, God can always give more – and give more than what is needed.

This is the truth friends! But we need to have faith in it, and faith is being certain of this truth in spite of what we see around us when things are scarce.

In spite of seeing the economic downturn, in spite of seeing no job opportunities, in spite of seeing our savings or pension fund decrease – we must believe that Christ is our endless supply for all we need in this life – and especially for the life to come and wait on Him.

And that recycles Greed my friends, and it sets us free to pursue the Kingdom of God – to help bring heaven to earth instead of hell.

So brothers and sisters, it's fitting that we end this series on recycling looking at Greed because more than any of the other sins this deals with what we go about doing in our everyday life – sustenance and provision.

And it's in our everyday life that we need to start to think about our Christian life as participating with the Holy Spirit's work of recycling - that is seeking first the Kingdom...

So brothers and sisters what is the Holy Spirit saying to you this morning about recycling your Greed?

Amen - Let's pray.