

*Women & More*

*The Mirage of More*

November 14, 2013

The following anonymous poem was emailed to me by Mary J. Erb on Tuesday, 17 November 2009, and made it into this lesson: And no reason to wonder why!

Twas' the month before Christmas  
When all through our land,  
Not a Christian was praying  
Nor taking a stand.

The PC Police had taken away  
The reason for Christmas—no one could say  
The children were told by their schools not to sing  
About shepherds and wise men and angels and things.

It might hurt people's feelings, the teachers would say.  
December 25<sup>th</sup> is just a 'holiday'.

Yet shoppers were ready with cash, checks and credit  
Pushing folks down to the floor just to get it!  
CDs from Madonna, an X BOX, an I-Pod  
Something was changing, something quite odd!  
Retailers promoted Ramadan and Kwanza,  
In hopes they'd sell books by Franken & Fonda.

As *Targets* were hanging their trees upside down,  
At *Lowes* the word Christmas was nowhere to be found.  
In *K-Marts* and *Staples* and *Pennys* and *Sears*  
You won't hear the word Christmas: it won't touch your ears.

Inclusive, sensitive, Di-ver-si-ty—  
Are words that were used to intimidate me.  
Now Daschle, Now Darden, Now Sharpton, Wolf Blitzer;  
On Boxer, on Rather, on Kerry, on Clinton!

At the top of the Senate there arose such a clatter  
To eliminate *JESUS* in all public matter.  
And we spoke not a word, as they took our faith away  
We're forbidden to speak of salvation and grace....

The true Gift of Christmas was exchanged and discarded  
The reason for the season was stopped before started  
So as you celebrate 'Winter Break' under your 'Dream Tree'  
Sipping your *Starbucks*, just listen to me...

Choose your words carefully; choose what you say  
 Shout Happy Birthday, Jesus! Not Happy Holiday.  
 Christians, together, wish everyone a MERRY CHRISTMAS!  
 For Christ IS the Reason' for the *Christmas* Season!

Just as a *mirage* is illusory and unattainable, so is the striving and searching for lasting peace and contentment through what the world offers. Fortune, fame, achievement, knowledge and possessions will not satisfy in the end, and may cost us everything of real value! Proverbs 3:13-15 “*Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, 14for she is **more profitable** than silver and yields better returns than gold. 15She is **more precious** than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her.*” Proverbs 4:2 “*Wisdom is supreme, therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.*” The best ‘things’ in life are not things! It will take the wisdom of God to know where real worth lies. Scripture tells us how to invest.

Matthew 6:19-24 “*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20But **store up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

22“*The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*

24“*No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve both God and Money.**”*

Money and possessions are the major competitors with our allegiance to God! And they are a mirage, because they will not bring the peace, fulfillment and lasting joy they promise. They advertise as if they will, but devotion to them in the long term will bring destruction and death. In mid-2009, Michael Jackson died a pitiful death. His fame and fortune—striving and straining to achieve happiness—and devotion to making money, spending money and losing it, ultimately cost him his sanity, his reputation and his very life. Proverbs 27:20 “*Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of man.*”

Luke 12:15 warns: “*Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.*” And Paul’s great treatise on love in 1 Corinthians 13 says that agape’—God’s love—does not envy (covet). What is the difference between greed and covetousness? Greed—selfish desire beyond reason—is an insatiable wanting: Amassing more and more of what we already have, and adding things that we don’t—hoarding and committing ourselves to gaining. But to covet is worse—it is advanced greed—because it means to desire enviously what belongs to another. Covetousness says: “I want what you have and I don’t want you to have it.”

Covetousness is greed that has been practiced hard until it will envy, hate and kill to get what it wants! We can be sure that the striving and straining to amass wealth and knowledge, fame and fortune, achievement and possessions has greed and covetousness crawling all over it. And these ‘things’ become substitutes for our proper search and devotion for God Himself!

“A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions,” Jesus says to the greedy crowd—including the money-loving Pharisees—just before he told the Parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:16-21—

“The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. <sup>17</sup>He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

<sup>18</sup>“Then he said, ‘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. <sup>19</sup>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.”’

<sup>20</sup>“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

<sup>21</sup>“**This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.**”

‘Fool’ is used by God to describe a person who rejects Him, and only He can identify that person and judge them a ‘fool’. We can only quote God’s word on it: *The fool has said in his heart that there is no God.* That his life would end that very night begged the question: *then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?* and underscored the fact that **he would leave it all!** Ecclesiastes 2:18-19 Solomon records: “*I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because **I must leave them to the one who comes after me.** <sup>19</sup>And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless.”*

“*This is how it will be*” in verse 21 is very telling and cryptic: **Life will end and every ‘thing’ will be left behind!** Believers should not act like those who have rejected God—like those who’ve chosen the world’s ‘things’ to fill their God-void. And anxiety over possessions is denounced in Luke 12:22-23. “*Then Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. <sup>23</sup>**Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.**’* Our lives are to be lived for the Lord God—spent for Him—and our bodies are to be living sacrifices unto Him.

► Some of Scripture’s *Who’s Who in the Greed Department* include:

● A disciple who explodes when a woman lavishly worships Jesus: John 12:3-6:

“*Then Mary (of Bethany) took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*”

<sup>4</sup>“But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected. <sup>5</sup>‘Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.’ **6He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief;** as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.” Mary anoints Jesus and a thief vehemently objects! He is no giver, but a getter for himself, because greed gives no gift without gain to self. Jesus knew that Judas was a thief and a murderer—he killed himself.

● **Wanting to appear** to give in the same sacrificial manner as Barnabas, who had sold a field he owned and brought all the money and put it at the apostles’ feet, an honor- and glory-greedy couple stoops to lying to God in Acts 5:1-3.

“Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. <sup>2</sup>**With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself,** but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.

<sup>3</sup>“Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?’” In the middle of verse 4, Peter asks Ananias, “**What made you think of doing such a thing?**” The man and his wife died that day.

● **Simon the Sorcerer** wanted to be in ministry for money and fame in Acts 8:9-13 ff “Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and **amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,** <sup>10</sup>and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, ‘This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.’ <sup>11</sup>They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. <sup>12</sup>**But** when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. <sup>13</sup>Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.”

Many were being saved, so Peter and John joined Philip and they prayed for the believers to receive the Holy Spirit—though they had been baptized, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Verse 17 “Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

<sup>18</sup>“When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money <sup>19</sup>and said, ‘**Give me also this ability** so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’

<sup>20</sup>“Peter answered: ‘**May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!** <sup>21</sup>You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup>Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. **Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.** <sup>23</sup>For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.’” This account ends with Simon pleading with Peter to pray to the Lord for him so that nothing happens to him that Peter had said—but we do not learn the rest of the story.

♥Acts 3:16 recounts a beggar who had expected money from Peter and John, but ended up getting so much more—physical and spiritual healing—complete healing Scripture says. *“By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that **has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.**”*

What is the antithesis to greed and covetousness, but contentment? What a pleasing, blessed and peaceful word—makes me think of “the contented cow” spoken of by the farmer—happy where she grazes—who will give good milk. Sovereign God is who has placed us on the earth with the resources and provisions that we have, and we so need to be content. Contentment is that state of being satisfied—a state of mind in which one’s desires are confined to her lot whatever it may be, and is opposed to covetousness and greed.

Acts 17:26-27 *“From one man he made every nation of men (women), that they should inhabit the whole earth; and **he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.** 27God did this so that men (women) would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though **he is not far from each one of us.**”* Charles Spurgeon: “Believer, if your inheritance be a lowly one you should be satisfied with your earthly portion; for you may rest assured that it is the fittest for you. Unerring wisdom ordained your lot and selected for you the safest and best condition...had any other condition been better for you than the one in which you are, divine love would have put you there. Nothing teaches us so much the preciousness of the Creator, as when we learn the emptiness of all besides.”

Luke 12:32-34 *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom. 33Sell your possessions and give to the poor. **Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.** 34**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**”* Unless what we want more of is God: His person, His presence, and His power, then what we may want is a mirage—empty husks and pods—hardly worth spending our lives to attain!

In Acts 20:33-35 Paul gave his farewell to the Ephesian elders: *“I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. 34You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. 35In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: **It is more blessed to give than to receive.**”* Henry van Dyke: “The land of wealth is not the empire of peace...the lowliest, plainest, narrowest life may be the sweetest. For what does it profit a person to be the landed proprietor of countless acres unless they can reap the harvest of delight that blooms from every yard of God’s earth for the seeing-eye and the loving spirit.”