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1 Kings 21:1-7,13-21; Sirach 18:30-32; Luke 12:16-21
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Precious Life

Good morning church. Today we are finishing up with the summer series. We shall know them by our fruits. These weeks have been a whirlwind of how the scriptures provide a richness that is deeper than a single verse or a single perspective. I hope that we have all gained a greater appreciation for the whole of the Bible, even passages we don't like. Because they can give us wisdom into what real people thought about God. And not every one of us is the same.

But today. Ah. today's theme of self-control is a hard one. How do you know when someone is controlling themselves? I'm not sure. But I can tell when people are doing a poor job, and so we have two examples who acted without self-control around wealth. Yes, today is one of those Sundays where we talk about money, annoying how much the Bible focuses on that uncomfortable topic. And let me be clear, I'm not a financial consultant, but, I've still going to try my best to preach the good news of loving God and neighbor in every aspect of our lives.

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you. Our solid foundation and creator of our beings. Amen.

The Summer day by Mary Oliver

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

I'm going to go right out and say it. I think self-control is asking this question, because we only have one life, God has only given us so many days on this earth and has given us the freedom to decide what to do with it.

We shall love, pray, work, sleep, eat, drink, and be merry.

We could spend our whole lives doing only a few of these things while ignoring the other things that make us human. Yes, humans work, but every seven days we shall cease our labor and take our Sabbath rest. Prayer teaches us how to be idle and blessed. Sleep and wakefulness have a healthy balance, if we spend too much time doing one or the other it can ruin our days.

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

And with this in mind, let's take a look at the parable in Luke. The rich fool. I wonder where his foolishness comes from. He has an abundant harvest but does not live to enjoy it. I know the parable says that he is storing up things for himself, instead of focusing on God, but what does that even mean?

John Westly, the founder of Methodism, lived on 30 pounds a year, but only needed 28 to live on, so he gave the other 2 pounds away. Then when his income kept increasing he kept living on 28 pounds and giving the balance away. This is because he thought that the purpose of money was to first, keep him and his family alive and the rest belonged to his neighbors. He died with only enough money to pay for his funeral, saying, "When I die if I leave behind me ten pounds...you and all mankind can bear witness against me, that I have lived and died a thief and a robber."

This would be an almost unthinkable statement to today's world. And I'm not telling you that we should exactly emulate Westly because we live for decades of retirement. But the principle has some sense to it. We want to leave behind enough for our children to have a good life, but should we not also think about other people's children having a good life as well?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

This brings me to another story of money, or namely, a story of the land. Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard. However, Naboth could not conceive of selling the land, because it had belonged to his ancestors and should be an inheritance to future generations.

It was painful for me to see the house I grew up in and the houses of my grandparents get sold. I cannot imagine what it has been like for some of you who have had to sell your parent's homes or the farm. It is an incredibly painful thing when the big corporations come into muscle out the family farms and when it is so hard to make a living that your children must move away to work in far-off cities. I cannot imagine.

And it is also hard to imagine the lack of self-control that Jezebel showed when she orchestrated Naboth's murder. A murder that Elijah finds Ahab complicit in. It is astonishing that greed is so powerful that murder to get what you want becomes thinkable. But isn't this what Sammuah warned us about kings, that they would take and take? Jezebel said it best, this is how a king behaves. It is the way the rich and powerful act in our own world, accumulating billions while letting millions starve. Where is the self-control to know when we have enough?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

Whatever these passages have to say about self-control, I think the main takeaway is that if we spend our days going after accumulating more and more for ourselves, then we run the risk of being like the rich fool, corporate farms, and Ahab. There is more to life than money. Sometimes, we've got to spend some time looking at grasshoppers or holding our grandchildren. Then perhaps we will have the wisdom to spend our one wild and precious life loving one another.