

## **FULLY FUNDED 1 – SERMON SERIES**

**LUKE 12:13-21**

**MAY 22, 2016**

I want to introduce you to one of the more famous Bay Area products, Ruben Garret Goldberg, a Cal Berkley graduate born in San Francisco in 1883. Mr. Goldberg is famous for many reasons; he became one of the first and most successful syndicated cartoonists. Mr. Goldberg's cartoons were being read in dozens of major papers across the country. At the height of his success, he was publishing three different cartoons simultaneously and making in excess of \$2 million in today's dollars.

Ruben Goldberg won a Pulitzer Prize for his work, he made tons of money and to this day, his name is the only one listed in Webster's dictionary as an adjective. You see, what made Ruben Goldberg so famous was his penchant for drawing cartoons of extremely elaborate and complicated machines that achieved very simple tasks. You probably know Mr. Goldberg by his nickname, Rube Goldberg. If you don't know his name, you have seen some version of his work. Here is an example:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdSSOAtIrYU>

For those of you who are engineers in this room, you are either salivating and/or pulling your hair out. The goal of engineering is providing simple solutions to complex problems. Rube Goldberg machines do just the opposite. They make simple tasks utterly complex. They add on layers and layers of movement and process where seemingly none is needed.

Thus you have the adjective, Rube Goldberg. Making simple tasks complex. Adding countless layers and levels, movement and process where none is needed. You may now insert your politician joke of choice here. When you see inefficient, overly complex processes, you are seeing Rube Goldberg at work. As much as Rube Goldberg might drive you insane, you might be surprised to know how often he creeps in to our everyday lives.

*Luke 12: 13-21*

In verse 13, Jesus has been teaching about spiritual things and a man comes up yelling, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus is speaking in the midst of the Jewish culture and in Jewish culture there was a hierarchy and pattern for inheritances. The first-born son got a double portion of the inheritance. For instance if there were two sons, the estate would be divided into three and the older son would get two of the three slices. If there were three sons, the inheritance would be divided four ways and the oldest son would get two of the four slices. This was a common practice in Israel.

Presumably this man has an older brother who will be getting two-thirds of the inheritance while he will only be getting one-third. For some reason, this man thinks this isn’t fair. Maybe the older son had done something wrong, maybe he just thinks the whole double portion idea is unfair, so he comes to Jesus asking him to fix it.

On the surface, this man is having a disagreement with his brother, but the root cause is money. Now, this is the first time in history that people have argued over money, but bear with me. You laugh because you know it isn’t true. Most marriages today do not crumble over infidelity but money. Money has a way of burrowing into our hearts and dividing them. It has a way of burrowing into our relationships and making a mess of them. Our relationship with money has become quite “Rube Goldbergesque.” Currency, a thing that was meant to be a means to an end has become an end unto itself. The simple task was this, have a trade or a skill, use currency to exchange your skill for other goods so that you can live, end of story, but we have “Rube Goldberged” it. We have added on layers and levels, countless things that divide our money and require more money. Many people are left with a convoluted mess.

The most recent reports from early 2016 record that American’s currently have 1.2 trillion dollars in college debt. This is the largest form of consumer debt second only to home mortgages. Some 40 million Americans are in the process of paying off student debt. The

class of 2015 graduated with \$35,000 in student debt. The average bachelor degree holder now takes 21 years to pay off their student loans. I'm all for college and I am all for student loans, but this seems a bit excessive. It is the Rube Goldberg device we are building. The problem of course is that this leads to a lifetime of complexities and loans and the Rube Goldberg machine grows.

Chasing money and climbing in jobs can easily become a prison. The thing that was supposed to support your family eventually supplants your family. You can convince yourself that all of the work is for your family's good, but deep down you know the Goldberg machine is taking all that you have.

In verses 14-15, Jesus continues, "I'm not the judge over this petty issue between you and your brother, but I will give you a word of advice, guard yourselves against covetousness." The Greek word here is *phulasso*. It sounds so gentle in English, be on your guard against covetousness. It kind of sounds like when you are growing up and your mom tells you to be careful when you play in the backyard or go riding on your bicycle, but the Greek word is much more potent. *Phulasso* is used elsewhere in Luke to respond to a shepherd guarding sheep. This wasn't making sure they didn't hurt themselves while playing with other sheep; this was guarding them against critical wounding and even death from wolves. Jesus says, "*Phulasso* yourself against the wolf of covetousness. It is coming no ifs ands or buts. Be ready, guard against it.

I know you know this, but nobody sets out to build a huge Rube Goldberg machine of personal finances yet it builds up and it grows more complex, more complicated and the payoff seemingly gets further and further away.

That's why Jesus says to be on your guard. Be careful what you are building because your life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions. You aren't what you own. We often think otherwise. We forget the temporary nature of this life and can get quickly wrapped up in the stuff of this world, the salaries of this world. We have to keep guard, *phulasso*, because this mistake is embedded in our very language today. Whenever we

discuss someone really wealthy, we ask how much are they worth, the same word that means a person's value. We have conflated money and self-worth. We have connected our own existence to how much we accumulate. The very thing Jesus cautions against, *phulasso*, because it creeps in. As is the way with most dangerous things, it is surreptitious and incremental.

Howard Hughes at the end of his life confined himself in a dark room, devoid of relationships, dirty and alone. This man who had everything, relationships, money, adventures as a young tycoon had something burrow into his heart over time and change him. Now I imagine if you showed 25-year-old Howard Hughes his future self, he would want to avoid such an inauspicious future, but it isn't that easy. It is surreptitious and incremental. The machine always starts off simple, but we keep building it to keep up. With our neighbors and coworkers who are also building and complicating their own lives. What option do we have?

#### *Luke 12:16-21*

This man got caught building and building. At the end of his life, he is declared poor before God. He got wrapped up in what his gut told him. This parable is essentially the 1<sup>st</sup> century Israelite version of keeping up with the Joneses.

We find out in verse 16 the guy was already wealthy. He was already well off, but it wasn't enough. Strangely enough it never is. The man who is already rich has an abundant crop come in, and he says what should I do with it? He says, where should I put it? So, he builds bigger barns. He was already rich, but maybe if he was richer, maybe if he invested in himself a little bit more, then things will be really great.

You all know the problem with this. Enough is never enough because once those barns are full, this rich man will want even bigger barns. All that climbing, and he never thinks he has reached the top. There is always a new goal. He has a surplus and he reinvests in himself and he chases the myth of happiness in bigger barns.

America is king of the bigger barns syndrome. This has less to do with the actual size of real estate and more to do with the myth of next. The next car will fulfill me. The next house will fulfill me. The next vacation will fulfill me. These are all symptoms of bigger barns syndromes. Every time we buy into that myth, it is like adding another layer and level to the Goldberg device. It feels like progress, but we really aren't going anywhere. It is sneaky, and we don't often realize we are doing it. That is why Jesus tells us to guard against it. It will burrow into your heart and sneak into your goals.

A couple of years ago, I was taking my dog on a walk, and it was a route that took us by the same place twice. My dog, Bauer, is territorial. He likes to mark his territory on walks. His MO is simple on a walk. He gives landmarks a sniff test, and if someone else has been there, he marks. It's just what dogs do. But it went to a whole other level when we passed a fire hydrant, he marked it and 30 minutes later we passed the same hydrant, and he had to mark it again. I laughed at how silly he was being. You are in an endless game. Someone is always going to surpass you. Silly dog, why can't you just relax and stop trying to claim so much territory. Just enjoy what you have. Stupid dog. Good thing I don't ever act like that...same Goldberg device. Different species.

Jesus says beware of the machine. It grows and builds and before you know it, you are so far from where you started. The final verses are so potent.

*Luke 12:20-21*

"The things you have prepared whose will they be?" Then he says, "This is what it is like for the one who isn't rich toward God." He is essentially saying you have missed true riches. You were building and building and layering and layering and you didn't get anywhere. Here is the great irony for Rube Goldberg machines. They always end in the same place. You can add levels of distraction and complexity, but it will come to an end, the same end.

As ridiculous as that sounds, Jesus is saying it is just as ridiculous to build bigger barns because in the end, only your eternal investments last. I am telling you now for certain, you don't want to show up in heaven and show people pictures of your boat or pictures of your African safari because the safaris will be way better in heaven. And you won't need a boat. You can probably just walk on water. The stuff of this world has no value in the next. If you know now what you will know then, you would be investing in things that last, like people and programs.

How much better would it be to make it into God's presence and have someone there with you because you invested in a soul. Someone who knows God because you sent money to World Vision, their stomach finally stopped growling, so they were able to listen for God. Or perhaps a soul who knows God because you gave time and treasure to help pull off our Christmas or Easter program, and someone there heard the gospel for the first time. Jesus gives clear direction to help you disassemble the Goldberg device in your life.

*Luke 12:22-31*

If we are honest here today, worry is what keeps most of us building. Worry is what makes us hold tight to what we already have. Worry is the fuel that keeps us climbing and climbing and climbing. We worry that we won't have enough, so we stay late. We worry that the money won't last, so we refuse generosity. We worry because our identity isn't secure, so we try and keep up with the Joneses to make ourselves feel content.

Here is what is amazing about this passage. Jesus says, do not worry because I will take care of you. I will clothe you and feed you. Period. But he doesn't tell you how. This is one of those moments where we think Jesus is really smart spiritually, but he isn't that sharp when it comes to money. He is kind of naïve, like a hippie who hitches a ride and looks for handouts. He doesn't understand the realities of living in the Bay Area and how competitive the job market is.

The simple truth today is that you need to trust him for all things. Here is something that really blows my mind. I (supposedly) have a lot of faith that God will catch my soul and save me when this life is over. I believe he will provide for me at the point of my death and take me to heaven, but I am unsure of whether he can put bread on the table? I am unsure that if I am generous, he will take care of my bills?

I have a simple encouragement for you today. Trust him for all things in death and in life. Trust him when it comes to your checkbook and your heart, your eternity and your present. Learn from him when it comes to things like forgiveness and prayer, but also when it comes to generosity. Trust him for all things. Today his advice to you is simple. Stop building. Work hard. Make a living, but don't live here. Don't let worry make you start building again.

One of the number one antidotes to worry about wealth is generosity. There is no greater way to undermine and defuse an idol than to directly counter it. It is nearly impossible to worship money if you are regularly giving it away. We talk about money at SFC on a regular basis for a few reasons. 1) Jesus talked about it often, and he didn't talk about it because he or God was hard up for cash. Jesus knew that our heart and our cash are usually nestled up together. If you want to know what a person values or loves, you can look at their checkbooks. So we need to talk about it. The very real truth is that our bank statements make a statement about what is important to us. We can claim to have certain priorities, but our bank statements make a statement for us. So Jesus says that how we understand money is directly tied to our souls. 2) Greed is an insidious idol that can creep into our lives sometimes without our knowledge. Tangible things like murder and adultery have clear boundaries. You have either committed those sins or you haven't, but greed is slippery and sometimes difficult to gauge. So we need to talk about it. 3) When you refuse to talk about something, it becomes taboo. The refusal to discuss something openly makes it a dirty topic or an embarrassing topic, and we simply don't want that to be the case at SFC when we discuss a resource that God has given us to invest and grow the Kingdom with. So we need to talk about it. 4) We talk about a vision for making disciples at SFC which includes our

ministry here and around the world. This vision is going to require an investment not only of our time and talents but also our treasures. So we need to talk about it.

We are in the last six weeks of our budget cycle. We run July 1 to June 30. You can look on the back of your worship guide and see that we need about \$430,000, to get from here to there. We can do it. I want to encourage you to give. You can give in multiple ways:

Online on our website (show screen shot so I can highlight the giving tab)

Mobile giving (show text message that leads to a link)

You can give checks and cash in the plate.

You can give cash directly to me. I'm just kidding.

If you value this church and you believe in the ministry here, I hope you will give to what we are doing. I pray that you will help us finish on budget, so we can continue to serve God and reach our neighbors with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Rube Goldberg said he designed his devices as a "symbol for man's ability to exert maximum effort to accomplish minimal results." The most appropriate part of this is Rube Goldberg's devices are rarely used twice. The blocks fall over. The balls roll away. Springs are sprung. Then it is used up. The same is true for us. You have one life. What will it count for? How will you invest it?