

You might be familiar with the phrase, “That’s not a bad problem to have.” It’s when you have too much of a good thing, and your problem is that you struggle to keep track of it all. It’s a good phrase to use, because it reminds us that most of our problems are not really problems after all. The problem isn’t that God gives or doesn’t give. God certainly gives. He’s more generous than we could begin to count. It’s just that we can’t handle his generosity toward us. It’s so easy to get overwhelmed by your spouse, your children, your friends, and your business.

Perhaps you have a house with a bunch of rooms, and you are hosting friends and loved ones for Thanksgiving. So you have to clean the rooms, organize your kids to do their parts, and make arrangements for the occasion. Let’s break that down. You have a home with a lot of room in it. You have friends, and you have family. God has also blessed you with children and more than enough food to eat. To top it off, you have a day that everyone has set aside to get together and enjoy one another’s company. That’s why you have to clean, cook, organize, and prepare. That’s not a bad problem to have.

Take another scenario. Say that your congregation has a bunch of young, growing families in it, so now you need to figure out how to turn the conference room into some kind of a nursery or a cry-room. Because, you know, little kids can get noisy when they are in church with their parents, and mothers can easily get stressed out. Let’s review that as well. You have young families who are coming to church to hear the Word of God. This means that God has brought these couples together in marriage, and he is blessing them with children, putting in their hearts the desire to have their children in his house and to raise them in the fear and instruction of the Lord. Little toddlers get a bit rowdy, because God gave them voices and little feet to walk and run around, and as they get older, these same voices and feet will be used to sing God’s praises, confess his name, and serve their neighbors. Also, the parents don’t want their children to be a distraction, but they also want their children to be in church with the rest of God’s people. Not to mention, God has blessed us with a church building, which has a bunch of rooms. So now our problem is to figure out how to use these rooms to serve these godly desires. It’s certainly not a bad problem to have.

A man in the crowd had a bad problem. He said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to give me my share of the property our father left us.” So what’s his problem? It’s not that he doesn’t have what he believes should be his share of his dad’s inheritance. It’s not that his brother has more than he has. That you had a father who raised you and your brother is not a problem. It’s a blessing. That your father provided for both of you is not a problem. That your father left your brother a greater inheritance is not a problem. Even if your father left you nothing, that still isn’t a problem. Instead, the man’s problem is this. He doesn’t love his brother. That you have a father and a brother is a tremendous blessing from God. The tragedy is that you and your brother have become enemies.

Where does this problem come from? It comes from unbelief. It comes from the fact that he is not content with what he has. He doesn’t trust that God, who has provided for him his entire life, will continue to do so. And his inability to be content – his distrust toward God as the giver of all good things – causes him to be at odds with his brother.

Now, here he is sitting at the feet of Jesus. Here he is, face to face with God himself who has deigned to come in the flesh, visit these poor people, and declare the very words of eternal life. In other words, God has not spared for this man even his own Son. He has sent him to earth, ready to give him up for us all. If God is willing to do that, then certainly he will not withhold from us any good thing.

Our Lord responds to this man by asking, “Who appointed me to be your judge or to divide your property?”

Consider what Jesus is saying here! He is the Son of God. The Father has given all judgment over to the Son. To him shall be the obedience of all the nations. All kings and authorities will pay tribute to him, and he will judge the living and the dead, uncovering the secrets of every heart. He is the Judge of judges, the Lord of all lords. Certainly, he can make judgement on an inheritance of property.

After all, Moses played this role for Israel. He was the main boss. Remember the story of Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law? He told Moses that he should appoint lower circuits of judges who could decide smaller cases. Then, the more difficult cases would be brought to Moses. Moses listened to Jethro’s advice. The pettier cases were given to the lower judges, and the more complex cases came to Moses. One of these more important cases had to do with inheritance and property. A man died, and he only had daughters. So Moses had to make the judgment to allow them to inherit their father’s land.

Now, Jesus shows up, and he promises them the kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit. He urges his hearers to ask for anything, and it will be given to them; to seek for anything, and they will find it; and to knock, and the door would be opened to them. So what do you want? What’s your problem? How can Jesus help you?

The man sitting in the crowd had a problem, but he didn’t know what his true problem was. He had a brother who got an inheritance. He had a father who loved and provided for them before he died. That’s not a bad problem to have. But here he stands, before the Judge of all the earth. And that Judge of all the earth uncovers the man’s deeper and true problem. “Be careful,” Jesus said, “Guard against every kind of greed. Even if you have more than enough, your property doesn’t give you life.”

With these words of rebuke and warning, Jesus demonstrates that he is an even greater judge than Moses. Jesus did not come to adjudicate property disputes. No, he came to reveal the true judgment. He came to expose the true need of the heart and the true danger against our souls. Beware of every kind of greed. Because no matter how much you get what you think you need so badly, you will never be content. You will never be satisfied. As long as you remain discontent and at enmity with your brother, then you will never know the life that Christ has come to give.

Jesus tells a parable of a rich man. The rich man had a problem. His problem was that he had a lot of good crops on his land. He had more crops than he had places to store them. What do you think? Doesn’t this sound like it’s not a bad problem to have? But the man had a much bigger problem. While he spent his time and energy focusing on how he would keep his earthly wealth, he completely lost sight of what his soul truly needed. He was so focused on these worldly things that he became a fool. The fool says in his heart there is no God. He doesn’t necessarily deny it with his mouth. He might show up to the festive occasions to give his gift on the altar. Yet, his heart completely forgets about God. His soul has replaced the comfort of God’s mercy in Christ with temporary comforts, which moth and rust destroy and thieves break in to steal. This is why he is a fool. He foolishly imagines that he can be at rest just because he figured out a relatively simple solution to his quote-unquote “problem.”

The man was a fool, because he didn’t recognize his true problem. His true problem had nothing to do with outward property and wealth. Your true problem with your spouse isn’t about how to balance your checkbook or figure out your child’s schedule. Your true problem with your old friend isn’t that

you don't do certain things together like you used to. Your true problem with your boss isn't that he gives you too much or too little to do. However nerve-racking these things are, our Lord and Judge cuts deeper to the genuine problem of our hearts. We need faith in God and his promises in Christ. We need hope in the kingdom, which has been prepared for us. We need love for one another and the ability to bear with each other's faults and annoyances. We need contentment. We need peace with God and our brother. If we have this, then all other problems become much less significant.

When we know Christ and his love for us, which surpasses anything this world can know, then all our earthly problems are put into perspective. When we know that the Judge of all the earth took the judgment of our sins upon himself, then we begin to look at our life and those we love through the lens of God's mercy. When we have the confidence that this same righteous Judge does not count our sins against us but promises every blessing in heaven, pledging to be with us at every moment we live on this earth – when we have Christ's kingdom and righteousness – then we can face our problems with honesty, confident that God will see us through.

Even when we do have to face the real, pressing problems, we can have confidence and wisdom to deal with them as God's children. When your child, your brother, or any other loved one has wandered away from the faith, or you have been cut off and disowned, then you can acknowledge this great problem. But you learn to rely on the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to call them back. In the meantime, God guides you to consider more vividly your own problem and your own need. You need your faith to be strengthened. You need God to comfort you with his mercy in Christ. You need the body and blood of your Savior, his Word of absolution, and the guarantee of his Holy Spirit as the only true remedy for your soul. The more you learn about these true needs, then the more you see how God meets them with his abundant mercy. All the more, you learn to pray as a Christian, to call upon God in the day of trouble, confident that he will deliver you and content to glorify his name. You learn to ask, seek, knock, and beg for the one thing needful. And you can be sure that God gives it to you abundantly.

He who stores up earthly wealth and comfort while neglecting the problem of his soul is a fool. He isn't rich toward God. He will have nothing in the end. This is a bad problem to have. But God knows your problems. He knows your needs. He knows that you are easily overwhelmed by all the blessings he gives you in this life.

So what should you do if you find that you are drowning in the abundance of earthly cares and you're turning God's good gifts into stressful problems? Repent. Repent of being discontent, and trust God's promise that he who forgives you for Christ's sake and promises you his kingdom will also take care of you and your loved ones in this life. But what then? Should you go on giving yourself a guilt trip about having lots of stuff? That's not going to do anything. Share what you have when you see the need. Support the mission of the church. Love your neighbor. And enjoy what God has given you. Receive it all with thanksgiving. Enjoy it while it lasts, but recognize that it's only yours for a short while.

In the meantime, consider what makes you truly rich. Value a godly marriage and pious children more than career and money. Consider it a greater blessing to be a Christian father than to be a king, a greater honor to be a Christian mother than to be a queen, and a greater security to be a Christian friend than to be a judge. Enjoy the wealth of the gospel with one another. Lift up your glasses and your forks, and sing hymns that teach about Christ and his great works and promises for poor sinners. Let the Word of Christ dwell in your richly. Because he who knows your deepest problems has blessed you with his kingdom. Oh give thanks unto the Lord. For he is good, and his mercy endures forever. Amen.