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Three clergymen who jointly owned a lottery ticket won the grand total of a whopping million pounds. The question was: how much do they keep for themselves and how much should they give to God"? After a few minutes the Baptist minister said "I know we'll draw a circle and throw the money up in the air, whatever lands out of the circle we'll keep and whatever lands in the circle we'll give to God." The Priest pipes up and says, "You know it's a little windy, I think we should throw the money up in the air and whatever lands inside the circle we keep and whatever lands outside of the circle we give to God." No, said the rabbi. "I think we should throw the money up in the air and whatever stays up there is God's, whatever comes down is ours"

In today's gospel Jesus tells us to be on our guard against avarice of any kind. We might be tempted to let ourselves 'off the hook' and think that this only applies to the super rich and not to us?

The Bible teaches that 'the love of money is the root of all evil' and an old Roman adage says: 'our fondness for money is like salt water - the more you drink, the thirstier you get'.

The great playwright, Henrick Ibsen said: '*money can bring you the husk of many things but not the kernel. It can bring you delicious food but not appetite, medicine but not health, acquaintances but not friends, days of happiness but not lasting peace*'. Jesus said: '*a man's life is not made secure by what he owns even when he's got more than enough.*

The avarice which Jesus condemns is that which puts profit before people or when we gauge a person's worth by the size of their bank balance. We can also exploit people for financial gain. People become expendable and their dignity is trampled upon.

We are rightly shocked when we hear about child bonded labour working in sweatshops for a pittance in far-away places.

Nearer to home, though, we hear about people, especially from Eastern Europe, who work long illegal hours with little or no break time. Avarice has hardened the employer's heart to such an extent that he or she has no conscience about exploiting these vulnerable people. According to the BBC, worldwide more than 45 million people are living in modern slavery. Figures suggest there could be between 10,000 and 13,000 victims of slavery in this country, trafficked from countries including Albania or Vietnam. About 3,000 children from Vietnam alone are thought to be working here in cannabis farms and nail bars. Someone in Doncaster told me last week that she knows of migrants working long hours at a nearby 'car wash' for a mere £20 a day. The gospel would demand that we do something about it.

St Paul reminds us today, "you must kill everything in you that belongs only to this earthly life, especially greed which is akin to worshipping a false God". The pay-backs may be lucrative in this life but we're hardly on the straight and narrow road which leads to Life Eternal.