

The Rich Fool
Luke 12:13-21
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Let's read Luke 12:16-20. This is the parable.

It says, "Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool!'" There it is. "This night your soul will be required of you..."—or "demanded of thee"— "...then whose will those things be which you have provided?"

I want you to notice in verse 16, it says, "Then He..."—Jesus—"...spoke a parable to them." The word "parable" in the Greek is the word "parabolé." That means "to throw or to lay alongside." A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. So Jesus is going to give them a spiritual lesson behind this earthly story about this foolish farmer.

He is called the rich fool. This is the name of the parable: The Rich Fool. Notice verse 16: "The ground of a certain rich man." Then again in verse 20: "But God said unto him, 'Fool!'" Now if God says you're a fool, guess what? You're a fool big time. If I say you're a fool, you'd take it with a grain of salt. It's not a very nice thing to say. But if God says you're a fool, you're a fool.

Now what does He mean by "fool"? God's not talking about his intellectual capability. He's talking about his moral life. He's not foolish in the area of lacking a quick mind or an intelligent mind. He's saying he was foolish because of the way that he lived. So it's a folly in the way that he lived, his moral behavior.

There are a lot of people with high IQ, but they live sinful lives. There are a lot of people who have education—many of them educated beyond their intelligence, by the way—but they don't know how to live, or they live in rebellion to God or they live very foolishly.

We're going to see that this foolish farmer lived as though God did not exist. He was a practicing atheist. He lived like God wasn't there, and he lived as though his life was going to go on indefinitely.

Now there are three divisions to this that I want to point out. The first is the purpose of the parable. We have to back up to verses 13-15. Whenever you are interpreting a parable, I recommend that you back up into the text to find out why the parable was given. If you discover why Jesus gave the parable, you can discover the meaning and the purpose of the parable.

Verses 13-15 say, "Then one from the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher...'—or "Master" or "Rabbi,"

referring to Jesus—“...tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Notice that this isn’t a request of Jesus or of the man’s brother. This is a demand. “But He said to him, ‘Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?’” Notice Jesus asked a question back. “And He said to them...”—here’s the key to the parable—“...‘Take heed and beware of covetousness...”—or “greed”—“...for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” So the key to understanding this parable or story is that it is about covetousness and that life does not consist in the abundance of things that we possess.

Now in verse 13, it says, “Then one from the crowd said to Him...” In verse 1, you’ll see that the context is that Jesus is speaking to thousands of people. The Scripture says “an innumerable multitude of people...”—or “a great crowd”—“...had gathered together” around Jesus. That’s the Bible’s way of saying “tens of thousands.” They were all there to hear Him teach. He was talking about spiritual matters. He was talking about not worrying and not being afraid, that God will take care of you. He said that we should “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Think about it: right in the middle of Jesus’ discourse, some guy jumps up, interrupts Him, which is totally rude and totally out of sync with what’s going on and what Jesus is teaching about, and says, “Jesus, will you command my brother to rightfully divide the inheritance with me.”

Isn’t it funny that wherever there’s a will, there’s a fight? Someone said, “Wherever there’s a will, there’s a family.” I saw a cartoon once that showed a family gathered in a lawyer’s office for the reading of a will. They’re all rubbing their hands in anticipation. The lawyer rolled out the will and read, “I, Jim Jones, being of sound mind and body, spent it all.” What a shocker; right? Wherever there’s a will, there’s greed, there’s covetousness, there’s a fight.

We don’t know if this man was the younger of the two brothers or how many brothers there were, but he had a beef. He’s kind of anonymous. It says he was a certain man. He stood up in the crowd while Jesus was preaching and said, “Master, Teacher, Rabbi, can you tell my brother that he needs to divide the inheritance with me.”

Jesus said to him, “Who made me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” So Jesus refused to get involved in this man’s family matters. I believe that was because Jesus didn’t come to solve our problems. This man wanted Jesus to start a new TV program called The People’s Court. What’s with all these stupid courtroom shows in the daytime? We’ve got nothing better than to watch people fight in a courtroom? It’s like, “Jesus, will You start a new TV program called The People’s Court, and my brother and I will be the first ones there?” Jesus said that He hadn’t come to deal with these matters.

Now Jesus will come at the Second Coming to judge, and He’ll judge righteously, but this time He came to die for the sins of the world. He came to redeem man; He came to save man from sin. He didn’t come to get involved in these disputes that they wanted Him to resolve. That was for the law courts of the day.

I believe that Jesus knew about and detected in this man's demand that the heart of the problem was the problem of the heart. Jesus knew what was really going on in this man's heart. So Jesus warned of covetousness: "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

It's interesting, though, that people want Jesus to fix their problems but not change their hearts. But the problem is the problem of the heart. If you get a change of heart, then God will work in your problem, like in your marriage. You get a change of heart, and God will heal your life. You need first to be forgiven of your sin in order to have your problems resolved.

The man's real problem was covetousness. Notice in verse 15, He said "to them," so He's speaking not just to the man but also to the crowd that is gathered around. He gives them first a warning, verse 15: "Take heed and beware of covetousness." That's the warning from the lips of Jesus.

What is covetousness? Literally, it means "to fix the desire upon." It's the inward desire to have more. Isn't it interesting that it is the sin that we celebrate but that God condemns. If you are covetous, you get to have your picture on the front of Money magazine. You get exalted as being a hero. Look at how rich and powerful you are! Yet, God, in His Word, condemns this attitude sin of the heart.

It's interesting that we go to jail for lying, we go to jail for stealing, we go to jail for murder, but we don't go to jail for coveting. I say that because the tenth of the Ten Commandments is "Thou shalt not covet." Psalm 10:3 says that the Lord abhors the covetous person.

Covetousness can also lead to other sins. When David sinned with Bathsheba and committed adultery—"Thou shalt not commit adultery"—it was because he coveted her, "his neighbor's wife." Then he lied to cover up his sin. He stole another man's wife, and then he also committed murder.

Jesus knows that the sin of covetousness can lead to the breaking of all these other commandments. You don't think it's a big thing? God knows the issues. God knows that this covetousness can lead to other sins in your life.

In 1 Timothy 6:10, Paul told Timothy that "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." By the way, that's the way that verse should be translated. "The love of money is a root" not "of all evil" but "of all kinds of evil." So Jesus warns us to take heed to watch out for covetousness.

Then He tells us why in verse 15: "For one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." He's given us the rationale or the reason. This is the reason you should be careful not to be covetous. This is a life-giving principle.

In Ecclesiastes 5:10, it says, "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance with increase. This also is vanity." By the way, these words were written by King Solomon, who had more things than anyone could ever want, yet he basically said,

"They're all empty. They're all vain." There's no purpose or meaning in them.

Before you were a Christian—in your "BC" days, "before Christ"—even as a young teenage, you wanted that bike. Then you wanted that car. I remember when I was about 13, I had a friend who had an older brother, Don Gregory, who was in high school. I was still in elementary school. Don had a cool surfboard and a cool woodie. I wanted a surfboard, and I wanted a woodie. I wanted to be like Don. I want those tennis shoes, and I want those shoes. I wanted those clothes, and I wanted that haircut.

So you kind of lust and desire. But it's like drinking salt water; it only makes you thirsty for more, and eventually it leads to your death. If you're ever lost at sea, don't drink the ocean; it'll kill you. It will only make you thirst for more. That's what materialism is like: "I want more." Never enough money. Never a big enough house. Never a nice enough car. Never enough clothes. Kind of like the Imelda Marcos syndrome. "What will I do with all my shoes? I'll build bigger shoe closets." Just keep building bigger and bigger barns. "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing."

So Jesus gave the parable for two reasons: to warn us—"Beware of covetousness"—and to reveal to us that life is more than our possessions. Life is found in knowing God. If I were to reduce the message of this parable to its essence, it would reduce down to "Don't forget God." That was the problem: this man forgot God.

Now I want to move to the parable of the foolish farmer, verses 16-20. Why did God call this man a fool? Let me tell you why He didn't call him a fool. He didn't call him a fool because he was rich. Don't misinterpret this parable to conclude that this is a message saying you're not supposed to be rich. God gave him the bumper crop. There's nothing wrong with a farmer building bigger barns and putting food in storage. He didn't condemn this man because he was rich. Nowhere in the Bible are riches, in and of themselves, condemned. Some of you say, "Praise God! Preach it brother!"

It's the love of money that is the root of all kinds of evil. Covetousness is that "I want more. I want more." You'll lie to get more. You'll steal to get more. You'll murder to get more. You'll commit adultery to get more. But you'll never be satisfied; you'll always be thirsty.

This is basically the problem with mankind. There is an emptiness in our lives that can only be filled with God. And when God is not a part of our lives, nothing can fill that void. We'll spend our whole lives searching.

Have you ever seen that foolish bumper sticker years ago that said, "He who dies with the most toys wins"? It's a dumb sticker. If it's on your car, let me know and I'll come and help you tear it off your car. "He who dies with the most toys wins." Really? How silly. How foolish.

So he wasn't a fool because he was rich. Both the rich and the poor could be covetous. You can be poor and have a covetous heart. You can be rich and have a covetous heart.

He wasn't a fool because he stored his grain. There is no indication in the story that this man was a fool because he stored. God tells us to "consider the ant, how he stores away for the winter." We are to be wise and take care of our family. There is nothing sinful in that. But again, this man totally disregarded God.

Now let me give you the five reasons from this parable why this man was foolish. Number one, he thought only of himself. When the foolish farmer looked at his bumper crop, which was a blessing from God, he forgot to thank God, and he thought only of himself.

When you look at your material blessings, do you think of and thank God, or do you think only of yourself—how you can use them for your own pleasures. In verses 17-19, there are six "I"s and five "my"s; so eleven personal pronouns. Notice them. In verse 17, he says, "What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?" Verse 18: "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods." Verse 19: "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink and be merry.'"

So why was this farmer foolish? He was foolish because all he could see was himself. He forgot that he was not the owner, but he owes everything to God. We are only stewards.

Don't miss that important lesson. It's not your money. They're not your automobiles. It's not your house. They're not your kids. Some of you say, "Praise God for that!" I'm kidding. I shouldn't kid about kids; right? They're a blessing. But they don't belong to me; they belong to God. They're only on loan to me for a short period of time. Your children are God's children. Your wife is God's wife. Your husband belongs to God. God only gives us our things in trust; we're stewards. This foolish farmer forgot that.

By the way, who is more dependent on God than a farmer? I was talking to a farmer here in the valley, and he said because of the lack of rain this year, all of his crops were destroyed and gone; it was a complete loss. I thought, Wow! That's crazy that you lose everything because it doesn't rain. How dependent a farmer is on the rain, the soil and the weather. So if you get a bumper crop, if anyone should get on their knees and say, "Thank you, God!" it should be this foolish farmer. It should actually read that "His crops brought forth in abundance, and that he got on his knees and said, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless Your holy name.'"

When you look at the blessings that God has given you, do you get on your knees and give Him thanks? When Moses spoke to the children of Israel about going into the Promised Land, he said, "You're going to inherit houses you didn't build. You're going to inherit vineyards you didn't plant. You're going to inherit wells you didn't dig that you'll drink of. So when you are in the land flowing with milk and honey, beware of this: Take heed that you don't forget God." Such wise counsel.

Have you drifted away from a thankful heart? Have you forgotten the principle that you are only

a steward? That you don't own anything? That it all belongs to God—your time, talent and treasure? Do you ask, "God, what do You want me to do with these things?"

Let me give you the second reason he was a fool: because he thought only of the present pleasure and the pursuit of pleasure. Notice it in verse 19: "And I will say to my soul..."—and you know that when you're talking to yourself, you're also pretty crazy—"...take your ease; eat, drink and be merry."

Is there anything wrong with resting? No. Praise God for rest. Before church even started this morning, I told my wife, "I'm coming home to take a nap after church." That's my one vision or goal for the day: sleep time. There's nothing wrong with taking your ease. There's nothing wrong with retirement, as long as God has not been left out of your retirement. One commentary I was reading actually said that this is the only place the Bible talks about retirement—the foolish farmer. "Take thine ease."

There's nothing wrong with eating, nothing wrong with drinking, nothing wrong with being merry. But when God is not a part of the picture, that's when it becomes sinful. It's what we call "hedonism." Hedonism is the philosophy that is so prevalent in our culture today; that pleasure is the chief goal of life, that all we do is live for pleasure or what makes me feel good. It doesn't matter if it's good for others or if it hurts others. It doesn't matter what goes on; it doesn't matter if God approves. I just want to do what I want to do. I want to live my life my way. That's hedonism. The farmer was a hedonist.

The third reason why he was foolish is because he forgot about the brevity of life. Look at verse 19. Still talking to himself, he said, "You have many goods laid up for..."—here's his mistake—"...many years." This is what's called a "false security." That's why riches are dangerous; they can develop a false sense of security and can lead to a lack of dependency on God. I don't ever want to be in a place where I'm not humbly dependent on God. I want God to keep me in a place where I must depend on Him and trust in Him and keep looking to Him. I have a tendency to depend on others things, to drift away from that. I want to stay in dependence on God.

So he thought he had many years left. The Bible tells us that "life is but a vapor." It appears for a moment and then vanishes away. The Bible says that life is like a flower that springs up fresh in the morning, and then it withers with the noonday heat. You talk about heat! Flowers are withering right now. They don't last through the heat of the day.

James said, "Go to now, ye that are rich and say, 'We're going to such and such city, and we're going to buy and sell and make gain.'" You don't know what a day may bring forth. You make your plans and devise your schemes, but you don't bring God into the picture.

None of us knows the time we will die. Think about if God actually told you when you would die. How that would change the way you would live! If God came to you today and said, "Tonight you will die," what would you do the rest of the day? How would it change your heart

and your attitude? We don't have a lease on life. None of you, when you say, "See you tomorrow," know that you'll see them tomorrow. You might go home, go to bed and then die in your sleep. No one has a lease on life. No one knows the day they will die.

But this man planned so far into the future. How many times people do that. "Wow! We finally reached retirement. We have this wonderful nest egg. We're going to buy an RV. We're going to travel around the country. We're going to do what we want to do." That's fine, but you don't know what tomorrow holds.

In my own life, just this week as I was studying this parable, it spoke to my own heart about the brevity of life and about how much time I have left. I looked back on my life and honestly felt some regret and grief of places and things and times that were wasted. That I wasn't more devoted to serving God and more committed to the things of the kingdom. I pray, "God, help me, these last few years that I have here if You should tarry, to spend my days serving You and busy about the things of Your kingdom and investing what You have entrusted to me in the kingdom of God."

In verse 20, God said to this farmer, "This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" He forgot that life was short.

Here's the fourth reason the man was a fool: he forgot his own mortality. In verse 20, (God said to him, "This night your soul will be required of you." The Bible says that it is "appointed unto everyone once to die." Every one of us has an appointment. Then after that, we will stand before God in judgment. You might be able to avoid taxes, but you can't avoid death. "Who is he who lives and shall not see death? Who can save his soul from the hand of the grave?" The answer is "No one." Every one living will die. The statistics on death are quite impressive: 10 out of every 10 people living will die.

We don't want to think about that. When you're young, you don't think about the brevity of life. When you're young, you don't think about the certainty of death. That's why the Bible says that it's better to go to a funeral than it is to go to a wedding. We all love weddings. We love to see the beautiful weddings and rejoice and celebrate, but it's more valuable to go to a funeral, because that's where we're headed. You see that open casket, and sometimes that person looks so nice and peaceful and content, but they're not there anymore. They've gone into eternity. Whenever you look down into the casket, remind yourself that one day, that will be you. And you don't know when. You have no idea. (I just thought I'd encourage all of you with this.)

After church, someone asks you, "What did the preacher preach on?"

"He said I'm going to be in a casket real soon!" Scary.

But you want to be wise and not be a fool? Then prepare to meet your maker. Be ready for eternity. When we take a vacation, we plot it out and plan it out. We have it all mapped out. We go to AAA and get our maps. But we don't prepare for when we die. So this man is a fool,

because he forgot his own mortality.

Then lastly and fifthly, he forgot that you can't take your possessions with you in death. I don't know why, but we have this idea that we accumulate wealth and we seem to think that we can take it with us. Have you ever seen a funeral procession with a U-Haul trailer attached to the hearse? There's an old proverb which says, "There are no pockets in shrouds." We can't take it with us.

You heard the story of the very rich man who died? Someone asked, "How much did he leave?" The other person said, "Everything." He didn't take anything with him. We get this idea that we can take it with us. We can't.

So he forgot that he can't take his possessions with him. God actually asked him a question in verse 20—and I love it: "Whose will those things be which you have provided?"

Go home today and look around your house and ask, "When I die, are my kids going to appreciate this? Are they going to value this? Or are they going to have a big rummage sale? Is it going to be garbage weighing them down? Are they going to say, 'Look at all the junk we have to clean up!'" These things were your treasures but another man's junk. God, help us to remember our mortality, to remember the brevity of life, to remember that we can't take these things with us.

Now the conclusion of the parable, in verse 21, I've called the problem. So we have the purpose of the parable, verses 13-15; we have the picture of covetousness in the parable, verses 16-20; and we have the problem. Jesus wraps it up for us in verse 21. He says, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself..."—notice the problem is that these treasures are laid up "for himself." By the way, these are temporal—"...and is not..."—here's the problem—"...rich toward God." The problem is that he was not rich toward God.

By the way, all these other reasons I gave for him being a fool are caused because of this one problem: he forgot God. He was "not rich toward God." Because he wasn't rich toward God, he only saw himself. He didn't see his mortality. He didn't see the brevity of life. He didn't see that the material things can't be taken with you into heaven. So he was not rich toward God.

Now whether you are rich or poor in this world, what matters most is that you are rich toward God. Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

So where do your riches lie? In this world or in the world to come?

Now what does it mean to be "rich toward God"? For the Christian, it means that we invest in serving the Lord—our time, our talent and our treasures. Maybe you don't have money. Maybe you just have time—serve the Lord. Maybe you have a talent or gift that God has given you—

use it for the glory of God and for the good of others and for the building up of the church. Maybe God has given you treasures; God has entrusted you with a lot of wealth. It's a great responsibility—not only a privilege but a responsibility. Use it for the kingdom of heaven. So for a Christian, you're rich toward God when you're rich in good works and you're serving Him.

But if you're not a Christian, let me say this: You need to get right with God. You need to have your sins forgiven. You need to have the riches of God's grace. In Ephesians 2:8-9, it says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

The text doesn't say this, but I would venture to say—and I believe it—that the inference in the text is that the man died and went to hell. The foolish farmer was foolish because he wasn't rich toward God; he didn't know God, and he didn't have a personal relationship with God. He didn't love God with all his heart. He wasn't saved; he was lost. The Bible says, "You can gain the whole world, but if you lose your soul, it profits you nothing." In other words, you're a foolish person. I believe this farmer died and went to hell, and that's the reason why this man was foolish.

If you don't know Jesus Christ and haven't been born again, your sins aren't forgiven, you don't know that if you died, you would go to heaven. If you don't know beyond any shadow of a doubt that when you die, you'll go to heaven, then you need to get right with God. You need to get rich toward God.

The Bible says that "Jesus, though He was rich, for our sake, He became poor; that through His poverty, we might be made rich." "Through His poverty" is a reference to His death on the Cross. It's a reference to His incarnation and through His crucifixion. Jesus came from heaven, took on a body and died upon a cross. And when He died on that cross, He died for your sins. The Bible says, "All have sinned and fallen short." The Bible says, "There is no one righteous; no, not one." We are all sinners separated from God by that sin. That's why we are trying to fill the emptiness and void in our lives with things, but nothing satisfies. Jesus died in your place to pay for your sins. He was then buried, but the Bible says that He rose from the dead and ascended back into heaven. He ever lives to forgive you and give you the hope of heaven, eternal life.

Have you made plans beyond the grave? Have you made plans for what happens when you die? I'm not talking about a trust or a will or putting a name on furniture so your kids will know who gets what. I'm talking about your name being written in the Lamb's book of life. Do you know that when you die you'll go to heaven? That's the only thing that really matters. Everything that we see, the Bible says, is temporary. But "that which is unseen is eternal."

If you can say, "Pastor John, I don't know that if I died I'd go to heaven. I don't know that I'm really forgiven and that I'm saved," then you're not rich toward God. Or you are but don't know it. I'm going to give you an opportunity to get right with God. I'm going to give you an opportunity to be rich toward God.

In verse 21, Jesus is saying there are two worlds: there is this world, the temporal world; and the eternal world, heaven. Which are you living for? Where do your treasures lie? Are you rich only in this world, or are you rich toward God? Don't be a fool; don't forget God. Death is certain. Life is short.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Please don't leave this service—don't be a fool. Don't listen to the story of the foolish farmer and be a fool yourself. Get right with God. Get rich toward God.

Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer.