

The Rich Fool
Luke 12:13-21
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In Luke 12:13-21, Jesus is going to be speaking a parable. “Then one from the crowd said to Him...” We’re not given a name or a reference to a time frame; just someone from the big crowd that was gathered and mentioned in verse 1. This individual said to Jesus, “‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’ But He said to him, ‘Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?’ And He said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness...’ why? “...for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”

Verse 16, “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...” speaking to the farmer “...‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

In verse 16, it is very clear that Jesus is speaking a parable. The word “parable” comes from three, Greek words: para-bo-le, which means “to lay alongside.” Jesus takes an earthly story and lays it alongside a spiritual or heavenly truth. So it is an earthly story with heavenly meaning. The stories He tells may not have actually happened, but they are true to life. Never is a parable fiction; it’s always a true-to-life story, and Jesus uses it to convey a spiritual truth. Normally there is one, primary lesson in it. We can draw other lessons from it, but there is one, main purpose to the parable, which Jesus gives us in the Scriptures.

Verse 16 refers to the man in the parable as being “rich,” and obviously he was a farmer. But in verse 20, Jesus referred to him as a “fool.” So he was a rich man who was a fool.

Obviously in our culture today, rich people are thought of as being great and wonderful. We put their picture on the cover of a magazine and venerate them and praise them.

But if God says you’re a fool, you are indeed a fool. If I call you a fool, take it for what it’s worth.

I want to look at three things in this parable. Number one, the purpose of the parable; why did Jesus give the parable? What you always should do when you study a parable is to back up and see in the context what precipitated it or what caused Jesus to speak it. You’ll find out what the parable is about.

Luke 12:1 tells us there was a great crowd gathered around Jesus; the Scripture says it was “an innumerable multitude.” No doubt there were thousands. Verse 13, “Then one from the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’”

This is not part of the meaning or the purpose of the parable, but I have a lot of questions about this man. Who is he? Where was he from? Was he young? Was he old? Was he the younger or the older of the two brothers? What was the situation he was referring to? Was it an older brother who didn't want to divide the inheritance with his younger brother? Was it the younger brother who wanted to sell the property? That was something they didn't want to do in those days; they wanted to keep the property in the family. But the parable does not deal with these issues.

This man came and interrupted Jesus rudely. And it's interesting that he didn't say, "Would you arbitrate?" or "Would you tell me if I'm wrong?" or "Would you help us to come to a fair conclusion"? No; he said, "Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." He was ordering Jesus what to do. He's not asking; he's telling. So Jesus answered him, "Man," which is a term of derision and not a loving, friendly term. So He said, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" Jesus didn't come to arbitrate these kinds of disputes.

It's interesting that wherever there is a will or a trust, there is a fight. I saw a cartoon once of a family in a lawyer's office waiting to hear what was in the will. They were rubbing their hands in greed and were very excited. The lawyer opened the will and read, "I, Jim Jones, being of sound mind and body, spent it all." You talk about disappointment! And we know that when a person dies, they leave it all behind. But how sad that people would fight and argue over an inheritance.

But Jesus didn't come to arbitrate these disputes. He wasn't going to start a People's Court program. Why didn't He want to deal with it? Because He knew that the heart of the problem was the problem of the heart. Jesus knew that the problem was this man's covetous heart, so He spoke to the real issue.

It's interesting today that people want Jesus to fix their problems, but they don't want Jesus to change their hearts. They don't want to repent and get right with God. People come to us at the church and ask, "Can you fix our marriage?"

"No, we can't fix your marriage, but God can."

"Can you fix our teenagers? They're all messed up!" And they want us to fix them in one hour. It's not gonna happen.

"What about you? Have you given your heart to the Lord?"

"Oh, no. We're not Christians, but we want our kids to get straightened out, so we brought them to you."

They want Jesus to fix their problems, but they don't want to change their heart. They want God to fix other people but not themselves. But God wants to change their heart; that's the real issue.

The man's problem was so common, even today. It was the problem of covetousness. So in verse 15, Jesus warns us about this. "And He said to them, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.'"

Earlier in the chapter Jesus warned of hypocrisy. Now He is warning us of the danger of covetousness. And in our next study, Jesus will warn us of the danger of worry and anxiety. These are all so important. And they are all tied together: the fear of man, not confessing Christ, hypocrisy, covetousness and worry.

What is covetousness? The word "covet" literally means "to fix your desire upon." It's an intense longing and desire for more. It's the love of possessions. Some translations actually say "greed"; "Take heed and beware of greed." That word we understand. It's the same concept; "I want more. I'm not satisfied with what I have." So we live in this constant state of longing for and desiring things that are material.

Covetousness is an inward sin. And as a culture, it is a sin that we celebrate, but God condemns it. Sometimes it's called "keeping up with the Joneses." It's buying things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like. That's covetousness or greed.

Covetousness is the opposite of contentment. 1 Timothy 6:6 says, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." Actually 1 Timothy 6 has a lot to say about possessions. Verses 7-8 say, "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content." In Matthew 6:25, Jesus warn us, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on." Covetousness is a desire for things, and it's a sin God condemns. Covetousness is a dangerous sin, so it's no wonder that Jesus warns us about it.

In 1 Timothy 6:10, it says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." That's a pretty good description of covetousness. In Colossians 3:5, Paul lists the sins we need to put off as believers: "fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire..." and he concludes the verse by saying "...covetousness, which is idolatry." These things take the place of God in our lives. So Jesus warns us by saying, "Take heed and beware of covetousness."

Now He tells us why we should beware, in verse 15. "For one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." This is an important principle of life given by Jesus. "Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing" (Luke 12:23). Your life does not consist of the things that you possess.

In Ecclesiastes 5:10, Solomon said, "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity." It's like drinking salt water; it just makes you thirsty for more. You're never satisfied.

Jesus gave us this parable to warn us, number one, of the danger of covetousness, verse 15. And number two, He gave it to point out the principle that real life is not found in our possessions; it is found in God. Don't forget God. So this is the purpose of the parable.

Secondly, I want to move to verses 16-20 and talk about the picture in the parable, the painted picture of this foolish farmer. "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! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'"

Why did God call this farmer a "fool"? He did not call him a fool because he was rich. Nowhere in the Bible are riches condemned. It's not sinful to be rich if you get your wealth by an honest means. Abraham was rich, and he wasn't a sinful individual. Money is neutral; it can be used for good and for God, or it can be used for evil and for selfish things. The Bible says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." So it's not money itself; it's the covetousness or the love of money that is the problem.

So this man was not a fool because he was rich, and he wasn't called a fool because he stored his grain. It's okay to have a savings account, a retirement fund and to put money aside; that's prudent. But you have to be careful on how you do that. And you need to keep eternity in mind and always be God-infused.

Now I want to give you five reasons why God said this man was a fool. Number one, God said he was a fool, because he thought only of himself. This foolish farmer thought only of himself. When he looked at his bumper crop, he forgot to thank God and thought only of himself. In verses 17-19, there are about eleven times that the personal pronouns "I" or "my" are used. So this guy thought only of himself.

When God blesses you with material prosperity, what is the first thing you think of? Do you think of yourself? "Oh, man! I can buy that car I wanted!" You first think about yourself rather than God or blessing God or thanking God or how you can use it to bless others. So this "fool" forgot to thank God.

The Bible teaches that we're not owners of anything. We owe everything to God; we are just stewards of His goods. Everything we have belongs to God. It is to be used for God's glory and to be a blessing to others. It is to be invested in the kingdom of God and should be handled with an eternal perspective. You are to be a steward over what God has entrusted to you. You don't own anything.

So he forgot to get down on his knees and thank God "from whom all blessings flow." What if the story would have said that he had a bumper crop, he came home to his wife, gathered his children and said, "God has blessed us. Let's get on our knees, let's give thanks to the Lord, let's pray for God's wisdom on using this bumper crop to be a blessing to others and to glorify God"? What a different story it would have been. Even if that night he had died, he would have no doubt gone to heaven.

I believe this foolish farmer went to hell for all eternity. The Bible says, "What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26). It profits you nothing. There is every indication that this foolish farmer did not go to heaven. He went to hell, even despite him having these big barns full of goods, because his soul was not right with God. So he thought only of himself when God blessed him.

When Moses spoke to the children of Israel about going into the Promised Land, the "land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:17), he said that they would inherit cities they did not build, wells they did not dig, vineyards they did not plant. And when they did, he warned them not to forget God (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

When God begins to bless you, to prosper you, it's so easy to forget God. It was God who sent the rain to create the bumper crop that God blessed him with. God also provided the soil and gave the sunshine. So God brought about the crop, but there is no mention of the farmer praising God or thanking God or blessing the Lord from whom all blessings flow.

Be careful when you enter into this life of blessing of what God has provided; don't forget God.

Number two, this man was a fool, because he thought only of the pursuit of his own pleasures. He forgot God, and he thought only of himself and of his own pleasures. In verse 19, he said, "Take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." This is called "hedonism." It means that pleasure is the chief goal in life.

If you're a Christian, God "gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17). But we don't live to find pleasure in things. Our pleasure is found in God alone. So this man was living only a hedonistic existence. He lived only for himself.

And it's interesting that this is the only place in the Bible where retirement is mentioned. And it is in a negative connotation. "I have everything I need to retire—bigger barns full of grain, so all I need to do is 'eat, drink, and be merry!'"

I'm not telling you that you can't retire, but don't retire to selfish living, to be a hedonist. About this passage, R. Kent Hughes said, "A retirement that lives for self is unbiblical and immoral. If the rich man had survived that night, he would have gone on to live a life of bored hedonism."

So if you're going to retire and have your nest egg all set up, don't forget God. And don't forget that you're going to have to answer to God for how you spent your money, your time, your treasure and how you invested your talents. We are stewards; we own nothing. Don't be like this rich fool and live a hedonistic life.

Number three, God called him a "fool," because he forgot about the brevity of life. He forgot that life is short. He said, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years," verse 19.

And this man is pretty flipped out; he's talking to himself. He's looking in the mirror. "Hey, dude! You got it made! You have many years." Think about that! God said, "This night your

soul will be required of you.” He was going to die that very night. Yet he was all excited about the years he had ahead of him.

One of the dangers of material wealth is that it creates a false sense of security. But the rich die just like the poor do. Rich people die of cancer just like poor people die of cancer. The statistics on death are quite impressive; 10 out of every 10 people living will die. “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). “What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave?” (Psalm 89:48). No one can. Everyone dies and everyone is going to be accountable one day before God. So this man had a false sense of security.

In James 4:13, James says not to say, “We will go to such and such a city...buy and sell, and make a profit.” Verse 15, “Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’” You don’t know what a day will bring forth. We should never, ever forget the brevity of life.

The problem is that the reality of the brevity of life doesn’t hit us until we’re old. When we’re young we think we’re immortal and will live forever. But when the reality hits us, we’ve not already invested our life, but some have even wasted their life. “God, help us to invest our lives for You in eternal things.” Jesus will go on to say, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

In verse 20 of the parable, it says, “This night your soul will be required of you.” What if God came to you right now and said, “Tonight you’re going to die.” How would you spend your afternoon? I suggest that you get your priorities right, that you get your heart right with God.

Number four, God called this man a “fool,” because he forgot his mortality. He forgot the brevity of life, his mortality and the certainty of death. “Your soul will be required of you,” verse 20 says. And after death comes the judgment.

Life is like a vapor of smoke (James 4:14). It seems as though you graduated from high school last week, and now they’re checking you into the rest home. You’ve got one foot in the grave. It happens so quickly. That’s why the Bible says, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

None of us have a lease on life. There’s no guarantee you’ll be here tomorrow. We’ve conducted a lot of funerals at the church in the last few months—young people, old people, middle-aged people, seemingly healthy people. God has a time appointed for us; He mapped out our days before we were ever born. “So, God, help us to number our days. Help us to apply our hearts to wisdom.” Life is brief and death is certain. This man forgot all these things that we should be reminded of.

Number five, this man forgot that you can’t take your possessions with you in death. In verse 20, God asked, “Then whose will those things be which you have provided?” All the furniture, all the cars, all the houses, all the things—it will all go to someone else. Who are you laying it up for? That’s why Jesus said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth

and ruse 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" (Matthew 6:19-21).

Where is your heart today? Is it on earthly things? Or is it on the Lord?

So first, we have the purpose of the parable, in verses 13-15; second, we have the picture of the foolish farmer, in verses 16-20; and third, we have the problem, in verse 21. "So is he who lays up treasure..." earthly treasure "...for himself, and is not rich toward God." How powerful that is. Jesus said that's another reason why this man is a "fool." Whether you are rich or poor in this world, what matters most is that you are rich toward God. There's nothing wrong with having things in this world that we can afford. But first you must have what the world cannot give and the world cannot take away.

Are you rich toward God? What does it mean to be "rich toward God?" It means that you have been born again. You can't be "rich toward God" until you first acknowledge that you are a pauper and poverty stricken, that you are "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17) before a holy, righteous God. You must come broken, wounded, empty and sinful before God and repent of your sins. You turn to God and buy of Him by faith in Jesus Christ the riches and clean garments that He provides.

Jesus died on the Cross so that His righteousness can be imputed to us; our sins were placed on Him, and He paid for them in full. The Bible tells us that "though He..." who is Jesus "...was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). So we have to come to Jesus broken and needy and receive by faith the grace of God, the forgiveness of God, the riches of God.

Salvation is a free gift; you don't earn it, you don't buy it, you don't deserve it. The Bible says, "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. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10). But we are saved "for good works"; we're not saved by good works.

So that's being "rich toward God." It's salvation, sanctification and service. It's God's spiritual life in the soul of man. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark:836). You'd be the richest man in hell. Big deal!

Are you "rich toward God?" Or are you only rich in this life? Are you living for the things that the world gives and the world can take away? We need to be rich in faith, "lay up for [ourselves] treasures in heaven." Don't be a fool! Be wise. Don't forget God.

If you're young, just getting started, acquiring wealth and building up your nest egg, always keep God in your vision. Keep an eternal perspective.

I wish there was some way I could convey the importance of this.

Life is so short. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven....For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Be "rich toward God."

There is a story put in a book called *Through Gates of Splendor* about a missionary named Jim Elliott. After getting out of Bible college, he and some of his friends felt that God called them to Ecuador to reach the Alcan Indians, a primitive people group. No one had ever reached them with the Gospel, and they felt called to do that. Before this, any contact with the outside world ended in the death of those who reached these Indians.

Jim Elliott and his friends were called "fools" by others. They left America, but they could have prospered here and had great jobs here. "Why would you go to Ecuador to reach a people group that could kill you?" And they all were put to death, speared to death for trying to reach this tribal people with the Gospel.

But before that happened, Jim Elliott read a commentary in the papers about how foolish they were to do this. He said, "No one is a fool who gives what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose."