

### 13. The Parable of the Rich Fool

Luke 12:13-34

The Parables of Jesus

Before the Lord called me to come and follow Him, I worked with my father as a commercial fisherman on the east coast of England. We mostly fished for Dover sole, one of the most expensive fish on the market. I grew up in the port of Harwich, Essex, living my childhood and teen years within a few hundred yards from the sea. After I became a Christian, I continued to work my father's boat, but I would take it out on my own (a perilous thing to do) and fish while he took time off. One time, I decided to go further out into the North Sea and fish twelve miles or so from the harbor. I planned how to maximize my time and the state of the tides in the hope that I could catch a large amount of Dover sole, cod, plaice, and flounder. When I hauled up the nets the first time during that night, there was an absurd amount of fish earning me a heap of money in a short space of time. After four plentiful hauls, when I got home and went to bed, I could not sleep. I had all sorts of ideas of how on the next night I could maximize my fishing time to catch even more. I tossed and turned and had no peace.

I was very successful, but at what price? Greed had made a pass at me and grabbed at my heart. When I came to pray and read the Scriptures, all I could think of was how to catch more fish. I had to repent of how my heart was sidetracked to thinking how I could make more money. Even in those early days as a young Christian, there was a call on my life to prepare me for what God was calling me to do, i.e., to leave my nets and win precious people to Christ. When I look back, I can see how the enemy was trying to divert me from following Christ by using greed and my desire for success. A few months later, I finally left the sea and fishing and decided wholeheartedly to follow Christ. I began church planting, and I used window cleaning to supply our financial needs as a family. How humbling it was to clean windows for a living after buying a house, a car, a motorbike, and lots of other material things with the lucrative wages I earned as a commercial fisherman.

It is tempting to think that life is all about what we can accumulate on earth. This world system says to us, "He who has the most toys wins." If there is no eternity, then that may be a good philosophy by which to live, but many of you reading these notes have become convinced that there is more to life than what we can see, feel, and touch. For those of us who are Christians, there is an eternity for which we are being prepared, and the choices we make while on this earth have repercussions in eternity as to our being poor or rich in the sight of God. Too many people climb the ladder of success only to realize in their twilight years that their ladder has been against the wrong wall. What things do you value—eternal things or this world's things?

The ugly side of greed reared its head before Jesus in the passage we are studying today. The Lord had been teaching a crowd of many thousands, telling them to beware of the false religion of the hypocrites and warning those in the group that there would come a time when the things hidden from men will be brought out into the light. With many thousands crowding around Him, one man thought he could command the Lord to enter into a personal dispute with his brother. We don't know if the brother was in the crowd, but if he were he would have cringed at the words of his brother: □

<sup>13</sup>Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." <sup>14</sup>Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" <sup>15</sup>Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:13-15).

In ancient Israel, when a father died, his eldest son became the head of the family. The father could not dispose of his inheritance how he liked. The Law of Moses stipulated that a double share of all that a man possessed be given to the eldest son (Deuteronomy 21:16-17). The man in the passage we are studying wanted to get his brother to divide the inheritance equally. He wanted more than what was allotted to him. Often at the passing of parents in Western nations, family members will fight over their parent's inheritance and it can break up families. It is a wise thing to plan your financial arrangements carefully and communicate your wishes so that family disputes do not happen upon death. □

Jesus would not be drawn into the dispute between these two brothers. There were more important things for Christ to do with His time. It was a teachable moment, though, for Him to speak on the subject of greed, especially as the people listening also heard the man. The enemy of our souls loves it when an insatiable desire for more displaces a man's peace, just as I could not sleep after catching so many fish that night. More never satisfies. Do not underestimate the power of greed. Jesus said for us to, "**be on your guard against all kinds of greed**" (v. 15). The word *guard* is translated from a Greek word used of a soldier who has his weapon at the ready, shield in place and ready to parry any sword blow from an enemy. This enemy that we fight is unseen, yet he comes to steal our peace and give us a toxic substitute in place of it, i.e., a desire to live for what this world can provide instead of drinking the pure, life-giving water of life that will take away every thirst that we have.

Question 1) Have you ever had success or greed grab your heart and consume your thoughts? How do we guard our hearts against greed? Why are we told to be on our guard against it?

Paul, writing to the Colossian Church, wrote:

<sup>5</sup>Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and **greed, which is idolatry** (Colossians 3:5).

Greed is like a false God that we set up in our hearts. We sacrifice our time, energy, and money to it. Paul compares it to idolatry in the verse above. It is one of the base things of this life that must be put to death. It grabs our attention and tempts us to live to accumulate more. We look at the guy across the street with the BMW, or the speedboat in the driveway next door, or the neighbors who go away on exotic vacations, and we lust for more. If you are a Christian, don't stoop to become a king! To walk with Jesus is better than owning the world. If you are a Christian, what you have is the greatest gift in the entire world. Don't let it slip from your hand by grasping something of lesser value. Consecrate yourself to live for the Lord Jesus and Him alone. Do not bow down to false idols! To consecrate oneself to God is to have empty hands before Him to hold on to nothing but His hand.

Jesus continued His talk with a story about a rich fool.

## The Parable of the Rich Fool

<sup>16</sup>And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. <sup>17</sup>He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'<sup>18</sup>"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup>And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." <sup>20</sup>"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' (Luke 12:16-20).

Question 2) What kind of problem does this man have? What was he doing that was so different from anyone today who puts aside something for retirement? Why was it displeasing to God?

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This man was thinking within himself (v. 17), but God knew every thought and every motive of his heart just as He knows every idea that has ever come to our minds. There is nothing hidden from God (Hebrews 4:13). The love and mercy of God are astonishing to us when we fully understand that He knows our darkest thoughts and inner depravity. The man in our story pondered over his problem: he had too much grain and not enough storage space. God had blessed the man through his job as a farmer, but his only thought was toward himself. He thought that his blessing was due to his knowledge and the hard work that he had done along with the skills he had acquired in his life up to that point. It is essential for us to realize that, if we are blessed financially, it is because of God's favor.

But remember the LORD your God, for **it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth**, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today (Deuteronomy 8:18).

We have nothing of ourselves that was not given to us by God. Before the foundation of the world, God planned what opportunities would come our way, what family into which we would be born, and what country in which we would grow up. We have nothing that we did not receive. John the Baptist said, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven" (John 3:27). Whatever gifts and talents we have acquired to make money, it has come from God, and we are accountable to Him for what we are given.

As this man thought about his retirement scheme, there are at least two things he did not consider. The first lack of consideration was that his plan was all about himself. There were no thoughts to share with others in his retirement package. His only thought was how much pleasure, leisure, and hedonism he could now have. The original Greek manuscripts of verses 17-19, has him using the personal pronoun "my" four times and "I" eight times. He never prayed about what God would have him do with the excess blessing given him. There is nothing wrong in planning for retirement, but your life does not belong to you, for you were bought with a price if you are a Christian (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Our lives are to be about serving others, even in retirement. It is said of William Booth, the pioneer of the Salvation Army, that when he was very sick and asked if he had a message for all

the people attending a conference at which he was supposed to speak, he sent just one word as his message: "others." Christ came not to be served but to serve, and this must be our passion, too.

The rich man intended to hoard his money for himself. A barn that is full speaks of a man who wants to keep the price high while he slowly releases the grain to obtain the best price for himself over time. He thought this would guarantee him a large bank account and keep him for many years. Mohandas Gandhi once said, "The world provides enough for every man's need but not for every man's greed."<sup>1</sup>

The second thing this man never considered, the one thing that should always be on a man's mind, is that of the day of his death. There comes a time when every man must put the parts of the game of Monopoly back in the box. There are no pockets in burial shrouds, i.e., you can't take anything with you apart from your character, the knowledge you have gained, and those people you have influenced in life.

We have all read about the Nobel prize, but not many know why Alfred Nobel created the prize in the first place. He got up one morning and read his own obituary in the newspaper. Nobel had an opportunity granted few people: to read his obituary while alive. What he read horrified him. Of course, the newspaper got it wrong, the one who died was his brother Ludvig, but Nobel did not like the newspaper calling him, "The Merchant of Death." They wrote that he had grown rich by developing new ways to "mutilate and kill" due to his invention of dynamite, nitroglycerin detonators, blasting caps and a smokeless gunpowder. The newspaper said that Nobel made it possible to kill more people more quickly than anyone else who had ever lived. He decided that he wanted to be remembered for better things than killing people more efficiently, so he created the various prizes for outstanding inventions and achievements.

What is your obituary going to say? What memories will you leave behind? Many a person, even Christians, live as if there is no eternity. If we believe that there is a hell for those who are without Christ, then we would throw as much of our energy as we could into winning the lost.

God called the man a fool (v. 20). All the man saw was "my barns," "my grain," and "my goods." What a wasted life! God's thoughts about the man are relayed to us by Jesus, and He said of him: 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' (v. 20). He had wasted all opportunities to do good with all that he had been blessed. A useless life is an early death (Goethe). Jesus went on:

This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God (Luke 12:21).

Question 3) What does it mean to be rich toward God? What does that look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

This man had prepared himself only for this world. He never stopped to think of how much of his wealth he could lay up in heaven, where moth and rust cannot get to it (Matthew 6:19).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://good---life.blogspot.com/2012/09/mahatma-gandhi.html>

Having riches does not keep a man from heaven, but the problem with this man was that his wealth had him. We don't know if the man in the parable ever got to the point where he put up his feet and called a halt to his work. It is likely that this aspect of his character was forged over some time. For most men who work just for this world's goods, when their bigger barn is built, their focus becomes on the next milestone in heaping up riches to themselves. Riches do not ever satisfy, and a man is deceived if he thinks enough will be enough. □

Men of this world attain riches by sound investments, and so do the Children of the Light. We can lay up sound investments in the things that matter in eternity, i.e., people that God greatly loves. If we had a time machine and could go back in time with gold in our pockets to invest wherever we could, wouldn't it be wise to go and invest in the development of the personal computer with Bill Gates, or in the development of the first Apple computer? However, if we could take that same time machine and go into the future and see the return of our spiritual investment in the Kingdom of God, then we would no longer accumulate things in this world. We would invest our time, energy, gifts, talents, and money massively into the Kingdom of God. I pray that God will open your spiritual eyes to see the value of every one whose hearts become open to the love of God. □

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Corinthians 2:9).

God assures us that His rewards are great toward those that invest for eternity. If you are having thoughts concerning eternity, do not put it out of your mind. God is the one who places thoughts of eternity in our heart: “He has also set **eternity in the hearts of men**” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We would be wise to think concerning eternity with all that we say and do. Ask yourself as to what you want to take with you when you pass into eternity.

The rich man thought he had a lot of time left in which to enjoy himself, but God had other plans, plans that included his death that very night while he was making his plans. Many a man in hell regrets the decisions he made on earth, but it is a truth that one cannot correctly live on this earth until he has contemplated his death and made decisions in the light of his mortality. It was almost as if the man's motives and plans made God decide to take his life that very night.

### **Why Worry?**

The Lord anticipated the question in the crowd after His parable about the rich fool. What they want to know is how they will care for themselves in their old age if they are not to be so focused on laying up for themselves as much as they possibly could. Who's going to take care of them?

<sup>22</sup>Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. <sup>23</sup>Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. <sup>24</sup>Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! <sup>25</sup>Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? <sup>26</sup>Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? <sup>27</sup>Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like

one of these. <sup>28</sup>If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! <sup>29</sup>And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. <sup>30</sup>For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup>But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. <sup>32</sup>"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup>Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:13-34).

#### Question 4) What type of treasures can be transported to heaven?

My father was not the worrying kind; in fact, his fishing boat on which I worked on with him for many years was named, "Why Worry." For many years as a reminder of my fishing days, my car license plate was, "Wy Worry." God has promised that He will provide for us. Often, that will be through His gift of skills and knowledge to work in this world. Paul the Apostle wrote, "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). Worry and anxiety should have no part in the life of a Christian who has given up all he has to be His disciple (Luke 14:33). God is the owner of the things you have, and we are but managers or stewards. Seventeen of the thirty-six parables that Jesus taught was about stewardship. God wants you to be free from worry and anxiety to live a life of few burdens.

This world trades in worry and fear. The news channels are full of it—fear and anxiety will paralyze you from living fully the life God has for you. The wise Christian will restrict his input of the news propaganda. Below the surface of the news channels is the thought of what would that be like if it was something that happened to you. Our King says that we should not be anxious about what we shall eat or what we shall wear (v. 22). The Lord has the listeners look around them to the wildflowers, are they anxious about how they look? He speaks about the birds of the air, the ravens flying over their heads, "They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!" (v. 24). If God cares for and feeds the lesser of His creation, how much more will He care for those who are of the highest value to Him?

Said the Robin to the Sparrow;  
 "I should really like to know  
 Why these anxious human beings  
 Rush about and worry so."  
 Said the Sparrow to the Robin,  
 "Friend, I think that it must be  
 They have no Heavenly Father,  
 Such as cares for you and me."  
 --Author Unknown

But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well (v. 31).

When King Solomon, David's successor to the throne, was asked by God, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Solomon responded by asking for wisdom to rule the great nation of Israel. That was the only thing on Solomon's wish list. God's response was to make him the second wisest man that has ever walked the Earth (Christ being the other). The Lord was so delighted with Solomon's answer that He also gave him riches and honor that would have no equal among kings (1 Kings 3:12-13). When we focus on living for the Kingdom of God, we also walk in such a blessing from God. He promises that if we too have the same attitude, material blessings can be trusted to us as well. "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). But we are not to live for those things, nor focus our hearts on acquiring goods and comforts in this world. We are to daily invest in the purse that we have in heaven, that unseen purse that God sees. We can take nothing with us except the Word of God that we have learned and obeyed and precious lives that we have invested our time, energy and money in. Spend your lives investing where no thief can steal or moth destroy. A treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (v. 34).

No man may go to heaven who has nothing of his heart already there. If you have never wholly entrusted yourself into Christ's hands, then today is your opportunity. Stop and pray this prayer:

Lord, today I at this moment cast all that I have into your hands, I relinquish control over my home, my car, my children, my job, everything that I have now belongs to you. Thank you that you will help me in managing the things that you have given me. Please give me the grace to live a life of freedom from worry and anxiety. I consecrate my life to live for the Lord Jesus; I come with empty hands to you alone, I will bow down to no false idol. Set me free to live a life free from worry and anxiety. Amen

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