

Sermon 65: Luke 12:13-21: The Parable of the Rich Fool

OUTLINE

The warning
The parable
The lesson

INTRODUCTION

There is a sin which every person here struggles with that Jesus addresses next, the sin of Greed/covetousness. On a daily basis we wake up to a heart that is dissatisfied with what it has and thinks that happiness lies in having more. When on the hunt to purchase something we need, for just a few more dollars we get an upgrade with better options. Once we have bought it we get buyers regret because once we get the thing we thought we always wanted it has flaws and limitations and can't do everything we want. We spend a lot of time thinking about that next great purchase and it feels great when we get it, but then that euphoria wears off and we need something else. Friends we have a heart problem, we have a sinner's heart that tries to fulfil itself on things in creation instead of finding satisfaction in the Creator and the eternal riches He has in store for us. Every Christian is an heir a guaranteed millionaire but we act like paupers.

We come now to the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:13-21. 12:1-12 dealt with the temptation to leave Christ because of persecution, now we come to the temptation to leave Christ because of greed. Both these sins are outlined for us in the parable of the sower. The seed that is sown among thorny ground and springs up but dies with the heat of the sun represents those who become fair weather disciples who fall away under persecution. This section addresses the seed sown among thorns where the cares of this life choke out the seed.

We will look at the warning, then the parable, then Christ's closing lesson.

The warning

V13, 'Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." We have a very disturbing picture here. Jesus is speaking about some of the most solemn things one can speak about, being disowned by Christ and committing the unforgivable sin. But in the crowd is a man who is not listening. His heart is full of anger and resentment because he feels that he has been shortchanged in an inheritance dispute and he butts in and demands that Jesus take his side. This man's heart is obviously more concerned about his earthly inheritance than his heavenly inheritance and this provokes Jesus to give a parable warning about a man who is obsessed with the things of this life.

Now it was common for a person to approach a teacher and ask him to arbitrate in matters that related to inheritances. The OT spoke about such matters and often it was a case of interpretation, so Rabbis were called on to make judgements based on their interpretation of the OT. We are not told the specifics of this case whether it was a case of the eldest who got a double portion taking more than his share, or dividing up the double portion which would have been used to support the parents, now that both parents were dead, etc. What we do see here though is how the human heart in its pursuit of things destroys relationships. James 4:1-4, 'What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ²You desire and do not have, so you

murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.' Here we see James exposing the issue, we fight with each other because we love things more than we love others and other get in our way of us getting what we want.

V14, 'But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?"' Jesus refuses to be drawn into this civil suit. It is clear from the way Christ is petitioned that this man is not asking Jesus to weigh his case, but he is trying to use Jesus influence against his brother and shame him into giving him what he wants. Jesus is the final judge and has been given this authority from God, John 5:22, 'For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.' However, it is not His purpose now to judge in these matters, the present mission of Jesus is very different to this.

Christ knowing that this sin of valuing things over God and people is a major problem addressing the whole crowd with a warning, v15, 'And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Christ gives a double warning, 'take care' and 'be on your guard' against the danger of covetousness. The word here is 'pleonexia.' This is what William Hendriksen says about this word, 'The Greek word for *greed* is very descriptive. Literally it means: the thirst for *having more*, always having more and more and still more. It is as if a man in order to quench his thirst takes a drink of salt water, which happens to be the only water that is available. This makes him still more thirsty. So he drinks again and again, until his thirst kills him.'¹ This word speaks of an insatiable appetite, it has the opposite meaning to anorexia which literally means without appetite. Jesus is describing sin and its inability to be satisfied as in Ecc. 5:10, 'He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.' Prov. 27:20, 'Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and never satisfied are the eyes of man.' Each of lives with a parasite that is never full. Are you watching? Are you on guard against its hunger? Are you denying it?

The Bible warns us that covetousness is the sin of idolatry, Col. 3:5, 'Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.' An idol is that thing that you give the place of God to in your life. How do you know you have an idol? Let's take some time to evaluate whether we are serving idols. Traditionally idols were things of wood and stone that we offered religious service to, but the Bible indicates that idols come in different forms, how do we know if we have an idol? I have a 9fold test for us to test to see if we have an idol in our lives. An idol is that thing that makes you mad, bad, sad, or glad, or it is something that you look to for identity, satisfaction, purpose/meaning, security, and sacrifice for something in the place of God.

When you can't have the things of this life does this make you angry at each other? Do you get angry at God because you think He has somehow deprived you of your rights? If so then you have an idol, for we deserve nothing, everything we have is a gracious gift, anger at God for not having your heart's desire means your heart's desire is your god. Will you deny God's gracious provision and wisdom in your anger?

Do you break God's law to have what you want? Do you steal from your parents, from your friends, from your employer to have things? Will you extort money, deceive so as to keep money, will you deny God's authority in your life to serve your idol?

1 <https://www.preceptaustin.org/luke-12-commentary>

Is your heart broken beyond all repair, beyond all the consolations that God offers you in salvation and in Himself? Would you rather die than live without that one thing? Will you refuse to allow God to be sufficient to give you life and hope?

What is the thing that you think will make you happiest in life? Is it God or is it something else? Imagine heaven, imagine that it does not have that thing you desire but it does have God; now imagine that heaven does not have God but does have that thing, which heaven would you prefer?

We also find our identity in things instead of God, instead of defining ourselves by our union with Christ, by our adoption and being part of God's family, we are encouraged to be identified by our brand loyalty, by what we own, by what consumer choices we make and approve. We add things to our lives to build up the image of ourselves that we like. The house we live in is no longer just a house but an extension of our personalities, the car we drive, the phone we use, the clothes we wear, the perfume and make up brands, etc. Often our pursuit of things is an attempt at a pursuit of self. Our sinful hearts misdirect us to find ourselves in these things instead of in God in whose image we are made, and in Christ who saves us out of sin which dehumanizes us and remakes us in His image.

Satisfaction we have already addressed in looking at what makes us glad. But it is worth adding that sin lies and tells you that you will be truly satisfied by some created thing, but that is wrong. There is nothing in creation that will finally satisfy the God shaped gap in your hearts. Having a spouse will fill the spouse shaped gap, having a family the family shaped gap, success will fill the success gap, but there is a God sized gap which we try and fill with other things, and they will never satisfy, only God can. Are you driven by a hunger for God that you are trying to satisfy with all the wrong things?

Purpose. What are you for? What is your purpose in life? What you think your purpose is will determine how you aim your life and how you spend your energies. What is the all defining goal of your life? Many direct their lives to the pursuit of things, they live to get a house and a car and a pension and a retirement that will provide, A, B, and C. Are you living in light of an eternal purpose or a temporal one? To live for anything but God and your joy in Him is idolatry. Meaning. Now meaning and purpose are similar. I remember being a child in primary school being astounded at this question, what is the meaning of life? The evolutionary worldview says there is no meaning we are here by happenstance, just make the best of it. But our hearts seek understanding, to interpret all the parts of our lives and existence in light of a bigger picture. Is your meaning found in the temporal things of this life or in the eternal things of God, salvation and the new creation. Does this show in how you are living your life everyday?

Security, what do you look to for security? Do you live your life trusting in God's provision and power, or do you look to the things of this life to make you feel safe and secure? I do not mean that you should not take out life insurance, the nature of the economic situation we are in makes it a wise thing not a lack of faith. We can so place our hearts in things that we need them to feel secure and they take the place of God, of prayer, of walking by faith.

Sacrifice. Religious service often includes sacrifice, the measure of our devotion is measured by our sacrificial service. What do you sacrifice to instead of God? Many things need sacrifice like marriage and parenting, I am not asking you whether you are doing hard things to fulfil legitimate responsibilities. No, the issue is are you sacrificing your health in the service of some earthly thing more than you do in God's service? Do you give so much in service to things that you have no service left for God?

So do you have an idol, is there a desire for something created that you are serving in ways you should only serve God. Our hearts are idol factories that is why Jesus warns us to 'take care' and to 'guard against.'

Jesus also says, 'one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.' The word for 'life' here is the Greek word *zoe* from which we get the English name *Zoe*. This is the word most commonly used to speak of our new life in Christ, the eternal life that we receive from Him. We can gain the whole world and lose our souls, but we can lose all our worldly possessions and still have life, and in the next life we will have all riches a purified heart could ever want. Friends, where do we find our lives? Not in the things of this world but in Christ. Is this true of you? Is this how you are searching for life?

The parable

Jesus then gives the well-known parable of the rich fool to illustrate His point. V16-17, 'And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' The setting for the parable is the lands of a rich man. In the first century riches would have been perceived as a sign of God's blessing because of the man's righteousness. And in the blessing of God he gets a bumper crop. He is faced with a conundrum what should he do with this superabundant blessing? V18-19, 'And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" This man has just gotten enough of a harvest that he can retire, it would have been like winning the lottery. So what does he do with this blessing? At first it seems like he goes about setting up a good business plan that will look after all his future interests so he can enter early retirement. However, we know that Jesus is telling us this story to illustrate the danger of greed and how wrong headed a single-minded pursuit of physical wealth is. What looks like good financial planning is bad spiritual planning. One commentator points out that in the 54 Greek words that make up this parable, 18 of them are first person pronouns like I and my. This apparently prudent businessman is hiding a heart in the grip of greed. Jesus is not saying that all wise business decisions are driven by greed, but the surprise here is that someone apparently righteous and blessed of God is someone who does not love God but has fallen prey to the deceitfulness of riches.

That phrase 'the deceitfulness of riches' is taken from the parable of the sower when describing the seed sown among thorns, Mark 4:19. This is Jesus description of riches. The owning of riches is not evil in and of itself, but our sinful hearts get deceived by this good gift. Deut 8:11-14 highlights for us that God's good gifts can become snares because of the sinfulness of our hearts, 'Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, ¹² lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.' Soft pleasures harden the heart, and good gifts can become snares.

What you will notice about the rich fool's response is that there is no acknowledgement of God with thankfulness. Gratitude reveals that we remember that all that we enjoy is a gift, that it does not come from ourselves, and it turns our hearts towards God as the giver of what we enjoy. The heart ensnared by covetousness is not happy for what it has but is always looking for more.

You will also notice that the rich fool's response to His windfall is loveless. Here is an opportunity for a man who is already rich, who already has all that he needs to give to the needy and share with others. Instead of thinking about ways in which he could benefit others with these gifts, he strategizes to make his own life easier than it already is. The OT is full of encouragements to be generous to the poor, this is something the rich fool did not take to heart. Prov. 19:17, 'Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.' 21:13, 'Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.' 22:9, 'Whoever has a bountiful (good) eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.' 28:27, 'Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.'

The godless planning sounds very much like what James rebukes in the rich in 4:11-16, 'Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—¹⁴yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."¹⁶As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.' Planning is never wrong, but to plan your life ignoring that all things come from God, that all our gifts are to be used for His will and glory, and that all prospering is by His strength is faithlessness and sin.

Note as well the way the man speaks to himself in his own heart in v19, 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."' Can you hear the self-congratulating tone? Note as well how this abundance of goods is not used for others good or God's service but for personal indulgence. The language of 'relax, eat, drink, be merry' sounds like an epicurean philosophy inscribed on a tombstone, 'Eat, drink and sport with love, all else is nothing.' The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, this is a godless philosophy.

V20, 'But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' Into this earthly utopia come the true realities of life, the day of our death appointed by God, and the fleeting nature of our treasures which we cannot take with us. God speaks in this parable giving the divine perspective on this man's ways. God calls him a fool. A fool you will remember is someone who has been living like a practical atheist, as if God does not exist. Whatever success, business savvy, wise strategies or whatever else he had, God characterizes this man who has ignored Him, and not done His will as a fool. He has lived his life not realizing that he could die at any moment, even as a young person in the prime of their lives. He had not planned for eternity and the judgement. On top of that Christ shows the vanity of having lived for riches, he cannot take them with him, they will become someone else's. After all that hard work, after exchanging his soul for the world, he cannot keep what he has bought at the price of his salvation. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul? For this reason he is a fool. How many in the world today are living like fools?

The lesson

V21, 'So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.'" Christ brings home the parable with its main lesson, be rich towards God. What is surprising about this ending is that Jesus does not say, be rich towards the poor. Being rich towards God would include being generous towards the poor. But how are we to be rich towards God?

This can be done in several ways. Firstly, richness towards God includes returning praise and gratitude to God for all the gifts that He gives us.

Secondly, being rich towards God includes seeing all that He gives us as temporary and as an opportunity to use for Him. We are stewards, we are not building our eternal homes, so let us use these gifts in His service.

Thirdly, serving God with our gifts includes being generous towards others who are in need. The needy could include those of your family, those in your church, the poor in your neighborhood, but it could also be giving money to the support of the gospel. Giving money to build a church, to support a bible college student, to support a missionary, to plant a church, to translate bibles, to build a bible college, etc.

Fourthly, being rich towards God means that He is our treasure not the things of this life, that we give Him our hearts, our worship, our sacrifice, and our allegiance.

The challenges of this portion are many, but let me end with this one. This rich man was given an abundance of blessing by God, but he did not use it for God. What gifts has given you, and how will you use them for God?