

LESSONS FROM HEAVEN FOR LIFE ON EARTH - The Parables - Pt 12
Sunday, October 17th, 2021, 6:30 p.m. - Teaching # 2136
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THE MAN GOD CALLED A FOOL

Luke 12:13-21 - "Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." [14] But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" [15] 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." [16] 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?' [18] 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.' [20] But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' [21] So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

It's always an ugly moment when someone shouts out while the preacher is preaching. We had an experience like that at one of our district conferences. From what I've heard, the speaker was saying some rather foolish things. And then one of the pastors shouted out his objection from the congregation, which was more foolish still. The whole situation leaves an awkward feeling in the room.

That's what happened in our text. If you glance back to the beginning of this twelfth chapter you will see Jesus speaking words of life and light on important issues of the kingdom. He had been teaching the crowds about the **love and care of Father God (12:6-7)**, the **reality of sin, hell** (notice He specifically uses the term "**hell**") **and judgement (12:2-5)**, and the **danger of shunning and rejecting the convicting work of the Holy Spirit (12:8-10)**.

Suddenly, without any warning, a shout went up from a man in the crowd - **"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!" (12:13)**. Obviously, from his request, we can tell people were already putting a great deal of weight behind the words of Jesus. He is being treated like a rabbi - being asked to arbitrate this family squabble. **"Jesus, you tell my brother to do this."** The implication being that, if Jesus says the words, the brother will listen. This man is not the first nor the last one to hang on to the Name of Jesus purely for material gain. It's become quite a business these days in the church.

There is no indication from the passage that this man was not **entitled** to the money he was seeking. There is nothing to hint that his request was dishonest or rooted in anything illegal. If the man were after money that wasn't rightfully his, Jesus could have solved the dilemma instantly by simply quoting the words from the law, **"Thou shalt not steal."** That would have settled the matter.

But here, in Jesus' response, another less obvious sin is about to be exposed. The warning is not, "***Beware of injustice***," but "***Beware of covetousness***"(13). This parable is directed at the inward, invisible sin of ***covetousness***. The warning is not about ***obtaining wealth by unjust means***, but ***setting the heart upon wealth, however rightly it is earned***.

More than this man needs his inherited wealth, he needs this lesson on greed and covetousness. This lesson from Jesus will do him more good than all the wealth in the world. ***Not wanting something is frequently better than possessing it.***

And so, once again, our Lord and Savior tells a story:

1) **GOD WAS THE ONE WHO HAD PROSPERED THIS DILIGENT LAND OWNER**

Luke 12:16 - "And he told them a parable, saying, 'The land of a rich man produced plentifully....'"

There was not a word from Jesus to indicate any lack of diligence on the land owner's part. He got up early and stayed up late working his land. Yet, for all of that, Jesus is careful to point out that, in a sense the **land** produced the crop, not the **land owner**. True, he planted and tended and harvested. But did he make the rain fall, or the sun shine? Did he put the fertility in the soil? Did he make the seed crack open, sprout and multiply? Could he even explain the process?

The point Jesus is making has to do with ***the mind-set from which greed springs***. If you view your wealth as the result of nothing but your own talent and effort you will, without doubt, think of yourself as an **owner** rather than a **steward**.

“Well, I’m not a farmer, pastor Don. I don’t rely on the ground to produce my wealth. I really **do** produce my own goods in my machine shop, or in the financial institutions, or in my sales contacts.”

Really? Who gives you the ability to walk around without an oxygen tank? Who gives you the mind to calculate numbers and make recommendations? Who enables you to speak. Or breathe? Or move? Who put you in prosperous Canada instead of Calcutta?

Every one of us earns his wealth with ***borrowed abilities***. This is what King David said when he prayed at the dedication of the temple. The people had responded so generously to the cry for funds. A huge offering had been received. But notice what David says as he offers the temple to the Lord:

1 Chronicles 29:11-16 - “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. [12] Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. [13] And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name. [14] "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. [15] For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. [16] O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own.”

When my children were little they would come and ask for five dollars to buy me a Christmas present. I would gladly give them the money and was pleased with their desire to give me something. ***But only a fool would think I was coming out five dollars ahead on the deal.*** I've since learned to look at all my gifts and offerings to the Lord in the same way. Everything comes from His hand. ***Jesus called this land owner a fool because he forgot that simple truth.*** Every good and perfect gift comes down from above, the Apostle James says.

2) **GOD CALLED THIS MAN A FOOL BECAUSE HE BECAME SELFISH IN HIS HEART**

Notice the abundance of personal pronouns in his conversation with himself:

Luke 12:17-19 - “....and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' [18] 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.'”

Remember, while the crowd is listening, Jesus is really teaching His disciples with this parable (12:1). As you grow in Jesus, He begins to challenge and reshape fundamental **attitudes** of your heart. Growing in discipleship means moving on from basic **outward areas of cleansing** (lying, stealing, cursing, adultery) to **changing the way you think about life and time and possessions and goals**.

That's what was wrong with the wealthy land owner in Jesus' parable. He hadn't **robbed** anyone. He wasn't **dishonest**. And for many in the church today, that's as far as they ever launch into the practice of the kingdom. But while this man wasn't dishonest in **deed**, he was sinful in **heart**. He was sinful in the way he **viewed** what God had given into his stewardship.

It's interesting that God calls this man a **fool**. The Bible uses that term very carefully and specifically. We use the term, rather cruelly, to describe anyone we don't think is too bright. The Bible always uses the term in reference, not to a person's **intelligence**, but to his or her **relationship to God**:

Psalm 14:1 - "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

But, in this parable, we learn a fool doesn't have to actually **say** there is no God. A fool can just **act** as if there is no God. That's precisely why God calls this rich land owner a fool.

To his credit he **does** stop to think about his goods. He stops to consider what might be the necessary next step with the prosperity coming into his hands - “...and he **thought to himself...**” (17). But for all of that, he’s a fool because **God isn’t mentioned in his plans**. He has no sense of **receiving** his goods from God, so he has no sense of **responsibility** in the use of those goods.

In short, this man is a fool because, however much he reads the Scriptures, however often he drives his children to youth night at the church, however often he prays and worships with the congregation, **he lives as if there is no God when it comes to his wealth**. All he can think of - his **very best plan** for all his wealth - is to put it all in a barn.

Do you see the point here? He **can’t possibly use all that he has been given**. A person only **needs** so much. And with a multiplying, dying, lost world all around him, he thinks the **very best use of his wealth is to store it all up for his future pleasure**.

There is a sense in which nothing measures the stature of a Christian like the use of his wealth. It may be the greatest test of discipleship. That’s because **nothing allows us to pursue our own interests and desires like wealth**. And **nothing is more detrimental to our walk with Jesus than pursuing our own interests and desires**. There’s the danger of covetousness in a nutshell.

3) **THIS MAN IS A FOOL BECAUSE HE THINKS HE CAN PUT TIME IN HIS BARN LIKE HIS GRAIN**

Listen to him:

Luke 12:19-20 - ““And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ [20] But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’”

Look carefully at that telling phrase in **verse 19** - “**You have ample goods...for many years.**” Many goods, for many years. He thinks he can bank his future years along with his goods. Or, he thinks that many goods **guarantee** many years.

That’s exactly what can happen with the accumulation of wealth. You can start to ***tie together what you have with what life is all about.*** You start to think that ***life is obtained, or, at least, maintained by the accumulating of things.***

And ***that’s*** what Jesus warns against -that’s what He warns ***His disciples*** against - at the very beginning of this parable: **Luke 12:15** - “**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.’”**

This man's goods have eaten the heart out of his understanding of life in this world - **Luke 12:20** - **"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'"**

We're meant to see the contrast in **verses 19 and 20**. The man says, **"I have many years."** God says, **"You're leaving tonight!"** There's quite a difference between **many years** and **tonight!**

Here's the lesson. None of us is immortal. And that truth has to be more than a **theological** understanding. My **temporary existence** on earth, and my **accountability** for my use of material goods, must shape my lifestyle. ***I haven't handled my wealth properly until I can leave it all tonight, stand before my Creator, and know that not one penny spent would be displeasing to my Lord.***

Now, I know none of us is there yet. I'm certainly not. And all of us are better at policing others than we are at policing our own greedy hearts. But Jesus calls His disciples to pursue this issue diligently each and every day.

4) **HOW GIVING KEEPS THE HEART TRULY RICH**

Luke 12:21 - **"So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."**

These words aren't part of the parable. This is a direct statement of fact from Jesus. The hard message of these words from Jesus is clear. ***You can't store up wealth for yourself and be rich in the life of God.*** You can ***earn*** a great deal of wealth. But you can't just ***store it up for your own use*** and be rich in God.

If the great danger in this parable is hoarding wealth, then the great solution is to become a generous giver of what God gives you. Like many good preachers, Jesus comes through the back door to the subject of giving.

I start with the tithe - the tenth - of all my wealth belonging to Father God. I don't do it because somebody can marshal proof texts and shame me into giving the tithe. I do it because ***I know my own heart.*** I know that my standard of living will always rise to whatever level of income God blesses me with.

The tithe helps me ***hold my greed in check.*** But beyond my tithe, I need to come to terms with a far more basic and mature issue of discipleship. ***How much is enough? How much do I need? And at what point am I just wasting what should be used in God's kingdom?***

I can't deal with that issue for you. I have a hard enough time dealing with it for me. But that's what this parable is all about. The key verse for all of us is **verse 15** - **“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.’”**

“Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed...” I take those words to mean ***every disciple has to fight this sin all the time***. You have to ***beware***. And you have to ***be on your guard***. Because of the climate of the age, the persistence of the advertisers, and the fallenness of our own hearts, this issue takes constant warfare.

Here's how giving fights covetousness:

- a) ***Giving expresses gratitude to God***. It recognizes the ***source*** of every good and perfect gift.

- b) ***Giving makes my life a blessing to others***. It ***extends*** what God has given me into the lives of others. It multiplies the blessing of God.

God has constantly been trying to teach this spirit of generosity to His children. Way back in the Old Testament God told His people to ***leave the corners of their fields unharvested*** so the strangers passing through their land would have something to eat (**Deuteronomy 24:19-22**).

- c) ***Giving keeps my greed in check.*** But only ***sacrificial*** giving will do this. If I only give what I can easily afford, the real benefit of giving will be missed. I need to give to the extent that ***I can no longer afford to do whatever I would like.***

- d) ***Giving can actually redeem the lost as I invest it in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.*** This is the most meaningful use of worldly wealth. It's the one way the fruit of my wealth can pass from the temporal into the eternal.

- e) ***Giving shows I value God and His eternal kingdom more than the material things of this world.*** Until my ***use*** of wealth demonstrates this truth, much of my Christian life will just be talk.

I hope no one will misunderstand this message. I have nothing whatsoever against Christians making money - ***lots of money***. When you do, ***use it to make your soul rich toward God***. And remember - Jesus said it, not me - ***if you allow your wealth to be selfishly used on your own interests, you're a fool***.