



Luke 12:13-21
“Where Does Security Lie?”

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“Following Christ from City Center”

LUKE 12:13-21 "WHERE DOES SECURITY LIE?"

12:13-34 To Disciples On Possessions

A. 12:13-21 THE WRONG ATTITUDE TO TREASURE AND POSSESSIONS.

1) vv.13-15 INTRODUCTION AND FIRST GENERAL PRINCIPLE.

Is God Enough?

A Family Matter, Brother Assumes Justice Is On His Side

13 One of the multitude said to him (Jesus),
"Teacher (Rabbi),
bid my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

Assumes Massive Crowds Of 12:1

Assumes Law/Justice Are With Him

Specific Situation: Justice Issue, *Rabbi* As Arbiter Of Torah

G.T. 72, Jesus Is About The Kingdom Of God, Not To Be Diverted

14 But he (Jesus) said to him,
"O Man,
who made me a judge or divider over you (pl.)?"

Divide//Divider, Dt. 21:15-17 Eldest Got Double

Sharp Rebuff To Family Conflict Over Inheritance

Use Jesus To Get What He Wanted: Property Meant Honor/Status

Look First At Self! Heart Problem, Desire To Hoard, Gk. *pleonexia*

15 And he said to them,
"Take heed and beware of all covetousness (every insatiable desire);

Ex. 20:17, Dt. 6:21, Mic. 2:2, Col. 3:5

for a man's life (self) does not consist in the abundance of his **POSSESSIONS**."

You Are Not What You Own, 9:25

Personhood Is Not = To Surplus Possessions

2) vv.16-20 THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL.

//Th. 63, Sirach 11:14-19, 1 En. 97:8-10

1:51-53, 6:24, 8:14, Example Of v.15b

a) v.16 Plenty Of Goods Given (By God: Holy Land).

Parable Is Meant To Shock Listeners

16 And he told them a parable, saying,
Occasion "There was a certain rich man
whose land (holdings) brought forth plenty.

Them = Brothers + Crowd

Ps. 104:14, 24:1, Gift = *Fields* Prospered, To Be Envied

1:51, 2:35, 12:2-3, Self-Talk Reveals Priorities

b) v.17 Problem Of Self Talk: I/I/My.

What Are The Conversations In My Head?

Problem And he discussed with himself, saying,
17 "What shall *I* do,
for *I* have no place to store *my* crops?"

Soliloquy, Overhear His Honest Thoughts

//Ecc. 5:10, Bounty Exceeds Expectations

Initially Perplexed, Necessary Prudent Question

2 *I*'s + 1 *My*'s, Hold For Later Sales

Foolishly Trusts In Possessions As Security

b') vv.18-19 Solution Of Self-Talk: Store/Enjoy Within The Circle Of Self.

Isolation: No One Else In The Story: Only A Rich Guy, His Stuff!

Solution And he said,
18 "I will do this:
I will pull down *my* barns and build larger barns; and
I will store all *my* grain and *my* goods.

His Plan, Prosperity Revealed A Corrupt Soul/Life

4 *I*'s + 4 *My*'s + 1 *Soul*, Self-sufficient/Autonomous/Invulnerable

Has A Plan! Hoard? Drive Up Price?

Prov. 11:26, *Whoever dies with the most toys wins?*

19 And *I* will say to *my* soul
'Soul! You have ample goods laid up for many years.
Relax, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself."

Tobit 4:16, Giving, Needs Of Others Never Crosses His Mind

Error! *Sentences of Sextus* 21, "Soul as trust from God"

Oops! Idolater, Test. Judah 19:1

(*euphron*) Goal = Good Life: Hedonism, Ecc. 8:15 LXX

9:25, Ps. 36:9, Practical Atheism, Disregards God/Neighbor

a' v.20 Goods And Life Taken By The Giver.

Slogan Of 1 Cor. 15:32, Not To Be Envied

Interruption! But God said to him,
20 'Fool!

The Hidden God (v.16) Steps In! *Soul* (vv.19, 20, 22, 23)

Jer. 17:11, *Many years* → *This night!*

(*aphron*) Practical Atheism, Ps. 14:1, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

this night your soul/life is required of you,
and what you have prepared, whose will these things be?"

Uncertain Life, Lit., "they are demanding your soul of you"

Un-Answered, What You Trusted Is Now Gone!

The One You Did Not Trust/Follow Is Now Unbearably Present

1') v.21 CONCLUSION AND SECOND GENERAL PRINCIPLE.

v.21 = *Nimshal* (Summary)

The Two Are Antithetical, What Accountant Measures *riches* for God?

21 So is he who **TREASURES** up for himself,
and is not gathering riches for God."

Did He Respond? Ease Is Not The Goal Of Life

//Mt. 6:19-21, Is The Next Life On Your Balance Sheet? 16:13

Is Yours A *Now* Orientation? Or Also A *Next* Orientation? Use Of Money Reveals Heart

Rich In Love? Service? Giving? Justice? Relationships? Worship? Prayer? Joy?

Enrich Self? Or Enrich Relationship With God? Run Away From Practical Atheism Towards Kingdom Living

Story Asks, "What is the meaning of life?" Commentary On 12:15, Life Is Not Mere Possessions

If My Desire Is To Be Like The Rich Fool, I Have A Greed Problem And Have Believed A Lie!

WHERE DOES SECURITY LIE?

“But to him God said, ‘Fool!’”

Not something you want to hear.

L U K E 1 2 : 2 0 b

One of the effects of our fallen condition occasioned by the universal rebellion against God is mental confusion. What we see in dementia patients is an image of how we appear to the good angels all the time. Not only do our bodies die, our cognitive faculties are corrupted because we no longer see all things in the light of God. We don't think clearly about ourselves or the world about us,¹ and one of the symptoms is amnesia. We easily forget the things that are important, as evidenced in our disordered lives and misplaced loves. Another symptom of the root disorder is what philosophers call a *category mistake*, as in the oft-heard complaint that someone is comparing *apples* and *oranges*. To treat *un-likes* as *likes* is a logical error with real-world consequences, and not only for fruit salad. Another category mistake is when we confuse life and its meaning with the stuff we own. You are not what you own or don't own but so much more, and to equate the two- your life and your stuff- is a philosophical and moral mistake with consequences. Life and things are not of the same order. Your stuff you leave behind at death, but the you that is you, your unique soul or self, is not another commodity, and one day it will be recalled by its maker for final inspection.² We all stand before the One whose words we read today, and on that day we will know what we valued. At every funeral I say, “Phil, one day that will be you.” Why? Because it wakes me out of the fog and false values of this

¹ See Romans 1:18-32 for Paul's devastating list of the full effects of sin: personally, corporately, cognitively, sexually, sociologically, eschatologically.

² See the U.M. Confession of Faith, **Article XII: The Judgment and the Future State**, “We believe all men stand under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, both now and in the last day. We believe in the resurrection of the dead; the righteous to life eternal and the wicked to endless condemnation” (*BOD 2012*, 74). We teach only two ways!

world. Facing death is potent cognitive therapy; I recommend it to you.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

The Lure Of An Inheritance (vv.13-15).

It began with the death of their father. That is often a time for families to split as greed and envy perch like vultures to pick the estate apart as so much carrion. When I see it or smell it, I flee the cemetery as fast as possible after the final *Amen*.

In this case a brother- no doubt the younger- felt cheated. Jewish custom in the case of two sons was for the firstborn to inherit two-thirds with one-third to the younger, but in some cases there was an attempt to keep the estate together.³ His older brother was holding out. Things were not going well, so the younger did the unthinkable; he went outside the family into the streets. Dirty laundry now goes public, and Rabbi Jesus just happens to be in the neighborhood.

Luke says the younger brother was *one of the multitude*, which means he was not yet a disciple.⁴ He knew Jesus as a rabbi was well acquainted with the laws of inheritance and cries out for a public ruling. For him Jesus is the *Judge Judy* of the Jewish world, and the more drama the better. He will leverage the rabbi, shame his brother and get what's his! It's not a request for private arbitration but a demand Jesus use his influence to enforce an agenda, "Rabbi, bid my brother to divide the inheritance with me! Make my wicked brother do right!" His grand dream for the future is held hostage to his brother's unjust actions. But our friend has misread Jesus, who responds gruffly, "Bug off; it's none of my concern. Who made me a probate judge over you and your family squabbles?" The younger brother wanted to use the Lord, but it was not to be. Jesus saw right through him, "You there, yes you! Take heed and beware of all covetousness, for a man's life does not consist in the surpluses of his possessions." The one who dies with the most toys does not win

³ On this parable and Jewish laws of inheritance, see Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 57-84; Bernard B. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1989), 127-140; Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 1990), 266-268; Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 104-109; Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 389-400.

⁴ The crowd is introduced in 12:1.

because life is not a scorecard and you are still dead.

We don't get to use Jesus for our agenda: health or wealth, name or fame. He will not cooperate because he is about the new reality of the kingdom and will not be diverted. He's not about giving us our dreams or our rights as currently defined by the law of the land. He can't save us on our terms but only on his, which means a huge reordering of priorities, the death of an old life and the rebirth of a new one.

Our friend came for one thing and found another. Whenever we engage the Lord, our heart is revealed. All the dark, smelly sludge is dredged up for inspection, not just once but over and over. When the saints across the ages confess they are great sinners, it is not humility on parade; it's what they see because Christ has peeled them to the core. Jesus is the death of image management. We want him to fix the world for our comfort; he, instead, invites us into his world and reveals our hearts. With Jesus we always get more- and often more unpleasant- than expected. Here was a man who believed "If I get mine, life will be good." Jesus refused his scheme and warned him something greater was at stake, and here I paraphrase:

"Beware of every insatiable desire. I'm not you father's executor, but your life is my concern. Do not equate your life with what you own or control. More stuff beyond the basics does not mean more life. Life is not measured by the overabundance of what is owned."

The Greek word for covetousness means always *wanting to have more*, what we call *greed* or *avarice*.⁵ It's opposite is *contentment*, and the cure is *generosity*; an open heart replaces a grasping hand.⁶ To close the hand is to harden the heart.

In 2006 I read that at least twelve U.S. multimillionaires, and likely many more by now, are looking to life beyond death. Confident in medical progress, they've arranged for their remains to be frozen. They've also set up a legal vehicle, a *personal revival trust*, to ensure wealth will be waiting for them when resuscitated 100 or even 200 years in the future. Sixty-four-year-old David Pizer figured the \$10 million he left to himself- after compound interest is added- will make him the

⁵ *pleonexia*.

⁶ On the vice and its effects, see James Bryan Smith, *The Good And Beautiful Life* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2009), 153-170.

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world's richest man when he wakes up. What a fool, and in his case- technically speaking, what a *damned* fool.⁷ At death he did not meet nothingness; he met the God of Jesus. We even know what was said of his cryogenic scheme and self-referenced will? "Thou fool!" It's really not something you want God to call you.

Because of the age of this congregation, more and more will be dealing with the deaths of parents and other family members, which means there will be inheritances, in some cases large ones. I offer a number of precautions:

- * Put relationships before money. Don't lose a loved one over a lamp.
- * Secondly, don't believe the lie that more money means more life; that's not the way God arranged the equation. Riches don't guarantee class or character, and- unless you are careful- can corrupt your faith.
- * Thirdly, take at least a tithe off the top and give it to God's work. Consider a double tithe as a thank offering. Make the decision before you face it. Put it in your will.
- * Realize, fourthly, that with opportunity goes danger. "O Lord, money I never worked for has come my way. I open my hands to you. Show me how to scatter it to gather true riches."
- * Fifthly, ask your parents if they have a clear will. Have one yourself. Leaving no will is a lack of Christian stewardship. Make the reading of your will a testimony of your faith in Jesus Christ.

Parable Of The Rich And Foolish Farmer (vv.16-20)

Jesus then told a tale to fix his warning in the imagination of the crowds. "There was," he began, "a certain rich man whose land brought forth plenty." Already a rich farmer, and what a good year it was. God's good soil yielded its bounty.

He was, I am told, a Clemson grad, an agribusiness tycoon with a big soybean and tobacco operation in the lower part of the state. Twelve tractors, four combines, a Cadillac customized into a pick-up truck, an autographed picture of Jerry Clower

⁷ "Only in America," *The Week* (2-3-06), 6.

on the mantel. Rain at just the right time. No bugs to speak of. "Boy, am I going to make a killing. Make the cover of *Progressive Farmer* and get invited to the governor's barbeque." Rich and getting richer. It did not cross his mind to consider the dark side of prosperity, that it could be a character test.

What would you do? He set up a discussion with himself which Luke lets us overhear- *self-talk* they call it, "What shall I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" Must have been a huge harvest. Notice he doesn't talk with anyone else, as was the custom in the villages where all matters were discussed at the city gate. Already we see how isolated he is in his prosperity. No mention of wife or children, family or friends. Not *us* and *our* but *I* and *my*- life as a singular possessive pronoun.

Ever notice how wealth has a way of doing that? It breeds fear, and fear leads to isolation. According to the values of our culture, and what any accountant would advise, our farmer did the right thing. It was, as they say, a *business decision*. God only knows how much evil has been committed under that unchallenged banner- a *business decision*- as if it gave a pass on larger, moral concerns. Money before God and profits before people. He radically enlarged his storage capacity. "I will pull down my barns and build larger barns; and I will store all my grain and all my goods. I will corner the commodities market when I make my play!"

If we do a simple word count of the farmer's question and answer with himself, we find six *I*'s and five *my*'s: "What shall *I* do, for *I* have no place to store *my* crops? *I* will do this. *I* will pull down *my* barns and build larger barns; and *I* will store all *my* grain and all *my* goods. And *I* will say to *my* soul...."

In this bit of interior dialog, the farmer reveals his heart. No concern beyond himself. No awareness the enormous harvest is a final gift from God and a final test of character. No sensitivity that with riches come responsibility.

But there is an even greater problem. He did say *my soul* didn't he? in the same breath as "*my* barns, and *my* grain, and all *my* goods." But his soul was not his own, not one more commodity under his control. The breath of life was on loan from God. He had deeds to the property, but God had a lien on his soul. "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul. Life is good and getting better." He was dead wrong. Long range plans were cut short by immediate accountability, "This night your soul is required of you...." What if today is your day? That was the question Jesus wanted to raise in every heart. He only has a few hours left.

You are a living soul, an amalgam of flesh and the breath of God, stamped in God's image with the capacity to relate to God. And the core, the personality that is you, is being formed or malformed by daily decisions and one day will be recalled for inspection. Several years ago I sat with a man, one who claims to know Christ, and he said to me after we probed his history and tickled out its repeated themes:

"I am a chronic liar. I am a cheat and a thief, and I have forced employees to lie for me. I am a bully and verbally abusive. If I don't get my way, I make others miserable, and I want to die, preacher! I have destroyed my family and I am so, so alone."

What would you say? I said something absolutely brilliant, "Sounds like sin and the devil to me! If this is who you've become on your own, why not try a better way? All the help you need- doctors and counselors, pastors and friends who love God- are within ten miles of where you sit, but only if you ask for help; otherwise, you will die. The Lord is here to help you make a new beginning starting right now." He was a rich man, but he was bankrupt in the account of riches with God. We were starting from very near zero, and he was old and cranky and brittle and drunk.

What a thrill it was to look across the green expanse of crops, to hire crews to tear down old barns and build new. How large his life; how small his soul. What a miniature man he had become along the way.

A farmer whose barns were full of corn used to pray that the poor be supplied, but when anyone in need asked for grain, he had none to spare. One day after hearing his father pray, his little boy said, "Father, I wish I had your corn."

"You do," said the father, "and just what would you do with it?"

His son replied, "I would answer your prayer."

The thought never crossed the farmer's mind; his desires are revealed in verse 19, "And I will say to *my soul*, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, enjoy yourself.'" The ancient name for this philosophy is *Epicureanism*. Today it's called *Hedonism- the Playboy Philosophy*. Life's goal is to maximize pleasure because you only go around once and since death puts an end to all pleasure, grab for the gusto now. It's life defined by the senses and their itching demands. It dominates pop-culture, and it is- sadly- the goal of many a retirement plan, "Now I get to do what I want!" How small, how narrow, how deadly.

Look at the airline magazines and TV. Is this not what's being sold as the meaning of life? To *have*, to *own*, to *indulge*. It is an ungodly, wicked, and shortsighted approach to life. This man was a practical atheist. Oh, he may have gone to synagogue, but when it came to business decisions and life plans, he ignored God. God gave a blessing as a final test of character, and he blew it! As he figured spreadsheets and reviewed the blueprints of his local empire, his soul hung invisibly in the balance. If that sounds dramatic, this is a dramatic story; remembering it may save you from the same mistake. Which brings me to a pointed application.

I'm not sure that much of what Christians do with retirement has anything to do with the kingdom of God. More free time? Good, but for what? Time with grandkids? Great. Time to travel? Wonderful. But not time to waste in trivial pursuits- endless golf or laying in the sun in some retirement village that serves prunes and Viagra daily. Being sixty-five does not release anyone from the demands of being a disciple. With the extension of life health care now gives, you may have ten, fifteen, or twenty years after your work life to do something that matters for eternity. Give the church ten hours a week as a lay minister. Go to seminary. Become a lay preacher and serve one of our smaller churches. Spend three to six months a year on the mission field. Finish well.⁸ But if you've not been walking with Christ all along, you'll miss it! Anyone who uses their resources only for their own pleasure is a fool and not worthy of using up any more of God's air. Souls are being recalled every day for just this reason. What could have been a blessing became a curse. God had enough of this man's presumption and issued a recall order on his pathetic, shriveled, soul. Verse 20: "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and what you have prepared, whose will these things be?'"

On August 17, 2008, Dave Freeman, co-author of *100 Things to Do Before You Die*, died at age 47 from a head injury incurred in a fall at home. His book inspired the movie *The Bucket List*. Freeman's list includes attending the Academy Awards, running with the bulls in Pamplona, and taking a voodoo pilgrimage in Haiti (not recommended!). He'd gotten to about No. 50 before his knock on the head. Tragically for Freeman and his readers, the 100 things he suggested did not include a relationship with Jesus Christ.⁹ Only one word for such an omission: foolish!

⁸ Check out www.finishers.org for a whole new movement for retirees.

⁹ A.P., "'100 Things' co-author Dave Freeman dies in LA," (8-26-08).

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Jesus' parable of the rich and foolish farmer, first spoken to an angry man in front of a huge crowd, leaves me with five counter-cultural insights:

- * We are stewards, not owners. The circle of life is larger than *I* and *My*. Life itself is a loan that will be recalled and carefully examined.
- * Unearned surpluses may come; and if they do, they are a test of character you want to pass, not fail. More stuff does not mean more life.
- * Third, our checkbook is perhaps the most spiritual record of our lives.
- * Next, a nation that goes to the mailbox for a letter from Publishers Clearing House or to Vegas in search of a dream or to scratch-offs for this week's groceries is in trouble because greed in any form is spiritual poison. The growth of the gambling industry is a tribute to how deeply covetousness is woven into our self-indulgent national character. We are giving ourselves over to corruption because we have not the political courage to deal honestly with taxes. We are prostituting and pimping our citizens- and particularly the most vulnerable- to the gambling industry. The spirit you feel there is not the spirit of Jesus, so why go?
- * Finally, to mistake money for life and life for self-indulgence is to invite God's judgment. Money is a tool to do good, not an excuse for a luxurious, self-centered lifestyle. Simplicity of lifestyle ought to characterize us as believers. The conspicuous display of wealth is obscene, and if not for others, then at least for the Methodists.

Jesus' States The Lesson Clearly For All (v.21).

Jesus' last comment was first meant for the younger brother who demanded his inheritance, but also for the crowd, and that includes all of us, verse 21: "So is he who treasures up for himself, and is not gathering riches for God." That is what scholars call a *generalizing conclusion*, or in folklore *the moral of the story*.

You don't have to be rich to live within the small circle of *I*, *me*, and *mine*. The issue is a miserly spirit that does not know the generosity of God and the call to love the neighbor. For most of us- and this is the normal way, breaking the power of a greed begins with tithing, the regular discipline of giving ten percent of what you

have to spend to God's work through the church. The tithe ought to be understood, not as the maximum but minimum standard of faithfulness. God will let you know when more is asked, sometimes much more.

Lori and I tithe and are open to God squeezing us when he wishes, and because I've just said this, I know I'll be tested soon! Our testimony over the years is that if it's required for our mission, God supplies it; and if God does not supply it, it's a distraction, and so we don't need it. I intend to live no other way: Kingdom-centered, Jesus-focused, Spirit-led, Mission-driven, Scripture-shaped, and supplied from the coffers of heaven. We all admire Mother Theresa, but for years she was unknown. She tells how her character was tested in this matter of a generous and trusting spirit:

"On my first trip along the streets of Calcutta after leaving the Sisters of Loretta, a priest came up and asked me to give a contribution for the Catholic press. I left with five rupees, and I had given four to the poor. I hesitated, then gave the priest the one that remained. That afternoon the same priest came and brought an envelope. He told me a man had given him the envelope because he had heard about my project. There were fifty rupees in the envelope. I had the feeling, at that moment, that God had begun to bless the work and would never abandon it."¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Did the younger brother get his inheritance? We don't know. What we know is that he received tremendous grace, enough to change everything if he responded. At the crossroads of life he was exposed and rebuked, then warned in a sizzling parable and called to decision. The question is: Will we gather riches only for ourselves, or also for God? C.S. Lewis wrote, "Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither."¹¹

Next Sunday, November 10, is Pledge Sunday at Main Street and we will have a single service followed by a meal. If you think I've told the truth today, I invite you to gather riches for God, that we may do the great work to which we are together called, here and around the world. Salvation cannot be purchased, but it is a gift that changes everything else. What Jesus wants is our trust and obedience.

¹⁰ Edited, *My Life for the Poor* (New York, NY: Ballentine, 1985).

¹¹ Paraphrase of Mt. 6:33, found at www.quotesdaddy.com
