The Rich Man and His Barns

Second in the series: “Parables of Jesus on Money and Things”

# Scripture: Luke 12:13-34

# Key thought: Eternal life gives us needed perspective on our money and things.

# Intro:

The occasion for today’s parable is an inheritance dispute that was brought to Jesus. Jesus does not attempt in any way to solve the dispute. In fact, this is one of the examples where Jesus deliberately avoids entangling himself in something that was not his responsibility. He was not the judge assigned to the case. This can be a lesson for us when other people try to involve us in solving their problems. Sometimes the best answer is to recognize that the problem is not our responsibility to solve.

But Jesus continues the discussion on the subject which was his forte; human motivation. He was a spiritual leader, and the person who had brought to him the inheritance dispute was in great spiritual danger from a common human malady – greed. So, while Jesus declined to solve his immediate problem, Jesus did give him some life giving advice –advice which will help us too.

"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 12:15 NIV

Then Jesus illustrated his lesson with a story, which is often called the parable of the rich fool. It is really a parable about how to look at abundance.

# Fantasy fulfilled

Jesus proceeded to tell about a man in in his day and culture whose fantasy of wealth was fulfilled. In that day, a good way to be comfortably wealthy was to be a farmer some acreage and have an unusually successful season or two. This would result in large stores of grain, which could then be sold to other people who were not so fortunate. This is the situation that Jesus chooses for his illustration. A man’s farm had been so successful that he needed more grain storage than he had to store all the grain that he had harvested. Our translation says he decided to tear down his existing barns and build bigger ones.  Now I’m old enough to remember when barns had granaries in them. I’ve helped shovel grain into the backside of the second-floor wooden granary bins in our barn and then shovel it back out again when it came time to make grist for the cattle. Those old wooden granaries inside of barns are probably the reason that our translation uses the word “barns.” The Greek word means simply a storehouse, a repository, a granary. Nowadays, a farmer with such a problem would not use a barn. They might just buy another of those large round metal granary bins.

But the problem that concerned Jesus was not the large harvest, or the manner of storage, it was the attitude of the farmer in the story. As Jesus tells the story, the farmer said to himself;

“You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” Luke 12:19 NIV

It was a very self-centered attitude. It was a greedy attitude in that it did not consider the responsibilities of stewardship. When God grants us a great harvest, whether of grain or of success in some other venture, he does so not just so we can take care of ourselves and spend the increase on our pleasure. God desires that we help take care of others as he gives us guidance. This man had no such thoughts of sharing any of his bounty with anyone else. There is no indication that he intended to give God a tithe as the OT required either.

I think Jesus told this parable so that we all would be prodded to think about our own greedy fantasies. Most of us have had or maybe still have fantasies about getting rich and comfortable and being able to take life easy and, “Eat, drink, and be merry.” On the one hand, it is simply human the wish to have life a little easier. But we have to admit that at some point, the whole scenario becomes greedy.

In our world today, gambling is big business. Ultimately, whether it’s lottery advertisements, or playing machines at a casino, greed is the driving factor. When people talk about their gambling habits, they say, “O pastor, if I ever won, I would give a whole bunch the church.” I just smile. What I’d like to do is reply with this simple question. What percentage of your income do you currently give to your church and to charity? You see the likelihood is that you would probably give about the same percentage of your income if your fantasies suddenly came true. In fact, unfortunately, statistically tell us that as a rule, those who are more wealthy give smaller percentages of their income than people who are less wealthy. There’s something about wealth that having more of it does not make it easier to let go of it. It makes it harder.

What is needed is a different perspective of the heart!  What is needed is another viewpoint on money and stuff. And that’s what Jesus provided for his questioner.

# Surprise

The parable contains a big surprise, a turning point. When interpreting a parable, always look for the surprise. That very evening the rich farmer in the story died. Considering that event, Jesus judges that this man whom everyone was thinking was hugely successful was really – a fool. That turn of events is intended to be a shock to his listeners.

The parable presses a hidden question. What is truly valuable? The rich man’s idea of value was in his stored crops. But they were worthless on the day of his death.

Jesus is teaching that the determiner of real value must include the consideration of our death. What will happen then? What will be valuable then?

I read a couple illustrations that we can relate to Jesus’ parable. I read that when the sailing ship Britannia was breaking up a storm, the order was given to abandon ship. The ship was carrying a cargo of many kegs of gold coins. As the ship was going down, there could be seen on deck one crewman who had not obeyed the order. He was feverishly working with a hatchet to open the kegs to get at the coins. He had lived in poverty and he was determined to die rich.

I ready another story from Texas in the twentieth century. It seems that one rich Texan had ordered that when he died he was to be buried in his Cadillac convertible with an expensive cigar in his mouth. So the undertaker dressed him up in a tux, sat him up in the front seat of his Caddy and put a big cigar in his mouth. At the graveside, as the Cadillac was being lowered into this mammoth grave, the man operating the crane was heard to exclaim, “Wow, that’s really living!”

We laugh, because such things just don’t make sense when viewed from the perspective our one’s death. Why did Jesus call the rich farmer in the parable a fool? The answer is found in verse 20, 21.

“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?’

“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.” Luke 12:20-21 NIV

So we can conclude, that person is a fool who stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.

## What does rich toward God mean?

What is the definition of rich toward God? We need to know what God values!

God values people. – John 3:16 They are the sheep of his pasture, the jewels of his crown (Zech. 9:16), and the sons and daughters of his family.

God values good character. I always think of the Proverb,

“Whoever pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor.” Prov. 21:21

I think also of what Paul said,

Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. 1 Tim 4:8

Certainly, the Fruits that the Holy Spirit produces in our lives are part of that picture (Gal. 5:22).

Peter tells us that a gentle spirit is of great value in the sight of God (1 Peter 3:4).

Furthermore, Peter encourages us to add to our faith various character virtues because in doing so we will be ready to receive a “rich welcome” in God’s eternal kingdom (2 Peter 1:5-8,11).

So, having good and godly character is a big deal with God.

### God values proper stewardship of money and things

This parable teaches us first of all that our usual assumption that all our assets are ours to use for our own pleasure is wrong thinking from the start. All of our assets are gifts of God. He gave us the ability to get them. His sovereignty landed us in circumstances where we could have them. So the place to begin is to recognize that we will all give an account to God of how we use our money and stuff.

**What uses of money will stand the test?**

Consider this passage from Paul. He is helping us to get a better perspective.

No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. 1 Cor 3:11-15 NIV

### Let’s ask the question again. What uses of our money and stuff passes the test?

* Using or assets to support ourselves and our families passes the test, in fact it is required (1 Tim. 5:8; 1 Thess. 4:11,12)
* Giving to those in need is a work that God approves (Eph. 4:28; Matt. 25:34-40). Such giving mirrors the compassion of Jesus. It is one way that we are the hands and feet of Jesus in the world today.
* Giving to God’s work also lays up treasure for eternity. From Moses call for contributions for the wilderness sanctuary (Ex. 35:5) to the call of King David for the Temple of Solomon (1 Chr. 29:5) to the sacrificial offering of the two small copper coins by the widow in Jesus’ day (Mark 12:42), there is always a role for gifts to the kingdom of God.

These are undoubtedly not the only uses of money and things that will stand the test. But they will help us get started in how to use our stuff in ways that stores up treasure in heaven (Luke 12:33).

# New perspective

## We need to change what we value

In the parable, the problem was not that the farmer was rich or that he became even richer. The problem was his focus on things of this world to the exclusion of his spiritual welfare. The question that Jesus wanted his questioner to ask was this. How was this rich farmer’s attitude or perspective on life similar to my perspective on money and stuff when I asked Jesus about inheritance? The problem was that rich farmer was valuing too highly that which was temporary. The man in the inheritance dispute who had asked Jesus to intervene likely was doing the same.

## We could apply the principle to our recreation for example

What about the way we spend our leisure time? John Wesley urged his Methodist preachers to never be triflingly employed. Why? The same perspectives will help us. We can judge our entertainments according to what will pass the test of usefulness on the Day when God judges our works. For example, what is the purpose of our recreation? Let’s recreation for an example.

* Recreation that will pass the test on the day God judges our works is first of all wholesome in itself. Would it be okay for Jesus to go along with you?
* Second, recreation that will pass the test on that day is probably also tied to a second purpose.

For example, we are playing golf partly to relate to friends. Or we are golfing alone because we are stewarding our energy and need some alone time with a rest and renewal activity. Self-care is not the same as selfishness.

In other words, the kinds of activities that will endure the test on that Day are not completely selfish. They are not energy spent just “gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts” (Eph 2:3 NIV). There is something larger in view, something of eternal significance.

## Jesus gives us further perspective by reminding us of our accountability to God

In the next part of the section Jesus pictures us as working for a Divine Master who will return and ask for an accounting of our service to him.

* ***"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return.” Luke 12:35,36 NIV***
* ***“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” Luke 12:40 NIV***

Jesus pictures us not as workers for ourselves but as workers for a grand Master – for God – for himself. Again, he reiterates. As Christians, we are not people whose highest interest is our own self-interest. Rather, we are people in charge for another, for one to whom we must one day give account. We oversee gifts that are to be used for him. We are temporarily in charge of finances to be used as God guides and for God’s purposes. We are workers who have been assigned responsibility in his Kingdom. When the Master returns, after we have given our accounting, we will be rewarded.

# Conclusions:

## **Jesus gives us three key and pointed admonitions about money and things in this passage.**

These three sentences from Jesus should be the basis for our new perspectives on things and money. They can guide us in keeping a spiritually healthy.

Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. Luke 12:15 NIV

Your Father knows that you need them. Luke 12:30 NIV

***It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready. Luke 12:38 NIV***