

## Feeling Independent? – God of Consent – Luke 12:20

### Scripture Reading: Luke 12:13-21

#### Introduction

A young investment professional who had experienced a very profitable quarter rewarded himself with a brand new Corvette and was testing it out on a mountain road when he lost control and slid toward the drop off

Recognizing his imminent peril he tore off his seatbelt and, at the very last moment, he leaped from the car and watched it as it tumbled end over end into the ravine below and burst into flames

Although he had escaped certain death he didn't escape without injury as the sleeve of his coat had been caught on some part of the car's frame and ripped his left arm off at the shoulder

A passing trucker who witnessed the accident stopped his truck and ran over to help and heard the young man wailing, "My 'Vette! My 'Vette! My new Corvette is gone!!!"

Well, the trucker pointed at the young guy's shoulder and said, "Hey buddy, I think you have bigger problems than losing the car. Your arm is gone!"

The young man tore his eyes off of his burning car and looked down at where his arm had been and started screaming, "My Rolex! My Rolex! My new Rolex is gone!!!"

#### **This morning's sermon is about misplaced priorities**

Luke 12:13-21 is known as The Parable of the Rich Fool and countless sermons have been preached on the passage through the years and most of those sermons have focused on the money aspect of the parable

I would suspect that you have all heard one or more pastors preach about greed or some other financial aspect using this text as a basis

That makes a lot of sense because Jesus is literally talking about money in the passage and the guy with the inheritance dispute and the rich farmer are portrayed as caring too much about money

But there is a message below the surface that I believe gives the passage a wider application and that's what we'll be exploring today

We're going to begin by looking at **the background** of Luke 12:13-21 to give us the context of the passage

Then we'll consider **the problem** that Jesus was highlighting when he told the parable

Lastly, we'll look at **the solution** that will keep us from being seen as a fool in God's eyes

Let's start by looking back just a bit to gain the perspective of context

### **I. The Background**

#### **In Luke 11 and the first part of Luke 12 we see Jesus teaching against the religious leaders**

Starting in Luke 11:37 we see Jesus rebuke the Pharisees over being concerned only about external matters

Jesus was very hard on them as he pronounced woe after woe against them for their various practices and omissions

And he called them out for being hypocrites or actors playing a part while being totally different behind their masks

I find it rather humorous that Jesus said all these things while he was a dinner guest in the home of one of the Pharisees

It must have been a dinner party of sorts because it's revealed that there were "lawyers" or scribes in attendance also

And one of them piped up and objects by telling Jesus that he took offense at what Jesus was saying

That proved to be a tactical error on the part of the lawyer because his protest caused Jesus to shift his focus to the lawyers

The scribes, or lawyers, were the recognized masters of interpreting and applying the Mosaic Law but the way they interpreted the Laws laid heavy burdens on the people while providing the savvy with elaborate loopholes

And in so doing they used the Word of God to oppress the masses while dodging their own responsibilities before God

Then Jesus went on to chastise them for claiming to honor the prophets of old whom their forefathers had killed while rejecting, persecuting, and even killing contemporary prophets – of course he was talking about himself and his disciples. And he told them that they would be held uniquely accountable for what they were going to do but also what they were doing by keeping others from seeing the truth and entering the kingdom of heaven.

Had they been as smart and wise as they fancied themselves they would have listened to Jesus and sought to change their ways.

But Jesus' words of condemnation went over about as well as you would expect such words to go over when leveled against a group of proud, self-important men and as chapter 11 ends we see the religious leaders plotting against Jesus.

Then as chapter 12 begins we see Jesus being followed by increasing numbers of people and teaching them two things. First, he tells them to beware of the negative influence of the Pharisees.

Second, he teaches them that even though the religious leaders seem powerful there is no reason to fear them because God sees what is going on and he values them highly and cares for them.

And Jesus promises heavenly reward for all who confess him and shunning for those who deny and speak against him.

Then he promises that God will give them strength and guidance through the Holy Spirit when persecution comes.

Jesus was teaching about important, spiritual matters – truth, honesty, commitment, and God's provision of care.

### **And as he's teaching, a guy comes up and asks Jesus to intervene in an inheritance dispute**

When we come to the interruption it seems like it's a request that comes straight out of left field.

The guy was obviously consumed with his own concerns and not paying attention to what Jesus was saying and he just blurts out his demand from the midst of the crowd.

And, without appreciating what he was doing, the man became the catalyst to another line of teaching.

There are a few details that we might overlook that are important to understanding the connection his demand has to the parable to come.

First, the Law already determined how an inheritance was to be divided between two brothers.

The eldest was to receive 2/3 and the younger was to receive 1/3 so that tells us that the petitioner was the younger brother and that he was likely seeking a 50/50 split which was more than he was entitled to indicating he was greedy.

The fact that this is even an issue also tells us that his father has just died which reveals what was truly important to him.

And in Jesus' response I think we get a bonus lesson.

Notice in verse 14 [**Luke 12:14**] Jesus asked the young man: "...who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?"

Jesus didn't feel it was his responsibility to get involved in every dispute and to settle every matter and there were some disputes he simply refused to get tangled up in.

The day will come when Jesus is going to judge everyone but not yet and he knew he had a bigger job to complete.

So he used the demand to teach a much more valuable lesson that would have also served to settle the matter of the inheritance if the man understood it and took it to heart.

And Jesus told him and the crowd to beware of covetousness because it is always lurking and deceitful because having an abundance of possessions doesn't satisfy the way we think it will.

Benjamin **Franklin** is quoted as saying: "Money never made a man happy yet, nor will it. The more a man has, the more he wants. Instead of filling a vacuum, it makes one."

And that is so true, grabbing and grasping for possessions is sort of like drinking saltwater in that it seems to work at first but only creates a deeper thirst in the end.

Then, after giving the warning, Jesus told the parable of the rich fool in verses 16-21 and as we look at it we will see that it contains lessons that go beyond money and greed even though it is told in the context of those issues

So, as we begin to look at the parable itself, let's look first at the problem as Jesus presents it

## **II. The Problem**

And the problem may not be what you think it is because

### **It was not that the man was successful and rich**

The first thing Jesus tells us in verse 16 [**Luke 12:16**] about the man is that he was productive – in fact he was prodigiously productive

He says the man had a fertile piece of ground and I think it's safe to assume that he worked to make it even more fruitful because that's the nature of farming –

Crops don't just spring up someone has to prepare the ground, plant the seeds, tend the plants as they mature, and harvest the increase - and the result was that this man brought in a bumper crop

We know the Bible tells us that there are difficulties that arise when one is rich but being wealthy is never condemned Industry and thrift are encouraged in its pages

It's not a bad thing to be successful in your line of work or when your investments pay off and being wealthy isn't a sin

There is no indication that the man in the parable got rich unjustly and he doesn't appear to be guilty of greed like the young man with the inheritance as he declares his willingness to sit back and simply enjoy the fruits of his large harvest

And although his abundant harvest caused him problems when he considered his storage capacity, there is nothing inherently wrong with him building bigger barns to store it

How much more foolish would it have been to have simply left the grain in the field to rot?

And there was nothing wrong with him looking at the harvest and thinking that it was enough to last him a long time because there is nothing wrong with setting money and goods aside and saving for the future

After all, in **Proverbs 6:6-8** we are told to be like the ant; to be industrious and plan for the future

In fact, we see Joseph commended for doing just that in Egypt as he set up granaries in the bountiful years to store grain for the lean years that we coming

So we are safe in saying that the man was not being called a fool because he was a productive farmer who planned for his future

So why exactly did Jesus refer to him as a fool?

### **It was that he viewed himself as independent**

I want you to notice how often he refers to himself in this very short dialogue starting in verse 17 [**Luke 12:17-19**]

*“What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store **my** crops?” 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. And I will say to **my** soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”*

Counting up the reference to himself we find he used the word “I” six times and the word “my” five times

He was completely self-absorbed and preoccupied only with himself – his possessions, his needs, his plans, and his pleasures

He left God completely out of the picture as all of his thoughts were I, my, and I will

What he had was his alone and what he did with it was up to him alone and for his benefit alone

In the movie, Shenandoah, Jimmy Stewart plays the patriarchal character by the name of Charlie Anderson and there is a scene in the movie where he and his extended family are gathered around the table for a Sunday dinner and Charlie Anderson prays the following prayer before they begin to eat

“Lord, we cleared this land; we plowed it, sowed it, and harvested it. We cooked the harvest. It wouldn’t be here – we wouldn’t be eating it – if we hadn’t done it all ourselves. We worked dog-bone hard for every crumb and morsel but we thank you just the same anyway, Lord, for this food we’re about to eat. Amen.”

I think Charlie Anderson and our farmer were a lot alike except we have no indication that our farmer even considered God’s part in his prosperity and future plans at all

So he was a fool for leaving God out of the equation of his life but

### **It was also because he gave no thought to eternity**

When someone is called a fool in the Bible it isn’t an indictment of their mental ability as we commonly use the word today

Rather, “fool” is used to describe someone who lacks spiritual discernment

And a fool is someone who makes their choices and plans as if God doesn’t exist and lives as if God hasn’t spoken

The rich man in the parable had proven to be a capable farmer and he believed that, with proper management, he was set and would live a good life for years to come

He had worked hard, been successful, and was looking forward to living the remainder of his years in leisurely comfort

But then God entered the picture in verse 20 [**Luke 12:20**] and says he is a fool because he is going to die that very night

God tells him “This night your soul will be required of you...” and that word “required” indicates an obligation

It’s the language of economy and it carries the sense of a debt owed –

And sense the word “soul” in this instance means life the loan of life that he has enjoyed is being called

The man had thought his life was in his own hands as he relished his success and made plans for his future but he failed to recognize that God was in control that night would be his last

All his plans would remain unfulfilled and his wealth would go to another

He was a prime example of the admonition we read in **James 4:13-16** –

*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”— yet 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. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.*

While we know, at least in an intellectual sense, that we are all just one heartbeat or one accident away from death and eternity we really don’t tend to think our death is imminent

But put yourself in the place of the rich man in our parable

What if God were to say to you: “Tonight your soul is required of you”

Are you ready for that?

Can you face the possibility of God calling the loan of your life and be satisfied with the way you have managed all that God has put under your care and stewardship?

**Hebrews 9:27** tells us that every person (except those who have trusted Christ and are still alive for the rapture) will die and after that comes judgment

So, beyond trusting in Christ for salvation, how can we be sure that we will be ready for the judgment?

### **III. The Solution**

The first thing you need to do is

#### **Give God primacy in your life**

Remember that Jesus told this parable as a result of a greedy young man demanding more than his fair share of his father's inheritance

Jesus was in the midst of talking to the crowd about being on guard against the false teaching and example of their religious leaders and God's love and provision toward them when this young fellow blurted out his request

His interest wasn't on God or on eternity but on how much money he could get in the here and now

The young man and his greed were on one end of the spectrum and the farmer was on the other because even though he was content with his big harvest he was guilty of feeling self-satisfied with his supposed self-sufficiency

And though they were quite different in their financial outlook they were the same in that they disregarded God

There is a bumper sticker I have seen from time to time that says: "The one who dies with the most toys wins"

But the reality is that it doesn't matter how rich a person might be they leave it all behind when they die and if they've left God out of the equation they wind up bankrupt in the only economy that matters

Remember, having possessions and enjoying them and setting a portion aside for another day are not wrong

The rich farmer wasn't condemned for being successful or for planning for his future

He was condemned because he was self-centered and because he left God out of the picture and for giving no thought to eternity – and God called him a fool

Therefore, the wise person will

#### **Recognize God's sovereignty**

We've already seen how the rich farmer used the pronoun "I" six times and the possessive pronoun "my" five times

And like Charlie Anderson he undoubtedly worked for everything he had – he might have even worked dog-bone hard for it

But like Charlie Anderson he failed to acknowledge God's part in all of it

Had they been wise they would have recognized that their ability to labor was because God gave them the strength to do so, their ability to plan was because God gave them the mind to do so, and their ability to harvest was because God so ordered the universe so that seeds grow and the ground nourishes them along with the rain and sunshine in turn so that they multiply for the harvest

And they would have been thankful to God rather than ignoring all he had given them – and so will we if we are wise

We also need to recognize God when making future plans unlike the rich farmer

Just as he failed to acknowledge God in his prosperity he ignored him as he made his plans and all his grand plans came to naught

Again, there is nothing wrong with planning and saving for the future – it's actually foolish not to do so – but to do so with no regard for what God would have us do is even more foolish

And to view the money and possessions God has entrusted to our stewardship as ours alone and ignore God's instructions regarding money is the height of foolishness

Jesus spoke more about money and our attachment to it during his earthly ministry than he did about heaven and hell combined because he knew how much of a problem materialism is for us

And we need to consult God's Word and make all our financial decisions in light of its teachings

And that bring us to our final way we will look at today about solving our tendency toward greed and self-sufficiency

As we see in verse 21 [**Luke 12:21**] we must be

## **Be “rich toward God”**

In the context of the passage being rich toward God is the opposite of laying up treasure for [yourself]

But what exactly does that mean if it’s not wrong to have things and to save for the future?

Again, we need to consider what we learn from the two men who serve as negative examples

The first young man was greedy and believed that his satisfaction was dependent on getting what he thought was his due from his father’s inheritance

That is to say, he put too much emphasis on having an abundance of possessions while being indifferent toward God

And the second man ignored God altogether as he focused only on the material things of this world

From their examples we can ascertain that being rich toward God means that we view knowing God and interacting with God as our riches and counting God as being more valuable than anything on this earth

Consider how differently the first young man would have acted if he was seeking to please God

Would he not have decided that living in harmony with his brother was more valuable than a bigger piece of his dad’s pie?

And would not the farmer have turned to God and sought what he would have him do with his abundant blessing?

How he might use God’s blessing to him for God’s glory while trusting in God to care for him in the future?

When we went through the Sermon on the Mount a while back we saw where Jesus taught about this very dilemma concerning the tug-of-war between treasure on earth and treasure in heaven and he said in **Matthew 6:21** “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”

And then in verse 24 [**Matthew 6:24**] he went even further by saying –

*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

## **Conclusion**

The problem isn’t how much you make or how much you have but how much you value what you have and where you find your satisfaction and security

The problem isn’t even so much what you do with your possessions but whether you use your possessions with God in mind and try to please him with your use of them

Let me ask you some pointed questions that should help you to know if you are being foolish when it comes to your stuff

1. Who truly owns the stuff you call yours? Can you rightly use it however you please or are you charged with being a faithful manager of it?

2. Are you more concerned about a comfortable life now and your retirement years or your eternity? How is your answer reflected in your use of your stuff?

A wise man once said, “Don’t tell me what you value and where your priorities lie. Show me your financial statements and I’ll tell you.”

Let’s ask God to help us have a right attitude toward our possessions and to help us to find our wealth in him alone

Let’s pray