

Luke 12:13-21  
*Rich Towards God*  
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell  
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Good morning once again, I want to welcome you, especially if you are new here, my name is Jonathan, I am the pastor at Wabash Pres, and if you are a visitor we are very glad you're here. It's time now that we turn to God's word. Today is a subject about which Jesus had lots to say. Jesus knew that this subject was closer to the heart of faith than nearly anything else, more than the subject of heaven or hell, more than prayer, more than social justice—the subject to which I'm referring is money. Now before we get into it I'd like to ask my users, if you wouldn't mind guarding the doors, just in case any of you try to make a run for it.

No other subject has the potential to keep us from experiencing God's true purpose and abundance, than our bank accounts. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, where we place our treasures in order importance—that's where we'll find out where our heart is.

I'm going to give you my point right out in front: Jesus teaches that true life, life that is abundant, full of joy and peace and gratitude comes when we are rich towards God. Not driven towards what the bible calls “every manner of possession.” So what does it mean to be rich towards God?

Turn with me to Luke chapter 12, starting at verse 13. **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.”**

Jesus is teaching, when out steps a man with a request. What does he ask of Jesus? To make a decision about an inheritance among family members. In that day, when a family member died and there was not a will stating how the assets would be divided, the older brother would be responsible for dividing up the estate—he would get two thirds and the younger the rest. So, in our text this morning there is a conflict over an inheritance.

Is this a strange story? Do any of you know the trouble inheritances can cause for siblings? Do you know why? **Because money can make us do crazy things.**

In my internship year I had lunch with a man from the congregation after worship one day. And during the course of our talk this man stated, rather proudly in fact, that he was the owner of a classic automobile, handed down by his father...AND that as a result it had caused a rift between he and his younger brother, and they had not spoken in 10 years.

This sounds crazy, but it's really pretty common. Money and inheritance can cause us to make ridiculous decisions.

This man who comes to Jesus is not coming for wisdom, he's come with a property dispute. He is coming to him as Rabbi, who, in Jewish culture was the arbitrator between two people in times of conflict. And what this man wanted was Jesus to give a ruling over this property dispute. To him,

the relationship with his brother is as good as gone, he just wants to make sure he gets his. And Jesus says, I won't do it.

But what he does is take that moment to turn and teach the crowd. Do you see what it says in verse 15: **Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness (other translations: greed), for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.**

The matter Jesus is addressing is greed. Greed is one of the most dangerous conditions that can affect our lives, and it is uniformly condemned in the New Testament. When the Apostle Paul gives lists of things to be on the lookout for, greed is always included. When he says things like: be on the lookout for evil, wickedness and all kinds of malice, he also includes greed. When he warns against impurities that ruin Christian communities: impurity, sexual deviance, all manners of passion, he also always includes greed.

Whenever the bible speaks about dangers and destructive behaviors to guard yourselves against, Greed is always among them. And yet in today's conversations among Christian leaders in leadership in churches, government, business rarely do you hear them asking if greed is a part of their life. Pastors are just as susceptible to this as any other...

Greed is deeper than the desire for possessions. But greed is not the desire for a possession, but the desire for possessing. Having something and enjoying it is one thing (not greed); to want more always with insatiable thirst and covetousness (greed). The drama of discovering, strategizing, and obtaining that is not satisfied by the thing itself that is greed.

But we don't have to be rich to be greedy, we don't have to be rich to be possessed by our possessions. Have you ever had something really nice, and you found yourself taking special precautions always to protect and shelter it. Maybe it was a car, or a bike, or a tool, or perhaps you're like me and the one you struggle with is time greed. And you worried that if you weren't careful something would happen to it, it would get dinged or dented or stolen. Do you remember the worry that went along with that? It's horrible, right?

Jesus tells his listeners to be on the lookout for *all manners of greed*. Not just money, but all manners of greed. The one that says if I just get this degree, or I just get this relationship, if I just get this accolade, or if I just get into this social circle, or win the approval of this group, then I will be happy. Why are we to be on the lookout for all manners of greed? One's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Jesus is talking to this man and sharing important wisdom with him and with us, because this man—like each of us—is looking for true life. He thinks it comes when he is financially secure and stable, when he is set and has all of his financial issues resolved, then he will be content. Jesus warns him, this is not where true life comes from. And then he goes on to tell him a story.

**“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.”**

The story is about a rich man, who is rich before the season where his fields produce abundantly. So not only is this guy rich, but he’s just landed a bumper crop. What does this mean? Cha-ching.

So he asks himself, what should I do with all my extra crops now that I don’t have enough room for them in my barns? I know, I’ll tear down my barns and build larger ones. Notice he didn’t say I’ll add another barn alongside my existing one—this would mean sacrificing valuable producing land. This guy is very shrewd.

The second thing we see here is something that you financial wizards probably already know. This man understands the economic concept of supply and demand. Some might think, now that I have this abundance the thing to do would be take it to market and sell it—this will get me more moola. But he doesn’t, he stores it waiting for a year when there is a shortage and he can sell it at a premium and really bring in the cash.

You see, this man lives in an agrarian society that is based on subsistence farming—you eat and sell what you grow. And if you don’t grow enough and don’t have money to buy food, you don’t eat. And by holding back large amounts of food, this man is able to control the markets. It’s pretty clever. He’s going to do whatever he can to make as much money as he can, but why does he do this? It’s here in verse 19.

**19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”**

What this man wants is a satisfied soul. He wants to come to a place in his life where he can find peace and rest and contentment, but the way he does it is by acquiring enough possessions so that he is shielded from the world’s cares and concerns, he is shielded from the pressures of a culture that is not always sympathetic to those who have less. He thinks that in the world of happiness that it is a zero sum game—the more I have the happier I will be, and the less I have the more anxious, discontent, and miserable I will be.

This man wants a merry soul, he wants contentment and gladness, that’s a good thing, we should want that too. God wants our souls to be satisfied. But the problem with this man is that he doesn’t have the first clue how to find it. He’s still using the Rockefeller metric of satisfaction...”just a little more.”

Researchers have studied this extensively, looking at people who won the lottery, people who have become very wealthy one way or another. They uniformly agree that the acquisition of possessions does not bring greater and long-lasting happiness—momentarily maybe, but over the long run people go back to the way they were before.

Do you know what Jesus wants for you and me? He wants us to be free. He wants us to be free of the thought that if we can just get this thing, this possession, this relationship, this job, this degree, this accolade, then we’ll be happy.

This is the problem with this man who wanted Jesus to arbitrate between he and his brother, and it's the problem with the man in the parable. When we look for happiness and peace in the possession of things we will always, always come up tragically short.

Do you see the next line in the parable, this is staggering, this is where it really comes into sharp focus. Verse 20 says this: **But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'**

Tonight this guy is going to die. And the eulogy that God gives at his funeral is a single word, "fool." You ever hear a pastor give that kind of eulogy? That pastor would not be very popular.

This very night your life is being demanded of you, in the world of lending "demanded of you" is another way of saying, the owner is calling in the debts. The landowner would come and say, time's up, I want back what is mine. What Jesus is saying to us here is that even our very lives do not belong to us. The trouble with thinking that real life comes from possessions is much deeper, not just that your possessions are your own, but it's the thinking that your very life is your own—it's not. Our lives are on loan from God. So the point that Jesus is making here is that it is impossible for us to have real life in our possessions, it's impossible for us to have real life in our financial security, it's impossible for us to have real life, unless we have it in relationship with God.

Unless we search for real life in a relationship with God we are likely to end up like this man...a fool.

Being rich towards God means we seek happiness and contentment where Jesus says it can be found, not in every manner of possession. If we spend our lives accumulating stuff and seeking happiness in what we can acquire, things that do not last, but only turn to dust, if this is what we are driven towards, when our lives expire the same thing will be said of us that was said of this man, fool.

So that brings us back to our initial question: where is real life? Jesus answers this question in the second half of verse 21. The person who finds real life does so when they are **rich towards God**.

So what does it mean to be rich towards God? Well if we look at the parable Jesus just told we see a man who is rich by one measure, but it is the wrong measure. He is rich in the eyes of the world, but he is impoverished towards God. He thinks that if he just keeps his grain and sells it when the market is scarce, making lots of money, that he will be rich. If this man were rich towards God what do you think he would do with the produce?

Instead of storing the produce in barns he would store it in the bellies of the hungry people in his town. The way we become rich towards God is by sharing with others what we have, by holding on to everything we have loosely, because it's all on loan from God anyway. The way we become rich towards God is in freely giving our possessions to those who do not have enough. Now we can go around and around making excuses and theorizing why handouts are no good and that people need a hand up, about whether we're keeping people impoverished by giving to them—it doesn't matter, they're still hungry right now.

Being rich towards God means instead of storing our excesses in bank accounts or barns, or even worse, storage units, that we use what we have and what we've been blessed with to share God's

goodness with others. **God expects us to share our money with the poor.** There is no other way around it, no matter how you parse it.

We as a church and as individuals can pursue all kinds of things, but what Jesus is saying to us is that the place where true life is found is in being rich towards God. Ultimately how does this happen? When you have a relationship with Jesus Christ and he is the one who leads you and guides your decision making in life.

When Jesus guides your decision making you will see that true and everlasting peace can ever only be found when he guides our spending and sharing habits. When Jesus guides your decision making you will find incomparable wealth and joy in absurdly giving yourself and your resources away because you know that it is God who created the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, and he takes care of them, and so how much more will he take care of you. You can only experience this freedom, this contentment, this peace, this joy when you are in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

And I promise if you commit today, in the weeks and months to come, that you are going to seek to make decisions regarding your finances according to Jesus' metric metric you will experience a freedom you could have never imagined. It's the freedom of a living trust in our loving, and abundantly giving God. Does this sound good to you? Is this something you would like in your life? Then let's pray together that God would help us get there. Let's pray.