

PARABLES IN LUKE

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Lesson 3

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL Luke 12:13-21

What is the greatest of all sins? Is it murder? Is it adultery? Is it lying? It is pointless to try to determine the greatest sin because all sin, big and small, is abhorrent to a holy God. However, I think it is safe to say that one of the more subtle and obnoxious sins to God is the sin of greed or covetousness. This is one of the most common sins and one which the human heart is very prone to commit.

Greed is what caused the angels to rebel and follow Satan, for they were not content with their first estate. Covetousness was at the basis of the sin of Adam and Eve for they were not content and satisfied with what God had planned for them in the Garden of Eden. The lust for things and power has been the basic cause for misery and unhappiness upon earth. Wars, quarrels, strife, divisions, disputes, jealousies and hatred of all sorts may all be traced to the fountainhead of greed.

In America today, we see the sin of greed or covetousness most clearly in the area of materialism. The lust for money to gain things has exploited people, raped our nation ecologically and destroyed millions of individuals. In America today, her curse is greed, her idol is money and her god is materialism. This covetous spirit takes so many forms, and the Parable of the Rich Fool speaks directly to our situation in this country.

THE SETTING (12:13,14)

“And someone in the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’” -- Some hearer in the crowd to whom Jesus was speaking asked the Lord to deal with a worldly, temporal matter that was bothering him. This anonymous hearer probably had some vague idea that Christ was going to set up a kingdom in this world and reign upon the earth; therefore, he thought Christ had the authority to solve the problem of dividing an inheritance.

“But He said to him, ‘Man, who appointed me a judge and arbitrator over you?’” -- The Lord Jesus knew what was in this man’s heart and He knew that this man’s motives were not pure, for he was filled with the lust for money. Jesus had been teaching on spiritual truths and this man wanted him to deal with carnal, worldly matters. He abruptly refused the man’s request because his whole motivation and value system was based on greed.

Christ knows a person’s heart and He sees right through our superficiality and materialistic sham. We cannot hide greed and the lust for things from the omniscient Christ.

THE PRINCIPLE (12:15)

“And He said to them, ‘Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed;’” -- Using the example of this very covetous man, Christ told the crowd to watch out for greed in any and every form it might take, both in them and in others.

Men must be warned against greed, for how one handles lust for things in his life has eternal consequences.

“For not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.” --Our Lord made a profound statement that life does not consist of things; existence is more than materialism. In fact, real life has nothing to do with possessions.

Covetousness is folly. No man enjoys real happiness, rest for his soul, or peace, nor finds the true meaning of life in the possession of things. Man cannot live by bread alone because he has been created to live in dependence upon God. Man was not made to amass great wealth per se, but he was made to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. The answer to life is not in possessions but in the person of Christ, not in riches but in regeneration!

Only the man who knows God can say, ***“I have learned in whatever state I am therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11)***. Only a Christian submits himself to God’s sovereign purposes. A true Christian knows that if he has only a few worldly goods, that it probably would not be well for him to have much. And, if he has many worldly goods and these things were taken away, he would still be satisfied with Christ.

THE PARABLE (12:16-20)

“And He told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a certain rich man was very productive.’” -- To illustrate His point about covetousness, our Lord told the story or parable of the rich fool who thought that he could find real happiness in earthly abundance, but who, on reaching the climax of his acquisition of wealth, was unexpectedly snatched away by death. Obviously, this man was rich because his lands were very fruitful. He must have been an excellent farmer and there is no evidence that he came by his wealth dishonestly. He was a diligent, hard working, skillful farmer who was a self-made and self-sufficient man who did not have time for God in his life. He did not attribute anything in his life to the common grace of God.

In our day, it is not that most men are anti-God, but that they do not have time for God because of their materialistic pursuits. They are too busy with things to think about God, and, furthermore, if they think too much about God, they might have to change their value system and lifestyle and they do not want that because they love money and the pleasure it brings.

And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do since I have no place to store my crops?’” -- This man had so much production from his lands that he did not know what to do with all his crops. Notice carefully that this man’s reasoning process was totally secular so that his mind was completely on scheming and planning how to make more money. His whole being was materialistically oriented.

The more money increases, the more time one thinks about it. There is a real sense in which riches make a person’s life more complicated and complex because he is always trying to figure out how to spare and to spend, or, as we say it today, “How to make a buck with a buck.” The wealthy have many worries about what to do with what they have and how they should dispose of it. More often than not, the possession of

things produces an insatiable desire for more. We know that many more rich men commit suicide than poor people, because of the pressures of greed.

“And he said, ‘This is what I shall do.’” -- This rich man’s possessions took him on an ego trip, and the big “I” became the center of his life - “This is what I shall do.” There is absolutely no thought of God in his life and he felt he was the master of his own life; he was a self-sufficient and self-made man. Because this man was rich, he was probably cultured, educated, and well respected by most. He was a nice guy, but totally secular.

“I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.” -- Notice very carefully this man’s subtle greed - my barns, my grain and my goods. He did not regard his possessions as something lent to him by God to be used wisely for God’s purposes. On the contrary, he felt everything belonged exclusively to him and he had a monopoly on all his possessions to be used for his own pleasure, enjoyment and glory.

Friend, have you ever asked yourself three basic questions about money; “Where did it come from? Why was it given? What am I to do with it?” This rich fool, as so many modern-day rich fools, never answered these questions except on a human level, and never saw God behind the acquisition of any and all wealth.

“And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.’” -- This rich fool actually believed that money, possessions and materialism were the essence of security. His wealth brought him a carnal and false security because he missed the true meaning of life, which is spiritual. This man acquired great treasures in this life, but in so doing ignored his responsibility to God and the reality of the next life. He was a materialist through and through and every thought was geared towards making himself happy in this life by the gratification of the flesh.

Today people think they have arrived when they can live the good life. The good life of luxury and leisure brings a false security to men and they think that they have no need of God. Financial security lulls men to sleep and hardens their consciences to God.

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you;’” -- When this man had reached the zenith of self-satisfaction and absorption in material affairs, God spoke to him and required his soul in death. Just when he thought he had it made, death ended everything he had slaved for as an industrious human being. This rich fool had not taken into account the possibility of death, and, much worse, that he would give an account to God. This man was a fool. The word “fool” means “without mind or sense or understanding.” He lived as a man who thought he would enjoy earthly possessions forever, but how wrong he was. He lived as if there was no death, no judgment and no world to come. He was sincere, but he was sincerely wrong. He chose to live as a materialist and ignore God, so at death he lost his soul and faced the wrath of an angry God who damned him forever. This rich fool left this world poorer than the poorest beggar.

O, how many people there are in this world, sincere people, nice people, who are materialists. Their goal in life is to gain money, possessions and fame. They think that they are masters of their own destinies, but they are not. God will one day strike them down with death. The irony of it all is that they will not be able to take one particle of

their riches with them into eternity, and their riches which they thought a blessing are actually a cursing. Men are fools!

It is very difficult for a rich man to be saved, because money puts before him so many alluring temptations and he thinks that money is security. It is difficult for a rich man to be saved, but it is not impossible!

“And Jesus looked at him and said, ‘How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ And they who heard it said, ‘Then who can be saved?’ But He said, ‘The things impossible with men are possible with God’” (Luke 18:25-27).

Men often say, “I would rather be rich than poor!” Humanly speaking this is true, for poverty has many disadvantages. However, riches destroy more souls than poverty ever has or will!

“And now who shall own what you have prepared?” -- When a materialist dies, he not only loses his soul, but he has no guarantee that his money will be used the way he wants it to be used. Greed is often a strong motive in the inheriting of money, and those who inherit it are many times destroyed. Many a person, if he could have seen before death what would have happened to his money and its effects upon others, would have never left it.

THE MORAL (12:21)

“So is the man who lays up treasures for himself,” -- The fatal end of a materialist is hell. Why? Because a materialist never learns that Christ, eternal life and grace are the only lasting possessions. Only eternal things have eternal value!

“And is not rich toward God.” -- Here is the key. A spiritual man is rich towards God and lays up treasure in heaven as well as on earth. How does one become rich toward God? By trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation. ***“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (II Corinthians 8:9).*** Christ died to make men spiritually rich and to give them the real meaning of life. Who is the truly rich man? The man who is rich in grace, who is rich in faith, and who is rich in good works. The man who is in Christ, whose name is inscribed in the book of life and is an heir of God and a joint heir of Christ, this is the rich man! His treasure is incorruptible. His bank never breaks. His inheritance never fades away. The Devil cannot steal his spiritual riches from him. Man cannot deprive him of these spiritual riches. Not even death can snatch spiritual riches from the Christian.

“So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God” (I Corinthians 3:21-23).

Lest I be misunderstood, this parable does not condemn the possession of worldly goods, but what it does condemn is a covetous and carnal attitude with regard to earthly wealth, the trust in materialism instead of God, and a failure to recognize that all material possessions are a gift from God. ***“For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (I Corinthians 4:7).*** God chooses to give some Christians wealth and He wants them to enjoy this wealth in any and all ways that glorify Him, as long as He is given first place in their lives.

“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed” (I Tim. 6:17-19).

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and God wants Christians to use the world but not abuse it. It is not riches that God condemns, but our attitude towards them. It is not money that is the root of all evil, but the love of money which is the root of all evil.

If God has given you money, then you must use it wisely for Him. With wealth comes greater accountability to God. Money has caused many to err from the faith, and money obviously causes Christians to have more materialistic temptations. Beware of greed; it can destroy your relationship with Christ!

When Carol and I went back to California a few years ago, we stopped in to see one of my close seminary buddies who is now a pastor at one of the best evangelical churches in California. In the course of the conversation, he told me that he had inherited around two hundred thousand dollars, and this sudden acquisition of wealth at first almost ruined his Christian life. Most noticeable was his prayer life, for he admitted that the security of money caused him to stop praying for his daily bread. For awhile, he no longer put his trust in God, but in the bank that was holding his money. When he realized what money was doing to him, he put the money in a trust fund and he now draws a reasonable portion from the interest to have a comfortable living but he gives the great majority of the interest money to the Lord's work. He now prays more earnestly than ever that God will show him how and where to use his money for God.

CONCLUSION

For you without Christ, I have just one word for you. Worldly possessions will never fill the spiritual hunger of your soul. Wealth apart from Christ makes one frustrated, miserable and unhappy. St. Augustine many years ago said, “Our hearts are restless, O God, until they find their rest in Thee.” Only those who are rich in Christ have found the real answer to life, for they are living for God for whom they were originally created.

The world calls wealthy and powerful men clever, prudent and wise, but God calls them fools if they have built a life apart from Christ. They have gained earthly

success and lost their souls. ***“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36)*** If you are trusting any of your riches to get you to heaven, you are a fool! If you are trusting your culture which money gave you to get you to heaven, you are a fool! If you are trusting your education, which money bought you, to get you to heaven, you are a fool!

Only Christ can make you spiritually rich and take you to heaven. If you are trusting in anything or anyone but Jesus Christ to take you to heaven, one day at the appointed hour of your death, God will call for your soul and will say to you, “You fool! You fool! You fool!”