

Sermon Reading: Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

¹⁴ Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” ¹⁵ Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

¹⁶ And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

¹⁸ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

²⁰ “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?’

²¹ “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Sermon Theme: Be Rich towards God

“Meaningless, meaningless,” says the Teacher, “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” The idea behind that word “Meaningless” has this picture of passing vapor; it’s here and then it’s gone. When you first read those words from Ecclesiastes it sounds like a terribly sad outlook on life. But we can understand how someone might get to that point. You think about the amount time and energy we put into so much and sometimes you might wonder, did it mean anything? The work and energy put into sports for memories, trophies, and awards that fade, collect dust, or you’ve already pitched them into the garbage. You make the smart choices to be healthy only to end up getting sick. All the time and effort you put into raising your children to watch them grow up and do the things that you told them not to do. One spends their entire life acquiring all of these different things, works so many hours so that they can have this stuff, and then it’s all gone in an afternoon at the auction. But the Teacher’s point from Ecclesiastes is not that nothing in life has meaning. Jesus’ point in Luke is not that stuff and things are bad. No, the lesson to be learned today is how being rich towards God gives us a meaningful life.

In Luke 12:13-21 Jesus is talking to a large crowd of people when a random individual has an interesting request for Jesus: **“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”** Evidently when the inheritance was divided up it did not sit well with this man. Whether he was in the right or he was being selfish and greedy is not shared with us. The point is, he recognizes that Jesus was an important guy who people listened to. It’s not too hard to imagine that people went around saying things like, “Well, I heard Jesus say once...” as we do today when quoting famous people and thinkers. Already people recognize Jesus is someone who speaks with power

and authority. So this man probably thought that if Jesus says something, his brother will have to listen to him.

But Jesus responds: “**Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?**” The man wanted Jesus to be one thing but Jesus wasn’t the man he was looking for. We see something similar today. One wants Jesus to be a sort of Captain America who is going to come and defend all that is patriotic and red, white, and blue. Another wants Jesus to be the Official Social Justice Warrior who fixes the problems in society. One looks to Jesus as the Financial Savior while another wants him to be their relationship guru. Still others only see Jesus as this good teacher who teaches us some good morals and way of life. Like the man in Luke, we can fail to appreciate that Jesus is exactly what we need Jesus to be. Jesus could have easily done what the man asked; but that wasn’t the reason why he came to live in this world. He knows that if he heads down that road it would only distract from the real work that he was sent here to accomplish.

But, as the man called him Teacher, so Jesus sees an opportune moment to teach. Jesus says, “**Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.**” This is something you need to continually be on the lookout for. Be on your guard; it’s going to attack you in more than one way. Be constantly vigilante against all kinds of greed. Greed is the desire of wanting to have more and never being satisfied.

But Jesus isn’t just teaching against the action of greed and wanting more; he’s teaching against the sinful heart that greed comes from. And so he teaches us about a certain rich man. Now this man, who already was wealthy, had a piece of land that produces unusually well. It does so well he asks himself, “**What should I do? I have no place to store my crops.**” God had already blessed this man in the past and now God blesses him again with the harvest he just brought in. Being rich, being wealthy, having success and accomplishments isn’t a bad thing. It’s a blessing from God!

So what does the man do? He’s a good businessman and opportunistic. Maybe his barns were getting old and needed to be repaired. He might have crunched the numbers and realized that building the bigger barns wouldn’t just serve him then, but also would save him hassle in the future. Again: this isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Some say that he is being selfish here; he should have just kept what he had, sold the rest and helped out those who needed it. Could he have? Of course. But Jesus’ point of this earthly story with a heavenly meaning isn’t about how we budget our dollars for everything. And so, we shouldn’t come down too harshly on this man for wanting to build bigger and better barns.

After he has reached that conclusion, in his heart of hearts the rich man knows what he wants to do next: “**I have grain for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and celebrate.** I finally made it.” Again, nothing inherently wrong with the man. God wants you to enjoy the blessings he gives you.

That is, as long as you have your priorities in the right place. God says to the rich man: You fool! He thought he was rich when in reality he was the worst kind of poor. He had all of this stuff, but he wasn't rich in the most important thing. He thought he would be the one to enjoy all of it for many years to come; instead, God says, "**Who knows who will?** You worked so hard for all this; people who didn't even work for it would be the ones who get to enjoy it. You thought you were set for years to come; tonight it's all over. Tonight your soul will be demanded from you." It was all meaningless because he was not rich toward God. He was so busy storing up, building up his barns on earth, that he neglected his relationship with God.

Jesus isn't just talking about building physical structures and bringing in produce from a field. You store up money in savings accounts, retirement funds, put money in the stock market in order to invest in your future. You build up barns of legacies and accomplishments that you might hope people will remember you by with being kind to others, doing the "right" thing, helping out. You store up possessions and collections that we have in our homes—if God so blesses you. You build up experiences and succeeding at different life goals. You store and build up your social status, reputation, your acquaintances and who your friends might be. You maybe store up and rest on your past laurels and work you did for the church and in the church. Again, none of those are necessarily wrong in and of themselves.

But if you are not rich towards God first, when God calls you to account one day you will hear him say, "You fool!"

You can have the most successful life by the world's standards and known for all your wonderful good deeds. You can have people sitting at your funeral saying, "He was such a great guy. You never heard a bad word out his mouth and just all around good guy." But if you are not rich toward God, you will hear, "You fool!"

Your children can have all the great experiences, social interactions for a happy life, be provided with all they need to be successful and hard working. But if you have not trained them up in the Lord so that they are rich toward God, they will hear: "You fool."

One day every person will be called to give an account. When you pass from this earth, God won't be looking at how many friends you had, how much you saved in your bank account, or how successful you were. He's not going to be checking to make sure you fulfilled all experiences or concern himself with your accomplishments. First and foremost is your relationship with him; were you rich towards God?

This isn't talking about how much you put in the offering plate. The rich man from the parable would never have been able to buy even a square foot of property in heaven. It's not talking about how often you went to church. It's not referring to the amount of hours and time you spent volunteering for church. Being rich toward God is fearing, loving, and trusting him above all things. And the only way you can be rich toward God is because Jesus makes you rich.

Jesus is perfectly aware of his mission when he comes to this earth. He is so much more than a judge or divider of earthly inheritance. He comes to give you the inheritance of heaven by making you God's child and heir of eternal life. We don't need him to be Mr. Patriotic, Financial Savior, or relationship guru. We need him to be so much more than just a good teacher. We needed him to perfectly fear, love, and trust God above all things in our place to fix our broken relationship with God and save us from sin. Jesus comes because not even a single sin that was owed could be paid off by you. But when Jesus dies on that cross he fears, loves, and trusts that God will accept the payment for you. So he sheds his blood that is worth more than any silver or gold to pay the entire debt of your sin. By his wounds you are healed of your sin of not fearing, trusting, and loving him above all things. And with his rising from the dead, we know that God accepts the payment for you.

This is the grace, Paul says, of our Lord Jesus, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus didn't have to do it; we would never deserve it. But that's grace. Jesus chooses to become poor for your sake so that you would be made rich with his grace; grace that is yours today. With sins forgiven there is no guilt in life; all is well between you and God. Already today you don't have to live in fear for when God calls you out of this world. Because Jesus makes you rich with his grace, with sins forgiven, God will not call you a fool. No, already at your baptism the Father marks you with his name and calls you his child.

Because this is what Jesus has done for you, we want to fear, love and trust him. Now, having an abundance of things—or even if you don't—we can rejoice because we have an abundance of riches in Jesus. Go after that promotion, we pray you have that success, achieve those accomplishments—and whether you do or do not need not burden you or lead you to worry; with Jesus you have a peace with God that surpasses all understanding. Now what we do in life has meaning—all that we do is not for self but to give God the glory.

And so we do want to come to church to be encouraged by our brothers and sisters in the faith. We want to come to be fed with Word and Sacrament that strengthens faith and our relationship with God. We do want to support the work of our church and school so that more may continue to learn and grow in their relationship with God. Because Jesus has made us rich towards God we want to share that richness in all that we think, say, and do. Amen.