

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Rich Fool

Part 17 - October 21, 2007

[VIDEO: MAPLEWOOD FARM]

Ever have a garden that produced so much, you couldn't give it all away? Whether it's potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, or zucchini, there's a deadline. You gotta give 'em away before they spoil! Vegetables are not a long-term investment. But what if we viewed our money and material possessions the same way?

In the parable of The Rich Fool, Jesus teaches us to be openhanded and generous with what we've been given, before our own deadline arrives.

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ' "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 anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." - *Luke 12:13-21 NIV*

The set-up to this parable is more interesting than the story! If we go back to the beginning of chapter twelve, Luke tells us that a "crowd of many thousands had gathered" (Luke 12:1).

Have you ever come to church after quarreling with someone in your family, and you just can't stop thinking about it? You don't really focus on the worship, or anything that's being spoken or taught; you just keep running scenarios in your head. That's what someone in this huge crowd is doing.

Jesus is teaching about hypocrisy, and hell, and confessing Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and the unforgivable sin, and all of a sudden:

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13)

Have you ever had to divide an estate with your siblings? It can bring out the worst in families. Not so much the big ticket items (they're usually covered in the will), but the small items: "That broken cookie jar meant so much to *me!*" "*Me too!*"

My mother will have none of that: she invited her children and grandchildren (one at a time) to "tour" her house with her, and tell her what was special to them. Then she made her decisions ... and tagged everything!

Some scholars speculate that one brother must want to keep their father's property intact, whereas the other wants to split it up and liquidate it. But if that's so, he'd have legal recourse. I think he's the younger of two sons, which means his brother legally inherits *two-thirds* of the estate. Under Jewish law, the eldest son gets a double portion.

Notice that he doesn't ask Jesus to listen to both sides and render a verdict. He just asks Jesus to take his side. People like to use Jesus to put their relatives in line!

Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me (Luke 12:13)

Jesus had just finished saying:

When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say. - Luke 12:11-12 NIV

And this guy blurts out: "Tell my brother to divide the inheritance". The brother is probably standing right there. And this guy isn't pursuing reconciliation; he's pursuing a cash settlement! Jesus must've looked at him like, "Really?" And He rebukes him:

Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" (Luke 12:14)

"Man" is not a term of endearment. And when He says, "who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" He's saying, "This isn't My purpose. That's not why I'm here."



But He doesn't let it go at that; because there's a much deeper issue here. Money had taken his focus off of Jesus. He doesn't seem to realize that the One who could meet his *greatest* need for security is standing right in front of him.

Then [Jesus] said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed" (Luke 12:15a)

I was going to ask: Are you greedy? But, we're Americans; of course we're greedy! We love "stuff"! Know how to improve an Oreo cookie? Double the "stuff"! Our closets and garages are filled with stuff we don't really *need*, that we buy with money we don't really *have*, to impress people we don't really *like*.

So, the real question is: Just how greedy *are* you? What are you doing about it? How are you counteracting it? Are you even aware of it? Are you on guard against it?

A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions (Luke 12:15b)

Let's take the "Packrat test". Hold up a finger on *both* hands, for every statement that fits you: I complain that I don't have enough room for my stuff; I have a hard time throwing things away; I own things that I'll probably never use; I can "lose" things in my own house; I can "lose" things in my own car; Things have a way of collecting on all available spaces; I sometimes "find" things that I forgot I owned. Hold up the number of "yes" fingers; put them next to your mouth; those are your "whiskers;" look around and see how many whiskers the rats around you have!



Now, being a packrat doesn't mean you're greedy, but we do have to be on guard, and remember that: Life is not about what I own. It's funny we call it a "piggy bank". There's a big difference between "saving" and "pigging". *Pigging* is wanting more of what I already have enough of.

The man in the crowd wanted more than his fair share. So, on the spot, Jesus creates this story of a rich fool. He's *already* rich, but he wants to hoard (to "pig") more for himself.

The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, "What shall I do?" - Luke 12:16-17 NIV

His barns are already filled to capacity, that's why he has to tear them down and build bigger ones. What's the short answer? What should he do? **Thank** God ... **seek** direction ... **help** the needy. But this man has no thought of God or his fellow man.

He said, "I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and I'll store my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." - Luke 12:16-19 NIV *paraphrased*

Jesus isn't coming against wealth, or ambition, or saving, or planning for the future, or retirement, or enjoying life. The parable isn't about *prosperity*, it's about *priorities*.

The head of a local charity visited a notorious miser. "Sir, our records show that despite your wealth, you've never once given to the needy in our community." The tightwad fumed, "Do your records show that I have an elderly mother who was left penniless when my father died? Or, that I have a disabled brother, or a widowed sister with small children?" "No, sir," the volunteer meekly replied. The miser said, "Well, if I don't give to them, why in the world would I give to you?!"



Two philosophies when it comes to having enough "stuff":

1. Demand more
2. Desire less



Life by default accumulates and complicates. And we naturally develop attachments to our “stuff”. It can’t be avoided. It takes *intentional* effort to simplify. But, the more I discard, the freer I feel! There is *freedom* in ridding ourselves of stuff. A clean closet is a Godly closet!

“Life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” But greed tries to convince us of exactly the opposite!

Q: Do you know how the saying ends: “Eat, drink, and be merry ...”

A: “For tomorrow we die.”

But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you (Luke 12:20)

He was a fool because he didn’t know when enough was enough; and because he missed his purpose in life; and because he spent like there was no tomorrow. A “fool” isn’t someone with a low IQ; it’s a person with a low SD (spiritual discernment).

The word “demanded” was used in banking circles when a loan was called in for repayment. God has *loaned* us our very lives, and He rightly expects interest on His investments.

Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?

This must have struck home with the guy in the crowd, who had just inherited his father’s wealth. Will it go to someone just as self-centered as yourself, or to someone who won’t allow wealth to distract them from what’s important in life, and right in front of their face?

This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God (Luke 12:21)

The way to be rich toward God is to invest ourselves in His Kingdom, and to be generous toward His children. Who wants to die with nothing eternal to show for it?! I’d sure rather hear the Lord say, “Good job faithful servant”, than “You fool!” But I suppose it’ll be one or the other.

Let’s see how well you’ve been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we’ve learned that:

1. You can be a great financial success ... *and* a fool.
2. Joy comes from treasuring possessions over people.
3. Life is a loan which must be returned with interest.
4. Retirement plans are the devil.