

# Red Chairables

## *The Rich Fool*

Part 14 - December 4, 2011

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 Rich Fool", Jesus tells 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*



Have you ever come to church in the midst of a heated argument? And you're so consumed with what had been said, what should've been said, and what will be said that you might as well be alone in the room? Imagine in the middle of service, someone yells out, "Pastor, tell my husband to take the job!" We'd all be like, "What?!" That's the context of this parable.

Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak ... - *Luke 12:1a NIV*

And as Jesus warns and reassures and *even* reveals himself as the Son of Man, there's this guy in the crowd who's obsessing over a dispute with his brother about their deceased dad's property.

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." - *Luke 12:13 NIV*

And they're all like, "What?!" The brother is probably nearby. And the people are probably looking at him and mouthing, "WOW". And then they all look back at Jesus.

Jesus replied, "Man, [not a term of endearment] who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" - *Luke 12:14 NIV*



The Rich Fool by Rembrandt 1627

We don't know the specifics of the problem. Maybe he was cut out of the will; or maybe his brother won't agree to liquidate the land; or maybe he only received a third (as the younger son).

Whatever the problem, Jesus looks at him and sees the problem-beneath-the-problem: greed.

And he tells about a rich man, whose barns are stuffed, who is suddenly blessed with even more! But, instead of sharing his blessings, he decides to store what he already has plenty of.



It's like having a furnished home, a reliable car, adequate savings, and a retirement plan, and then winning a 10-minute shopping spree. It'd be *exciting*, racing around gathering more and more of what you already have plenty of!

That's a decent analogy for this short life we're given.

Afterwards you survey your carts: one is filled with blenders, another with hams, and you have to decide what to do with it all. And as you pass through a low-income neighborhood, on your way home, a "light bulb" comes on: I'll use my *savings*, and some of my *retirement account* to build myself a big, heated *shed*! That'll improve my property value, which can *only go up*! I'll get freezers for my hams and a special shelf for my blenders! I am *so blessed* ... I mean, who else has a *blender-shelf*?!



But just as you put the *last* blender up on the shelf (a KitchenAid Pro-Line, 500 watt, 2-speed ... with a heavy-duty, die-cast base, and a 48 ounce, stainless steel container polished to a sleek and sexy mirror-like finish), it falls on your head and you die. And then instead of hearing God say, "Good job faithful servant." He shakes his head and says, "You idiot. You were blessed to be a blessing in My name. You were meant to share in my peace and joy and security, on earth and in Heaven, but you traded it for a blender!"

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?" - *Luke 12:20 NIV*

And why *exactly* was he a fool? It's defined in the next verse.

This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God. - *Luke 12:21 NIV*

He was a fool because he wasn't "rich toward God". So, what does it mean to be rich toward God? Well, just before Jesus told this parable, he said ...

Be on your guard against all kinds of greed ... - *Luke 12:15 NIV*

And then he depicts the two major types in this story: stinginess, which is a reluctance to share what I have. And greediness, which is a desire to have more than I need. Stinginess comes from a lack of love and compassion for others. Greediness comes from a lack of faith and trust in God.

I'm going to give you 10 seconds to choose an amount (we won't share), a dollar amount which you would say to God, "If I earned that much per year, I'd give *everything* above it away till I die. 10, 9, 8, if you're married it's a joint number! 7, 6, it'll adjust for inflation but not a lottery win! 5, 4, it's post-taxes and post-tithing. 3, 2, 1! That's tough, isn't it?! But don't worry, I don't think God will hold you to a 10-second sermon illustration ... but he will expect you to ponder it.

The Rich Fool was given abundance on top of abundance, but he was only rich toward himself, not seeing when enough was enough. To be "rich toward God" is to share with others out of love and compassion, and to live in a manner that demonstrates your faith and trust in God as a good Father who watches over you.

Do *you* know when enough is enough? Are you content? This parable isn't as much about the Haves and the Have-Nots as it is about the Trusts and the Trust-Nots. *This* is the *even deeper* problem-beneath-the-problem that Jesus exposes next.

Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, **do not worry** about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. - *Luke 12:22-23 NIV*

He doesn't say that life *isn't* about food and clothes; but that it's "more than food" and "more than clothes". We *have* to eat and you can't run around naked ... and not get arrested! Contentment doesn't come from a lack of desire; it comes from an abundance of trust (in the goodness of God). Worry is the enemy of trust and the friend of greed.



Worry offers a false sense of control over the uncontrollable, and we really, really like being independent and in control. That's what the devil used to tempt Adam and Eve into eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. - *Genesis 3:5 NIV*

And they were deceived into knowing good and evil (like God), without the omniscience to grasp its purpose (like God), or the omnipotence to deal with it purposefully (like God). So now, when *actual* control isn't possible, the illusion of control (i.e. worry) pacifies us. That's the price for knowing good and evil, like God, without having the power of God. And this leaves us with only one very obvious option: trust God!



Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? - *Luke 12:24-26 NIV*

Worry won't extend your life, but it can sure shorten it!

Ravens were unclean and therefore worthless in the marketplace. Jesus is saying, "If God enjoys providing for dirty birds in his plan, how much more so for those he created in his image?!"

Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! – Luke 12:27-28 NIV



“Lily” applies to a flower called an anemone, which covered the fields of Galilee in brilliant reds and purples: *royal* colors! But, the grass they grew in was short-lived and used for fuel. Jesus is saying, “If God enjoys clothing something as fleeting as grass so splendidly, how much more so for his *eternal* ones?!”

Paul captured it best when he said ...

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. –  
*Philippians 4:19 NIV*

This is where most of these types of sermons end. But there’s one more problem-beneath-the-problem ... and it’s a *biggie*: you *wish* that was true, but you *know* it isn’t. We like it when someone prays for a car or a job and receives it in an unexpected way ... but we *know* that that’s the exception.

I mean, do you *really* want to consider the raven? They scavenge through rotting garbage and peck away at putrefying animals. They eat pretty much anything; because food *isn’t* always plentiful, but the poor raven *is* always, well, ravenous!



And let’s *consider* those lilies. This one has Lily Botrytis Blight Disease. At least it ain’t a fungal leaf infection! Oh! And we should consider the Lily *Beetle*! God provides for them too, by letting ‘em eat ... the *Lilies*!

Birds starve and bugs eat flowers! You can trust that it’s part of God’s omniscient, omnipotent plan, or pretend to control it through the destructive illusion of worry.

Paul’s words are not true *if* you expect God to meet your needs as *you* define them. *He’s* not a genie, and *you’re* not a master. He doesn’t ask us to trust that everything will always be good, just that *he* will! And that his presence and love and grace is sufficient.

Faith isn’t pretending that he’ll meet all my needs according to *my* limited definition. True faith trusts *God* to *define* my needs according to *his* eternal plan and *my* eternal best, and to meet all those needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus!

That’s when worry and greed give way to peace and joy and security.