



“Be Rich Toward God”

Luke 12:13 - 21

May 5, 2019

We are going to be in Luke Chapter 12 this morning. Please join me there.

The title of this morning’s message is *Be Rich Toward God*. That is drawn from the final sentence of the Scripture that we are about to read. It is an expression from the Lord Jesus Christ that we, as His people, be generous to the purposes of God on this earth.

I want to let you know that I almost titled this message *Don’t Be a Rich Fool*, because this morning as we continue in the Gospel of Luke, we come to the Lord’s so-called *Parable of the Rich Fool*.

It was interesting because I opened one of my devotional Bibles as I began preparing my heart and contemplating this text, and I saw a note that was written in the margin. I had written this note several years ago and it said, *Our society is filled with rich fools*.

Maybe after reading what is depicted here, you will agree with me. Southern California is filled with people who have so much and there is so much taken for granted. There is such little fear of the Lord in their eyes. There is a minimal amount of true and genuine gratitude that gets lifted up to the Lord for all that we have.

Southern California is filled with rich fools. But our greater concern is that the pews of Bethel can very well be filled with rich fools as well, because the pull of materialism and the lure of wealth is such that we too may give our hearts and our lives and our passions and our energy to gaining material things without the proper generosity and gratitude toward God that should be filling the heart of each and every follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We need to take heed this morning that we are not like the person depicted in the parable of Jesus our Lord. Let’s see what is before us as we get back on to the discipleship road with the Lord Jesus and His disciples.

The green hills of Galilee were behind them. They were slowly and steadily making their way to Jerusalem where the cross was before Jesus Christ. As they went, Jesus was teaching vital lessons about discipleship and following Him.

This morning we come to some teaching about wealth and money and possessions and the fundamental attitude that ought to fill the heart of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Let’s read what is before us in Luke Chapter 12 and Verse 13 through 21:

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” ¹⁴But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or

arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵And 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.” ¹⁶And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸And 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. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” ²⁰But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Here we have teaching that comes straight from the Messiah to each person here today. What we find in this text is that our Messiah, our King and Lord and Savior, has no hesitancy or discomfort at all talking about money and wealth and possessions. He is very willing to shoot straight with His people about those things.

I remind you that this is not the teaching of Jeffery Thomas Saltzmann that we have just read. This the teaching of King Jesus Christ who wants His followers to be very careful about how they view money and possessions and material things.

This is the not last time Jesus would address our attitude toward wealth, for the use of money is a primary test of the condition of the heart. So as we go forward into the weeks and months ahead, we will see Jesus talking about these things repeatedly and we will have our hearts searched by the Holy Spirit. I think our hearts will be prompted toward gratitude and generosity as we do.

As we look into the text that is before us this morning, I want us to have the Lord speaking into our lives and transforming us. As we look at what is before us, I want us to see three insights about material things.

By that, I mean wealth and all the things that wealth can buy. I want for these things to enter our hearts, transform them and make their way into the way that we use the resources the Lord gives to us.

The first insight related to material things we see in this text is:

1. The passion we feel about material things (12:13-14)

As we look at Verses 13 and 14, we see a certain outburst that revealed the zeal and passion that we often feel about material things. It is so remarkable to view this, especially when we remember the context of what had immediately preceded this man calling out to the Lord the way he did.

Remember that Jesus was on the outskirts of some unnamed town between Galilee and Jerusalem. He just had dinner in the home of a Pharisee. As he left that town, the people of that village, they started to recognize that this was Jesus of Nazareth. His notoriety and gone all throughout Israel, and they began flocking to Him.

There was a multiple of people pressing in to hear Jesus teach. Then in Verses 1 through 12, the text that immediately precedes what we are digging into this morning, Jesus taught them heavy-duty truths. He taught them about the grave realities of the judgment to come, about our need to fear God and not man. He taught about heaven and hell, and the need to repent and come to God in faith.

It was all so serious, then in the midst of that we have what is read starting in Verse 13.

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” ¹⁴But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”

This man put himself on that Board of Directors to tell the Lord Jesus Christ what to do. People do that repeatedly in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus asked where that was coming from. Talk about getting the sermon off topic!

This was the very Son of God teaching the crowds with the authority that was unique to who He is. He was teaching about the judgment to come in the sight of the holy angels of God. He was teaching things that are so eternally serious.

And in the crowd was the face of a man. You can see the frustration on his face as he was growing impatient. He was waiting for Jesus to finish so he could go to Him with the problem that was on his mind. He finally just could not take it anymore. He discerned a pause in the thoughts of Jesus, and he burst out:

¹³...“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

He wanted Jesus to sort the matter out right then and there. Right in the middle of a teaching like that? I understand and I can give you a little bit of slack that when I’m up here teaching, your minds will often wander. I can see things up here that you don’t know that I can see.

However, this is the King of kings and the Lord of lords teaching about ultimate things. The inheritance issue was burning in that man’s heart, even as the Son of the Living God was right there in front of Him teaching about the everlasting Kingdom that would far outlast any inheritance he might get. And still, this man could not tune in to it.

Such is the case when it comes to the pursuit of material things. The things of this world can really, really rise up powerfully in our hearts. Looking at this text, I think that many of our hearts might go out to this man because it seems that he was getting the short end of the stick. His brother had the inheritance and it would seem that he was being left out of it. Maybe that was the case

Maybe the big brother got the inheritance. It was his job to portion out and maybe the big brother hoarded it all to himself, feeling that his little brother was too irresponsible to handle it

yet. At the right time, perhaps his older brother planned on giving some of the inheritance to him. Perhaps something like that was happening.

More likely, what was going on was that the Jewish Law of the First Born was being practiced. According to the Law of Moses, the first born, he would eventually take headship over the clan. So with that responsibility, the first born was given a double portion of the inheritance.

If there were two brothers, the inheritance would have been divided into three parts. The big brother would get two portions. The little brother would get one portion. It is likely that this man was questioning the validity of that law, and he knew that Jesus had the reputation of challenging the customs of Israel.

Maybe he saw his opportunity with Jesus present and was thinking he could get a larger portion of the inheritance that was that was coming his way. Something like that could have been happening.

One way or the other, this man did not come to Jesus for mediation. He came for representation. He did not come asking Jesus to search the situation inside and out, laying it before Him and asking Him to decide what is best. Instead, this man came with the conclusion made that his brother needed to give him what he was asking for.

It would seem that Jesus saw into this man's heart by the way he responded. It is evident that this man was experiencing the greed that is common to us all. It lives within us and needs to be kept in check and crucified by the work of the Holy Spirit.

It was entirely possible that this man would receive a favorable ruling, get his desired portion of the inheritance and walk away with his heart vindicated, rather than transformed. He might have gone away with a full bank account and an empty heart. So Jesus came to teach the things that He was in the world to teach.

As we continue, we see that Jesus gives:

2. The caution we need about material things (12:15)

We see the passion that we feel but, in view of that, Jesus gives us some caution about the pursuit of material things in this world. We see that in Verse 15:

¹⁵And 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."

Fullness and joy of life does not come with things. That is what Jesus taught here. Life consists elsewhere.

It is interesting that a couple of weeks ago I downloaded an app on my phone called *Offer Up*. It is an app by which people everywhere can sell and buy things. Some of those things are new, most of those things are used. We had a yard sale recently and there were a couple of items we

could not get rid of, so I thought I would try my hand on *Offer Up*. Now I can see all the things people are trying to sell as well.

I was recently swiping through this app, looking at all the things that kept coming and coming. I saw some cool things from armchairs to furnishings and lamps and surfboards. These things were interesting to me, but I kept swiping and swiping down, resolved to get to the end of the list. I swiped down on that app for more than five minutes, however it was a bottomless pit. I finally gave up!

I had this text in my mind and if what Jesus said to us is true, I could come in to possession of all those things and still not have life and still not have my heart full. Jesus said:

¹⁵ ... “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Life is elsewhere. Life is not found in an object. Objects are not living things. Your dream home, it is not alive, and it cannot speak peace into your heart. The ultimate technological gadget, it is not alive, and it cannot issue love into your soul.

None of these things are alive. They are not living and, hence, they do not bring a person life. Life is found elsewhere. Life is found in living things. It is when we are joined above all to the Living God in faith and in trust and in obedience walking with Him, that is where life in the heart and soul is going to be found and issue forth.

Life is in the Lord. Jesus once said it like this during His High Priestly Prayer. He said in John 17:3:

³And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Life is found in being joined to God in faith. Therein is life. Life is found in having our sins washed away by the blood of the Lamb and being brought into the life that is in God.

There are people in this world who have an abundance of things, but their hearts and souls are dead. There are people in this world who have precious little, yet their hearts are alive in God. So, we need to take caution and hear this and we need to receive from Jesus.

First, we see the passion that we feel about material things and getting our pieces of pie. Then we receive a caution that Jesus gives. Yes, you might get that piece of the pie but is that really going to fill your soul, even if you get it and eat it. Jesus said no to that.

We continue and see:

3. The warning we receive about material things (12:16-21)

This warning comes in the form of a parable that Jesus gave. It is found in Verses 16 through 21:

**¹⁶And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully,
¹⁷and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’**

This is a story of becoming richer. This man, he just could not seem to lose. He already owned property, then that property that he owned produced prolifically. It was like a bonanza. It just kept on coming. Verse 17 again:

¹⁷and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’¹⁸And 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. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”²⁰But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Reading this parable, let’s understand some things. It is not a bad thing when your crops produce abundantly. It is probably a really good thing. It is not a bad thing when your business prospers. It is not a bad thing when you get a promotion at work and you get a pay increase that comes with it. It is not a bad thing when investments increase in their value. These are not bad things.

The man in this parable is not being called a fool because he was a productive farmer. I think we might agree that the world could use lots of productive farmers. So, where is the moral culpability in this parable? Was wealth the problem that this man experienced? No! The problem lied elsewhere.

I would say that the problem was lying in the fact that there are two words that can be used to describe the man that we see in this parable. One of those words is *selfish* and the other word is *foolish*.

We see his selfishness in this text. Isn’t it stunning how it is depicted here for us? The words *me* and *I* are used ten times in the text that we just read, with no mention at all of anyone else. This man was concerned for himself. He was not thinking about the people in his neighborhood, or the people in his village, or the people that were experiencing different levels of need or challenges.

These people were not even on his mind. He kept saying *me* and *my*. *I* want to relax. *I* want to be merry. *My* life is going to be consumed with eating and drinking to my heart’s content. This man was a selfish man. He was not thinking about using the great abundance that God placed in his hands to bless others with. He was being selfish.

He was not thinking about this, saying, *Thank you, God for the way that you have provided for me. Now let us multiply the joy by looking to others who are struggling and seeing the joy that*

will light up their faces when they know that their burdens are being alleviated by somebody who has been provided for in amazing ways.

He was not thinking like that. He was thinking about himself. The world is filled with people that are just like that. When the Holy Spirit of Jesus takes charge of a person and their wealth, they are going to be people who are giving in generosity, multiplying the joy of provision that they received from the hand of God.

This man was selfish. In addition to that, we see that he was foolish. That is the word that Jesus used to describe him. He called him a fool!

²⁰But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’

Understand that in the Bible the word *fool* is not a word that has to do with IQ and intelligence. It always has a moral and spiritual nuance to it. There are a great number of very intelligent fools living in this world.

The fool is the person who does not live under the knowledge of the fear of the Lord. They are the ones who live this life as though this life is all that there is, without understanding that we are accountable to the God who provides for us.

So this man was called a fool by Jesus, and we must be careful that we do not conduct ourselves in ways that are foolish; that we understand that God has given to us and He intends for us to be generous with what He places in our hands at whatever level we are able to do so. We are all to be sacrificial like Jesus was sacrificial. That is the calling that is upon our lives.

What would it have looked like if instead of being foolish, this man was wise? He would have taken in this blessing from the Lord. He would have seen how these things were made prolific. Maybe he would have prayed like this:

Father in Heaven, all of this is Yours. You made my fields fertile. You made these crops multiply. You gave me wisdom to cultivate these things. You have been so good. Thank you, Lord for providing for me. Thank you, Lord for providing for my family. Lord, will you give me wisdom and understanding in the use of all the things that you have placed in my hands? What would You have me do? How would You have me use the things that You have given by Your grace?

This would be a man living under the knowledge of the goodness of the Lord—that these things come by the hand of God. The Lord wanted that man to provide not only for his family, but for others and for ministries and for missions through Him. That’s what it would have looked for this man to walk in wisdom in the sight of God. That’s how Jesus wants us to walk.

I was waffling and I was wavering over the title of this morning’s sermon. We could have gone in a positive way. We could have gone in a negative way. I didn’t go with *Don’t Be a Rich Fool*, although King Jesus would say to each and every one person here today, *Don’t be a rich*

fool! I think Jesus would preach to you with much more boldness than I do sometimes. But He would say to you, *Be rich toward God.*

In the same way that we love God because He first loved us, we are rich to the purposes of God, understanding that He first has been rich toward us. And understanding and having eyes to see those things, we then live as those who have generosity of heart and hands.

Be blessed. Think about these things. May the Lord lead and guide for you to use the wealth that you have been given in the ways that He would have use them. Let's pray. Then we will go to the Table where we will remember how God has given us the greatest treasure of them all, His very Son, Jesus Christ.