

The Foolish Farmer
Luke 12:13-21 (01-05-2020)
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We have a powerful passage for a new year. It's about a wealthy farmer who was a shrewd planner and confident in his future, but then unexpectedly met God and eternity. He hadn't counted on that. The last 2019 issue of World Magazine devotes a number of pages to important people who died in 2019. Sadly, many, if not most, were no different than this farmer. They may have known they were going to die shortly, but they hadn't planned on meeting God. And like this farmer, many lived at the shrine of their personal trinity: Me, Myself, and Mine.

In Luke 12 Jesus has been bringing a serious message. He warns us about hypocrisy and the importance of fearing God more than man when it comes to confessing Christ and facing persecution. Suddenly in verse 13 an unidentified man interrupts Jesus and demands justice and fairness with his brother.

Luke 12:13, Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

This guy is like so many people in church. While the preacher is going on and on about God, the world, and other things, they are figuring their finances, or thinking about where to go to lunch, or wondering if the Eagles will win today. Or like the little boy in Sunday School who raised his hand when the teacher asked a Bible question and responded, "Did you see my new shoes?" So this guy out of the blue commands Jesus, a teacher and rabbi in Israel, to tell his brother to share the family wealth, revealing where his heart has been as Jesus is teaching His disciples. It is true that Jews did go to rabbis for help in solving problems like this, but his question was far from what Jesus was teaching.

What is Jesus going to say? Imagine if He would have stepped into this family quarrel. Every greedy brother or sister would be lining up to bring their case to Him. Someone has said that when the will of parents is read, brothers and sisters often turn into snarling wolves.

So how did Jesus respond to the interruption?

Luke 12:14, But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?"

Jesus didn't come to bring property to people. He came to save sinners and teach them how to live for God's glory. This guy came looking for Jesus to change his brother, but Jesus knows what's going on in his heart and calls him out with a rather sharp address, "Man." Not friend, but "man." Jesus sees the bitterness, the anger, the resentment of greed in his heart. This guy doesn't love his brother. He's angry because his brother has more than he has. That's greed. He wants to use Jesus to feed his greed.

Friends, don't use Jesus to get what you want. People do this. They'll come into counseling hoping the counselor will straighten out their wife or husband. "Tell this woman to stop her overspending." "Tell this husband to meet my needs." Jesus didn't come to fix us, to patch us up a bit. No, He came to change us from the inside out; to create a new heart in us. It's not about getting what you want, but rather learning to honor Christ in your life. This guy wasn't listening with his heart. He didn't hear about denying himself and taking up his cross daily and following Jesus. Far more important than feeding this guy's greed is freeing his heart from his greed through the power of the gospel.

Jesus gives us A STRONG WARNING ABOUT GREED

Luke 12:15, Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."

Greed or covetousness is at the root of most sins. Greed drives people to hate, fight, quarrel, resent, even murder. The Greek word for greed is *pleonexias*. It means to grasp after more. It's the heart saying,

"I want and I want more." You see it in the nursery. "I want that truck and I will get it, even if I have to scream to get it, or bonk that kid over the head to get it. I had it first, anyway." That's greed. I want and I want more. You'll find this word positioned right beside immorality, impurity, and evil passion in Ephesians 5:4-5 and Colossians 3:5. Colossians 3:5, "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry."

Greed is idolatry. Instead of worshiping God in your heart, you are worshiping yourself in your mad pursuit of money or things or positions or power or even a person. You're living for it, whether you have it or not. Proverbs 28:20 talks about the man who "hastens to be rich will not go unpunished." Greed comes in varying degrees, but it has the potential to ruin relationships. That's why James 4:1-2 says when these inner desires for more drive you, you begin to fight and quarrel about what you have or they have or what you want. And you want it more. Your bother has it and you want it.

No wonder Jesus delivers a double barreled warning here. Beware means look out for, keep your eye on your heart, lest greed start stirring around and control you and drive you. Then He adds, "put a guard up against greed because it is your enemy." And in case you think it just means wanting more money, He adds, "every form," meaning literally all kinds of greed. Don't think your angry greed is justified.

Leo Tolstoy illustrates the power of greed in his short story, "How Much Land Does a Man Need." Pahom, a Russian peasant, becomes obsessed with wanting more property. He hears about a place where you can have as much land as you can walk around in one day for just 1000 rubles. He sets off to find that land and finally gets to the land of the Bashkirs. Sure enough, that's the deal. At sunrise you leave from the spot designated with the chief's fox-fur cap and Pahom's rubles on it, and then you walk as far as you want to, marking the corners with a shovel. But there's one stipulation: you must return to this very spot before the sun sets. Fair enough. Off goes Pahom with his shovel in hand, digging markers along the way. In his lust for as much land as possible, he walks too far and has to rush to return before the sun sets. Thoroughly exhausted, he falls to the ground as the sun is setting, with his hand stretched out touching the fox-fur cap. But his greed killed him. His servant digs a grave for poor Pahom. Six feet from head to heels was all the land he needed.

Greed is a cruel sin. It is idolatry. It is worshiping self rather than God and causes all kinds of trouble.

1 Timothy 6:9-10, But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Lot said, "I want that lush land down there by Sodom." He paid dearly for his desire. Achan thought, "I want that silver and that garment and that gold," even though it was forbidden. It cost him and his whole family their lives. Gehazi was Elisha's servant. After the Syrian leper Naaman was healed by obeying Elisha to take seven dips in the muddy Jordan, he wanted to give Elisha a gift, but Elisha refused. However, Elisha's servant Gehazi was gripped by greed. He secretly ran after Naaman and said his master changed his mind, "We could use those gifts." He received the gifts, hid them in his house, and quietly returned to Elisha only to hear this question, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" Many parents have heard a similar response to Gehazi's, "Your servant went nowhere." "Ah," replies Elisha, "my heart went with you when you ran after Naaman." Gehazi's greed resulted in him and his descendants being cursed with leprosy. Jesus warns all of us, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed."

A SIMPLE STORY OF A GREEDY FARMER

Luke 12:16-20, And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'

Here you have a successful businessman, the kind they would put on the front cover of Fortune magazine as Man of the Year. He's the envy of the land. His sales are surging, his stocks are soaring, and money is coming in hand over fist. He has a major problem, though. He has too much wealth!

Before we go on, let's be clear that God never condemns wealth. What He does condemn is worshipping wealth, loving wealth, and treasuring earthly wealth. In 1 Timothy 6:17-19 He doesn't condemn wealthy people, but gives counsel to them. If you are wealthy, don't be conceited or think you're better than others. Always remember it is God who gave you the power to make wealth. And don't set your hopes on your wealth, because in an instant they can fly away like an eagle at 99 mph (Proverbs 23:5)! Instead, be generous, provide for others, give to the cause of the gospel, and build up treasures in heaven. So, there's nothing wrong with wealth. But something else is going on here.

There sits the rich man at his mahogany desk working over his assets, wondering what he's going to do with his abundance. Those fields God gave him have been extremely productive. So he begins to pray, thanking God for blessing him this year and how grateful he is to have inherited this rich farm land. He asks God, "How can I use all this increase to bless others and store up treasures in heaven?"

No, that's exactly what he doesn't do. Instead, he reasons in his heart. He worships at the shrine of Me, Myself, and Mine. Go through verses 17-19. "I, I, I, my, I, my, my, I, my!" I want, I want more. Build bigger barns, accumulate more, kick back, relax, enjoy, eat, drink, celebrate. This man has one god in his heart – himself.

Suddenly, like a crack of thunder, God breaks in, "Fool!" Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" He is a thief. God is not in all his thinking and planning and scheming. He has stolen the blessings of God and turned them into his idol.

Not only that, but he is a fool because in all his reasoning, he didn't take into account the most important thing – eternity. He is living as if this life is all there is. He even tells himself, "I'm in good shape for many years to come." Little did he know God would visit him *that very night*. His greed ruled him and deceived his heart. He was a mindless, senseless, stupid, spiritual fool.

So God asks this fool, "Who will own all you've accumulated?" Not him. He's flying off into eternity to meet his Maker absolutely empty of anything of heavenly value. He lived for the wrong treasure and he died with no inheritance in heaven. How many of those who died in 2019 suddenly realized they owed an accounting to God Almighty?

Let me ask you a question. Do you bring God into your earthly plans? Are you asking God what He wants you to do with what He has given you? Do you hold your wealth with an open hand? This farmer lived like a practical atheist, but we can do the very same thing. Instead of worshipping at the shrine of Me, Myself, and Mine, you should come to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and lay out your plans to Him. James 4:13-17 tells us how to plan for the future. "If the Lord wills we will live and do this or that." Since your life is a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away, you should draw up your plans, but then give them to God. That's what this foolish farmer should have said.

A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO FIGHT THE IDOLATRY OF GREED

Luke 12:2, *"So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

What difference will your decisions about your life make 100 years from now? Are you asking God what He would have you to do with what you have? Or is greed driving your bus, feeding your ego, building your reputation? Do you find your identity in what you possess? When you die, and it could be this year, will you die rich toward God? Will you die rich in faith in Jesus Christ, rich in love and hope and joy in Christ, rich in godly character, in blessing others, and in treasuring God's word? Will you be rich in leaving a legacy of living for God's glory?

R. G. Letourneau lived from 1888-1969. He was a sixth grade dropout who became an inventor, a

businessman, and the leading earth moving machinery manufacturer of his day. He had plants on four continents and around 300 patents. Gigantic profits poured out of his business. He was a wealthy Christian businessman who invested generously in gospel ministries. In 1935 his wife gently suggested to do a 90/10 split. They would give 90% of their profits to the Lord and live off the 10%. And that's exactly what the LeTourneaus did. Mr. LeTourneau, unlike our foolish farmer, was known as saying, "It's not how much of my money I give to God, but how much of God's money I keep for myself."

May God help us to set a guard against the greed that creeps almost unnoticed into our hearts and to be sure to live our days rich in God, with our faith firmly fixed in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, making every day count for eternity.