

The stories Jesus told.



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Luke 12:13-21 | August 27, 2017

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I. Introduction to this Study

Our summer series *The Stories Jesus Told* continues as we look at a parable that addresses our inner commitments.

II. Connecting with One Another

What causes you to worry in this life? Be specific. Share with your group what worries you currently carry.

III. Study the Text

- a. Read Luke 12:13-21. As Jesus is teaching a man pushes through the crowd and demands that Jesus perform one of the common functions of a rabbi: arbitration in a dispute over a will. Apparently the man's older brother refused to give him what he felt was due. The laws of inheritance stipulated that the elder brother would receive a double portion of the inheritance (Deut 21.17). If the father had no sons, his possessions were to be divided among his daughters (Num 27.1-11), but his daughters were then required to marry within their father's tribe so that his possessions would not leave the tribe (Num 36.7-9).

Why do you think Jesus responds as he does in verses 14-15? What does his response suggest is at the heart of this man's request?

- b. In verse 15 Jesus warns the crowd to be guard against "all kinds of greed." In what different ways can greed manifest?
- c. Jesus illustrates his point that life consists of more than wealth and possessions by telling the parable in verses 16-20. What happens to the rich farmer that puts him in a quandary? What does he do to solve his problem? How does he feel about his decision? What unexpectedly happens to foil his plans?
- d. The man declares to himself that he will "take life easy; eat, drink and be merry," assuming that he has many years yet to enjoy his abundant wealth. Read James 4.13-17 and Luke 12.20. How do these verses speak to the perceived control we have in our lives?
- e. The wealthy farmer was prepared to receive a crop, but not one of such abundance. Rather than tearing down his barns to build bigger ones, what could he have done instead? (Read Luke 12.33-34) Where was the man's heart?
- f. Read Luke 9.23-25. How do these verses reinforce what this parable in Luke 12 teaches?

- g. Read again Luke 12.21. How would you sum up the moral of this parable in your own words?

Note: One *can* read verse 21 to be saying, "If you are self-absorbed and ignore God, God will strike you down." But this reading is incorrect. Rather, it is saying: If you are so focused on self and possessions, ignoring God and the call of God to love and serve others, you will be surprised at the end of life to discover what a "fool" you have been.

- h. God calls the man a "fool." Read Psalm 14.1a. In what ways has this man's actions communicated, "There is no God"?

IV. Reflect

- a. Until the voice of God interrupts the fool's dream there is nothing in the story but the man and his goods and prosperity. They have become the sole pursuit of his life. In what ways have possessions preoccupied your life? Can our possessions sometimes "own" us? How can Christians guard against this?
- b. The parable sketches the figure of a man who does not need anyone else. He can provide for himself; his provisions will take care of him for many years. How is this temptation to self-sufficiency seen in our world today? Do you experience it?
- c. Greed is the opposite of generosity. This man's greed blinds him to the needs of others, needs that he might meet out of his abundance. In what ways does our culture encourage greed? How does one reject greed and embrace generosity?
- d. The rich fool is most excited about a future in which he can "take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." He wants to a future that maximizes his own pleasure. This sounds uncomfortably like what many of us envision for our retirement years! What gives life true meaning, whether retired or not?
- e. Many people today live with what has been termed a "practical atheism." They may claim to believe in God, but when it comes to managing their lives, dealing with possessions and planning for the future, they live as if there were no God. What difference should our faith in God make in the practical matters of life?

V. Pray (If you are in a group, perhaps take 5 minutes—or more—to individually and silently pray the steps below.)

- a. Settle yourself comfortably in your chair...focus for a few moments on your breathing...become aware of God's presence with you...
- b. ...identify one characteristic of God to praise, perhaps relating to this parable...praise God...
- c. ...acknowledge your sins to God...in what ways might you be like the rich fool?...do you lack generosity?...are you overly self-sufficient?...confess to the Lord...
- d. ... let the Spirit take your mind to those people and situations who need your prayers...do you know people caught up in the pursuit of possessions?...lift them into the light of God's love...
- e. ...end by resting in God's embrace...ask God to protect you and protect Good Shepherd from greed...and to help us live generously...Amen.