

Rich Toward God

Lk 12:13-21

Key Verse: 12:21

“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

I would like to start my message with a confession of mine. If anyone knows me, I am crazy about shoes, especially Jordan's. I don't know why, but I can get super excited just at a picture of a pair of these. One of my favorite pair of Jordan's are the ones that Michael Jordan wore in the movie Space Jam (1997). They were re-released on Christmas Eve 2009 (yes that's how crazy I am, I remember the exact day and year a shoe was sold). These shoes sold out in less than one hour across the US. In order for me to get a pair, I woke up at 4 in the morning. I found a way to sneak into the Lincolnwood Mall through the employee entrance with about 50 other people who were there for the same exact thing. I waited outside of Footlocker for about 5 hours, with all these other sneaker heads, until I was able to get two pairs, one for me, and one for my 3 month old son who would never even walk in those shoes because he was so little.

You ever have those moments of excitement? Maybe it's that fully loaded, turbo charged, hybrid, zero emission SUV? Or maybe it's that high paying job, with tons of benefits, super secure, that comes with a 4 hour work day? Or maybe it's that new Iphone 1000S that comes with 1000 functions and features that we'll never need or use? Or maybe it's that perfect spouse, who's patient, and gentle, and kind, who will always agree with you no matter what?

I'm not the only one here, am I? How easy is it to feel like (Blank) is life? I mean we can literally feel it: the excitement and the joy of getting that one thing we really want. It's the tendency to think and feel like my life is those things. This passage today speaks to that. Jesus' simple words to this tendency of the human hearts are **“Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”** (15) A man in this text interrupts Jesus with a personal problem, and Jesus goes straight to the heart of this man. Let's all open our hearts to what God has for us this morning, so that we can lay bare before God how we really truly define life. May God open our hearts to see the ultimate glory and excitement in being rich towards Him.

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I. Be on guard against all kind of greed (13-15)

Let's take a look at verse 13. **“Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’”** Do you remember what Jesus was talking about when this man interrupted Jesus? Jesus was talking about some of the heaviest difficult things to understand about fearing God who can throw you in hell and blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Clearly this man was not listening. The reason is probably because in this man's life, this inheritance problem he was having was a very big deal. It must have been bothering him and tearing him apart so much that he felt like he had to bring this to someone's attention. He couldn't hear anything else.

In Jesus' time the inheritance, usually land and cattle, got divided among the sons. The oldest son got a double portion of the rest of the brothers. So let's do some math everyone. (I love math) If there were 3 sons, what percentage would the oldest one get? Right, the oldest would get 50%, the other 2 sons would get 25%. So he probably wasn't the oldest son, and perhaps he did not receive his fair share of the inheritance. Maybe his brother was keeping it all, we don't know. Whatever the situation, this man felt he did not receive his fair share.

Inheritance money has and still does cause a lot of heartache and strain on family relationships still today. It is so sad how the inheritance money of a parent can have such a negative effect on families. I'm sure many of you have seen and maybe even experienced this yourself. It rarely seems to go well, and often results in strain and stress at best, legal battles and lifelong divisions at worst. Siblings fight over every item in the house, they fight over the money in the bank account, the home that they all grew up in. It can become really messy and petty. Just like the man in this parable, people get consumed and torn apart on the inside fighting over inheritances.

Now this man in our passage may have very well been cheated by his brother. But no matter the situation, he did not handle this well. Firstly he made a very personal issue public by interrupting Jesus who was teaching a crowd. Secondly, his approach to Jesus was not right. He addresses Jesus as a teacher or Rabbi. And Rabbi's certainly did settle disputes like this. But this man's posture was not in seeking Jesus' counsel as a teacher. Rather he seems to want Jesus to

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rebuke his brother and somehow force him to divide the inheritance according to how he saw fit.

How does Jesus respond? Look at verse 14. **Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”** Jesus is not simply a judge, not simply a teacher, not a police officer, or a lawyer. He is actually all of those things and more. Jesus is the Lord of the entire universe, and when we approach Jesus, this has to be our starting point. He is our king, and his kingdom is not of this world. When we know who Jesus is, we should approach him in humility, then He can work to help us resolve our practical matters. It just may not be resolved the way we want them to be.

Jesus continues in verse 15. Can we read it together? Then he said to them, **“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”** Jesus doesn't even talk about inheritance and instead speaks to this man about greed. Jesus sees beyond this man's desire for fairness and what he sees is the greed in his heart. We don't know the situation exactly, and surely the man was entitled to his fair share of the inheritance, but Jesus sees a deeper problem in the man's heart.

This is how Jesus cares for us. This is why he is more than a judge or arbiter. As the Lord of all things, he is a holistic healer, and wants to heal us from the inside out. He doesn't want to just be our law enforcer, he wants to be the healer of our souls. And yet how often do we confine Jesus to being this strict moral code enforcer, in our lives, and in the lives of others. We think he only wants to make us feel guilty or take the fun out of our lives. But that's not it at all. He wants to make us whole, from the inside out. He wants to get to our hearts. He doesn't just scratch the surface of our lives, he gets to the root.

So what does Jesus say to this man? He says, **“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kind of greed.”** All kinds. When Jesus looks at this man with the inheritance problem, he sees that the hazard of the inheritance is deceiving the man, lying to him. This is the power of greed.

Google did a great job of defining greed for me. It said that greed is “intense and selfish desire for something, especially wealth, power, or food.” Intense and selfish. The Bible teaches us in Col 3:5 that greed is idolatry. Idolatry... meaning it is something other than God that takes supreme value in our life. And this is such a chronic issue of the human heart. We are willing to work crazy hours,

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abandon family and friends to make more money. So many people live beyond their means, live in debt, and then put all the possessions they can't even afford and are purchasing on credit into long term storage building, paying even more to store the things they couldn't afford to buy in the first place. It's crazy. Ecclesiastes 5:10 says, **“Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.”** The deception of greed is a downward spiral. It literally consumes us. And its consequences are not confined to problems in this life time, they are eternal. They are eternal because they replace God as the supreme ruler of our hearts. So the hazard Jesus speaks to here is a big deal. What is the inheritance money in this passage saying to this man? It is saying: “If you lose me, you lose what life can be for you. Life will be real life — truly life — if you have me.” That's what the inheritance was saying. But the scary thing is, not only is this inheritance not his life, it is about to take his eternal life.

So Jesus' words are very plain but so difficult to live by. Jesus says, **“life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”** Growing up in UBF I have seen countless beautiful example of missionaries and shepherds who give up so much in order to love and serve God. To give one example of some in our ministry here, I know one UBF missionary who graduated from one of the top law school programs in Korea. He was on track to be a judge but then he felt God calling him to come to America as a missionary. Rather than enjoying the benefits of the job and status his education could have given him in Korea, he came to America working odd jobs that included working at a gas station. He is one of countless examples of people who sacrificed opportunities and chose jobs with lower pay in order to keep God first in their life. I know I am personally blessed by many who have lived this example of life not consisting in an abundance of possessions.

But the reality is this is a life long struggle. Oh how vulnerable the fallen human heart is to feeling that having lots of things equals being really alive. Just as I mentioned in the beginning, if I just had (blank), I would be so much happier. These are all lies. Are there things in this world you are chasing and seeking with intense and selfish desires? Don't be deceived by the message of greed that woos us with the words: “I give you life. I am your life.”

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II. God is the provider of all things (16-18)

To help this man, and us, understand this even more, Jesus tells a parable in verses 16-20. Verse 16 says, **“The ground of a rich man yielded an abundant harvest.”** So it basically starts with a rich man that just got even richer.

Whatever the cause was for this man’s abundance, it reminds us that God is the provider of all things. Anything we receive, even if it is because of a good decision we made, we should acknowledge that all things come from God. The very life we have is His! The pay check we work so hard to earn is all God’s to begin with.

John Wesley taught in his sermon entitled, “The Use of Money” to “make as much as you can, save as much as you can, and then give as much as you can.” It is not bad to make as much money as you can. It is not a bad thing when this man’s **“ground yielded an abundance.”** It is not a bad thing to receive a promotion and a pay raise. It is not a bad thing when investments increase in value. These are not bad when we remember that God is the provider of all those things. God knows this broken world needs productive farmers and profitable businesses.

God used the generous support of many people to support the HBF Uganda mission trip. It required a lot of money to make it possible. We are so thankful for the sacrifices of the members of this church that gave out of their own pockets to help fund this trip. If each of the team members can encounter God in deep and personal ways, then it was the financial support of each of you that God used to work in the hearts and lives of those young people. The reality is that money and financial resources make God encountering opportunities like these possible.

So the parable continues, and this rich man makes a plan to tear down the barns he already has in order to build bigger ones. This decision, on the surface is not a bad decision. He was being a good steward of the blessing that God provided for him. Rather than allow the abundance of harvest to rot or go to waste, he had the means to build bigger barns, so good for him.

I pray that all of us can be good stewards of whatever God provides for us. Bad financial decisions or risky investments that don’t work out cause much stress and heart ache on individuals and families. These days we don’t think of wealth in terms of a harvest, but rather in terms of dollars and cents (mostly). And dollars and cents, though just paper and metal, have this profound effect on our emotions, and can muddle our judgment. I pray that we may all know that all things come

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from God, that every penny I have, every possession I have, is our Father's in heaven in the first place. I pray that knowing this, God's children, each of us, would be good stewards of whatever He has entrusted to us, no matter how much or how little it is.

III. Be Rich Toward God (19-21)

Let's look at verse 19. **“And I'll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”** What he says to himself, reveals his motive and his heart, and this is where we see the problem. He was saying that my treasure is relaxing and having fun. That is my life. And this abundance stored up in big barns makes that possible.

Jesus uses this parable show this man, and us the even deeper problem of greed. Look at verse 20, **“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?’”** When we look at the man's motives he just wanted an easy life. What's wrong with that? Nothing, if there is no infinitely valuable God and if there is no resurrection. That's why Paul said in 1 Cor 15:32, **“If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”** But the truth is, there is a God, and the truth is there is a resurrection.

This man, though he seems wise and successful is called a fool. God decides to take his life, and all the wealth he acquired for himself would go to waste. Here is the even deeper, more fundamental problem than greed: it is not acknowledging God. The truth is that God is real, and he holds our life in his hands. And at any moment he can take our life. When we live our life without acknowledging him as our God, we are foolish. When we make plans and don't include God and His will for us we become fools. Ps 14:1 pretty much sums it up. It says, **“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”** So the most fundamental issue is what we know and believe about God. Because it is our creator God that determines our eternal destiny. And this helps us realize that we must care for our soul. When we don't live in fear of Him, our best plans are foolish because we are neglecting the spiritual side of our lives. So the most fundamental question we must answer is who is God? May God reveal to us all that He holds our life in his hands and because of that may we have eternity in mind in all we do.

In verse 20 the parable ends. And in verse 21, Jesus summarizes the parable and speaks plainly to his listeners, so this is for us. Let's read it together. **“This is**

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how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.” So what’s wrong with this man’s way of handling his riches is that he fails use them in a way that shows he treasures God more than his abundance. The point of our life is not to simply store up things for ourselves. But the ultimate and eternal purpose of our lives is to be rich toward our Father in heaven.

As I tried to think about a good example of what it looks like to live as if we are rich toward God, I realized our best example is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Though he sat at God’s right hand, he came into this world as a baby in a manger. He lived as a simple carpenter. He had no place to lay his head. He gave his life to the work God called him to do, which would eventually lead him to giving up his very life on this earth on the cross. With eternity in mind, he did not live to store up treasures in this world. Knowing that God holds his life in his hands, he did not fear man. He was rich toward God because he loved and fear God from the beginning of his life to the end.

I’d like to share one more example of someone who is rich toward God. In preparing this message I heard John Piper share his personal testimony of how he struggles to fight off greed and live rich toward God. One of the things that really challenged me is how he lives off of a set salary determined by his church. 100% of everything else he gives to God. Now he a is pretty well known writer and speaker, but all the money from books, honorariums, thank you’s for funerals and weddings, he gives 100% of that to his church. But it is not just this decision about his income that moved me. But it is his daily struggle to keep God in the center of his life. He studies to see and savor the supreme value of Jesus every day. To see God so supremely valuable that other things assume their way lower place. And then his obedience is driven by what is beautiful and glorious. He is rich towards God. All that God provides for his life is God’s in the first place. With an eternal perspective, he trusts God who holds his life in his hands.

This parable comes to me at a very timely place in my life. In March I left Lane Tech High School during my 11th year to take on a bi-vocational calling to be an HBF leader and an entrepreneur. This decision has given me the opportunity to commit myself all the more fully to God’s calling in my life to serve high school student with the gospel. I have a sincere desire to be rich toward God, so Anna and I have prayerfully sought to submit every decision to what God wants for us. At the same time, honestly speaking I want to make as much money as I can through business and entrepreneurship. But the Bible is full of warnings, even saying that it

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is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. So for the past year, I have pursued this passion with a great deal of prayer and care and caution. But there are times I get lost in lofty hopes and dreams to be comfortable, and relax. But it is God's word, and passages like this that remind me that life is not about the abundance of possessions. It is not about having shiny new things. It is not about having the biggest home. My life is about God. Why would I want anything more than being rich toward God? In the grander view of all things, being rich toward God is putting my life in his hands.

I would like to conclude with 1 Tim 6:17-19. Can we read it together? **“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”**

I started with my enthusiasm for shoes because such emotions that we feel in the things of this world can certainly give us temporary excitement, but they cannot lead us to take hold of the life that is truly life. I can only be rich toward God when the Holy Spirit changes my foolish and worldly view of things. God has the best and more wonderful gift for us in the Kingdom of God. Not only that, he has an exciting and glorious life for us now. I love the part of 1 Timothy that assures us, when we put our hope in God, he **“richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment”**. I pray that each of us may have even more excitement about the treasures God has for us in the kingdom of heaven. May the glory of God's riches for us through Christ Jesus shine so bright that all the temporary things our hearts tend to chase might become so dim. May God open our eyes to see that He himself is our greatest reward, he is our treasure more than anything. He has for us the life that is truly life.