

DEEP POCKETS, EMPTY SOUL

Parables 18: The Rich Fool

Lk 12:16-21

I. ILLUSTRATION

EXAMPLE: STOCK MARKET INVESTMENT—\$50,000

- Rising from \$1 to \$100 per share to— \$5 million
- When to pull out—risk of greed and loss
- What would be ‘enough’ money?
- What would you do with the profit?

II. BACKGROUND

A. LUKE 11

- Taught disciples to pray
- Parable of Persistent Neighbor
- Jesus Encounters Opposition from Scribes and Pharisees

B. LUKE 12

- Many thousands were following—stepping on one another
- Following today’s passage—‘Do not worry’ excerpts from Sermon on Mount—vv22-34

13 *Someone in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.”* **14** *But He said to him, “Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?”* **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.”*

C. EXPLANATION

1. OT ADJUDICATION

- o **Dt 17**—difficult cases were to be heard by a Levitical priest or judge

2. THE MAN’S REAL PROBLEM

- Issue was not deciding the law—which was specific
 - **Dt 21:17**—elder brother receives double portion of inheritance
- Probably older brother was withholding inheritance
- Man was not asking for judicial decision—but action
 - For Jesus to act as his attorney and enforcer—not judge

3. JESUS’ RESPONSE

- o He was not an earthly judge—not sent to sort out earthly disputes
- o More concerned with the man’s ultimate priorities—what really mattered—eternally

4. GREED—AN EARTHLY PROBLEM THAT KILLS ETERNAL HOPE

- a. Deals with *another* law—the tenth commandment—no coveting
 - Often at the root of most sin between humans—commandments 5-9
- b. Greed = consuming desire to have more
 1. **Rockefeller’s quote—what is enough—one dollar more**
 2. Opposite of contentment
 - Paul to Timothy—*godliness with contentment is great gain*—I Tim 6:6

II. BIBLICAL TEXT—LUKE 12:16-21

Lk 12:16-21—16 *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?’ 21 So is the man who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”*

SENECA (d. 65)—*Epistulae Morales* 101.4–5 [after a successful businessman died]

But how foolish it is to lay out one’s life, when one is not even owner of the morrow! O what madness it is to plot out far-reaching hopes! To say: ‘I will buy and build, loan and call in money, win titles of honor, and then, old and full of years, I will surrender myself to a life of ease.’ Believe me when I say that everything is doubtful, even for those who are prosperous. No one has any right to draw for himself upon the future. The very thing that we grasp slips through our hands, and chance cuts into the actual hour which we are crowding so full.

III. EXPLANATION

A. CONTEXT

- THIS PARABLE NOT IN OTHER GOSPELS
- THE ONLY NT PARABLE IN WHICH GOD IS AN ACTOR

B. PURPOSE—DEALS WITH FOUR ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM

- THE OUTWARD SYMPTOM—GREED—ACQUISITIVENESS
- THE ERRONEOUS PERSPECTIVE—ONLY THE ‘HERE AND NOW’ COUNTS
- THE ROOT ISSUE—DEPENDENCE ON ‘THINGS’—POSSESSIONS
- THE ULTIMATE QUESTION—WHAT DO YOU TRUST—GOD OR WORLDLY GOODS

D. THE PARABLE

1. THE LAND PROSPERED—v16

- a. **Prosperity**—was due to **God’s general grace**—not the man’s ingenuity or industry

b. But he showed **no gratitude**—only spoke of ‘**my crops**’—‘**my grain**’—‘**my goods**’

2. WHAT SHALL I DO—v17

a. Other options

1. Give a portion back to the Lord—as required by the Law
 - Wave offering—burnt offering—grain offering—and drink offering—**Lev 23**
2. Give bonuses to his harvesters
3. Share produce and seed for planting with neighbors
4. Leave gleanings in the corners for the poor—**Lev 23**

b. No—his **sole focus** was

- Personal enjoyment and happiness

3. WHAT THE MAN FOCUSED ON—vv18-19

a. Himself

- In three verses—14 references to himself
- *Speaking to himself*—v17
- 11 first-person pronouns—I and my—**vv17-18**
- Speaking twice in third person to himself—v19

b. This world

- No perspective of the next life
- But—this world is transitory
- Eastern saying:

“The world is a bridge. The wise man will pass over it but will not build his house upon it.”

4. WHAT THE MAN FORGOT—vv18-19

a. **His workers**—who labored hard to bring in the harvest

b. His neighbors

- Who could have rented him space in their barns
- Who might have needed his help

c. Time

1. He thought he had *unlimited* time
2. But—**great persons** always are impressed with the shortness of time
3. We should have a sense of urgency about time—not waste it—or take it for granted
4. **Tomorrow**—is a dangerous word
 - It may never come—in fact, it never does come
 - We cannot control tomorrow

d. **God**

1. He forgot the **Giver**—who had made him prosper
 - Not grateful to God—but to Mother Earth
2. Ingratitude was expressed in selfishness—keeping it all for himself
3. **Today**—people hold back the tithe—rob God because
 - Desire to have more wealth
 - Lack of trust—that God will fill in the gap

5. **SUMMARY PICTURE OF THE RICH MAN—vv18-19**

a. **Three things define** the rich man

1. **Selfishness**—focused on himself
 - **Self-centered** and inattentive to the needs of others
2. **Materialism**—things mattered most—more and more things
 - His **greed** blinded him to eternal matters—life and death
3. **Hedonism**—self-indulgence
 - Enjoyment is okay—but **self-indulgence** and pleasure are not our purposes in life

b. The **diagnosis**

1. He was a **slave**—not a master
 - Not in control—even of his own life
 - His life was demanded—commercial term
 - Life is on loan—and the loan can be called in at any time
2. He was **poor**—not rich
 - Possessions gave him a false sense of control
 - **But** *they* actually controlled *him*
 - Death left him stripped of all things—except a **bankrupt** self
3. His was a **failure**—not a success
 - Lacking all spiritual discernment
 - Not acknowledging God’s existence
 - Making life’s decisions without God

6. **YOU FOOL—v20**

a. **God judges**—by these **standards**

1. ***The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom—Pr 9:10***
 - The opposite of this wisdom is foolishness
 - So—he was a **fool** because he did not fear God—like the unjust judge
2. ***The fool has said in his heart there is no God—Ps 14:1***

- b. This man made all his plans without consulting God

Jas 4:13-15—Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that. But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

7. WHO WILL OWN WHAT YOU PREPARED?—v20

- a. The author of Ecclesiastes—said this was mere emptiness

Ec 2:18-19—Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity.

- b. This points ties back to the man in the crowd—[this was Jesus’ point]

- He was **foolish**—to put so much emphasis on worldly inheritance
- When he had the opportunity—to receive **eternal life** directly from the Son of God

8. RICH TOWARD GOD—v21

- a. **Opposite**—is storing up earthly treasure for ourselves
- b. What does it mean to be ‘rich toward God’

I Tim 6:17-19—Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

- c. Where does the wise person store this treasure?

Mt 6:19-21—Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

E. MAIN POINTS

1. THIS LIFE IS ON **LOAN** FROM GOD

- o What we have is not ours—God gave it to us
- o Even our most intimate self—our soul—does not belong to us
- o Someday God will call in the loan
- o And our souls will be ‘required’ of us—to give Him an account

2. THIS LIFE IS **FRAGILE** AND UNCERTAIN

- a. We have little control over our departure
- b. The only certainty is that this life will end
- c. No matter how we cling to it—we all must die

Example: Dave Asprey—Bulletproof Coffee CEO—age 45

‘Bio-hacker’ who expects to live to 180—to 2153

Injected with stem cells every six months—in every part of his body

Strict diet—bathes with infrared light

Hangs out in hyperbaric oxygen chamber

Wears goofy yellow-lens glasses when he flies

Has spent \$1 million so far—will spend millions more

***Bulletproof Radio* podcast—downloaded 75 million times**

Has 332,000 Twitter followers

Plan: live longest recorded human life-span—[Methuselah 969 years!]

- d. This is opposite to Jesus’ call to **eternal** life
 - Remember what Jesus then said

Mk 8—*Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul; or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*

3. THE **MEANING** OF LIFE

- a. ‘Life’—is not determined by our possessions
- b. ‘Life’—is who we **are**, not what we **have**
- c. “You can’t take it with you”
 - **Alexander the Great—instructions for his burial—showing his hands empty**
 - **Job 1:21—*Naked we came into the world; naked we will depart***
 - **I Tim 6:7—*For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.***

4. **POSSESSIONS** ARE NO BASIS FOR **SECURITY**

- o *Reliance* on possessions—**impoverishes us** before God
- o In western society—we have made an **idol of financial security**
- o But God calls us to depend on Him for eternal security

I Tim 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. For the*

love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

IV. APPLICATION

A. **GREED** IS NOT A FUNCTION OF WEALTH

- Both rich and poor can be covetous
- It may be *easier* for the rich to ‘store up earthly treasures’
- But the poor can be just as attached to and controlled by their meager earthly possessions

B. WATCH OUT FOR THESE **DANGERS**

1. **Using God** for our own agendas—like the man in the crowd
2. Losing our **perspective**
 - Not realizing what this life is all about—preparation for the next life
3. **Presuming** upon tomorrow—that we have plenty of time left
4. The **Perils** of Prosperity
 - Financial blessings—can cause us to take our eyes off God

C. THIS MESSAGE IS **COUNTERINTUITIVE** TO HUMAN CULTURE

1. We pursue money and possessions for two reasons
 - o Personal **pleasure**—or at least lack of suffering and pain
 - o Financial **security**—a safety net for the future
2. The **fault** is not wealth and possessions themselves
 - o But how firmly we **cling** to them
 - o And how much they take our **eyes off** eternal things
 - o And how much our **possessions possess** us

D. A WORD ABOUT ‘RETIREMENT’

1. Recent trend in America—early retirement
 - a. Some are not content to **make a living**—but to **make a killing**
 - b. Others have embraced **radical frugality**—to ‘gain control’
 - **F.I.R.E.** = Financial Independence Retire Early
2. Beware—the **sinister** undercurrents of this approach
3. Life is not about taking it **easy**—or gaining **control** of everything
4. We are called to be responsible—and ‘*rich toward God*’
 - o To live **productively** for Him
 - o To **seek** His kingdom and righteousness
 - o To reflect **His character** in all our relationships

E. LIVE RICH BEFORE GOD

- Invest in heavenly treasure by **sharing** with others
- Cultivate **compassion** not greed
- Pursue **relationship** and **confidence** in **God**—not in money and possessions
- **Focus on Him** and His plan—not ourselves

V. INVITATION

I AM THINE O LORD

I am thine, O Lord, I have heard thy voice,
and it told thy love to me;
but I long to rise in the arms of faith
and be closer drawn to thee.

Refrain:

Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,
to the cross where thou hast died.
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,
to thy precious, bleeding side.

Consecrate me now to thy service, Lord,
by the power of grace divine;
let my soul look up with a steadfast hope,
and my will be lost in thine.

O the pure delight of a single hour
that before thy throne I spend,
when I kneel in prayer, and with thee, my God,
I commune as friend with friend!

There are depths of love that I cannot know
till I cross the narrow sea;
there are heights of joy that I may not reach
till I rest in peace with thee.