

Rich Fool or Rich toward God
Luke 12:13-21; 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Turn to Luke 12 please. We are going through Luke's parables now. These teachings on parables will go in three parts. We began with the earliest parables, the kingdom parables of the sower and the seed, and others that are together with that one in Matthew 13 and Mark 4. He taught these in Galilee.

That was the first part. Now we're going through Luke's parables. The Gospel of Luke has a long travel section where Jesus and his followers are walking to Jerusalem, where Jesus will eventually die and be raised. Jesus teaches and meets different people on that trip.

In Luke, that last trip to Jerusalem starts at the end of Luke 9, well before the middle of the Gospel, and Jesus gets to Jerusalem at the end of Luke 19. A full 10 chapters of Luke, which has 24 chapters, tell us about that long final journey. And those 10 chapters include quite a few parables that are not in other Gospels. That's what we're working on now.

When that's done, the third section of parables will be those Jesus taught at the end of his ministry, while he was in his last weeks in Jerusalem, those mostly in Matthew.

Luke 12 has the story of the rich fool. That's what we usually call that parable, because Jesus said the man was rich, and God called the man, "You fool."

The parable warns us against the danger of wealth, but this parable does not talk about the right use of wealth. But 1 Timothy 6 has three verses that say how wealthy believers should live, so we will go there after the parable.

Jesus ends the parable by saying the rich fool was not rich toward God. But Jesus does not say what "rich toward God" would look like. (He does in other places, but not here). But 1 Timothy 6 tells us clearly what rich toward God looks like, almost using those words. So we'll end there.

Here is our text (Luke 12:13f): *Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."*¹⁴ *Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"*¹⁵ *Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a person's life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."*

¹⁶ *And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'*

¹⁸ *"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Rest, eat, drink, celebrate.'"*

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?’ ²¹ “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Let’s go through this a verse at a time. *Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”*

In those days, when the father died, the property was divided into one more share than there were sons. The oldest got two shares, the rest got one. Or, they could all stay together on the same property. That was ideal. Quite possibly this is not the oldest son, this is another son who wants his share and go somewhere else, and the oldest is not cooperating.

¹⁴ *Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”* At first glance I’d be tempted to say, “Well, Lord, we actually thought your Father in heaven appointed you judge and mediator.” But Jesus did not take on cases like this.

Jesus was more interested in how this man was thinking than in changing his situation. That was normal for Jesus. So Jesus used it as a chance to teach the crowd. V13 began, “*Someone in the crowd.*” In v15, “*he said to them ...*” He taught the crowd, but this man was still there. It was a kinder way of giving the man advice he did not want to hear.

¹⁵ *Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a person’s life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”*

Watch out! Be on your guard! The same warning twice. *All kinds of greed.* Any kind of wanting what we don’t have. Watch out for it! Be on your guard! Jesus told this man was that his concern was more dangerous to him than not getting his share of the inheritance. Badly wanting his inheritance was a bigger danger than losing his inheritance. Watch out! Be on guard!

Abundance of possessions: picture in front of you everything you own. Every object, land and home, car and clothes, and a box of money. Then add a second part: everything you would like to own but don’t, everything you would get if you could. Now all of that is in front of you also.

This is your abundance collection: all you own, all you’d like to own, and money for what you don’t know about yet. We each have an abundance collection.

For this man not getting his inheritance, the biggest part of his collection was what he’d like to have but does not yet. He wants his inheritance. He’s filled with what he wants but can’t have. The man in the parable already had it all. The rich fool’s abundance collection was entirely what he already owned. All he could think of to want was in his hands.

They are both making the same mistake: they both think they will get life from their abundance collection. Wrong, says Jesus: *a person’s life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.*

Whether my abundance collection is mostly what I want, or mostly what I have, there is no life in it. But a convincing voice tells me it has life in it, it has life to give me, and that convincing voice is a very good liar. Jesus always viewed money and possessions as his strong competition. He and possessions were competing for the deep loyalty of people; it was intense battle for Jesus.

That is why Jesus said, *Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.* And then Jesus told a story of a man who was like the cheated brother, except that all his dreams come true. If we think life comes from the abundance collection, our life is wrecked, says Jesus. If we don't get what we want it is wrecked, and if we do.

¹⁶ *And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. The rich man himself did nothing. But his land produced wonderfully. He had a bumper crop, which comes from things outside his control.*

¹⁷ *He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'* Here he sounds genuinely concerned. It is problem. His storage can keep 300 bushels, and now he has 800 bushels. Grain cannot stay outside very long.

¹⁸ *"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my grain and my goods.* That makes sense, it is not complicated, a reasonable plan.

And then he practices what he will say to himself once the bigger storage is built: ¹⁹ *And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Rest, eat, drink, celebrate."* This last part is just four words in Greek: *Rest, eat, drink, celebrate.*

Verses 18-19 are the retirement plan of most in North America. But there are many public voices out there saying so. This is the collective dream. We'd call that man a total success. We work for just that reasons. I say I know better, but lots of me thinks like that man.

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?'*

"Tonight you must hand back your life. You did not know when but you knew this was coming, and you did nothing about it. That's why you are a fool." That's why Jesus said, "watch out, be on your guard, against every kind of greed, every kind of longing for what we don't have."

The Lie. Whether we get it or not, greed tells us that our abundance will make our life full, and that's a lie. If we get what we want we will indeed feel full, when we get it we feel full, the rich fool felt like his life was full, it sure felt good when he thought about all that grain stored up, but it was a lie, his life was empty, which became horribly obvious on the day he died.

Jesus was still thinking about the man who wanted his inheritance. This is what he would look like if he got it. Advertising of all kinds is saying exactly this. Buy this, your life will be rich.

²¹ “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.” He was not rich toward God. The problem was not that he was rich. His land produced an impressive crop. That’s not a sin. He planned to get more storage for it. That’s not a sin.

But his view of life was to store it all up for himself. That was a problem. In his world, there is only this life not the future life, and there is only himself and all his grain. There are no other people, there is no God, and there is no future life after this life. Rest, eat, drink, celebrate.

There is a God, and there is a future life. Greed tells us “if I will just get what I want, everything will be okay.” Jesus says: “no, it won’t, getting what you want has nothing to do with everything being okay, don’t believe that, people who trust that feeling are fools.”

Whether you get it or not, if you believe that you’re a fool. Watch out, be on your guard, about that hunger to get more. Rather, be rich toward God.

Later in Luke, we have the story of Zacchaeus. He was rich. When he met Christ, he gave half his money to the poor, and wherever he had gotten money back unfairly he gave back four times as much. That made him rich toward God.

1 Timothy 6 – What “rich toward God” looks like.

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. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ 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.

There are wealthy people who are rich toward God. I work for Providence, and Providence keeps going largely because of large gifts from wealthy believers. That is a big part of why I have gotten a pay cheque from that place over the years.

I have always found this a straightforward and practical Scripture. These sentences spell out rich toward God.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant. In this present world. There is this life, which is short, and the next life with God, which is long. This life has difficult tests and also joys and comforts from God. This life is preparation for the next life with God. Jesus and Paul both talked about this life and also the next life, to guide us about possessions.

Do not be arrogant. Moses says, “when you get wealthy, you will say, ‘my energy and my good decisions made this wealth for me.’” “No,” says Moses, “remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.” Where did you get your energy? Your ability to make good money decisions? From the LORD your God. There shall be no quiet arrogance.

Nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God. A lot of fortunes have been made and then lost. Sometimes it was the fault of the person with the fortune, but very many times it was not. Forces outside our control go to work, and it is all gone!

Even in this life, wealth is uncertain. Even in this life, it makes more sense to trust God. Moths and rust corrupt, and thieves break in and steal. It's gone. Or you die young. Let's trust in God.

God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. This is the most amazing line. This is the main reason I like this 1 Timothy 6 text. *God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.* Do I even believe that? I want to believe it, but something in me believes that God is stingy, to be blunt. He will provide enough to stay alive, but not for enjoyment.

God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Really?!?! If this is true, what is the point being greedy? If this is true, what is the point being rich? Paul writes this, but Jesus taught like this too. Jesus said that even Solomon, with all his wealth, was not clothed as marvelously as a flower. And when we look at a flower, we know that's entirely true.

I think our enemy the liar is terrified we would believe this line. *God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*

Now we get to the core of the matter in v18: Jesus said the rich fool was not rich toward God.

What does it mean to be rich toward God?

1 Tim 6:18 is the opposite of: Rest, eat, drink, celebrate. Those four words are the treasuring for ourselves and being fools before God instead of rich before God.

In v18 we have four again, four short instructions: *Command them (1) do good, (2) be rich in good deeds, (3) be generous (4) willing to share.*

There are really just two commands here, each one given two ways. *do good, be rich in good deeds.* Be full of words and actions that are good for other people. Rich in good words and actions toward people that are good for them, that help them. This is the wealth that counts. Accumulate a big pile of this.

That's the first pair. Here's the second, again one instruction said two ways: Be generous, and willing to share.

Tell the wealthy people to have an open hand with their money. Give lots, and do so willingly. That does not mean we give to everyone who asks, but it means when a need is clear and honest, they don't have to pry our gift out of our hands.

It is interesting that Paul does not say they should spend less on themselves. It's good to think about what we always say about these topics, but it not in this Scripture.

I think this has some implications for spending on ourselves. Let's not make it our goal to spend less. Let's make it our goal to give more. The Scripture rarely calls us to spend less on ourselves, of the top I cannot think of one, but the Bible often calls us to be generous and willing to share.

This is how to be rich toward God: *Do good, be rich in good deeds. Be wealthy in words and actions that are good for other people. And, be generous and willing to share.* This means that if someone paid attention over time to where our money went, it would be evident that we follow the Lord Jesus, and he was a big priority in our life.

I have heard Christians say that, it is not how much money we have that counts, but our attitude to it. This is true, and v18 shows us what a good attitude looks like.

This is what a good attitude looks like: we are wealthy in words and actions that are good for other people. We are generous and willing to share, and if someone knew all about our finances and possession, what we have and what we do with it, it would be clear to them that we follow the Lord Jesus with our heart and our money. That's what a good attitude looks like.

¹⁹ 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.

Our Lord speaks to us here this morning, and he's giving us investment advice. He's afraid we'll get fooled by greed. He does not want us believing his enemy; that would be disastrous for us.

So he tells us: "Be wealthy in words and actions that are good for other people. Be generous and willing to share. This way, you will lay up treasure for yourselves for the coming age. This way, you will be rich toward God. This way, you take hold of real living, what is truly life." Amen.