Text: Luke 12:13-21
Title: Your Soul
Truth: Life is not about what you have; it is about what you give to God.
Date/Location: Sunday August 4, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira gave a gift of money to the church in Jerusalem, but they hid their true intentions by lying about the amount of money. Peter realized their hypocrisy and God used them as an example to set the church on a path of honesty and privacy when it comes to giving. This episode also uncovers for us a key area where there might be hypocrisy in our hearts, and that is the area of money, possessions, and covetousness. Those things reside deep inside our hearts. The Lord does not shy away from teaching about them because we need it.

I. The Occasion: A Teachable Interruption, v. 13-14

A. Dividing the inheritance. A random guy from the crowd calls out to Jesus and appeals to him about a legal dispute with his own brother. Apparently, their father had died, and the usual proprieties were not being observed by the other brother. Perhaps the brother was older and was holding onto everything from the estate and not releasing the part that belonged to the younger brother. Or perhaps the younger brother wanted a full half instead of the traditional 1/3. The typical pattern was for the firstborn son to receive a double portion of inheritance (see Deuteronomy 21:17). He would get two shares, and all the other brothers would get one share. In the case of two brothers, the older would get 2/3 and the younger 1/3. Being a firstborn was a bigger deal in that culture than in ours. In Israel this was particularly true, because from the time of the Exodus, when the Lord killed the firstborn of every Egyptian family, God instructed through Moses that the people of Israel were to make an offering for their firstborn. That child belongs to God, and gratitude to God was appropriate for His opening of the womb.

B. Changing the subject. The person in the crowd asked this question on the immediate heels of the Lord teaching about hypocrisy and

internal religion, the fear of God, the sovereign care of the Father over all creation, confessing Christ before others, speaking against the Holy Spirit, and how to handle persecution situations in civil and religious settings. Those are weighty subjects, but it seems doubtful that the man was really paying attention.

To interrupt that teaching with a matter of such triviality as to *how* someone's inheritance is distributed, or *when* it is distributed, is way of out of line. It is like when we focus on politics or physical health while someone is dead in trespasses and sins, or a group of people need the Word of God, or a brother is living in an unruly manner or needs encouragement, or a church has tried to change the gospel, or we are ignoring our own hypocrisy. *These* are the topics that matter and should receive our keen attention rather than mundane, worldly issues.

C. Immediately Jesus turned aside the man's request. His question is rhetorical: no one put Me in the place of being a judge about such matters. It was not Jesus's business to arbitrate between the man and his brother; it was not His mission; it was not His focus; it was not his jurisdiction; it was not even that important.

Oh, it was important to the questioner—so important that he pushed aside all hesitancy to ask in public about it! But just because *you think* something is important, does not mean that it objectively *is* important. The Lord shows us here that it is *not important*. It is money. There is no reason to get upset about it.

D. You may object that this sort of matter *does* fall within the jurisdiction of Jesus as the Son of God. I am willing to grant that, but Jesus operated mainly in His human capacity as a man. And as a man, He does not have authority over matters of the inheritance of others. There are priests for that, and judges, likely Roman judges, who would oversee such disputes.

E. Jesus did not get distracted from what His business was. He was certainly capable and qualified to function as a judge. To do so, however, would take Him away from the reason for His coming, which was to preach the gospel to Israel (Luke 4:43).

Jesus' choice here is applicable to me as a pastor, and to you too. Why do you do the things you do? Why do you have your family doing the things they are doing? Are those things really the priorities of your life? Are they Biblical? Do they recognize the urgency of the need for the gospel and the priority of spiritual matters?

F. Jesus focused on the core issue, which was *not* the "bad brother." It was a heart problem in the man asking about the inheritance! The man's question, and the fact that he was desperate enough to bring this private family matter into public view, show that his heart was focused on material possessions, not on his relationship with God. In this way, possessions have a serious danger attached to them.

II. The Lord's Message, v. 15

A. The doctrine or message of this section is what the Lord says explicitly in verse 15: beware of covetousness. The following text will make clear this has far more to it than just money. It is a desire to acquire more "stuff" that you fancy. The desire shows that some things are more important to you than God and other people. Your "loves" are messed up because you do not in the first place want more of God and to love others. The bottom line is that greed is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

B. Remember that this is exactly the 10th commandment from Exodus 20:17. There it focused on coveting the possessions of another person, which could lead to stealing those very things. Here, the Lord does not specify the source of the possessions. Where they are from does not matter. We must beware because to hold inside the strong desire for more of whatever is a violation of God's moral law.

C. Why not be covetous? The Lord tells us: because your life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions. That means that the value of your life, the utility of it, the importance of it, the experiences you accumulate, the places you can say you have gone, the money in your retirement account, etc. do not define your life. The following parable will explain. Two millennia before

Malcolm Forbes perfected his hedonistic practice (he who has the most toys wins), Jesus directly rebuked the philosophy behind it. God measures life in terms of godliness and spiritual priorities, not material and worldly ones.

D. Why not instead "covet" those things that do improve what your life truly is all about? Life is about something other than possessions and the drive for more. I suppose that the *opposite* of covetousness—contentment—is one thing that we should "want more of."

Once again, the Lord points us to considerations of the heart, like we were for the previous two sections of Luke in chapter 11.

E. This has been a problem from the beginning of time. But for most people in world history, material abundance, wealth, time, and leisure were never so available as they are to us today. So, we have an even *greater* danger of falling prey to our heart's covetousness.

F. What exactly is the danger? Well, there is the danger of becoming distracted from what your real mission in life is. There is the danger of being guilty of idolatry. And there is another danger highlighted in the parable: it is the danger of being destroyed amid your focus on things, showing that the soul being called is not right with God.

III. Parable of the Rich Man, v. 16-20

The parable serves to illustrate the Lord's plain teaching in verse 15.

A. There was a rich man. Whether he was self-made or obtained wealth by inheritance, we do not know. The reality is that some will be rich in this world, and many will not. We will always have poor in this world (Matt. 26:11, Deut. 15:11). Whatever the case, his land yielded plentifully. Obviously, the rich man did some work to prepare the soil and plant. But the "ground" does not yield by itself unless God has given conditions like sunshine and rain. The fields produced abundance because God created them and permitted them to do so.

B. The rich man's first thought in this case should have been: "Thank you God, for giving to me an abundant harvest. I owe you

everything that I have." The Israelites symbolized this thankfulness with an offering of firstfruits to God for His worship and service (Exodus 23:16).

Instead of thinking that way, the rich man focused on the abundance apart from its ultimate source, and started thinking about what he would do with all of it—how to store it and how to use it. The abundance of it posed a problem.

C. He must have had sizeable barns already—remember, he was rich. But he figured he needed bigger barns. In those new barns he would store all his stuff. It seems wasteful to me to pull down the old barns to build bigger ones. Could he not just have added one more barn? This wastefulness might indicate that he was interested in building something that would impress others.

D. Then, his thoughts turned to what he would do with his time after this. He had so much stuff that he could kick back for many years, and not work at all, take it easy, "eat, drink, and be merry." In other words, he began to plan what he would do in his retirement. He did not say "If the Lord wills, I will do this or that" (James 4:15), showing also a measure of arrogance.

> The philosophy of "eat, drink, and be merry" is that of *egoistic hedonism*, attributed to Epicurus. The main tenets of Epicureanism revolve around a focus on the material world, anti-superstition, and personal pleasure. This was twisted into a hedonistic philosophy of abandoning oneself to enjoy the (sinful) pleasures of life. But Epicurus taught that pleasure had to do with living modestly, learning about the world, and limiting one's desires. Still, his was an ungodly philosophy.

E. The Lord brings up a very applicable point in our culture. We should carefully think through our theology of retirement, especially since the notion of retirement really does not appear in the Bible. To not work for say 15 or 20 or 25 years, particularly if during much of that time we are able-bodied, is not contemplated in the Bible. Such retirement looks a lot like what was done by the rich farmer in the parable.

F. The Lord closed the parable with a surprise for the farmer: he was going to die that night. He thought he would enjoy "many years" but in fact he only had a few hours. The possessions that he trusted would give me years of enjoyment would be left to someone else (perhaps a fool like himself, Eccl. 2:18-19; see also Psalm 39:6, Jer. 17:11). The rich man thought about "my things" and "my soul" but he forgot that all things are from the Lord, and the soul belongs to the Lord also. It is not "mine" to do as I please.

IV. Lesson, v. 21

The Lord applies the parable in verse 21.

A. What coveters forget is that the end game is not the last day of one's life; rather it is the eternal state. There, not only will there be an abundance to meet every need, but there will also be no lack, no sin, and no other things that tarnish the enjoyment of a perfect life and fellowship with God. It will be the perfect, secure retirement. The believer knows that the end game in terms of 'what' or 'who' is not things, but God. Our priority is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, not a relationship with things!

B. Jesus pronounces that all who are rich toward themselves are fools. We meet the fool in other places in Scripture—namely Psalm 14:1 where the Bible calls the practicing atheist a fool. Why is he a fool? Because he does not fear God, and he will find out later that he *should* have. It is foolish to live in the here and now with no regard for the there and later.

C. Those who lay up treasures for themselves are ones who gather material possessions like the rich fool in the parable and focus on those things like he did—having to make more accommodations for things that he did not have room for. Gathering with a focus on self is opposed to godliness.

D. "What He [Jesus] disapproves of is the covetous and carnal attitude with regard to earthly wealth, the trust in worldly things instead of in God, and the fault of not regarding one's possessions

gratefully as God's gracious gifts and using them in His service and according to His will to the glory of His name."[1]

Conclusion

Those who are rich toward God are wise. This is obviously the opposite of laying up treasure for self; it is investing treasure in others for the sake of honoring God. It is investing in God, so to speak, using resources to further His purposes instead of one's own.

Stop and think today and this week, then, about how you are stewarding your resources to avoid being like the foolish rich farmer of the parable. Every effort you make in this endeavor to think—and then to act—will be an investment that will have a wonderful return in eternity.

MAP

[1] Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, p. 355–56.