

The rich fool encounters Jesus \* Luke 12:13-21, 32-34  
March 14, 2021 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

Years ago, I came across a lyric in a song that really stuck with me. It's by a hip hop artist, a Christian guy who goes by the Rel McCoy<sup>i</sup> now, who says – "Who got a hold – is in money or you – in control?"

In ten words or less, he asks a very profound question – who's in control? Your money or you? Do you make use of your possessions or do they exercise control over you?

Later in the song, he says – "Consider how you relate to the paper in your billfold" and that's what we're going to do today – think about how we as Christians relate to our money, to our possessions. Money is good and we need it but we all know that it can consume us if we let it. Too many people have lost too much in the pursuit of more.

So we're going to think today about how we relate to the paper in our billfolds – how we as Christians think about and make use of our money? For ourselves? For a bigger cause? For what?

Join me in Luke 12, starting in verse 13. In Luke 12, Jesus is standing in the midst of a huge crowd (12:1)<sup>ii</sup> and then, verse 13, someone in the crowd yells out – 'Hey, teacher! Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.'

Now we have no idea who this guy is; chances are good that he is a younger brother who is not content with what he's received, but inheritance law is not what Jesus is here to do, is He? And besides, this guy's not asking for a fair hearing – he's just like 'Jesus – tell my brother to give me more money.'

Jesus – very tactfully says – 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?' He's not going to wade into this inheritance squabble. That's just nuts.

But He IS going to take this opportunity to talk to the crowd about this desire for more. This is a perfect teachable moment and so He says to the crowd - verse 15 -

15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Jesus takes this opportunity to say to the whole crowd – 'Don't get tangled up in the desire for more. Guard yourself against all types of greed, because life is truly about more than what you own.' Money is good but it's not everything.

And that's something that I think COVID-19 has really taught us. A few weeks back I saw a Facebook post that said something like – 'COVID has shown us to value what is truly important – family and friends and community and grandparents and hugs. And notice how none of those involve money.' Smart Facebook post.

Life is about more than our possessions – we are more than what we own - but we often get our priorities mixed up and chase after the wrong things. And so Jesus says – be on guard against greed. He knows how insidious it is – it always starts with just a little 'Oh, I'd like that' and before you know it, you're obsessing over something you don't have – and so Jesus says actively resist it. Guard against it. And then He tells a story to explain why.

Verse 16 - And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop."

Now right away, we need to think about what that means. Read it in a hurry and you just hear 'The rich man got a good crop.' But Jesus says very specifically 'The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop.' And when the ground produces a good crop, what does that mean? Psalm 104:14 says that "[God] makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate-- bringing forth food from the earth..." The ground producing a good crop means God has made it grow. And so this man has received an abundant blessing from the Lord. The question now is – what is he going to do with it? In fact, that's exactly what he asks in verse 17

17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

Now we know right away that that's not entirely true – the very next verse says he already has barns to store the harvest – the question is really – what is he going to do with the surplus of this abundant blessing that God has given? He's got barns to put the harvest in; in just so happens this this harvest is much more plentiful. So what's he going to do with the excess? Verse 18 he tells us -

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 all my grain and my goods.

19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."

He's going to spend the surplus on himself.

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?'

You can't take it with you. You never see a U-Haul behind a hearse. Life is about more than the abundance of possessions. This guy is gaining the world but losing everything in the end.

21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Moral of the story – it is foolishness to be rich to self and poor towards God. That is to put the accumulation of wealth before your relationship with the Lord.

See, the problem here is not that this man was building new barns for himself. R. Kent Hughes writes:

"Building new barns was logical and prudent. It was a good idea (given that he had this surplus). But the danger lay in what was missing. There was no thought of sharing, and no thought of stewardship. There was no thought for the poor, the ill, and the naked who were all around him."<sup>iii</sup>

In fact, if you look back into the text, you can really see where this guy's priorities are. Listen again –

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 all my grain and my goods.

19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." 'I, I, I, my, my, my.'

Who comes first in this guy's books? Me, me, me.

And yet Jesus points out that our lives are limited and our wealth is fleeting and so it is foolish to be rich in perishable things but poor towards God.

And that is something that we need to hear too. We got so caught up sometimes in the pursuit of financial security that we forget to invest in our eternal RRSPs. We put the pursuit of the dollar before the pursuit of God and store up things for ourselves without being rich towards God.

We forget that all wealth is God's<sup>iv</sup> and that we are merely stewards of the abundant blessings that God gives to us. And let's be clear. We work hard for our money and we do so with God-given strength and God intends for us to appreciate His blessings and to take care of ourselves with the wealth that He gives.

The question is – what do we do with the surplus? Are you afraid to give, fearing that if you give some away, you won't have enough? If think that's why the very next passage is about worry tells us not to worry because our Heavenly Father delights to give us enough. But when your needs are met, what's your attitude towards the rest? Because as the fool learns, spending lavishly on yourself, with no thought towards God, is a losing proposition.

So if we are to be wise stewards of God's blessings, what should we do? How do we make use of money to become 'rich' towards God?

The answer to that is just a little further down your page – verse 32 –

32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

Now pause there because that's really important. Saying 'how do we use money to be rich towards God?' could sound a bit like you're buying God's favour. Right, like, spend enough and then God will accept you. But that's not it at all! Our Father in Heaven already accepts us. When we follow Jesus, we truly become God's children and He delights to care for us, to give us everything we need. It's for that reason – the fact that God already delights in us – that we invest in our relationship with God, to become rich towards Him. And that's why we do what verse 33 says -

33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Luke 12:13-34 NIV).

We become rich towards God by loving him more than our possessions.

David Garland sums it up like this – "The way to store wealth in heaven is to give it away on earth."<sup>v</sup> Kent Hughes writes – "The way to become rich toward God is... [to use what God has given for others;] to invest in Christ's church and in the lives of his people]."<sup>vi</sup>

I would pull it all together like this – "Store up treasure in Heaven by being generous on earth."

Let me just unpack that to pull all of this together.

Jesus shows us that wealth is fleeting. We can't take it with us. And in the meantime, thieves and moths can come and mess with our treasure. (I'm glad we don't have to use moth balls as much anymore – but you get the point, right?) Our earthly treasures are not eternal. They can be lost, they can be stolen. They can become obsolete in a matter of years. Why then do we put so much value on having so much? Better then to store up treasure in Heaven. To be rich towards God, rather than self. 'An abundance of things does not lead to an abundance of life.'<sup>vii</sup> So here's what Jesus calls us to – to store up treasure in Heaven rather than pursuing earthly wealth.

How do you do that? You store up treasure in Heaven by being generous on earth. You resist the urge to selfishly hoard your surplus for yourself. You resist the temptation to constantly worry that you won't have enough when your Heavenly Father has promised that He will provide. You actively, constantly guard against greed. You share generously the abundant blessings God has given. Jesus doesn't demand that we all sell our possessions, but He does call us to consider how we relate to those possessions and how they might better serve His Kingdom. When you look at your bank statement, do you see 'me, me, me' or a greater concern for God's Kingdom? Rather than hoarding it for ourselves, let's spread that wealth around to be a blessing to others.

I quoted Denzel Washington earlier – he's the actor who said 'you never see a u-haul behind a hearse.' That came from an address that he gave at an actor's workshop and I want to give him the final word because it is spot on. He says –

"You'll never see a U-Haul behind a hearse. I'll say it again. You'll never see a U-Haul behind a hearse. Now I've been blessed to make hundreds of millions of dollars in my life. I can't take it with me. And neither can you. So it's not how much you have. It's what you do with what you have... Use it. Share it. That's what counts."<sup>viii</sup>

Store up treasure in Heaven by being generous on earth.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://soundcloud.com/rel-mccoy/popular-tracks>

<sup>ii</sup> Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples... (Luke 12:1 NIV).

<sup>iii</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, Preach the Word Commentary Series, commentary on vss. 16-21.

<sup>iv</sup> Psalms 24:1, 50:10, 104:14,

<sup>v</sup> David Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 519.

<sup>vi</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW, Closing Reflections.

<sup>vii</sup> Paraphrase of Manson, *The sayings of Jesus*, 271, cited in Garland, 522.

<sup>viii</sup> <https://youtu.be/ESa45s7R4R8> starting around 2:48.