

THE RICH FOOL, Lk.12:13-21

Parables: Stories with a Secret #4

Intro: In Victor Hugo's novel, *The Toilers of the Sea*, an evil ship's captain, Clubin, wishes to disappear with a large sum of stolen money. So he steers the ship onto a reef and gets everyone into lifeboats. After herding all the people off the ship, he pretends to play the hero and stay with the ship, but what he really does is head to the other side of the ship with the cash box strapped to him and leaps into the water, intending to swim a short distance where another ship is passing. Once he hits the water and sinks down to the sand, Clubin pushes off to head to the surface, but just as he pushes off something grabs him. It is a giant octopus. He feels its icy tentacles wrap around him. He tries to throw them off, but another just grabs ahold of him until he is wrapped around the neck, waist and legs and pulled down to a watery death. Everyone thinks him a hero. And in the end it's ok, because he dies with lots of money, right?!

◆ In the parable of the Rich Fool Jesus tells another penetrating story to get us to think carefully about who and what we live for. The parable, I think, is captured in a word play Jesus uses. The term for *producing* in verse 16 is in Greek, "euphron." The term for *being merry* in verse 19 is "euphoria". And the term for *fool* in verse 20, is "aphron". So the word play is pointing out that if you think that euphron (stuff) will get you euphoria (happiness), you are an aphon (fool). And yet this is a natural assumption that many many of us make. Just a little bit more and I'll finally be happy. The wealthy tycoon JD Rockefeller was once asked how many dollars would be enough to which he is said to have replied, "Just one more." Now I know that nobody here struggles with greed, but just in case someone does, let's look at Jesus story.

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◆1. **Greed comes in many forms.** The term Jesus uses literally means “the always wanting of more.” Or “always thirsting for more”. This I think is part of the secret we need to dig into. On the surface most of us might dislike an openly greedy person, say, the person in the circle who takes a whole handful of M&M’s from the mere handful-sized bowl being passed around the room. Or the shopper who clears the entire shelf of the Doritos on sale, all into her cart. But few of us think we’re really struggling with “thirsting for more.” Lets put it in other ways.

◆1) How about “demanding justice”. It sounds noble. The man from the crowd looks like he’s asking for this. But a lot of times it’s just our dissatisfaction that we label “justice”. Jews had very outlined inheritance practices. The oldest got twice as much as the rest but that’s because he was charged with maintaining the family and providing and keeping it together. So it’s a good possibility that this fellow nagging Jesus to stop preaching so as to arbitrate with big brother is coveting the position of the eldest brother. We don’t know for sure, but Jesus clearly sees covetousness in the man. Law suits are full of this kind of thing: greed under cover of justice. And the question arises, “when is enough enough?” For example, in 1994 McDonalds was sued when 79 year old Stella Liebeck spilled her 49 cent cup of coffee in her lap in a drive through in New Mexico. She suffered third-degree burns. Originally asking for \$20,000 to cover necessary surgeries, the jury eventually awarded her nearly three million dollars in damages, although the judge reduced this to \$640,000. ABC News called it the “poster child of excessive law

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suits.” Others deemed it worthy. Was Liebeck greedy? Was it our culture that is greedy such that it produced a jury that would award such an amount? If I slip on the ice in front of your house and break my leg, do I try to get you to pay for my injury in the name of justice. What if I slip on the ice in the woods. Who do I get to pay for it then? Granted, complications can surely arise and circumstances may vary exceedingly. My point is simply that often we find it easy to expect a lot of other people in the name of justice that when it comes down to it, may just be our wanting more. Jesus says watch out, it won't give you real life.

◆2) How about greed renamed as security? Sometimes that's what we call it. We have more than one, jacket, or mower, or blue-ray player, or whatever it is that you can't stop buying. But we tell ourselves we need them all. What if we run into that exact weather circumstance where our winter boots are too hot, and our summer boots are too cold? If we give away our Fall boots to the man who has none, what will we do when we need them? We might have to be too cold, or too hot! Now I'm generalizing of course. And I'm sure that none of us have more in our closets than we can wear in a week. But if there was someone like that, they possibly could tell themselves that they have what they have because it's necessary and needed. And this can be another face of the disease of “always wanting more.” It's easy to contract.

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◆3) Now lets not misdefine greed. It's not "being thirsty" or "wanting" something. It is legitimate to need and even to desire. In the context of this parable Jesus says,

◆"And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them." Luke 12:29, 30, NIV.

◆Greed is "setting our heart on". Greed is thirsting for more of what we already have enough of, or more than we need. Part of the problem is that we often don't notice that we already have enough. This fellow is already rich *before* the crop. And the fact that he could even afford to consider tearing down already good and full barns to build brand new ones (notice not merely additional ones, but all new) –this all makes it abundantly evident that he is not in need, to say the least. It's surprising that he can't come up with any other ideas but this is greed.

◆**2. The problem with my greed is that I am lying to myself.** We lie to ourselves about a great many things. Greed is just one way we do it. Just look at the Rich Fool. In verse 19 reads quite literally "Then I will say to my Soul(psyche: that intangible seat of being a being), "Soul, you have plenty..." This, I think, is significant. This man expects the deepest part of him to be joyful because of his stuff. But we all know from experience it doesn't really work. Soon that new shirt is no longer new. Soon that new car is a few years old and has marks from shopping carts on the door

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panel. That cell phone will be a has-been probably in, oh, about a month from now. Stuff can't satisfy the soul!

◆ One study found that 5% of Americans with income of \$15,000 or less believed they were living the American dream! What percent thought so of those making \$50,000? Six percent! \$35,000 more but only one percent more happy!

◆3. I can break the back of dissatisfaction by being rich toward God.

How can I be rich toward God?

◆ A. By noticing his grace and thanking him. We don't notice that what we already have is a gift in the first place as well. In fact, what we already have we begin to see as what we deserve, which carries over into believing we *deserve* to have everything our neighbor has. And this is the covetousness that Jesus parable is talking about. The Rich Fool did not "produce" the crop. Verse 16 tells us, as is the case in agriculture, "the ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop." Any farmer can tell you even if you do everything right, you cannot insure the crop, because you cannot insure the weather. So this man fails to notice his blessings. His greed has given him a distorted view of reality that suddenly becomes evident when God comes on the scene in 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?’” Luke 12:20, NIV.

◆ That term "demanded" is a financial term for calling in a loan. In other words, "I'm foreclosing on your life." Or, "This very night I'm repossessing your life. You don't really own it. I do, and now I'm taking it back." It's got

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to make us think, right? Who do we think we really are? Try saying this out loud a minute: *“My life is on loan from God.”* That’s right. We are not ours! I am not mine! A few years ago a farmer and business man was showing me his land along a river, (beautiful place!) his house situated among towering old trees, in the peace of the country side. I marveled at it all and he said, “Yeah, well I’ve worked hard and earned everything I’ve got.” I didn’t reply, but I thought to myself, “It’s going to be very hard for this fellow to get to know God.

◆ *“You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.” Deuteronomy 8:17, 18, NIV.*

◆ *“For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” 1 Corinthians 4:7, NIV.*

◆ Practice thanking God and you will gain perspective.

◆ **B.** Practice sharing your wealth and you will gain more soul. Frankly we are not much different from the Rich Fool who has plenty but is convinced the proper thing to do with extra is to store it. We try hard not to notice how well off we are. It is not uncommon for people in our circles to, for example, remodel. Now it’s no sin to remodel. But look at what we tell ourselves. Look at how we speak about it. “It needed updating.” That’s because it had brass accent from the 1990’s. Everyone’s into nickel and formica like the 1960’s so it needs “up-, or should we say “back-dating”. Or

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we say “I wanted to be sure the siding would last in case I die.” So we are actually showing ourselves to be responsible planners for spending what we really don’t need. Now I’m not declaring remodeling a heinous crime, as some will undoubtedly quote me. I’m just saying watch how we talk about our greed. If we said, “I didn’t need it. I just wanted it. I can afford it, even though it’s absolutely unessential.” -well, then we’d have to reconsider, or at least think about what kind of stewards we are being with all the wealth God has loaned us for the few years we are here. We might have to feel a little guilty about not helping people who don’t have new siding, or even a home to put siding on. This is part of the super surprising action of the Rich Fool:

◆ Verse 17 “What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops!”

◆ The simplest, most obvious answer is what? Give some away! A little later Jesus will recommend a whole different approach.

◆ *“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.” Luke 12:33, NIV.*

◆ Treasure in heaven is the equivalent of “soul-life”.

◆ v23 “Soul”/life is more than feeding, even the body is more than what’s on it.

◆ So if you find that you have more than you need, extras like lets say, boats, campers, bikes, golf clubs, second homes, regular travel, annual new vehicles, and the like –well Jesus would advise that you increase your

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sharing if you don't want to live a constantly fretting life. The more you set your soul/life on your stuff, the less you really live.

◆ *"Tell those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone. But their trust should be in the living God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give generously to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of real life." 1 Timothy 6:17-19, NLT.*

◆ **Conclusion:** "Things Like You" Sanctus Real

Loving things like you has wrecked my life, made me cry
Loving things like you has made me lose my mind
And I can't figure out why I've been hanging on
To all these things I've tried to leave behind me for so long

And I think it's time to find a better way to live my life
Than loving all those things that keep me wrapped so tight

Everyone wants everyone else's everything
Some time's the more we have the less we really gain
I'm tired of loving all that money has to buy
Get out of my heart, out of my mind, leaving you behind

Loving things like you has left me bruised, black and blue
Loving things like you has made me so confused
And I can't figure out what I've been waiting on
God I can't be living for things I know are wrong

Now I think it's time to write a better chapter in my life
Leaving all those things that keep me wrapped so tight

Why are we obsessed with possessions here on earth?
Go and take a look at the flowers and the birds
God is always taking care of nature's every need
And how much more important in The Father's eyes are we?
I said, how much more important in The Father's eyes are we?
He sees everything

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◆ Ok. Jesus is not against saving for retirement. Jesus is not against people experiencing the rich blessing of God. Jesus is not against capital improvements. He is against wasting your soul on what cannot satisfy.

◆ *““But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your **soul/life** is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’”*

Luke 12:20, NASB.

◆ The NASB translates it right. God is pointing at the “soul/inner life.” You won’t get that from stuff or accumulation. The story is told of a man standing in line at the gates of heaven with a satchel at his side. The angel admitting folk asked him what it was he thought he was going to need to bring into heaven. The man opened his bag to reveal bright, shiny bars of pure gold. To which the bewildered angel responded, “You brought pavement?” The kingdom and treasure of heaven is light years beyond our material possessions, and according to Jesus (v32) the Father is pleased to give it to us.