

The Parables of Jesus

Week 3: Riches and the Soul -- Luke 12:13–21

A voice calls out from the crowd, interrupting Jesus in the middle of His teaching. “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” You can almost hear the grievance in it. Somewhere there is an estate, a family, a dispute, and this man has decided that the famous rabbi can settle it in his favor. But Jesus will not be drawn into the quarrel. “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” Instead He lifts His eyes to the whole crowd and names the thing crouching behind the request: “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Then, as He so often does, He tells a story.

There was a rich man, He says, whose land produced a bumper crop. Notice that the man is not a cheat or a thief. He has not robbed anyone. His fields simply did what good fields do in a good year, and now he has more than he can store. It is, by every worldly measure, a wonderful problem to have. The barns are full, and the harvest keeps coming. So the man sits down to think, and Luke lets us listen in on the most revealing conversation in the parable: a man talking to himself.

“What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?” And then the plan: “I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” Count the pronouns. My crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, my soul. In all his careful planning there is not one mention of God, and not one thought of another human being. He has built an entire future around himself, and he has left out the only two things that matter.

Then a second voice enters the story, and it is the voice of God: “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” The man who had years all mapped out does not have the night. The barns he was about to build will never hold his grain. And Jesus drives the point home with a single sentence that is meant to lodge in the conscience and stay there: “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” Read these verses slowly. They are not only about a rich man long ago. They are a mirror held up to every heart that has ever whispered, if I just had a little more, then I could finally rest.

Group Discussion: Jesus warns the crowd to be on guard against “all covetousness,” and then tells a story about a man whose only fault, on the surface, was being successful and planning ahead. Why do you think covetousness is such a hard sin to see in ourselves, and how does our culture actually train us to believe that life does consist in the abundance of our possessions?

Personal Reflection: The rich man told his own soul, “Relax, eat, drink, be merry,” as if security could finally be purchased and stored. Where in your own life are you quietly believing that a

little more, more money, more savings, more stuff, would let you finally rest? What is that belief costing you?

Read Luke 12:13–21

Study Questions

1. Before telling the parable, Jesus states its lesson plainly: “One’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (v. 15). What is Jesus teaching here about the true nature and purpose of human life, and why is the belief that more possessions equal more life such a persistent and dangerous lie?
2. Jesus introduces the parable with a warning to guard against “all covetousness.” Where do you feel the pull of covetousness most strongly in your own life, the sense that you would be more secure or more content if you simply had more? Be specific about what you find yourself wanting.
3. The rich man is never accused of cheating anyone; his wealth came honestly from his own land. As you listen to his private speech (vv. 17–19), what is actually wrong with him? What does the steady drumbeat of “I” and “my,” with no mention of God or neighbor, reveal about the real sin of this parable?
4. Listen to your own inner planning the way Luke lets us listen to the rich man’s. When you think about your future, your money, and your security, how often do God and other people actually enter the conversation? Where do you tend to leave God out of your plans as though your life were your own to manage?
5. God calls the man a fool and says, “This night your soul is required of you” (v. 20). The man had planned for many years and did not have a single night. What does this teach us about the certainty and the unpredictability of death, and about the accountability every person finally has before God?
6. Suppose your soul were required of you tonight. As you sit honestly with that question, what would you most regret, and what suddenly looks far less important than it did this morning? How might living with your own death in view reorder the way you spend this coming week?
7. Jesus ends with the contrast that holds the whole parable together: the man “lays up treasure for himself” but is “not rich toward God” (v. 21). What does it mean to be rich toward God rather than rich toward self, and how does Jesus’ teaching elsewhere about treasure in heaven help us understand it (Matthew 6:19–21)?
8. If being “rich toward God” became the goal that shaped your finances this year, what would actually change about how you earn, save, spend, and give? Name one concrete adjustment that would begin to move treasure from your barns to the kingdom of God.
9. Scripture calls covetousness a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5) and warns that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil that has caused some to wander from the faith (1 Timothy 6:9–10). How does this parable expose the way trust in possessions quietly takes the place

that belongs to God, and what does it teach us about the eternal danger of a life organized around getting and keeping rather than around God and His kingdom?

10. Look back across the parable. Jesus held up a mirror, not to condemn success, but to expose a heart that left God and neighbor out of its plans. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single change you most need to make this week to begin laying up treasure toward God rather than only toward yourself?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 6:19–21, laying up treasure in heaven rather than on earth, where our heart follows our treasure; Matthew 6:24–33, the impossibility of serving both God and money, and the call to seek first the kingdom; 1 Timothy 6:17–19, the charge to the rich to be generous and rich in good works, storing up a good foundation for the future; Colossians 3:1–5, setting the mind on things above and putting to death covetousness, which is idolatry; James 5:1–6, a sober warning to those who hoard wealth in the last days.