

Session 3

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

Luke 12:13-21

Memory Verse


He then told them, “Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because one’s life is not in the abundance of his possessions.”


– LUKE 12:15, CSB



The Parable of the Rich Fool

THEOLOGICAL THEME: The things of this fallen earth are temporal and will one day pass away. Those who understand this reality and understand the coming eternity will not be distracted by treasure that rust can destroy and thieves can steal.

 What would you say is the difference in the way Christians and non-Christians view the things of this world?

 How does this difference in perspective change daily behaviors, attitudes, and interactions?

Christians give thanks for the many good gifts they receive in this world from their Father in heaven. They enjoy them, utilize them, and depend on things such as food, shelter, clothing, and so on. However, Christians also know that these things are temporary and ought not take up residence in their hearts where they may become idols. Christians know that there is only one throne in their hearts and Christ alone should sit upon it.

God's good gifts here on earth inspire praise and thanksgiving to God, as they should. C. S. Lewis wrote, "Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home."¹ Similarly, Thomas Watson explained, "We may hold the world as a posy in our hand, but it

must not lie too near our heart. We may use it as an inn where we take a meal, but it must not be our home.”²

There is a wonderful thing that happens when Christians love not the world, but love Christ with all of their hearts and strength. When people revere Christ as they should, they are conformed to His image. In other words, the more they treasure Christ—the more they hate sin and love righteousness—the less they look to their own good and the more they seek the good of their brothers and sisters. In our text today, Jesus explained the foolishness of those who put their hope and joy in the temporal. He called His listeners to turn their hearts away from that which will be stripped away and to give attention to that which will last forever.

Session Summary

The four Gospel accounts that God has preserved in the Scriptures are of great value to the world. They are a powerful testimony of the person and work of Jesus Christ. They attest to His identity and mission. First and foremost, Luke wrote his testimony of Christ so that Theophilous would have certainty about the things that he had been taught (Luke 1:3-4). Luke sought to write an orderly account to give assurance that the things taught about Christ were indeed true. Thus, the purpose of Luke’s gospel was to produce faith in Jesus. When Christians read Luke’s account today, that purpose is still primary. This passage, for example, ought to cause the Christian to rejoice in the wisdom and purity of Christ, their Redeemer. Secondly, Christians ought to heed the words of Christ as truth and seek to apply them to their lives today.

In our modern world, encouraging people to “secure” their future is big business. Investment companies encourage parents to save for their child’s college education from the day the child is born; IRAs are pushed for retirement savings; and insurance is sold to protect against everything from the premature death of a spouse to extended time in a nursing care facility. In the midst of this approach, we read a parable of Jesus that seems to discourage that very kind of preparing for the future. How are we to take it? The issues seem to be ones of priority and an expanded understanding of what it means to prepare for the future.

The application of this parable is simple, even if we find it’s practice difficult. Jesus spoke of a universal truth that transcends time and culture, so readers today can take this parable as though Christ were saying it directly to them. It’s as if Christ is asking right now, “And the things you have prepared—whose will they be?” (v. 20).

1. Myopia of the Heart (Luke 12:13-14)

It is astounding that someone would get close enough to Jesus to ask Him anything they wanted and their request would be that He adjudicate a matter about a familial inheritance. The woman with the issue of blood pushed forward just to catch the hem of His robe so that she might gain healing (Luke 8). Blind Bartimaeus called out “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47), and he received healing. The man with leprosy asked Jesus to cleanse him (Matt. 8). Yet, this man wanted Jesus to settle a dispute about an estate.



If given the same chance as this man, what request would you bring before Jesus? Why?


Financial dealings are legitimate issues. There is no doubt that this was a serious concern for this man, and he was earnestly seeking an answer. It was not his intention to waste Jesus’ time. In his mind, there was nothing more pressing to deal with. But that was precisely the problem. His words revealed the state of his heart. The most important thing to him was whether or not his future would be financially secure.




What do you think about this man’s request of Christ? How does it compare with your own relationship to Jesus?

We need to be careful about our posture toward this man. If you are a Christian and feel superior to his worldly request, you may need to do an audit of your prayer life over the previous week before you acquit yourself. If a Christian’s prayer life is nothing more than a quick prayer before meals and at a church service, then it could be argued that his conduct is more lamentable than the man in the story. At least the man in the passage went to Christ with his needs, even if they were temporal. Some Christians live as though they are the captain of their own soul and never humble themselves before Christ in prayer. They trust in their own understanding. They lean on their own wisdom.

Is there any difference between the man's request and a Christian's request today for career advancement? If a Christian comes to Christ day after day asking for financial blessing or good health, are they not also seeking to store up good in their barns? When Christians read this passage, they must be careful not to rush past this man's request and Jesus' response thinking this is a lesson that they have already learned and need no more training in. The battle against the idols of this world is a lifelong endeavor for Christians.


 What was the fundamental problem with the man's request?

The problem with this man's heart is the same problem that all people, even Christians, deal with. The man suffered from myopia of the heart. He could only see what was right in front of him and could not see what was beyond this life. Paul said, "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Col. 3:1-2). The man had this formula reversed. His mind was set on earthly things.

 Application: Do you find yourself more occupied with earthly things or things above? What can you do to train your heart and mind to keep things above as primary?

2. A Warning (Luke 12:15)

Jesus gave this man a stern rebuke. He said, "Watch out and be on guard against all greed." Jesus refused to be used as a pawn for this man's material gain. Instead of being drawn into siding with him as a judge against his brother, Jesus effectively became the judge over both of them, exposing the motivation of their hearts. While the man claimed to simply want justice, his vision of justice was more tied up with gaining his share of material possessions than with pursuing reconciliation with an estranged brother.

 Would you have found Jesus' response unexpected if you were the man? Explain.

Some of Jesus' teaching and preaching comes across as attractive and affirming. For example, the three parables found in Luke 15 give us a vision of a patient, loving, and merciful Father who rescues us from danger. But other sections of His teaching make us bristle. We are less likely to dwell on these sections. We rush past them looking for something more comforting and encouraging.


Jesus never misspoke. He never taught anything wrong, nor did He teach with a wrong attitude or misguided tone or wording. The words of Jesus that make people bristle (like "repent or perish") are just as valuable as those that warm the affections. In fact, in some ways, they are more valuable. Remember, a surgeon is unable to remove a cancerous tumor unless he first cuts into the skin. The author of Hebrews likened Scripture to a double-edged sword: "The word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

Despite the discomfort, the direct and abrasive words of Scripture are a great mercy and kindness toward Christians. They are meant to snap them to attention because imminent danger lies ahead.

 How should Christians respond to this kind of warning?


There are two ways to respond to stern warnings from the Scriptures. The flesh wants to respond with pride. Many Christians hear a direct warning and they become offended or hurt and reject that warning as unkind and, therefore, illegitimate. It is certainly possible to deliver stern warnings in an unkind way, but they are not inherently unkind, which is the prevailing opinion of today.

The second way to respond is with humility and thanksgiving. If a stern warning is delivered to a Christian from the Scriptures, then that Christian, if he is mature, will ultimately respond humbly with gratitude. It may be that they have to fight against initial feelings of pride, but they will recognize those feelings for what they are (sin), turn from them, and respond in the Spirit.

 **Application:** How do you typically respond when you are warned about sin in your own life?

3. Temporary Treasures (Luke 12:16-21)

Christ illustrated His warning with a parable. This approach to teaching, of course, was common for Jesus. Parables use an earthly situation in order to explain heavenly realities. In this case, the parable is situated in both the temporal realm as well as the heavenly. The parable is meant to contrast those two realms.

 **What was the point of the parable Jesus told in these verses?**

Then, as now, a person's happiness and well-being were often thought to be determined by what he owned. Jesus flatly rejected this as a standard for measuring the worth of one's life. It wasn't wrong to store crops. The problem was that the man saw it as "my grain and my goods." Failing to see his bumper crop as a gift from God to be shared with others, the man saw it as his own possession to be used as he pleased. Ultimately, he also failed to see his life as a gift from God to whom he is responsible for how he lives (v. 20).

Jesus, as He usually did, addressed the heart issue. Of course it isn't sinful to plan for the future, earn a wage, or store up the fruits of labor. All of these are extolled in Scripture in one part or another. Jesus wasn't attacking those activities; rather, He took issue with the posture of the man's heart. Notice what the man said: "Take it easy; eat, drink, and enjoy yourself."

The problem with this statement is that it implies that the man believed his fundamental need was physical protection and provision. His words revealed that he believed his greatest deficiency was temporal and not spiritual. Thus, to have all his physical needs met led him to conclude that all was well with him. It wasn't. As Jesus illustrated, temporal goods are of no service when one goes before the judgment seat and faces eternity.



Where do you see the values of the man in the parable reflected in our culture? Where are they reflected in your own life?

This passage has everything to do with the affections of the heart. It is meant to shine light on what the heart of people desire, love, and value. Consider Charles Spurgeon's words: "He whose house was burned to ashes kneeled down and thanked the Lord because his child was safe. Just so, he who loses the whole world but obtains eternal salvation, has so much to rejoice in, that he would waste his tears if he shed them over his worldly possessions. So let us, above all things, care for our souls and their eternal interests."

Those who truly treasure Christ will make whatever sacrifice necessary in order to connect to Him and help others do the same. If a Christian is willing to give up his or her own dreams and desires and preferences to follow the instructions the Lord left in His Word, this shows where his or her treasure is.


The ultimate reality of God's judgment shows that making a priority out of seeking wealth for one's pleasure is meaningless. Richness toward God comes by making a priority of giving generously and lavishly to those in need (12:33). Disciples can freely give to others because they recognize that God is the Provider of all they have and need. Therefore, they need not grasp onto possessions and wealth as though they were in limited supply.



Application: What do you value most in life? How does your life give evidence of what you truly value most?

Conclusion

Jesus addressed the affections of this man's heart by contrasting the value of earthly good with the value of spiritual treasure. Earthly treasure may serve a person while they are on earth, but sooner or later they must face eternity. At that point, earthly goods will do them no good. Thus, all those who fear God and trust in Christ ought to seek above all else the remedy for their souls, which is Christ crucified and new life in Him.

 What are the areas in your life where you have myopia of the heart like the man in the parable?

 How is God calling you to find true treasure in Him based on today's study?

 How does treasuring the things of Christ lead us to share with others about Him?

CHRIST CONNECTION: Children of God look forward to an everlasting inheritance that is incorruptible and fight against being pulled aside by the things that this world has to offer.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Christians proclaim the glory of God by valuing Him more than the stuff of this earth. Further, Christians must be ready to give an explanation as to why their treasure is not of this earth.



FOR NEXT WEEK

The Parable of the Prodigal

Main Passages

- Luke 15:11-24

Session Outline

1. Illogical Pursuit (Luke 15:11-20)
2. All-Inclusive Rescue (Luke 15:21-23)
3. Unadulterated Joy (Luke 15:24)

Memorize

He then told them, “Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because one’s life is not in the abundance of his possessions.”

- Luke 12:15, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - Luke 12:1-7
- Tuesday - Luke 12:8-12
- Wednesday - Luke 12:13-21
- Thursday - Luke 12:22-34
- Friday - Luke 12:35-40
- Saturday - Luke 12:49-53

References

¹Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. London: Collins, 2012.

²Watson, Thomas. *All Things for Good*. Scotland: Banner of Truth, 1986.