

# The Parables

## Part 5 – “The Rich Fool”

### Luke 12:13-21

Jesus was not shy about addressing the sins of greed and covetousness. To be sure this made him few friends because greed is a very non-discriminating sin. It effects the rich and the poor; those with little and those with much. The occasion presented to Jesus in the present passage was a young man who wanted the Lord to arbitrate a family dispute. Specifically this younger brother wanted his share of the family inheritance which was under the care of his older brother. While it was not unusual for rabbis to arbitrate such disputes Jesus made it clear that this was not the reason he came. He came to set captives free. He came to save sinners not divide property between quarreling siblings.



After refusing the request Jesus spoke a strongly worded warning against “all covetousness”. The sin of covetousness, which is condemned in the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment, is desiring something which does not belong to you. It is greed. Anything can be coveted: money, homes, spouses, children, health, talents, physical appearance, etc. Jesus warned the crowds that day to “be on guard” against greed. It is a solemn warning akin to direct action taken to ward off an aggressive enemy. Essentially, Jesus said, “Take a firm stance against greed. Do battle against it. Fight it off.”

To illustrate the dangers of greed Jesus told a parable. It is about a man who was the fortunate recipient of the kindness of God. Year after year his crops yielded a plentiful harvest. So great was the productivity of his land that his barns were filled with the yield. Nowhere in the parable is there a suggestion that this abundant supply is anything other than a good blessing.

The problem was located, as is so often the case, in the man’s heart. As he took account of the abundance of his possessions he did not calculate what could be the measure of his generosity nor did he give thanks to God. Rather, like all misers, he determined to build bigger barns to store the increasing supply. All of these blessings he saw as his and his alone as the repeated personal pronouns (*I* and *my*) suggest. He took for granted the life that God had given him; a life that would end all too soon.

In God’s estimation the man was a fool. He had made himself rich in this life but was a pauper in the next. The blessings God provided him were not intended for him alone. God never gives us anything that we might hoard it for our own pleasure. What God gives to us is typically for the purpose of energizing our own generosity for his glory and the good of others. In this way we make ourselves “rich toward God.”

**Main Idea:** Greed in this life leads to poverty in the life to come.

### 1. A Selfish Request

Vs. 13

- Jesus’ mission was not to do what had become some of the mundane duties of rabbis. He did not come to settle domestic disputes or divide inheritances. The younger brother’s request reveals how greed over money often divides and destroys families.

- This younger brother had no doubt been in the crowd as Jesus had just taught about the care which the Father has for his people; that they are more valuable than the sparrows who the Father feeds (vv. 4-7). Nevertheless he is pre-occupied with the stuff of earth rather than the treasures of Heaven.
- “How many are incessantly planning and scheming about the things of time, even under the very sound of the things of eternity?” – J.C. Ryle

## **2. A Grave Warning**

Vv. 14-15

- “Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness...” Leon Morris says that “be on your guard” indicates “the taking of positive action to ward off a foe” (212). Covetousness, or desiring that which does not belong to you, must be beaten back as one would an aggressor.
- “...for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” We must never live as though money and possession are our highest good. The fevered pursuit of wealth has led to financial and moral ruin for countless individuals. Christians must have a radically different idea about what constitutes “the good life.”
- 1 Timothy 6:9-11a

## **3. A Fool’s Tragedy**

Vv. 16-21

a) He does not acknowledge the source of his wealth.

b) He does not consider a use for his wealth beyond personal indulgence.

c) He does not consider his mortality.

## **4. A Wise Investment**

Vs. 34 – “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

- Following the parable Jesus calls his hearers away from anxiety about the future. He calls them to trust in the faithful provision of their Heavenly Father whose “pleasure” it is to give them “the kingdom.” To be sure it is not the sort of kingdom characterized by immediate gratification and typically valued by the world. But the kingdom of God is of far greater value than the kingdoms of this world.
- So it makes sense that Christians should have an eye toward investing in the kingdom of God rather than pouring out their lives for what is strictly temporal.
- Jesus teaches a remarkable truth that runs counter to what we often think. Our investments in what matters for eternity must not wait until “our hearts are changed.” Rather our hearts will follow the course of our treasure. We will ultimately love those things in which we invest.
- 2 Corinthians 8:9