

12:13 Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

12:14 But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?"

Someone in the crowd had a brother who had refused to divide the family inheritance. The man appealed to Jesus, hoping that He would be sympathetic toward his problem. The fact that such disputes were normally handled by a scribe shows that Jesus was respected in His knowledge of Scripture. The request was that Jesus take the man's side against his brother.

By addressing the person as "man," Jesus distances Himself. It is as if He were saying, "I don't know you, nor do I know anything about you. I have no relationship to you. Why should I become a judge or arbiter over you?"

Jesus' mission was to bring people to God, not money to people.

12:15 Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."

It appears that Jesus interpreted the man's request as greed so He launched into a discourse on its dangers.

Jesus told the crowd to "beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed." "Guard against" is a military term meaning to take positive action to ward off an enemy. The enemy to guard against is not just money; it is greed – the desire to have more. Greed distorts reality; it values and pursues things above God and the will of God. Greed springs from the belief that possessions can satisfy and bring security. Job 31:24-25 says, "If I have put my confidence in gold, and called fine gold my trust: If I have gloated because my wealth was great, and because my hand had secured so much; . . . that too would have been an iniquity calling for judgment, for I would have denied God above (Job 31:28; also see Psa. 49, Ro. 1:29; 2 Cor. 9:5; 1 Tim. 6:10; 2 Pet. 2:3, 14). In Colossians 3:5 and Ephesians 5:5, greed is called idolatry. Originally, idolatry was giving honor to a creature that was due to God alone, but in the NT it also came to mean placing human desire over God's will (1 Cor. 10:14; Gal. 5:20; 1 Pet. 4:3) (ISBE). Idolatry is anything that takes the place of God. Greed is idolatry because it controls our behavior. Possessions possess us; we become consumed by our consumption.

Even having "an abundance" (a surplus) of possessions does not mean someone has an abundant life. Possessions do not bring satisfaction, fulfillment, enjoyment, meaning, and purpose; only God does.

In the parable that follows, Jesus illustrates how foolish it is to value temporal things over God; it shows that life does not consist of possessions. This is one of the four places in Luke where possessions are addressed (also see Lk. 14:12-33; 16:1-13; and 16:19-31). Hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1-12) threatens the religious; possessions threaten the materialist.

12:16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive.

12:17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?'

12:18 "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

12:19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'"

The man in the parable is identified as being rich. He evidently possessed a lot of land and would have been envied in an agrarian culture. From a biblical world view, "all things come from the hand of God. Wealth is a blessing from God. The productivity of the earth is also under God's control. Paul said in Acts 14:17 that *God* gives rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying our hearts with food and gladness (Also Deut. 11:14; Job 5:10; Psa, 65:10-13). So, a bumper crop would be attributed to the provision and blessing of God. However, in this case the blessing presented a problem to stewardship. It created a dilemma: the man had a large crop, but he didn't have large enough barns to store it.

After reflecting upon his situation he decided that he wanted to keep the entire crop, so he planned on tearing down his barns and building larger ones to store the surplus. At this point in the parable, nothing seems to be particularly out of place. By building larger barns the man would have a place to store his crops as well as his other possessions.

However, in verse 19 it is apparent that the man's values are off; his world view is skewed. In only three verses the word "I" appears eight times (in Greek) and the word "my" appears four times! The man wants to use God's gifts for self-satisfaction and fleshly indulgence – he wants to relax, eat, drink and be merry.

James 4:13-17 gives the proper perspective. It says, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin."

As Bock says,

His future perspective is entirely self-centered and self-indulgent. As 12:21 will make clear, he has laid up treasure for himself alone. He has morally mismanaged his wealth, giving no thought to the needs of others or thanking God. As Nolland notes, with such a wealth of resources "his responsibilities had only just begun." The man mistakenly thinks he is only responsible for himself. The comfort that allows the man to focus on himself is the product of greed (12:15). As Marshall notes, 16:19–31 gives a similar portrayal of a rich man who did not offer a crumb to a poor beggar outside his house (Bock, 1152, 1153).

12:20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'

12:21 "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

We now get a glimpse into God's plans and the man's future. God had blessed the rich man, but the man had a moral responsibility in stewarding what was given to him. *He* had planned for a life of ease; *God* required his soul.

The transitory nature of life and riches is established by the question, "who will own what you have prepared?" The person will not enjoy the riches that he had accumulated. The enjoyment of riches is short term.

Verse 21 makes the application to the parable: "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." This rich man's fate is the fate of all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich toward God. The rebuke is not directed toward being rich, nor is Jesus condemning planning per se, but rather the emphasis falls on storing up treasure for oneself, and not being rich toward God.

Bock summarizes verses 13-21. He says,

In Luke 12:13- 21, Jesus uses a dispute over inheritance to teach about the danger of attraction to possessions. Treasure laid up only for oneself is short lived. One cannot present a suitcase full of riches to God for admission into heaven. God desires other priorities. Jesus tells all to be rich toward God. When thinking about the most beneficial way to live, long-term thinking is crucial. The disciple should realize that the pursuit of wealth is a dangerous distraction and a form of greed when it is self-directed. Wealth toward self is poverty before God. The comfort that comes from wealth and power derived from materialism provide only a fleeting and false security, a vain effort at control. Jesus stresses that wealth is potentially a subtle, but devastating, obstacle to God. Where idols and selfish inwardness are present, God's judgment waits. Wealth's only legacy is its fleeting nature (Lk. 6:24–25). Only wealth handled with generosity meets with God's approval (1 Tim. 6:17-19) (Bock, 1155)

12:22 And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.

12:23 "For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

In verse 22 Jesus turns from the crowd to the disciples.

The word for "life" is *psyche* (ψυχή), the same word translated as "soul" in verse 19; the word's repetition shows that Jesus is applying the parable of the rich fool to the disciples. The key word in this section is "worry." The present imperative, "do not be anxious" is a command that stresses the need to have a constant attitude of not worrying.

The greatest concern for most people in Jesus' time was having basic needs met (food, clothing, shelter); however, even having those things does not satisfy because "life is more than food, and the body more than clothing" (see Lk. 12:31-33). Followers of Christ should guard against greed (Lk. 12:15), but they should also avoid being pre-occupied and anxious over basic needs. Whether one is rich or poor, life is more than material.

Verses 23-28 give reasons not to be anxious; they tell us why we can entrust our lives (our body) to God.

12:24 "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds!"

Verse 24 is an argument from lesser to greater taken from God's providential care of inferior creatures and their dependence upon God.

The Scriptures teach that irrational animals are the objects of God's providential care. He fashions their bodies, He calls them into the world, sustains them in being, and supplies their wants. In his hand is the life of every living thing (Job 12:10). The Psalmist says (104:21), "The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God." Verses 27, 28, "They all wait for You To give them their food in due season. You give to them, they gather it up; You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good." Matt. 6:26, "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them." Acts 17:25 says, "He gives to all life and breath, and all things." Such representations are not to be explained away as poetical modes of expressing the idea that the laws of nature, as ordained of God, are so arranged as to meet the necessities of the animal creation, without any special intervention of his providence. . . . but that his creatures depend on the constant exercise of his care. He gives or withholds what they need according to his good pleasure. When our Lord put in the lips of his disciples the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," He recognized the fact that all living creatures depend on the constant intervention of God for the supply of their daily wants (Hodge, Systematic Theology, I, 587).

To worry about food and drink is to have learned nothing from creation. In contrast to the rich fool (12:16-21) who built bigger barns to "guarantee" his future, birds live each day without any care or work of their own; they don't sow, they don't reap, they don't gather into barns. "They make no provision for the future themselves, and yet every day, as duly as the day comes, provision is made for them, and their eyes wait on God, that great and good Housekeeper, who provides food for all flesh" (Henry). However, it should also be noted that birds are not an example of idleness, but freedom from anxiety. As one writer said, "They are not always worrying that the supply of worms will run out; yet they do not expect the worms to crawl down their beaks."

"There is a great deal of good to be learned from what we see every day, if we would but consider it (Prov. 6:6; 24:32)" (Henry). If the disciples follow the example of the ravens, they will not fall into the greed of the rich fool (Tannehill, 247).

12:25 "And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life's span?"

12:26 "If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters?"

Furthermore, verse 25 makes it clear that we cannot change what God has ordained. God has appointed the day we were born and the day we will die. Job 14:5 says that man's days are determined and the number of his months has been appointed by God; He has set limits that no one can pass (cf. Psa. 139:16). No one can add even an hour to their life (Lk. 12:25). Worrying about food cannot extend our lives. So why worry?

Note: the word translated as “hour” is “cubit,” a measure of about 18 inches. Thus, the KJV translates it as “which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?” However, a cubit is also occasionally used to measure time. In favor of this latter idea, very few people worry about adding eighteen inches to their height; many worry about how long they will live. In addition, adding 18 inches to our height can hardly be classified as not being able to do even “a very little thing” (12:26).

12:27 "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

12:28 "But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you? You men of little faith!"

Clothing, like food, can also be a source of worry. However, once again observing the goodness of God in creation should teach us not to be anxious. Plants do not work and yet they are beautifully clothed with flowers, and their beauty even surpasses the attire of Solomon - one of the most resplendent kings the world has ever known!

Jesus argues from lesser to greater once again (as in Lk. 12:23-24). God clothes the grass with a spectacular array of flowers even though it is destined to be cut down and used as fuel. If God clothes the grass that is of very little value, He will surely clothe His children.

“A biblical cosmology coupled with observant eyes engender real trust in God. No wonder Jesus calls those who do not perceive these lessons, ‘men of little faith’ (Matt. 6:30).” (Carson) Anxiety is the sure sign that we do not believe that God is in control and that His ways are best; it reflects a weak faith.

12:29 "And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying.

12:30 "For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things.

The words, “keep worrying,” translate a single Greek word used only once in the NT. It carries the idea of hovering between hope and fear. It pictures emotional instability, the movement from emotional highs to lows. As an imperative it is a command, not advice. Do not vacillate between worry and trust; do not worry.

The “for” of verse 30 explains why a believer should not be anxious. In light of God's bountiful care, worry is really a personal affront to God. In fact, worry places the believer at the same level as the person who doesn't even know God.

Worry shows that we are pursuing the same things that the unbelieving are pursuing and by doing so we are ignoring the values of the kingdom. But worry is also a denial of our profession that God is aware of our daily needs. The Gentiles worry because they are without God and do not understand His benevolent providence. When we worry we are living as if we believed like they do.

Trusting God for physical needs gives the Christian the opportunity to live a life distinct from unbelievers who never learn to trust God for basic necessities (Lk. 10:41, 42; Heb. 13:5, 6). God's care for us should result in a worry-free life. 1 Peter 5:7 says, “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”

12:31 "But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you."

In Matthew 6:33 it says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." This helps in understanding Luke 12:31. In Greek, the present tense imperative 'seek' suggests an unceasing quest. The word translated "first" means "first in a line of more than one option." Of all the concerns of life, seeking God's kingdom should consistently be our number one priority. Worry inhibits action so we should not allow it to keep us from pursuing the kingdom of God.

Now we know what Jesus meant when He said that life does not consist of possessions (12:15), and "life is more than food, and the body more than clothing" (12:23); life that satisfies, life that is abundant and full, is found in God's kingdom. Therefore, we should not waste time trying to accumulate wealth or worrying about things that God already knows about; we should seek the kingdom; we should personally desire to enter it, submit to its norms, and live in such a way that we store up treasures there. If we seek the kingdom, "all these things" (food, clothing, and other necessities) will be given to us as well.

12:32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom."

Verse 32 gives another reason not to worry. God doesn't just give us the kingdom, He *gladly* gives it to us. Humanity will not need to file a lawsuit against God to get what was promised, for God finds pleasure in giving the kingdom to His children. He wants to bless us! Jesus said in Matthew 25:34, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." In Luke 22:29 Jesus said, "Just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you." Entering the kingdom is entering into the joy of our Master (Matt. 25:21). "If He has given us His Son," Romans 8:32 says, "how will He not also freely with Him give us all things?"

God's tenderness is expressed in the terms "little flock." Though their numbers are few (they are a *little* flock), Jesus' disciples are *GOD'S* flock (Psa. 77:22; Isa. 40:11; Mic. 4:8; 5:4). God tenderly cares for His people, as a shepherd cares for his sheep.

The nature of God and the relationship we sustain to Him also assures us that God will care for us. Worry is a failure to understand our value before God and to trust that He knows our needs and is capable of meeting them; worry is a failure to understand that God is our Father and He desires to give us the kingdom.

12:33 "Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys."

Pursuing the kingdom means giving to others. The security that believers have in knowing that God will care for their needs if they seek the kingdom (Lk. 12:31) frees them to give what they have to others.

As a result of giving to others, the believer makes "money belts that do not wear out"; the riches they receive from God will not be taken away. No one can steal what one has done in the name of Christ nor will it ever deteriorate. The contrast is between the temporal nature of material wealth and possessions and the enduring nature of treasure laid up in heaven. By doing what pleases God, one stores up the

pleasure of God which results in everlasting reward (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). By way of contrast, the unrepentant will store up wrath for the day of wrath (Ro. 2:5).

As Morris summarizes, "Trust in riches prevents trust in God. When this takes place, possessions become a fatal barrier to life. Real riches are a treasure . . . *that does not fail, found in purses that do not grow old*" (Morris, 236-237).

12:34 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

The things we most highly value are what control our time and the direction of our lives. Notice that Jesus does not say, "Watch your heart," He says, "Choose your treasure," "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

According to the Bible, the heart is the center of who we are and includes the mind, emotions and will. If our treasure is on earth, it's guaranteed our heart will be focused on earthly things. We can know where our heart is if we identify what we think of most, what we are drawn to, what we worry about, and what we measure our worth by. If these things are focused on the physical world and our earthly existence, we know that our heart is there as well.

Verse 34 sums up the entire section. The question we need to ask ourselves is, "where is our treasure?" Is it in the world or the things of God? Our heart will be where our treasure is (12:34).

If our treasure is in heaven, we will seek the kingdom of God (12:31) and we will rest knowing that He cares for us (12:31). Furthermore, we will feel secure since we know that we will be granted the kingdom (12:32) and will have heavenly treasure that will not wear out, fail, or be stolen (12:33).

However, if we love the world, if our hope is only in this life, if we are dependent on barns to hold all that we need for the future, we will never be satisfied; we will always want more or worry about not having enough.