

Dr. Hugh Hamilton
Trinity Presbyterian Church – Pensacola, FL
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ACTIONS REQUIRED: 4. “Look Beyond Yourself”

Luke 12:13-21 Colossians 3:1-17

Do you ever look at someone’s successes, abilities, or good fortune and say to yourself, “What about me? When is it MY turn?” Are you ever so envious of a friend’s life that you can’t or won’t celebrate his or her good fortune?

Do you speak of your life predominately in the first person singular, “I, me, my, mine? I want, I need, I did, I hope, I achieved, I accomplished, I will.”

Do you ever hear yourself saying:

If I have more money, then I will have a more secure future.

If I can get more of your time and attention, then I’ll feel accepted, important, and relevant.

If I can gain more power and control, then I’ll be safe and respected. No one can hurt me.

If any of this sounds familiar, you know something about greed, and you may be a “barn builder” like the guy in the parable Jesus tells in Luke’s gospel (Luke 12:13-21). In verse 15, Jesus warns against “*all kinds of greed*” – for greed is not just about money and possessions, tangible things. Greed is also about time, attention, approval, love, knowledge, power, control, being right, being in charge, or a thousand other things.

The antidote to greed is not just purging your closet or giving away your belongings. The real work is interior work, soul work. The rich man’s real problem was not a *space* problem, it was a *soul* problem. His problem is not that he doesn’t have enough space to store his abundant harvest; his real problem is that he doesn’t have space in his soul for God and neighbor. (Larue, 227). The man neither acknowledges God who provides all things on this good earth nor does he care that his neighbors live without access to the bountiful food he enjoys.

The antidote to greed then is to be rich toward God. That means we invest in God and others by sharing love and mercy, by sharing money and attention, by showing compassion, justice, hope, and courage. When we accept and forgive others, when we speak the truth and show beauty, when we practice generosity, when we help others, we are investing in others and that makes us rich toward God.

WHY does Jesus call the rich man a *fool*?

MAYBE THE MAN PAID TOO HIGH A PRICE FOR HIS WEALTH.

Did he work himself into an early grave by sacrificing his health, or his marriage, or his family, his respect, his reputation, to grab the almighty dollar? Foolish, isn't it? What good is a bank full of

money if your health is gone, if the people you love turn their back on you, or if you are not right with God? Foolish, isn't it? But we know people who have done it.

MAYBE THE RICH MAN PUT OFF LIVING UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE.

He put off living waiting for the tomorrow that never came.

Never traveled - and now he and his wife are too old to enjoy it!

Never took the family anywhere; said it cost too much and it was too much trouble!

Never did anything spontaneous or frivolous; thought that too wasteful!

Never took time for a day off with his children.

Just spent all his time making money, money, money; never enough.

Remember Harry Chapin's song, "Cat's in the Cradle"? The father who was so busy working that he never had time for his son and now his grown son has no time for his father. The father laments: "It occurred to me; my boy's grown up just like me." God is distressed when we never have time for God! Foolish isn't it? But we know people who have done it!

A public service advertisement years ago reminded us not to miss the simple blessings in our daily lives. It read: "Most of us miss out on life's big prizes. The Pulitzer. The Nobel. Oscars. Tonys. Emmys. But we're all eligible for life's small pleasures. A pat on the back. A kiss behind the ear. A four-pound bass. A full moon. An empty parking space. A crackling fire. A great meal. A glorious sunset. Hot soup. Cold beer. Don't fret about copping life's grand awards. Enjoy its tiny delights. There are plenty for all of us" (Word and Witness, 3).

Learn to appreciate the simple things that enrich your life and to thank God for daily blessings.

MAYBE THE FOOLISH RICH MAN DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THE JOY OF SHARING HIS WEALTH.

Contentment does not come with lots of "things": more toys, more goodies, more pleasures.

Wrong! Happiness comes from relationships, not things. Love people and use things, don't love things and use people. Happiness comes in sharing. SHARING makes you rich toward God.

What could you do with your money that would give you the greatest joy you've ever known?

What mission project could you enjoy?

What charity grabs your soul and brings joy to your heart?

When you put an offering in the plate as it goes by, do you ever picture in your mind the man, woman, child, family, you will bless when the benefit of your gift reaches their life?

William Allen White gave the city of Emporia, KS a public park in memory of his daughter. Handing the deed to the mayor, he said. "There are three kicks in every dollar: the first kick is when you make it, the second kick is when you have it, and the third kick is when you give it away. The big kick is the last one!" (Crowe, 127).

Maybe this rich man was foolish because he never learned that sharing brings joy.

THE RICH MAN WAS FOOLISH BECAUSE HE'D NOT CONSIDERED HIS ACCOUNTABILITY TO GOD.

Jesus warns in verse 21: *"So it is with those who lay up treasure for themselves but are not rich toward God."*

The man speaks of *"my crops, my grain, my goods."*

He doesn't mention God's gifts of the soil, the rain, the sunshine, that grew his crop.

He doesn't thank his farm workers for their labor and cooperation.

He makes no mention of God's ownership of all things and nor his own stewardship of his possessions.

In these 46 words, the rich man referred to himself twelve times. The personal pronoun "I" occurs six times and the possessive pronouns "my" and "your" addressed to himself, appear six times. He shows no interest in how his surplus might help others. He didn't need anymore for himself, but he wanted more simply for the love of having more.

Greed twists our loyalties, stunts our souls, and distorts our perspective on what is truly important in life. Lust for money creates problems. Jesus warns us in verse 15, *"Beware, and be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."* Woe to us if we never see beyond our own little world nor help make life better for others. Contributing to other's lives makes you rich and successful no matter how much you have or give.

Unlike Jesus' other parables about a Good Samaritan, a lost sheep, a lost coin, a Prodigal Son, this parable doesn't end with a last-minute rescue that brings a "happily ever after." Nor does it suggest the man changed. It just ends; it leaves us hanging, with nagging questions:

- Are you living only to self?
- Are you excluding God from your life?
- Do you ever look beyond yourself and notice others' needs; help others, do for others?

MAYBE THE MAN WAS A FOOL BECAUSE HE THOUGHT WHAT HE ACCOMPLISHED IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE TYPE PERSON HE BECAME.

A while back, I attended my forty-year college reunion. We shared photographs of us back in the day and reminisced about the people in the photographs. We emailed stories and memories and updates and waves of nostalgia. Several of my fraternity brothers became quite wealthy, gave millions of dollars to the university and had buildings and athletic facilities named after them. Others achieved national acclaim, while other brothers expressed satisfaction with serving smaller arenas as public school teachers and counselors, artists, small town administrators, a few ministers, and military careers.

Discussing the forty years since we'd graduated and what has brought us satisfaction and worth, we agreed that what we DO is not important as what we BECOME. BEING is much deeper than DOING. Being relates to character - who you are and HOW you make a LIFE. DOING is tied to activity, accomplishments, awards and trophies. BEING outdistances DOING every time. BEING is far more valuable, and lasting, and inspiring and rewarding. Honors come and go. Integrity remains. Virtue is its own reward!

Consider Colossians 3:17...*"Whatever you do...whatever you do in word or deed... do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."* Yet the rest of the verses in that passage have to do with BEING: characteristics, values, and principles by which you live. Be thankful, be considerate, be obedient, be sincere, be kind, and be humble. The kind of person that you are is more important than what kind of work you do, or how much money you make. What example are you setting for your family and friends, for your community contacts and church family?

In verse 10, Paul writes that we must "put off" the "old nature," our "old self" with its sinful habits, and put on the new self, "which is being renewed ...in the image of its creator." Remove your dirty clothes and put on fresh clothes. We can do the same spiritually. True, we can disguise our old nature for a while by covering it up with good behavior, but sooner or later our old nature comes back through. We need help. We need to be renewed, to become people of a new character who find our ultimate satisfaction in becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. And when our BEING is like Christ's, then our DOING will become more Christ-like. "Put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; forgiving one another, even as Christ forgave you" (Col. 3:12-23).

What kind of person are you becoming? What would you LIKE to become with God's help?" Rather than focus on riches and rewards, consider the quality of life that you want, and the principles that will produce that quality of life. Take on Jesus' character. Decide to let Jesus Christ be your all in all, and you can become the person you want to BE, and you can DO that which is truly important.

DON'T MEASURE YOUR LIFE BY POSSESSIONS AND AWARDS.

"A man's life does not consist of the abundance of the things he possesses."

"What does it benefit a person to gain the whole world, and lose his/her soul?"

The tragedy of the rich fool is that he missed the true values of life and didn't know it. He missed the joy of a peaceful mind and a sympathetic heart. He was cheated out of honest friendships. He knew little of the deep satisfaction of serving God and his fellow humans. He never knew the thrill of the far vision and the lofty ideal.

Poor, poor, rich man!

Amen!

Sources

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