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Rich Toward God
Luke 12:13-21

*Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.”¹⁴ But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?”¹⁵ And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly.¹⁷ And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’¹⁸ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’²⁰ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not **rich toward God.**”*

The **context** of this parable is very important.
Jesus doesn’t want anything to do with this situation.
Someone in the crowd has just asked him to help get their inheritance!

Jesus not only ***declines to intervene, he warns against greed,***
and thinking that life is about possessions.
Then he tells the story of a ***rich farmer.***

Situations like these are really not that unusual, are they?
Haven’t we all seen ugly situations after someone’s death?
When someone feels slighted because their inheritance wasn’t what was expected.
Or that they are ‘owed’ a certain amount, because of what they have done...

When someone dies,
There can be disagreement over who gets what, and why.

So Jesus ***addresses that head on---***by denying the request to be the arbitrator,
and instead offering a ***warning, and a story,***
All about **GREED.**

Now most of us don’t consider ourselves greedy, right?
We think the green monster isn’t in our hearts.

But sometimes it is.
 Instead of greed we call it ‘*wanting what’s fair*’.
 ‘*getting what we’ve earned*’, or ‘*what we deserve*’.
 That’s not greed, is it?

Well, Jesus might say, *it all depends on your heart*.
 And Jesus certainly *knows* our hearts!

So, what exactly is Jesus worried about?

When you first read this story,
 the request doesn’t seem ridiculous—
 I mean, *wouldn’t Jesus be a really fair judge?*

And the story of the man building bigger barns *doesn’t seem crazy either*—
 I mean, *shouldn’t we be wise* with our finances,
 and save for emergencies, and retirement?
 Especially if we are blessed with abundance?

This farmer seems to be a very hard *worker*, very *smart*,
 And one year he had a very good *harvest*...
 Jesus doesn’t say that he has been dishonest in any way—
 he just worked hard, and had success.
 so much so that he decided to build bigger barns to store everything.
 He was smart...or so he thought.

But then God calls this smart, successful businessman a **FOOL**.
 For his life will be taken from him, right at the height of all his success.
 "*You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you
 have prepared, whose will they be?*" 21 *So it is with those who store up treasures
 for themselves but are not rich toward God.*"

This *man is a fool* for thinking he can actually secure his own future.
 “*I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my
 grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid
 up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.*”

He didn’t realize that *no one’s future is secure*,
 At any moment life can take a dramatic turn, right?
 We’ve all seen that, haven’t we?

So what's wrong with this man?
 What if it's not as much his *actions, as it is his heart?*

In the heart of this smart, rich farmer, this man blessed with abundance,
 is an *attitude of selfishness*.
 He IS in fact greedy, because he is solely concerned with *his OWN welfare*,
 and his *OWN future*,
 not anyone else, or those less fortunate.

Maybe he *hasn't heard Jesus* talking about money ...or saying things like
 whatever you've *done for the least of these*, you've done for me!

In his sixty spoken words this man says *"I", or "My" 15 times!*
 For this guy, it's all about *him*—and no one else!

You don't hear anything about *gratitude to God*, do you?
 You don't hear anything about *generosity*, do you?

It reminds me of what Jesus says a little later in Luke 12,
 when he says *do not store up treasures on earth that can be destroyed, but
 treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Jesus is very clear—he wants us to be rich toward God.
 So what does that mean?
 How are *we rich toward God?*

We might start by asking what *we are doing with our money*, and our stuff.
 After all, where are treasures are, there are hearts will be!

Where are our hearts right now,
 when it comes to our money?
 Is God creating a generous heart in us—
 a heart that *cares more about blessing others than being blessed?*

That's part of this story isn't it?
 How—*real life*—the kind of life that is rich toward God,
 Is *about blessing others*.
 It's about *our attitude* toward what we have.
*15 And Jesus said, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for
 one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."*

Isn't that true?

When we *get to our last breath*,

will we really be worried about what kind of house or car we had?

I can say with near certainty, *people at the end of life don't dwell on that*.

They care about *relationships*,

about time spent or not spent with family and friends,

They care about love, about service.

When we *remember someone after their death*,

We don't sit and remember their great retirement savings---

we talk about their *heart*.

Why? Because that's what makes up real life.

This is why Jesus said, it's *always better to give, than to receive*.

Haven't you found that to be true?

So, how are we blessing others? Right now, today?

How are we being *rich toward God*?

In the magazine *Christian Century*, a couple years back, Peter Marty told the beautiful story of *25 year old twin sisters*, Bethany and Hannah Goralski.

Their Dad died of kidney failure,

and to *honor his generous spirit* they decided, each of them,

to donate a kidney to a complete stranger!

Their decision set up a chain reaction of anonymous kidney donations, at

Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago,

soon it was ten donors and recipients, with potentially more to come!

Their dad's generosity

Inspired their generosity, which inspired the generosity of others.

Marty wrote: *What inspires people to behave in such generous ways?*

I'm convinced that bone-deep generosity is a way of life that has

nothing to do with means, and everything to do with desire.

Peter Marty, *Christian Century*, July 31, 2019, pg. 3.

I agree.

Often the *most generous people have less* than others around them!

It's not about having extra to give away.

It's about just giving.
Being generous, blessing others.
With whatever you do have.

It does NOT depend on having a big bank account,

It has to do with our ***hearts***.

Christ calls us to have ***hearts that bless others***—

and when we do, our lives are changed, as is the world around us.

Because generosity is ***contagious!***

A few years ago I read a great book called
7:An Experimental Mutiny Against Excess,
by Jen Hatmaker.

In her book she documents her journey to go without some of the possessions and privileges of the average American, for a year...

because we have so, so much more than we need,

So much that can help those in need.

Hatmaker writes in her book, "*a child says 'me', an adult says 'us'.*

Maturity deciphers need from want, wisdom from foolishness.

Growing up means curbing appetites, shifting from me to we, understanding that private choices have public consequences.

***Let's be consumers who silence the screaming voice that yells "I WANT"!
and instead listens to the quiet 'we need'....***

What if we...wrote a new story....

***I suspect we'd find that elusive contentment,
storing up treasures in heaven like Jesus told us to."***

Jen Hatmaker, *7:An Experimental Mutiny Against Excess*, Nashville: B&H, 2012. pg. 94.

Wow.

What if we did ***spend more time thinking about how to give and bless others,***
than how to get and save for ourselves?

What if we could experience that ***contentment, and joy?***

I have a little girl I've adopted through Compassion in Uganda named Lillian
(if you're interested that is a great program!).

It's the 3rd child I've sponsored since college.

I've seen two girls grow up, graduate, and become nurses!

When I send extra money to little Lillian and her family for her birthday, or Christmas, you know what happens?

She uses it to buy food, animals, and sweets—for her family.
She knows the *joy of giving*—and they have next to nothing.

I can testify to the joy of giving.
When we Zelle our tithe each month, that's a joy—
I know it's helping through this church.
When I pay attention to that nudge from God about someone in need, and I give,
that's a joy—because it's making a difference.

You know, Jesus never says that the problem with the rich fool is that he is *rich*.
Jesus doesn't condemn money itself.
He condemns the *LOVE of it*.
He condemns *greed*—a word in Greek that means *a yearning for more*.

The problem isn't just that he was *storing* for the future.
It was that he thought that would *set him up for life*.
HIM. Not others. Not anyone in need.

He *built bigger barns*—for himself,
Begging the question, how much does one person really need?
This man is so concerned for *himself*,
That he never mentions *what God has given him*.
His attitude is *I did it myself, I'll keep it for myself...*

Now, I don't know about you, but I don't think of myself as
greedy or selfish.
But don't we all struggle sometimes, with deciphering *a NEED versus a want*?
Aren't we all faced with *choices on what we buy, and how much*,
On what we *save, and for what purposes*?
Don't we all wonder how much we should be *giving*,
especially because when we are blessed?

There's a reason Jesus talks about *money and possessions A LOT* in the Gospels.
He wants us to know that ours is a *God of abundance and blessing*,
So we can be a blessing to others!

Isn't that the way to become rich toward God?

How can that happen for *you*?

Right now, with what you own, with what you have in the bank?

If God went through your online bank statement, what would stand out?

Where does your money go, and how much goes to blessing others?

And, what does it mean for us as a **church** to be rich toward God?

How can we show even more gratitude?

And continue to bless others with what we have?

And lest we just judge the rich farmer,

We might ask ourselves, **where are WE falling into a similar trap?**

Where are we caring more about what we **have**,

than our **gratitude** to God for every bit of it?

Where are we caring more for our own **stuff**,

than **helping** the least of these?

Because here's the truth.

None of us is the sole source of what we have.

It is by **God's grace alone** that we are born where we are,

and given the opportunities we have received.

Sure, we may have worked hard to be successful,

but **not without the help of God**,

And **not just for ourselves!**

In **America**, we are a proud 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' kind of people.

We are **self-made men and women**, right?

Well, what if Jesus says: "no way!"

As followers of Jesus,

We are **in life together**—connected **and dependent** on one another,

and **totally dependent** upon God.

With a purpose--**to bless and love** one another.

In August 1967 in Chicago, Martin Luther King, Jr gave a sermon entitled, "**Why Jesus Called A Man A Fool.**" (Delivered at Mount Pisgah Missionary Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, on 27 August 1967.)

He said, "this man was a fool because he failed to realize his dependence on others.because he said "I" and "my" so much until he lost the capacity to say "**we**" and "**our**." He failed to realize that he couldn't do anything by himself. This man talked like he could build the barns by himself, like he could till the soil by himself....

Maybe you haven't ever thought about it, but you can't leave home in the morning without being dependent on most of the world. No matter where you are

today, somebody helped you to get there..... Don't forget those who helped you come over. There are a lot of fools around. Because they fail to realize their dependence on others.

Jesus himself acknowledged his dependence on God and others.

And Jesus certainly ***gave*** of what he had.

He ***lived to bless others***,

And show the ***love and grace*** of God!

So--what about us?

How will we live to bless others? Today?

Because, ***none of us know how long*** we have to live.

So, how ***will we make the most of every day?***

There's an old ***Quaker*** saying:

I expect to pass through this world but once.

Therefore any good work, kindness, or service I can render to any person or animal, let me do it now.

Let me not neglect or delay to do it,

for I will not pass this way again.

It's always the right time to give and bless, isn't it?

We will not pass this way again.

And whenever we do decide to give—

well, that's when we can really ***meet Jesus***.

Jesus is talking to US when he says:

'one's ***LIFE*** does not consist in the abundance of possessions”.

Life is not about what we ***have***, or what we ***can get***.

It's about what we ***give***.

So, when we find ourselves wanting just a ***little bit more***....

More clothes, more electronics....

More house, more car...

What if we stopped to think about who we could bless,

With a little bit more.

I am convicted by what Mark Hinkley Shore says in a sermon on Luke 12:

As for that grain in your barns, that work you are good at, those accounts you manage – they are worthless for the purpose of soul-securing. Worthless. But ...

Our time, our talents, our possessions – they are just what God needs to answer our neighbor’s prayer for daily bread. Mark Hinkle Shore, “On Securing the Soul”, Pilgrim Preaching, 2010.

What would it take for us to be ***rich toward God?***

It isn’t always easy to give....

When life seems insecure, or resources seem scarce...

But what if that’s the perfect time to give, and share, and bless—
and depend on God for all of it!

Friends, hear the ***Good News*** of the Gospel:

The life of ***joy, and contentment*** is ours---

If we live ***to share, and give, and bless*** those around us,

The time is always right to be ***rich toward God!***

And to that, all God’s people said, Amen.