

**Luke 12:13-21** *Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.*

*Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”*

*And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’*

*“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’*

*“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’*

*“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”*

Think about the man in our text and imagine that he is your neighbor—someone who lives just down the road from you, or right next door. How would you perceive him? Obviously he’s quite wealthy. You see that he’s good at what he does—so good, in fact, that he needs to expand his operation. He seems to have a good retirement plan in place to the point where all of his earthly concerns will be taken care of for as long as he lives. How would you view this man if he were your neighbor? What words come to mind? Successful. Impressive. “The Man!” Someone who has it all—and seems to “have it all together”? Would you maybe be a little bit envious of this man?

Is it a little shocking then that from Jesus’ perspective the rich man He’s describing in His parable is called a “**fool**” by God? That’s not a word you throw about lightly. If you call someone a “**fool**” there really isn’t much doubt what you think about that person’s intelligence, or their perspective, or their utter lack of common sense. In fact, the word in the Greek that is used here in our text for “**fool**” means exactly that: Literally, “*not using common sense*” (Friberg’s Greek Lexicon). It refers to some one who is ignorant of what the real situation is. That is what this rich man was: *Ignorant* of the real situation. That is why God called him a “**fool.**”

Don’t be this man! **Don’t Be a “Fool!”** That is Jesus message to each one of us in His parable. We pray that the Holy Spirit would lead us learn this lesson from the Words of Jesus and apply it to our individual lives as Christians.

What was the root cause of this man’s “foolishness”? It can be summed up in one word: GREED! Remember the context of Jesus’ parable; the reason He spoke this parable to the crowd? A man was arguing with his brother over his inheritance. He asks Jesus to intervene and Jesus flat out refuses to be “**a judge**” or “**arbiter**” between them in these types of matters. He had come for a much more important reason: To be their Savior! So, Jesus uses this dispute as an opportunity to warn this man, to warn the crowd that was listening, and to warn all who would read these words—which would include you and me!—against the very real and very dangerous sin of GREED. **Then he said to them, “Watch**

***out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*** (v.15)

Just so we're not mistaken, greed is not just a problem for those who are rich. Let's also be very clear that Jesus is also **NOT** saying here that it is a sin to be rich. It is not! As with all spiritual issues it is a matter of the heart, not necessarily the wallet. Greed, a sinful desire to have more and more money or possessions, is a temptation that all Christians are faced with, at least to some degree.

Greed is a type of "coveting." A good definition for "coveting" is found in Luther's Catechism: "*Coveting is sinful desire. Coveting is being consumed with wanting something you can't have or would have to sin to get.*" (Sydow, p.87) Our Scripture reading for this morning reminded us that "coveting" is a very dangerous and serious type of sin. In Colossians 3:5, the Apostle Paul warns us to, "***Put to death... "covetousness, which is idolatry.***" Greed and coveting can warp what we perceive as valuable in life and twist our view of material things, placing them as the highest priority in our lives—essentially making money and possessions our "god," which is idolatry, a sin against the first commandment. Greed can turn us inward so that we begin to care only for our self. And worst of all, greed can lead us to the frightening situation this man in our parable faced at the end of his life. The scary thing is that we often don't even notice the problem of greed within ourselves—especially in our materialistic, money-driven society. We see it all around us and we think it's "normal." In fact, there was an expression that became popular in our country not too long ago that stated: "Greed is good!" We need God's Law to expose and reveal to us this temptation and this sin. The Apostle Paul once wrote, "***For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.'***" (Romans 7:7)

Aren't these symptoms of greed and coveting evident in the rich "fool" in Jesus' parable? Listen again to the rich fool's words in v.19 - ***And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of (good things) laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."***

- I. His focus was on SELF
- II. He put his trust in his money and possessions
- III. He looked toward retirement, instead of eternity

God's words to this man show us just how catastrophically foolish a heart that is filled with greed and only focused on "earthly things" really is: **v.20-22 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."** These "earthly things" that the rich man was focusing on are all temporary, they do not last—SELF, money & possessions, retirement—and they cannot save us. In fact, if they are the focus of our heart and life instead of Christ, they will leave us spiritually bankrupt on the Last Day and condemn us for eternity! Don't be like this man. **Don't be a "fool!"**

What is the answer to the "foolishness" of greed and coveting? The "answer," as it so often is, is found in Christ! Paul pointed to this "answer" in our Scripture reading for this morning from Colossians 3: "***If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.***" (Colossians 3:1-2)

Focusing on Christ and the salvation He won for us and **1. setting our minds on heavenly—not earthly—things** and **2. being rich toward God** will produce the very *opposite* results than those experienced by the rich “fool.”

When we **1. Set Our Minds on Heavenly—not Earthly—Things...**

- I. Our focus is put on Christ and the people and work of His kingdom—not on our SELF
- II. Our focus is on the treasures of heaven
- III. Our focus is on our eternity and our everlasting “retirement” in our heavenly home

Focusing on these things will truly make us “rich”—**2. rich toward God**. Unlike the “earthly things” that the rich fool sought after, the “riches” of God give true fulfillment and joy in this life, they have lasting, eternal value in the next! The riches of God in Christ Jesus can, and do, save us! Listen to these words of Jesus that come just a few verses after the parable from our sermon text as He contrasts these two types of “riches”: ***“But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things [earthly things] shall be added to you. “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. “Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* (Luke 12:31-34)**

**Don’t be a “Fool!”** Our life should not be like the life of the rich man in Jesus’ parable who was only rich in earthly things. If we are truly “wise” our life should be different. It should be the life of one who is ***“rich toward God”*** (v.21).

In some ways that life will look very much the same as the rich “fool’s”: We will work hard to provide food and clothing for ourselves and our family. We will plan, budget, and save—even save for retirement! But if we are ***“rich toward God”*** our focus will be different. Our hearts and minds will be in a different place than the rich “fool.” We will not worry and fret about our future and our “earthly things.” We will leave the future and what we need for it in the hands of God our heavenly Father, who ***“knows that you need all these things”*** (Matthew 6:32). When we do all our work and planning for life trusting in God, we will remember that there are more important riches than earthly possessions. We will know by faith that the greatest treasures we have are the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. These are the only riches which guarantee eternal life. They are the riches God has freely given us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. They are riches which are ours forever! May God move each one of us to heed the words of Jesus this morning and give us the wisdom to **1. Set Our Minds on Heavenly—not Earthly—Things** and in so doing, make us to **2. Be Rich Toward God**. Amen.

—Pastor Luke Bernthal