

Luke 12:13-21

Trinity 1, June 11, 2023
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Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." ¹⁴ But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." ¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear 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, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

If you're a watcher of TV shows, you've probably noticed a storytelling tactic that many programs seem to use these days. It always comes at the beginning of the episode—"Previously Seen on...(whatever show you're watching)"—it's a highlight reel of past events that runs for a few minutes to prepare you for the upcoming episode. In a TV show that runs for several seasons, it can be hard to keep track of all the characters and remember everything that has happened. So, the show runners will use a shortcut and in the "Previously Seen" portion of the show, they show that character that you forgot about or that event that you didn't remember very well. This will clue you in that those things are going to be important for this current episode, so you had better remember them.

At the end of the episode, they'll often use another technique which is convenient for the viewer: the "Next Time on..." portion of the show. The show producers want to be certain to get you back in your chair the same time next week to watch the next episode, so they show you another highlight reel of what's coming up in the rest of the season. They give you some exciting glimpses of what's to come, so you know what you have to look forward to and take the time to watch. Without these before and after elements added to the show, it can be pretty easy to get confused and stop watching the show.

I'm treating our text like an episode of TV this morning. As we read through our text, it's like we were just thrown into a scene where a man asks a seemingly innocent question of Jesus—he wants Jesus to help him get his inheritance. Maybe he's got an older brother that is withholding their father's wealth from him, and he's coming to Jesus because he's sure that Jesus would be able to help, just as Jesus has helped many others before. But then Jesus' response seems rather harsh! What's going on here, did we miss something? Is there a little more background that we need, perhaps, to fully understand this episode?

We're going to employ those television storytelling tactics today, recapping past events with a "Previously Seen" portion, and we'll also look forward to what's coming up next with a "Next On" portion. I believe this will be of great help to us as we consider the theme (which I tried to make resemble a title of an episode of a television show): **Luke 12: "The One with the Rich Fool."**

In Jewish law, when a man died, his inheritance would be split between his sons. The eldest son would get a double portion. The way it worked was, if you had five sons, the property and wealth would be split six ways, and the eldest would get two of those portions. The other four brothers would get the remaining four portions. It was very cut and dry, there was no wiggle room in the law in any way, but there *were* often times when the siblings would squabble over the inheritance, accusations of impropriety flying. We don't know what the accusation was in this particular instance, but evidently this man felt aggrieved in some way, so he took the matter to Jesus. Jesus had nothing to do with it of

course, but these matters would often be brought before prominent Rabbis, as their influence might be enough to get the siblings to be fair with one another.

It didn't work out that way for this man. Instead, Jesus dismisses him, ***"Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you."*** And then Jesus reprimands him in front of everyone, pointing to him as an example: ***"Be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*** And then to make matters worse for this man, Jesus goes on to tell a rather severe parable about a fella that was a real scrooge, a real greedy individual. The story is about a rich farmer whose land produces plentifully, so much so that he doesn't know what to do with all of it. Whereas any of us might suggest that he could give some of it a way—charity never enters this man's mind.

Instead, he comes to a determination by discussing the matter with himself alone—and take note of all the references to himself: He says ***"I will do this: I will tear down MY barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all MY grains and MY goods. And I will say to MY soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."*** Not once does any person other than himself enter into his line of thought. This is the definition of a greedy person. And Jesus tells us what will happen to such a person: ***"God said to him, 'Fool! (Not something you want God to call you) Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'"***

I like to imagine what the crowd must have looked like as Jesus wrapped up this short sermon. Stunned silence would probably describe the feeling of the crowd, and I'm sure not a few heads were slowly turning to look at the man who had spoken up. Meanwhile that man must have felt as if he were about an inch tall and wishing to be anywhere but there. And in all honesty, it seems like a pretty innocent request that the man had! He'd been wronged, and he simply wanted justice. And then Jesus undresses the man before everyone! And you have to wonder, "What prompted this response?" Well, this is where a "Previously Seen" montage might come in handy for us in setting up this text. Let's do that.

Previously Seen in the Gospel of Luke, our montage might go all the way back to chapter 4, where Jesus begins his ministry saying, ***"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."***

And then *Previously Seen* we might next see Jesus going to society's outcasts, calling fishermen and tax collectors to follow him. *Previously Seen*, the next footage might be of Jesus continuing to show love to those that society overlooked: cleansing a leper, forgiving and healing a paralytic, raising the dead son of the widow at Nain. *Previously Seen*, more recently, in chapter 11, Jesus is teaching upon prayer, and He gives His disciples the promise that the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

And then *Previously Seen*, much more recently, in the verses right before our text, where Jesus warns his disciples about persecution that will come because they confess him. Then this *Previously Seen* montage might include Jesus' words from right before our text where he says, ***"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell."*** But then, the next scene might be Jesus saying soon after that, ***"But you need don't be afraid of [that guy who has authority to cast to hell], for you are of more value [to Him] than many sparrows."***

And then *Previously Seen*, wrapping up this montage, we might have Jesus' final encouragement for the disciples for when things start turning bad, ***"When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."***

And that's where the previous episode ends, and a couple seconds later we're at the opening scene of this new episode, where Jesus just finishes speaking and suddenly this man butts in. With all of that context, we see what a boneheaded request this was. Maybe this man *was slightly* interested in Jesus' teaching, but he had so much on his heart and mind due to his feeling of being wronged, that he was unable to wait for a more convenient occasion. In the middle of the crowd, at a brief pause in Jesus' teaching, he decides to break in with his request, *"I want my stuff, Jesus, help me get it!"*

Since he had the opportunity to be heard by Jesus, could you think of anything better that he might have asked, considering all the context? How about: *"Lord, you just said you'd give the Holy Spirit to those who asked, Lord, could you give me the Holy Spirit?"* Or maybe: *"Lord, You've come to establish God's reign of salvation to Israel and the world, Lord, could you grant salvation to me too?"* Or perhaps, he could have simply used the opportunity to say: *"Lord, will you remember me, when you come into your Kingdom?"*—But instead, this guy wants the stuff that he feels he deserves.

Now, it would be a failure on our part to read this parable and the surrounding account and not identify with the characters involved. After all, how many times have I gone to church, where Jesus promises to be present because 2 or 3 are gathered there in His name; how many times have I been to church, where the Holy Spirit of God promises to be working in hearts at the proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments; church, where God the Father promises that when the Pastor announces sins are forgiven it's as valid and certain in heaven as if God were himself standing there and announcing it. And in *that* place, where we now are, how often has my mind been on "my stuff"?

How often have I been in *that* place thinking about some grievance I have with someone, or about a problem at work, or about what I'm having for lunch, or about getting ready for visitors, or about some financial worry of some kind? We've all done that, probably even today. Dear friends, it's as if we were the man standing up and saying, "Jesus, that's all well and good, but what I really want is my stuff!"

Or let's consider the rich man in the parable, how much can we relate to his thoughts? When we get a pay raise, or we happen to have more money in the bank than usual, and we're starting to feel comfortable, don't the thoughts immediately gravitate towards what I can do for my family? How I can improve my house? What I can do for myself? Yes, I think we're all very much like that rich farmer too. And this all being the case, God really ought to look at us and declare us to be, **"Fools!"** Because with the wealth with which we've been blessed, we often place so much of our satisfaction and joy and contentment in the stuff that we can't take with us when we die, which will probably end up at the dump in due time. In this way, we are without a doubt, **"Fools!"** We ought to receive this same rebuke from Jesus, along with that man in the crowd.

Now, before I settled on this overall theme for the sermon, I'd read the word **"Fool,"** and a particular line from a certain boxing movie popped into my head. I toyed with another theme based around this phrase. It was going to be based upon the famous line from Rocky 3, where Mr. T is talking about Rocky Balboa in an interview and says, "I pity the fool." Obviously, this did not turn out to be my theme, but I believe the point still remains—the theme I'd considered was: "We are fools...but God pities the fool."

We might, when confronted with our greed (as when we're confronted with any sin), try to come up with excuses to try to justify our actions. Or try to justify ourselves by saying we have good intentions behind our actions, and it's not really greed per se. But what would be much better for us this morning is to fall to our knees before the Lord, and confess, *"Lord, I am a fool. Have mercy on me, a sinner."* And God *pities* the fool. We'll come back to that thought in a second. But first, our sermon text ends with a stern warning by Jesus, where He says, ***"So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich***

toward God." And if the episode just ended there, we might not want to come back next week to see what happens next. This is where the "Next Time On" montage will come in handy. Let's do that now.

Next Time, first, we might get a glimpse at the scene right after this in which Jesus turns to His disciples and explains why there is no need to be greedy over our earthly wealth, because consider what other things the Lord cares for. Jesus says **"Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them! & Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."** And the point is, as Jesus says, you are much more valuable to God than the ravens and your life much more valuable than the fields of flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, all of which God continues to care for, so surely God will take care of you too.

And then *Next Time*, this montage will jump to the next scene, where Jesus points out what else God wants to give to you: **"Instead, seek His Kingdom, and these things will all be added to you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."** And there we see our glimmer of hope to keep us coming back. Our God in heaven, who due to our sinful selfishness should look at us and call us fools, instead has pity on us. He does indeed desire to give us eternal life. And then *Next Time* it might include a scene from a little later on in Jesus' ministry, where we meet a new character, another truly greedy and covetous man named Zacchaeus, a tax collector who confessed His sin before His Savior. Jesus reassured him, **"Salvation has come to your house. For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost."** And then *Next Time* we might get a glimpse of one of the final scenes of the season, where Jesus hangs on the cross in order to seek and save lost sinners like us. There we see God's mercy and love towards sinful fools on full display as Jesus suffers to take away the punishment our foolishness deserves. So, in our *Next Time* montage, we see joyful conclusions awaiting us. God has had mercy on us, and because of this, God does not call us fools any longer! Instead, we are, as our final verse describes, **"Rich toward God."**

You know, there are lots of ways to become rich here on earth. They say the easiest way to become a millionaire is to convince one million people to give you a dollar each. Well, the *only* way to become spiritually rich, is for the One who has everything in His hands, to give you just one thing: His own Son. This you have received, and on the basis of that gift, we have wealth in abundance. As Paul writes, **"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."** (2 Corinthians 2:8-9)

Yes, we have the one thing that will carry on past our deaths, the love of God in Christ our Lord. The forgiveness and peace which God has given to you through Him, that will remain; no one can take it away. Even after your body is decayed, and all your stuff ends up in the dump somewhere, you will see God. You will have Jesus' crown of righteousness in your possession. These are real treasures. This is what Jesus' offers today. So, who cares about the rest of this stuff?

I would encourage each one of you, in light of all this, to consider Jesus' words throughout your week. Consider His warning, **"Be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."** I would encourage each one of us to evaluate our lives, evaluate the things that make us happy, evaluate the things we *feel* we need—and then *re-evaluate* those things.

You've heard the saying, "The guy that dies with the most stuff wins." Well, God says, "The guy that dies with the most stuff still dies." But at the same time, "The guy that dies with Christ will live forever." That's what you've been given. That's real lasting treasure. May God help us to put everything else in its proper place as mere stuff, because we've been given something far better. Thanks be to God! Amen.