

Rich Toward God

Luke 12:13-21

Tolstoy wrote a fable entitled “How Much Land Does a Man Need?” The central character, Pakhom, was a peasant who learned about a country of nomads who would sell you for a thousand rubles as much land as you could walk around in one day. You begin walking at sunrise; if you returned to the starting point by sundown, you would own as much land as you had walked around. If you didn’t return to the starting point by sundown, you lost the thousand rubles.

Pakhom traveled to this far off country with the thousand rubles he had managed to collect by sacrifice and by selling possessions. The minute the sun rose, Pakhom placed his thousand rubles on top of the fur hat marking the starting/ending point, and he set out walking. His plan was to walk off a large square during the daylight hours. He had calculated how far he could walk before he needed to make a turn. The first two sides of the square went as planned, but as he walked the third side he noticed a nice piece of land that would take him off course, but it was land that he simply had to have.

As you might expect, this detour took Pakhom off schedule to make it back to the fur hat by sundown. When he realized that he was in trouble, he began to shed clothes and water and began to sprint toward the starting point. Pakhom exerted every ounce of energy he possessed, making it back to the fur hat just before the sun set, collapsing to the ground, dead. At that point his servant dug a trench six feet long and buried him. The answer to the question, “How much land does a man need?” was simply “enough to bury him in.” (Bazyn, *The Seven Perennial Sins and their Offspring*, pp. 100-101)

Today we are going to consider a parable of Jesus found in Luke 12 that makes a similar point. This parable also forces us to think about our possessions and wealth *in light of the fact that **one day we will leave it all behind***. (“You never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul.”) Jesus is going to advocate a way of living that allows you to come face-to-face with God on the last day of your life and have no regrets about what you’ve done with your money and possessions (what you’ve saved, what you’ve spent, and what you’ve given). That way of living involves being “rich toward God” with the way we use our money and possessions. Instead of merely being rich (which is obsolete the instant you die), you can be rich toward God (which is a condition that transitions seamlessly from this life to the next).

Before we look at Luke 12, a couple points of clarification/context. . . . **First**, we are taking three weeks to talk about money because we are in the midst of a *Making Room* expansion effort that will require generous (and even sacrificial) giving within the church, giving above and beyond our regular giving. We’re planning to expand our facility in several significant areas; we’ve got a web site that explains more (www.makingroom.info). But as Brian mentioned last week, even if we weren’t in the midst of a building expansion, talking about generosity is important because it’s a basic area of discipleship - just like prayer and serving and reading Scripture. We’re not

merely seeking to raise up generous gifts; we're actually seeking to raise up generous people - people who are generous in every area of life, including giving.

Second, if you don't consider this your "home church" we really aren't expecting you to give to this *Making Room* effort. But since the principles from Scripture we'll be discussing have application for all of our lives far beyond this effort, we trust that you'll find these messages challenging and encouraging. We're really glad that you're here.

*The basic message of Luke 12:13-21 is that **Every believer can (and should) be rich toward God. (Luke 12:13-21)*** Jesus specifically talks about being "rich toward God" in how we use our money and possessions. Let's begin in verse 13:

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

In Jesus' day people looked to their teachers/rabbis to make this type of judgment because they had wisdom and credibility. Someone in the crowd assumed that Jesus would rise to the occasion and settle the dispute he had with his brother. He's even so bold that he instructs Jesus what to "tell" his brother: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." We don't know the circumstances of this dispute, but this person assumes that Jesus will agree that his brother is wrong and that he is right.

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

Jesus is unwilling to accept the role that this person had assigned Him. Rather, Jesus takes the opportunity to address a deeper issue. Whereas the person in the crowd was afraid of losing his inheritance, Jesus says that he should be **more afraid** of greed.

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."

The greater threat to a person's soul (much greater than not getting your share of an inheritance) is greed. Greed seeks to accumulate and keep as much as possible. Notice that Jesus mentions "every form of greed" - indicating that greed will look different in the lives of different people with different circumstances.

Jesus warned that if you are motivated by greed and you manage to accumulate an abundance of possessions and wealth that ***your life does not consist of your possessions***. It may appear that you're really living, but a person's life is not measured by his/her possessions. You can have a lot and live a bankrupt life; you can have very little and be living an incredibly rich life. It's ALSO true that you can have a lot and really live; you can have only a little and be greedy.

And so the irony is that this man in the crowd thinks Jesus will help him **secure** more wealth, but Jesus warns against **craving** more wealth. In order to bring home His point, Jesus tells a parable (a story with a point). Here it is:

16 And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 “And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’

This is a good problem to have. His land was so productive that he didn’t have the capacity to store everything that it produced. Notice his solution:

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.

We read this and think, “That’s a good plan. He accumulating wealth. That’s what you’re supposed to do.” I think we’d all agree that it’s not necessarily wrong in building bigger barns. This *Making Room* campaign is partially about building a “bigger barn” - a larger facility. What matters is the motivation. Notice what this man was telling his soul:

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.” ’

Jesus actually has this man articulate a common version of the “American Dream.” This is often put forth as the goal of life: accumulate so much that you have enough for years and years to come. Accumulate so much that you no longer have to work; you don’t have to worry about money; you don’t even have to trust God. The man in the parable has attained this goal, so he tells his soul, “take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.” This guy is “set” financially and materially.

But in verse 20 God addresses this man directly.

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?’

In the OT a fool is someone who “rejects the knowledge and precepts of God as a basis for life” (Liefeld, *EBC - Luke*, p. 961). Wisdom is aligning your life with truth/reality; foolishness is rejecting truth/reality and living in a make-believe world. For example, gravity is a reality in this world. You’d be foolish to climb up on a ladder and ignore the reality that if you aren’t careful you’ll fall to the earth at 32 ft/sec². Jesus’ point is that you’d be foolish to live as if your life consisted of your possessions.

This man was “set” financially for many years to come. . . . but he didn’t have years to enjoy it. He didn’t even have **days** to enjoy it. He would die that very night. Although his contentment and security revolved around an abundance of material possessions, in a matter of hours they would be worthless. When your soul leaves your body your possessions are suddenly obsolete.

God's question echoes a theme developed more fully in the book of Ecclesiastes: *"and now who will own what you have prepared?"* We each need to make peace with the fact that once we die we have zero control over our stuff. Those who inherit your possessions may take care of them just like you do, but they may sell it all for pennies on the dollar, or they may give it all away. Under any scenario, you have no control over what happens to it when you die.

In verse 21 Jesus broadens out the application for the man who wanted his share of the inheritance, for the crowd, and for us.

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

Remember that Jesus is warning against greed and against being preoccupied with storing up treasure for yourself. The following paragraph (verses 22-34) explains what it means to be "rich toward God." It involves seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness instead of worrying about food and clothing; it involves knowing that God will meet your needs. Notice how Jesus concludes in verses 33 and 34:

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

Jesus pointed out elsewhere (Matthew 6) that earthly treasure can be stolen by thieves or can be destroyed by rust or moths. But if you take that same earthly treasure and invest it in the kingdom of heaven, you are storing up treasure in heaven which is untouchable. This is what it means by being rich toward God in relation to money and possessions. The rich farmer in Jesus' parable was impoverished when he stood before God; he hadn't stored up any treasure in heaven. By contrast, Jesus says that you can be wealthy when you stand before God if you've invested a portion of your money/possessions in the kingdom of God. We can do this in many ways: giving directly to the poor, giving to fund the ongoing ministries of the church, supporting missionaries and ministries. Our building expansion is one more way to invest in God's kingdom and be "rich toward God."

Like Brian mentioned last week, it's more about an attitude than an amount. No matter whether you have a lot or a little in terms of money and resources, you can store up fantastic wealth in heaven. The widow who brought the two copper coins to the temple treasury was flat out rich toward God. Jesus commended her for giving more than those who brought much greater amounts of money out of their surplus (Mk. 12:41-44).

Jesus says that it's a matter of the heart (which is the command and control center of our lives; we live from the heart): *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* Whenever you find a person's treasure, you will find that person's heart; you will

know what really matters to a person. If you're "rich toward God" in the sense of loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, it will show up in how you use your money. That's why every believer can and should be rich toward God.

In His parable Jesus forces us to put ourselves in the place of the rich man and ask, ***"Do I honestly want to be rich toward God in relation to money and possessions?"*** Independent of the *Making Room* effort, this is a heart-issue that each of us needs to face. It's one thing to agree in principle with the idea that we should honor God with our money. . . and that we can't take it with us when we die. . . and that we don't want to end up like the guy in Jesus' parable who was rich in this life but poor before God. It's another thing to say with conviction, "I actually want to be rich toward God in every area of my life: I want to honor God in how I love, in how I speak, in how I serve, in how I pray, AND in how I use my material possessions."

As I mentioned earlier, this conviction ("I want to be rich toward God") is essential for the *Making Room* campaign. Without this conviction, giving toward this effort will be a burden or an obligation. We don't want to end up a new facility that is full of people who resent what they've given! This may sound idealistic, but we'd really like you to give as an expression of your desire to be rich toward God with your finances. This is no different than any other area of discipleship. We don't want you to serve and then resent the time required; we want you to love serving. We don't want you to give to the *Making Room* effort and then resent that you can't afford a new couch; we want you to be led by God in your giving and we want you to experience the satisfaction of being rich toward God.

Last week Brian shared how he and Cindy are talking about giving sacrificially to our *Making Room* effort - which is challenging during this stage of life with two kids in college. Brenda and I are in a similar situation. We've got more financial demands right now than we've ever had with two children in college and some large expenses on the horizon. But we're discussing the possibility of giving more sacrificially than we ever have; we're talking about whether or not we really want to be rich toward God when it comes to our money and possessions. We're talking about "how much is enough" when it comes to savings and lifestyle. Honestly, I'm usually just like the man in Jesus' parable: I think that if I have "more" I'll be better off (I'll "really live"). Like many couples Brenda and I approach money from two different perspectives. But it's really exciting to ponder the prospect of being rich toward God.

As I mentioned earlier, there are many ways to be "rich toward God." You can (and should) be rich toward God in the way you love others, in the way you pray, in the way you serve, in the way you suffer, etc. This is one of the beautiful things about walking with God: every circumstance - even the tough ones - are an opportunity to be rich toward God. But since our heart and our treasure are found in the same place, it's also vital that we be "rich toward God" when it comes to money and possessions.