

The Rich Fool

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Date: 11 March 2018

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you, Angela, for reading. It would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at Luke chapter 12. It's on page 1044 in the Bibles in front of you, if that would help.

And what's much more important than what I say for the next 20 minutes or so is that each of us has an encounter with the living God. So let's pray and let's ask for God's help.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the wisdom that Jesus brings. And we ask that you will open our ears to the message you have for us today. Open our minds to think rightly about you and your world and ourselves.

And open our hearts that we can respond rightly to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, today and next Sunday, we're in this little section of Luke's Gospel together.

And Luke was a doctor in the first century. And he explains at the start of his book, Luke's Gospel, that he has carefully investigated everything about Jesus to write an orderly account so that we can know what really happened.

[1 : 03] So this is first century historical testimony about Jesus. And at this point, Jesus is teaching his followers about what it looks like to be a disciple, to be a follower of him.

And in the midst of all that teaching, there is this shocking story Jesus tells. It's shocking, right, because Jesus tells us about a man that if you'd met him, you would have thought that he'd done everything right.

And God's verdict on the man is that he's a complete failure. We pick up the story in chapter 12 on a day when Luke tells us that a crowd of thousands of people have gathered to hear from Jesus.

They're trampling on each other just to get near him. And he's just been talking about massive subjects. He's talking about life after death and eternity and judgment day. It would have felt really intense.

Just look at verse 4 of chapter 12. It says, I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear.

[2 : 08] Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. I mean, you don't get much more intense than that.

And then in verse 13, Jesus gets interrupted. It's extraordinary. Verse 13, Someone in the crowd said to him, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

Presumably he's got an older brother who inherited all the property, and he won't share it. But what an extraordinary thing to say in the middle of what Jesus is teaching. He's consumed by a financial dispute in his family, and he can't concentrate on anything else.

And Jesus uses that, that moment, to give his followers a warning, and then he tells them a story. The warning is very clear. If you have a look at verse 15, Watch out.

Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. Just think about that for a moment. It's very interesting, the way Jesus says it.

- [3 : 12] The Bible doesn't ever say, Watch out. As far as I can think, I don't think it ever says, Watch out not to commit adultery. Watch out not to commit murder.
- Why not? It just says, Don't commit adultery. Don't commit murder. Why? Because if you were to have an affair, you'd probably know you were having an affair.
- It's not going to slip you by that you're doing it. But when it comes to money, to greed about money, Jesus says, Watch out. Be on your guard.
- He says, Guard yourself. There's this money sickness that he's trying to protect us from. And one of the most dangerous things about money sickness is that you don't see it in yourself.
- One of the marks, one of the effects of money sickness is that it makes you blind to the fact you've got it. And I think in Glasgow, just like in any western city today, we are in a culture that's deeply infected by this money sickness.
- [4 : 16] And so often, we just think it's a problem that other people have. We might even say that our society is greedy. We might look at things in the news and say, Well, if people weren't so greedy, these things wouldn't happen.
- But when it comes to ourselves, we don't spot it. Historically speaking, we are astoundingly rich, aren't we? Globally speaking today, most of us here are astoundingly rich.
- And yet we often think that we couldn't really get by if we had less than we have. Or even we think we don't have enough money to buy all the things we need. And Jesus says, Watch out.
- And he puts it in a story, and it's a story that it's perfectly fair to sort of bring into modern times so that we can relate to it better. Let's look at verse 16. He told them this parable.
- Verse 16. 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.
- [5 : 17] Well, so far, the man hasn't done anything wrong, has he? It's a good problem to have. He owns farming land. The harvest is so good, he's run out of space. So he's like an investment banker today over in the financial district just a mile from here in the center of Glasgow.
- He's got a house on Grange Road in Bear's Den, and he always travels first class. He's also got a flat up on Park Circus to stay in town on busy days. His kids are at the high school.
- If you're here this morning, by the way, and you live in Bear's Den, your kids are at the high school, you're very welcome to be with us. He drives an Aston Martin, and the markets are being very kind to him at the bank. So what does he do?
- He gets out his calculator, and he makes a plan. Verse 18. 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. To us, that seems like such a good plan, doesn't it? That is prudence. And so he gets to verse 19 with this great future hope of the time when he can take life easy, eat, drink, and be merry.
- [6 : 33] He makes it big time, this guy. He is living the Glasgow dream. Most of us never make it to this. We never have this problem that he has got. He realizes that he can retire at 48 from the bank.
48. Everything's paid for. He's going to enjoy the rest of his life free from work. He's got treasure, plenty of grain stored up. He's got leisure, take life easy. He's got pleasure, eat, drink, and be merry.

And so he quits the job and he plans a retirement party. And everyone in Glasgow admires him for it. He looks so wise. He's the member of the Royal Golf Club down at Troon.

He's got a yacht on the marina at Largs. He's bought a holiday house on the Fife Coast, just near St. Andrews, just overlooking the 18th T of another golf course. And the Sunday Times magazine run a feature on him, the man who knew when to stop.

And he has a retirement party up at his country house in Argyle. And his old colleagues and his wealthy clients all turn out and they're full of praise for this guy. And there are speeches about what a legend he is.

[7 : 35] And as they leave, the applause is still ringing in his ears. And he stands out on his veranda with a glass of single malt whiskey. And he thinks of the houses and he thinks of the ski chalet that he's going to buy in Korshava.

And he says to himself, you've done it. You have done it. And suddenly, there's a searing pain in his chest and he collapses and he's dead before they can get him to A&E; at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

And they have the funeral and the tributes come pouring in for this man. They even erect a statue of him in George Square. He was a great benefactor to the city. And they put an epitaph underneath the statue and it says, successful businessman, pioneering financier, generous philanthropist.

That's the epitaph. That's what the world thinks of this man. And that night, an angel comes down from heaven and takes away the epitaph and replaces it with one word, fool.

That's God's verdict on the man's life. If you have a look at verse 20, Jesus says, but God said to him, you fool. This very night, your life will be demanded from you.

[8 : 45] Then who will get what you've prepared for yourself? The world says he was wise. God says he's an idiot. That word fool, the original word, literally means without thought.

It's very interesting, isn't it? Because the thing we would have most admired about that man was how much he thought about it all. He planned everything. He thought carefully about a lot of things.

But as far as God's concerned, he didn't think because he thought about the wrong things. I recently heard someone say that one of the definitions of success, one of the definitions of failure is being successful at the things that don't matter.

Well, that's this man's problem. So what did this man get so wrong? He made three fundamental mistakes. The first is that he lived as though God wasn't there.

He lived as though God wasn't there. Jesus isn't saying in this story that it's wrong to become rich. But at the end of the story, Jesus says what the problem is, verse 21, this is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.

[9 : 52] The man wasn't rich towards God. That was his problem. And if you'd asked the man, do you believe in God? I'm sure he might well have said yes. He might have been someone who went to church from time to time, you know, Christmas and Easter.

But I wonder if in his heart of hearts, if you'd asked him if there was a God, he might have said, well, yeah, there probably is a God. But when you talked about church, church is for the kids.

I'm a real man. I'm a professional man. I don't need church. And so from day to day, he lives as though God isn't there. He's completely self-sufficient. If you just look again to verse 18, I'll just read it for us.

Just listen to how self-centered he is in verse 18. This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones and there I will store up my surplus grain and I'll say to myself, you have plenty of grain laid up for many years.

He's self-centered. And that's what's going on all around us in our city. People live as though God isn't there, don't they? And as far as Jesus is concerned, even if you make a success of that, you're missing the point of life because God really is there.

[11 : 03] He's made himself known to us by coming into the world as a man so that we could know he's there. Earlier you saw Rachel at the front. We dunked her in the water. At three years old, Rachel's just learning to play hide and seek and she wants to play hide and seek all the time, whenever we've got time.

She comes up to me and she says, Daddy, let's play hide and seek. You go over there and count to ten and I'll go and hide behind the sofa. So I count and then I walk in to where the sofa is and I look around and I say, where's Rachel?

Is she in the cupboard? And I can hear her squealing with delight behind the sofa until I find her. Clearly Rachel does not think that I am gifted at hide and seek but also what she's realized is that when you're playing hide and seek, the real fun is in being found.

If you were never found, you'd get boring and lots of people think that God has played this, it's like he's played this gigantic game of hide and seek with the human race where he's hidden himself away and we've got to try and find him and everyone's just guessing and trying to make up these different ways you could find this God through religions, through science and he's making it really hard.

He's hidden himself well but that's not what God has done at all. 2,000 years ago if we'd been alive in the Middle East, we could have met God. God the Father sent his Son into the world to make himself known to us and he demonstrated that God is there by doing things that only God can do.

[12 : 36] There was a man, Jairus, who was an important man, he was an influential man but his 12-year-old daughter got sick and he was so desperate he went to find Jesus, he'd heard he had power and he went to see him and he begged him to come and heal his daughter and while he was with Jesus his daughter died and Jesus went to the house and he took in the mum and the dad and he took in three of his disciples and he raised Jairus to life just like she was asleep.

He just woke her up. He had power over death and ultimately he proved that by rising from the dead himself so that the people who saw him alive again went out into the Roman Empire as though they had no fear of death anymore because they'd seen Jesus alive again.

God has made himself known in the person of Jesus and that's why he warns us, Jesus, don't live as though God isn't there, he is there. What about the second mistake the man makes?

Secondly, he lives as though there's no judgment day. He made lots of provision for his retirement but he didn't give much thought to his death. He says to himself, I've got lots of good things laid up for many years but he's got no time at all.

He dies that night and he plunges into eternity totally unprepared for it. And again, all around us people are making that same mistake today.

[14 : 00] we very rarely talk about death. We live basically as though we're not going to die or if we're going to die it won't happen to us any time soon. And the reality is it could happen to us any time.

We just don't know. A few years ago Kathy and I were in bed on Boxing Day and we were woken up first thing in the morning by Kathy's phone ringing. One of her friends, Becky, was phoning her because her husband had gone to bed that night as normal and he died in the night.

It was a complete shock. He would never have known the day before it was going to happen. Death is going to come to all of us and we don't know when and we've got to be ready for what happens next.

The man in the story, he looks like a success to the world but when you die all that matters is have you been rich towards God? He's going to hold us to account for how we've lived.

Jesus promises everything will be laid bare at that judgment day, not just what we've done but even what we've thought and what we've said and he assures us that it's good news that there is a God who cares like that.

[15 : 07] Surely we can see that when we just look at the use of chemical weapons in Syria or last week the use of chemical weapons in Salisbury or we look at the trials going on at the moment of football coaches and parents trusted them to teach their children football and they abused their kids and it's of incredible comfort to know there is a God who cares how you treat me and how I treat you and how we treat him.

It's good news but we have to be ready for that judgment day ourselves and when it comes to God's standards of right and wrong the reality is none of us have really lived the way we should have lived.

We've not been rich towards God in the way that he requires. This man, he thought he was an owner. It turns out he was a tenant and God wants to know what have you done with the riches?

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was a Russian poet. He was a Christian. He'd experienced horrific evil. He was in labor camps at concentration camps but he wrote this if only there were evil people insidiously committing evil deeds and it were only necessary to separate them off from the rest of us and destroy them but the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.

So whoever we are Jesus is urging us not to be a fool like this man and like so many people around us don't live as though there's no judgment day. So how do we respond to that?

[16 : 34] How do we put that right? Well that's our third point. The third mistake the man made. He lived as though God wasn't there. He lived as though there was no judgment day but thirdly he missed the greatest treasure on offer.

Jesus told another story one day another parable where he was he was trying to describe what the kingdom of God is like. The kingdom of God is what you enter when you become a Christian a relationship with God the kingdom of God is going into that hope of heaven and Jesus said that discovering real Christianity like that is like a man who finds some treasure hidden in a field that's so valuable this treasure he goes away and he gladly sells everything he has so that he can buy the field and get the treasure he gladly gives everything else up because this treasure is so great why is that?

Why is becoming a Christian treasure like that? Well another way that the Bible talks about treasure is this God addresses people in the Bible in a letter 1 Peter he addresses people Christians he says you are my treasured possession in other words of all the incredible wonders that God has made in the cosmos people are what he values the most ordinary people like you and me we sometimes say don't we at Christmas time what do you get for the person who has everything sometimes even advertise handbags at salvages and things they're the thing to get for the person who has everything well Jesus really was the man who had everything the whole universe was his the only thing he didn't have was us because we've turned away from God so he came into the world and he died for us taking the blame for everything we've done wrong in our place so that we could come back into a right relationship with God so that at judgment day anyone who trusts Jesus won't stand condemned will be forgiven and we can be with God forever and that's why the kingdom of God is like treasure that you'd find hidden in a field and you'd give up anything to get your hands on this treasure because it's discovering that this is what God is like a God who treasures you and longs for you to turn back to him and has put everything right so that you could be with him forever knowing him is the greatest treasure that you could have building your life on him and whoever we are it's on offer to any of us we've heard

Catherine and Rob today describing how they've come to grasp that in very different ways for themselves and when we do it liberates us from money sickness from greed because we've discovered a greater treasure and we want to be rich towards God so I'd want to urge you whoever you are whether you've been coming here for decades or you're visiting today I want to urge you to reflect on Jesus' story about this rich fool how will you define success in your life what will you look at and think well I made it because I did that you can be somebody thought of by everyone around you as incredibly successful but by living as though God isn't there by living as though there's no judgment day you could end up with the verdict on your life from God fool and all the while Jesus claims that there's this incredible treasure on offer of coming back to a God who loves you who gave up his own son for you so that you could have the treasure of knowing him let's pray together

I'll say a prayer if you feel comfortable praying it do pray along if not please do just take the time to reflect heavenly father we're sorry for the ways that we have been seduced by money distracted by money into self-reliance and all kinds of greed sorry for the lack of generosity we have shown towards you and towards your people all around the world in great need we thank you that Jesus' words are like a light shining into our culture and we thank you that he came not just to expose where we've gone wrong but he came in love to live and to die and to rise to rescue us from all of our mistakes and bring us back to you and so we pray help us wherever we stand with you today to ponder more deeply who Jesus is to live in truth in line with the realities about who you are and your coming day of judgment that we might respond rightly to you and discover this treasure that Jesus claims is on offer we ask in Jesus name

[21 : 26] Amen Amen Amen Amen and you Jews the Last night■■■ Come off in the different