

Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” But He said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” 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.” Then He told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?” 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. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life (soul) is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Reflection Questions

Luke 12:13-21 (18th Sund. OT)

1) **Overall themes:** The problem that is introduced in this parable is not the problem of owning things, but instead the dangers of being owned by them. All of us, (being temporal creatures) are tempted to worship temporal things for their own sake and then we are at risk for being owned by them. One good test for this is to ask ourselves how many different types of insurance policies we hold for various ‘things’ we own. We are all at risk for being tempted to believe that we can find true security in wealth, when we really can only find true security in God. Money in and of itself is not the problem, it is the love of money that is the danger here (1 Tim. 6:10). (‘where your treasure is, your heart will be also’ ...and at some point the heart has no more room for God). When we are ‘rich’ toward God, we find true security.

2) “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” The person was approaching Jesus, and placing Him in the role of scribe or Pharisee (one who would have been familiar with the Torah law about inheritance distribution.) Deut. 21:17 states that the first son will receive double of what the other sons receive. (so, for example if there are only two sons, the first will receive 67% and the second 33%, if there are three sons, the eldest receives 50% and the other two 25%). The issue for this man is not the amount that he received but the fact that he has been forced to share it jointly with his sibling. It is likely that this is a younger son coming to Jesus because the older had already decided that the inheritance would be shared jointly. The brother addresses Jesus respectfully as teacher, but does not seek to learn anything. Instead, this brother commands Jesus to carry out his will. When have we appealed to an authority figure, not to learn but so that they would do our bidding?

3) “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator (a ‘divider’) over Moses’ authority. Jesus probably is not questioning His own authority but questioning the man’s right to involve Him in such a dispute; the self-interest of the man is very apparent here. Jesus tells the man that He will not play the role of ‘divider’. In other words, Jesus refuses to be an instrument of division for the brothers especially over something as petty as possession.

Jesus may have decided that shared ownership would be the best thing for the brother's relationship with each other because in that situation they would be forced to work out old grievances. Jesus clearly shows His suspicion towards the man's motives and does not indulge the request. When have we insisted on our own way, only to be relieved later that we did not get it?

4) "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed." Jesus is observing the man's heart and can see that greed has taken root there and warns him against it. "For one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." (15b). The word "life" here is a metaphor for salvation. The man is so blinded by his own greed and lust for possessions that he loses sight of something infinitely (no pun intended) more valuable; his soul. Jesus offers a foreshadowing of the story He is about to share and is sounding the alarm. When have we heard that alarm in our own lives? Warnings against idolatry?

5) The man in the parable says to himself (e.g. does not consult others because 'he' knows what is best for him). I will tear down the old barn, build bigger ones to store my crops. I will retire early so that I can eat, drink and be merry. 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up'. He speaks to his soul and is trying to reassure his soul that his soul will be happy forever. The focus is on himself and his own happiness (count the number of times the words 'I' and 'my' appear in the parable). In what ways can the patterns of American individualism/materialism threaten to corrupt the soul in similar ways?

6) "You fool!" Jesus uses strong words to remind the man that the very 'soul' he was about to indulge with worldly goods is about to be lost. What is the connection between investing one's interest primarily/solely in temporal goods and temporal happiness and losing the spiritual (i.e. rewards, graces and soul)?

7) "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God." What does it mean for us to be "rich towards God"? How are we each called to use our resources (of time, talent and treasure) to glorify God and to spread His kingdom.