

The Foolish Life

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[0 : 00] I want to tell you a story about a man called Nabal. Nabal lived 3,000 years ago in the ancient Middle East.

He was a fabulously wealthy man. He had 1,000 goats and 3,000 sheep. He lived in the most fertile part of Israel, and he had a lot of friends.

But perhaps his greatest asset was his wife, Abigail. Abigail was intelligent and beautiful. However, for all that Nabal had everything this world could give him, he was harsh and badly behaved.

He was mean, greedy, and rude. Nabal lived at an important time in the history of Israel. Israel was ruled by King Saul, who at this stage in his reign had proved himself unfaithful to God.

God had replaced him, therefore, with a young man called David. But Saul didn't want to give up his throne, so he tried to kill David, resulting in David and his followers hiding in the countryside.

[1 : 14] Now, everyone in Israel knew that David was God's rightful king and that Saul had lost the plot. At sheepling time, David sent one of his men to one of Nabal's fields to ask if Nabal could provide a few sheep out of his huge flock to feed David's followers.

Previous to this, David's followers had helped Nabal's shepherds with their work. So, we have the future king of Israel, as anointed by God, asking Nabal to continue, to contribute, rather, a tiny fraction of his flock.

Remember, Nabal had 3,000 sheep. By doing this, Nabal would be doing God's work and win David's favor. What could possibly go wrong?

Nabal could go wrong. And he did. Nabal replied, Who is this David? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days.

Why should I take my bread and water and the meat I have slaughtered for my sheeps and give it to men coming from who knows where? See how many times Nabal uses, My, mine, I.

[2 : 37] Why should I take my bread and water and the meat I have slaughtered for my sheeps and give it to men coming from who knows where? In other words, why should I give anything I have to God's rightful king?

Well, bad answer, Nabal. David is furious and makes ready his followers to attack Nabal. But wise and beautiful Abigail, who knows how foolish her husband is, goes out to meet David and gives him the food David had been denied by Nabal.

But when Abigail returned home, she found her husband Nabal holding a banquet and he's extremely merry and he's very drunk. The next morning, she told her husband what she had done. Nabal was furious. He had a heart attack and ten days later, he died. Why did Nabal not give David what he asked for?

It could be because Nabal was just a mean, greedy, and rude man. Or it could be because Nabal did not recognize David as the true king of Israel.

[3 : 53] But for whatever reason, he paid a heavy price for his actions. The Lord struck him down. The Hebrew word Nabal means fool.

And fool was exactly what Nabal was. because for all his wealth, he was the most foolish man in Israel.

Now, let's go forward a thousand years from the story of Nabal and David in 1 Samuel 25 to our passage today in Luke chapter 12, verses 13 through 21.

Our passage contains two main figures. Jesus, the descendant of the same David who Nabal refused to help, and a rich fool about whom Jesus tells a story.

You see now why I've introduced this sermon by referring to the story of Nabal? because I want to suggest that it was Nabal Jesus had in mind when he told the story of the rich fool.

[5 : 07] Our passage begins in verse 13 with someone from the crowd saying to Jesus, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. What does this man think?

That Jesus, God the Son, has come from heaven to settle financial disputes within a family. Man, Jesus replied, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?

He continues, Take care and be on your guard against all kinds of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions. One's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possession.

Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, Jesus says, for your life is not all about what you have. How hard it is for us in the prosperous West to accept what Jesus says here, judge each other based upon what we are and what we have.

For the word possessions here, read anything, in this world, we make our treasure. It could be money, but it could be our status in society.

[6 : 17] It could be our academic qualifications or the academic qualifications and sporting prowess of our children. It could be our sporting prowess.

It could be our good looks. It could be our health. But most obviously, of course, Jesus is referring to our economic wealth. One of the themes of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts is our attitude to wealth and how we use our money for the kingdom of God.

In the same vein, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts challenge our attitude to the poor. At no stage does Jesus condemn the rich because they are rich, and at no stage does Jesus commend the poor because they are poor.

Some of the greediest people I know are poor, and some of the most generous people I know are rich. But in general, the bias in Luke Acts favors the poor, disenfranchised outsider.

The kind of greed Jesus is talking about here is the most respectable sin in the church today. The most respectable sin in the church today.

[7 : 26] This vice has been turned into a virtue with the relentless pursuit of possessions forming the bedrock of Western society. From the moment we are born, we are inundated by our parents and by society that our worth as human beings consists in who we are and what we have.

We pollute our children by reinforcing to them the supreme value of financial security and career progression.

We unwittingly say to them, you are nothing, unless you pass your exams in school, get a first class honors in university, are rising up the career ladder, and have bought your own house.

Isn't that true? Are these things bad? Not at all. As long as we realize that our life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions, that to be rich is not a sin, but not to be rich toward God will cost us more than we can pay.

We should not be surprised when our children turn away from Christianity, when we as parents have spent more time inculcating within them the pursuit of possessions over the health of their relationship with God.

[8 : 52] Nabal was a rich man, but so was Abraham. One was rich to God, and the other mean and greedy. Abraham's faith was more important to him than wealth.

Nabal's wealth was more important to him than God. So, Jesus tells a parable about a rich fool who was based, I'm sure, upon Nabal.

This man had land which produced a plentiful harvest. In Jewish minds, prosperity and wealth signify God's blessing. So, here's a man who is rich, whose land is fertile because God has blessed him.

For all this world, the man's exercising financial prudence because finding that his barns are too small to hold the plentiest crops, he tears them down to build new ones.

Of course, from an ethical perspective, we identify a problem with this man's thinking. He's already rich. Why build bigger barns?

[9 : 54] Stick with your smaller barns, and give to the poor the surplus of grain God has blessed you with. There was, after all, much need in the Israel of Jesus' day.

There were no middle class people at that time. Well, this is often the way, though, rich people think. Rather than be satisfied with the level of wealth they have, they want more.

So, in the early 20th century, John D. Rockefeller was the richest man in the world, and when he was asked by a journalist, how much money is enough, Mr. Rockefeller, he answered, just a little more.

In their minds, the rich are never rich enough. Money is no longer their servant. Money is their master. They become addicted to the acquisition of more wealth until they've got more money than they can possibly spend in a hundred lifetimes.

And the rich fool reasons to himself here, and he says, well, I'll say to my soul, having all this possessions, he says, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.

[11:01] Relax, eat, drink, and be merry. Is Jesus here condemning prudent pension planning? Not at all. Rather, notice how this man is making plans for his life with no reference to God at all.

It's all about him. It's all about his pleasures, what he wants. At the same time, tens of thousands of his fellow Israelites are dying of starvation, but he's relaxing, and he's eating, and he's drinking, and he's making merry.

He's living and planning as though he is not accountable to God, the God who made him rich in the first place and blessed him with a plentiful harvest. His wealth and his harvest may have come from God, but actually, you know, they've become a curse to him.

He's living now for himself as though God did not exist. It's the diametric opposite of the person who every day prays and depends upon God for his daily bread.

I wonder sometimes whether we realize that our wealth can become more of a curse to us than a blessing, that our riches can become more of a judgment than a reward.

[12:18] I wonder whether that's one of the reasons the church in the developing world is growing exponentially, whereas the church in the wealthy West is declining.

So here we have a rich man. He's looking forward to a luxurious retirement. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry. He's following in the footsteps of Nabal, who we find eating and drinking at a banquet. But then, as far as the man is concerned, the ultimate disaster strikes. The God, the rich man ignored, now says, Fool, this night your soul is required of you, and the things you prepared, who shall they be?

For all that this man was economically prudent, he was a fool because he did not factor his own death into his equations. For all that he'd reached the pinnacle of the American dream, he was now in the depths.

In the graveyard of my home village of Galsby, as I saw it this week, the graves of the wealthy are grand and they're imposing. The graves of the poor are little more than wooden crosses with the names of the deceased burned into the wood.

[13:40] But what does it matter? They're all dead, and no one can take their wealth with them beyond the grave. They all came into this world with nothing, and they all left with nothing.

In fact, in the case of the man in verse 13 who started the whole discussion, often what a rich man leaves behind him after death is a family at war with itself about their inheritance.

That's not a very good legacy to leave behind, is it? The rich man leaves the world with nothing, and his bigger barns now lie empty, his grain rotting, and his family are squabbling over his inheritance. His plans for the future lie in ruins, and all because he laid up treasure for himself, verse 21, and was not rich toward God. How careful we must be that in all our financial planning we aren't laying up treasure for ourselves at the expense of being rich toward God.

Ah, the rich man! Can you imagine this huge, big gravestone, and his name's inscribed on it, but underneath it someone's come along and spray-canned the word fool?

[15:00] Jesus has told a sobering parable, one designed to bring the crowd to their senses. Many in that crowd would have been very poor, and Jesus is warning them, do not make the acquisition of worldly possessions your goal in life.

To rich and to put alike, he says, take care and be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions. Okay, now, with the story of Nabal hanging in the background, let's apply Jesus' teaching in this passage briefly by asking four questions.

What, first of all, what, first of all, are we really worth? What are we really worth? In the negative, clearly, our worth does not consist in the abundance of our possessions.

So, you might hear someone saying, you know, maybe some rich person dies and someone says to them, what were they worth? Oh, 60 million quid. No, no, no, no.

Jesus says, our worth does not consist in the abundance of our possessions. The rich man is worth no more than the poor man.

[16:26] The educated man is worth no more than the uneducated man. The healthy is worth no more than the unhealthy. The young are worth no more than the old. We are all of equal worth because in the first instance, each of us possesses a soul given to us by the God who created us and to whom we are ultimately accountable.

The soul of a rich man weighs exactly the same as the soul of a poor man. But in the second instance, what we're really worth isn't a function, what we're really worth is a function not of our relationship with our possessions, but of our relationship with God.

It's all about our relationship with God. Jesus ends his parable by saying, so is the one who lays up treasure for himself who's not rich toward God. It's our relationship with God that's the measure of our true worth, not our relationship with the world or anything in it.

Consider, this rich man had enough money to spend his whole life making merry. The Jesus who told this story had nowhere to lay his head and he relied entirely upon the charity of others.

Was the rich man worth more than Jesus? Was Nabal worth more than David? The soul God has given us with which we are to enjoy relationship with him is the measure of our worth.

[18:01] Let's invest then in our true worth knowing that our earthly value will one day be taken away by death and we'll be left with nothing. Nabal was a fool because for all his wealth and success he didn't see any further than the end of his big nose.

Are we teaching our children to be Nabals? The last thing we want to be is like Nabal and his foolishness. Therefore, let's invest in true worth by growing in our relationship with God.

What are we really worth? Second question. On what basis do we judge others? On what basis do we judge others? The early church faced many problems but among the most serious was the way in which it judged between the rich and poor.

James, who was Jesus' brother, wrote a letter in which he paints a disturbing picture. So, a rich man comes into a church gathering through the back door and he's warmly welcomed and he's guided to a prominent seat down there beside Heidi because that's where really posh people sit. A poor man comes into the same gathering and he's treated as an unwelcome inconvenience and he's told to sit there at the back beside Ali McHeaver.

[19:23] Sit there and be quiet. Now, the early church did have some rich people but the vast majority were poor. Most Christians were slaves which meant as far as the world was concerned they actually owned nothing not even themselves.

The question for us is this, on what basis do we judge other Christians? Is there an inbuilt bias toward the rich and the prosperous and against the poor and disadvantaged?

I'm not picking on them. so please don't don't hit me afterwards. But do we favor allegiance with the American church on account of its prosperity rather than the African church on account of its poverty?

Questions like this of course open a huge big can of worms which is why stay behind have a cup of tea and throw things at me if you like. What about visitors to our church?

Do we favor the young over the old families over singles rich over poor the well adjusted over the struggling? If the measure of our worth consists in our sole relationship with God we must be careful not to judge people on the basis of their worldly possessions lest we fall into the foolishness of Nabal.

[20:49] Third question why should we be rich toward God? Why? You know Nabal for all his wealth was a fool and God struck him down.

Poor rich man for all his possessions here in Luke 12 he was also left with nothing because God demanded his soul. Take care Jesus warned be on your guard against all kinds of greed.

The man whose life consists only in his worldly treasures is a fool. What he has is never enough and what he doesn't have he covets and its lack gnaws at him.

The problem as Jesus identifies with the rich man is that when he died all as all must those things for which he worked so hard shall go to another and hey not necessarily his family.

You know they say you can't take it with you. that's no excuse to spend it all on oneself or even to perpetuate the lie to our children which is a very respectable sin that one's life consists in the abundance of your possessions qualifications career sporting achievements etc.

[22:06] etc. You know will our money or our degrees impress God on the day we meet him at the throne of judgment? We will appear before him as naked as the day we were born whether you're rich or poor.

He will judge us not on the basis of our worldly possessions but on the basis of something else. Let's go back to the Nabal story which I'm 99.9% sure is Jesus' inspiration for this parable. If Nabal corresponds to the rich fool in our story then to whom does David in the Nabal story correspond? Remember David the true king of Israel dressed at this time in rags and running from the hatred of Saul Nabal was a fool in that he didn't recognize David as king and refused to support and feed him and his followers.

In this parable Jesus is drawing a straight line between David and himself. Both the true kings of Israel though unrecognized hated and mistreated.

David's story ended with Saul's tragic death but Jesus' story ends with him being crucified on a Roman cross to take away all our sin and give us eternal life with him.

[23 : 39] Jesus' story is all good news freeing us from our slavery to greed and our bondage to worldly possessions setting our hearts rather on the greatest treasure of all knowing God.

Why then should we be rich toward God? Why should Nabal have been rich because David was the king? why should we be rich toward God?

Because of Jesus the king and all he's done for us. The greater son of David though he was rich yet for our sakes he became poor so that we through his poverty might become rich.

The gospel of Jesus Christ motivates our generosity toward God. Nabal was a fool chiefly in this. he did not support nor feed King David rich or poor shall we also be fools in refusing to have faith in and follow his disciples Jesus Christ.

last question how can we be rich toward God? How can we be rich toward God?

[24 : 59] Our passage is dominated by Jesus timeless teaching one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions and we've seen that possessions shouldn't be limited to one's money.

However it would be wrong to say it does not include one's money. How then can we be rich toward God?

The answer is to use every penny cent dime pound and dollar for Christ and his gospel.

Hoarding them keeping them to ourselves is not an option for the disciple of Jesus we are to use the possessions God has given us for Christ and his gospel.

So has he given us riches and wealth? Has he given us more than we need? That's his blessing upon us but we make it a curse unless we give generously to Christ and his church.

[26 : 03] It is a well-known fact that poor Christians give percentage wise more of their income to the church rich Christians percentage wise.

Rich Christians have bigger mortgages you might argue and bigger cars and bigger holiday plans. But the question then becomes is that because rich Christians haven't first factored God into their balance sheets and bank accounts and are therefore in danger of falling into Nabal's trap?

Has God given us health, vigor, and through our careers knowledge, talent which could help the church? Rather than hoard them to yourself, use them for the kingdom.

There are so many opportunities to serve Christ both here in Crow Road and in the worldwide church. Has God given us more time on our hands than others have?

Let's use that time for Christ. Many young parents here don't have a spare second of the day to give to the church and that's not a problem.

[27 : 25] But many others have far more time. Whatever the possession out of gratitude for the salvation Christ our true King has earned for us on the cross, we can use it for the glory of God.

So, Nabal was a fool, as they would say in Glasgow, Nabal the numpty. And he lost everything for it. The rich man in Jesus' parable was a fool and he lost everything for it.

Am I a fool? Are you a fool? what we do with what God has given us is the measure of whether you're a fool or not.

What you do with what God has given you is the measure of whether you're a fool or not. One thing is for sure, as we look on the cross on which the Prince of Glory died, we can be assured that for all that we may give to God, we will never outgive him.

Let us pray. Lord our God, we confess that we have driven home to our children that their ultimate worth in life consists in what they can be, what they can do, their achievements, so that the resume of their life is found on the pages of a CV are not written into the flesh of their hearts.

[28 : 59] Lord, we pray that you would cleanse us from this respectable sin that we have in the West. And for all that we say, a man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of his possessions, oh

Lord, we confess that we believe it to be true.

Lord, we pray that you would open our hearts to the truth of your word today, and open our hearts to the truth of who Jesus Christ really is. Yes, in Luke's gospel here at this stage, the fugitive from justice, the man running away in rags with nowhere to lay his head, but the true king through shēm with her to lay who is moving and