

The Rich Fool

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[0 : 00] Lord, be with us and bless our time of worship together and bless your word to us and forgive us all. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Amen.

One day he received quite an interesting offer. For the small sum of \$1,000 he could buy all the land he was able to walk around in one day, in one 24-hour day.

The only catch in the deal was he had to be back at the place he had started at by sundown. So early next morning he started out walking at a fast pace. By midday, of course, he was very tired, but he kept going, thinking how much more land he'd be able to acquire.

Well into the afternoon he realized his greed had taken him far away from the place he had started, and he would have to be back there by sundown. So he turned around and quickened his pace, and the sun began to sink low in the sky.

[1 : 30] He began to realize that he was able to run. He was worried that this opportunity to be a landholder in his area would be light.

As the sun began to creep below the horizon, the finish line came within sight, and he kept running, pushing himself. He was worried that he was not as good as he was.

He was worried that he had left in his body, and he was staggered. He finished life before the sun disappeared over the horizon. He was worried that he was worried that he was not as good as he was.

He was dead. Afterwards his servant dug him a grave, which was not much over six feet long by three feet wide. The title of Tolstoy's story was, How Much Land Does a Man Need?

The story, though, is really quite a familiar one, I think, to us. We see it quite often in our society. People seem to want to work and work to gain richer, to get more land, to gain more wealth.

[2 : 50] All they seem to care about is working and working. Because it sounds an awful lot like the parable that we just read.

There seems to have been a problem with human beings for a long, long time. Desire that we seem to have just to want more and more, and to never be satisfied, to never feel fulfilled, to always feel that we need more wealth.

Desire that wealth is bad. Nobody's saying that being a big landowner is a bad thing. All we need is to have is a gift from God.

What is important, though, is how that wealth, how all that land, how great possessions affect us. It's also important how we gain it, and how we use it, is also very important.

One of the things you'll hear quite often in the public sphere about Jesus is, Oh, Jesus was a socialist. He didn't believe in things like public property. He just believed in sharing everything, and living in communes, and this kind of thing.

[4 : 05] Well, the Bible itself would disagree with that, obviously. The Bible supports the owning of private property. The Eighth Commandment is, after all, you shall not steal. There are rules and guidance surrounding land ownership, inheritance rights.

Private property is a good thing if it is used. So one of the commandments, then, is about not stealing. It's really interesting, though, what the Tenth Commandment is all about.

But this parable this morning is discussing the sin of covetousness.

If you ask a non-believer what their objections to the Christian faith are, or what their objections to religion may be, caused too many wars throughout our history, things like that.

Other such things, where horrible things were done, and we don't deny that. But in reality, I think if you studied all the wars that have taken place in human history, I think you will find that more than likely the biggest cause of them all will be the sin of covetousness.

[5 : 31] Not religion. People may use the guise of religion to manipulate people. But I think the cause of most wars or conflicts will simply be the fact that people want what they can't have.

They see their neighbour, they see how prosperous their neighbouring country is, and they say, I want what you have, and if you don't give it to me, I'll take it from you. How many crimes are committed because of this sin, because of covetousness?

How many murders? How much fraud? Why do we always seem to want more? I don't think we really truly understand how destructive this sin is.

How it can be destructive to communities, to families, even to a whole nation. I'm sure if any of us worked in any kind of law enforcement for a short time, or worked in the courts, we would see with our own eyes just how much damage is done because of jealousy, because of resentment, because of covetousness.

People rise up in jealousy and hatred because they covet what others possess. People lie, they steal, they cheat, they slander, they gamble until they lose everything in the vain hope of making that big win.

[6 : 58] And it never happens. And people will often kill if they can't gain it by any other way.

People can so easily fall into lives of crime, they can risk everything they have because their hearts are covetous.

So Jesus gives us a very dire warning here in this parable. We're going to look at this warning together under three headings. We're going to look at great wealth, great greed, and great cost. So firstly then, we're going to look together at great wealth. Firstly, we need to say this parable is unique to Luke. It doesn't occur in any other gospel. And one of the things that stands out right at the beginning of this parable, and it has to do with the tendencies of people to bring worldly matters into religious circles.

Jesus has been talking about some very important spiritual matters in the passages leading up to this parable. And then it seems he's interrupted. A man asked Jesus to help him in the financial dispute he has with his brother.

Perhaps this is not really an unfair request. After all, the law had provision for managing inheritance, and it was not uncommon for rabbis to be involved in dealing with disputes of this nature.

[8 : 24] However, this man clearly recognizes that despite having no formal education, despite having no official status, that Jesus is a man of authority.

He thinks, okay, here's somebody who can maybe help me with my dispute. But that was not why Jesus came. The rabbis may have helped in these disputes, and Jesus may have been a rabbi in many ways, but that was not his purpose.

Jesus was to be a teacher. He was to lead people to himself and back to God. He was not to get involved in the petty legal affairs of the people. And also, if you look at the man's question, there's a little difference here than what you might expect.

Jesus is not being asked to be an arbiter. He's not being asked to help these brothers settle their dispute. Instead, Jesus is being asked to be an advocate. He's being asked by this brother to be on his side, to come down on his side of the argument.

But Jesus is not interested. Verse 13, it reads, someone in the crowd said to him, teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

[9 : 43] But he said to him, man, who made me judge or arbitrator over you? 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.

Jesus may have been framed in this way because of the way he was asked, because of what he was asked to do. But also remember that Jesus had the ability to perceive what was going on truly in men's hearts.

So it could be the case that he may have perceived what truly lay on this brother's heart. And it was not simply that he was not getting what he was due, but rather that he was in it just because of greed.

Hence the warning we get right at the beginning of this parable. This warning against greed, this warning against covetousness, which we know can destroy relationships, can tear families apart, sometimes even churches can be devastated over someone's greed.

This can be a terrible thing. So Jesus calls out to the crowd with this warning here. He's not just talking to the brother now, he's talking to everyone.

[11 : 07] He's telling them to take care, to be on your guard. Be on your guard against greed, guard against covetousness. Quite often we are commanded to be on guard in the Bible.

And to be on guard against greed comes up as well in a couple of other places. It comes up in Romans 1.29 and again in Colossians 3.5 to give you a couple of examples.

The parable then tells us the story of a man, tells the story of a wealthy man who had been blessed with great fortune. On the outside there seems nothing wrong with this story.

We hear a man who owned a good farm, who owned a fruitful farm, and he seemed to be a wise man, didn't he? Storing away his goods for the future. Someone could comment, hey, didn't Joseph do the same thing when he was manager back in Egypt?

Didn't he just put grain away and stored it for a rainy day knowing that the famine was coming? Isn't this man just doing the same thing here? And we tell ourselves to do the same thing, don't we?

[12 : 18] We tell ourselves to work hard saving up, to put money aside and save it all for a rainy day. Saving up for the leaner times. And that is fine, but that's not what this man was doing.

Again, there's nothing inherently wrong with wealth. Sometimes we get that impression, but that is not the case. But with great wealth does come great danger.

Despite that, though, I think if you asked a lot of people, even in churches, what would make their lives easier, I hazard a guess that probably the most common answer would be if we could just have a little bit more money, it would help out so much.

Now, sometimes there is a need. Sometimes there is a genuine need that people have. Especially in times like today with low wages, high inflation, increasing costs.

Some people really do need more money just to live, just to get by on a day-to-day basis. And in that situation, there's nothing wrong with that desire. But the rest of us really have to be careful.

[13 : 34] J.C. Ryle says something really quite profound. He said that poverty has many disadvantages, but riches destroy far more souls than poverty.

It's quite scary to think that, isn't it? This man had riches. This man had great wealth. God had blessed his crops. His work was fruitful.

Remember what James says, every good gift and every perfect gift is from above. His gift was good. But what he did with it, what he did with his great wealth, that was not good.

So we have great wealth, and secondly, we have great greed. The land of the rich man produced plentifully. And he thought to himself, what shall I do if I have nowhere to store my crops?

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 all my goods. And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.

[14 : 45] Relax, eat, drink, and be merry. Right off, we see how this man's heart was all wrong.

God had gifted him with great wealth. What should he have done with it? What should he have done? He should have given thanks to God for his great blessing.

He should have given back to God of the first fruits as the law commanded him to do so, but he did not. Now there's no mention this man gained his wealth through any kind of immoral actions or by being abusive in any way.

He simply had been blessed. He'd had a good year, a very good year. But then he refuses to return that blessing.

The man's major fault comes from his attitude to what was given to him. If you look at verses 17 and 19, five times, he speaks of things in the possessive way.

[15 : 53] He speaks of what he will do. He talks about my fruit, my barn, my goods, my soul. This man's thoughts are solely about himself.

He passes no thought for God who'd given him this great wealth and fortune. He passes no thought for those less fortunate than himself who may benefit from receiving some of his great wealth.

All he could care about was me, me, me, mine, mine, mine. He does not share in his blessings. His own focus instead is on himself, on his own happiness, his own well-being.

He says these remarkable words. I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry.

This man must be thinking to himself, what luck I have got. I'll never have to work again. I am so rich now. I can live quite comfortably for the rest of my life.

[17 : 04] My life can now be a life of pleasure and leisure. I can do what I want, never have to work again. I can relax. I can eat and drink and be merry.

Again, this sounds like a story we may hear today. If somebody came into great inheritance or if they won the lottery or something, not that you should play the lottery, but you know what I mean. If somebody came into a large amount of money, they would think to themselves, great, I can quit my job. I can retire at 35 or whatever and just chill out the rest of my life, never have to worry about anything ever again.

2,000 years may have passed, but humanity's sinful fallen nature really remains the same. But another thing we need to be careful of is one does not need to be mega rich in order to fall foul of the same sin as the farmer.

If we think about how well we are off in the West compared to the rest of the world, we are pretty wealthy, all things considered. There are some exceptions, of course, we've discussed this already, but generally, we are pretty well off.

[18:21] We've all got homes, we all have electricity and things like that. Lots of cars, yes, fuel is expensive, but we can still drive around. Generally, we are pretty well off, especially if we compare ourselves to the rest of the world and if we compare ourselves to the rest of humanity throughout all of history.

I think it's safe to say we're doing pretty well, at least at that moment, anyway. The man in this parable wanted to use his wealth to have an easy life.

He did not want to have to worry about work or putting food on his table. Just take it easy, just have fun. And our own wealth can be used much in the same way.

We can often use what God has given us to pursue our own interests, our hobbies and projects, things that give us excitement, things that give us joy. And these are all good things.

I'm not saying don't do them, but you need to be very careful that there is a balance in your life.

These things are good, but they can easily be twisted, they can be tainted, they can overtake our lives, they can draw our attention too much, they can eat our resources, pull away from honoring and serving God.

[19:41] Having a hobby isn't bad. In fact, it's a good thing. Having a hobby can be a good way to witness to others, especially if our hobbies involve other people and going and doing social things.

But hobbies should not take over our lives and they should not take precedent over God. I think the last two years has really revealed an awful lot about ourselves that either we didn't know or was this very well hidden.

Many people suffered financially, whether from lost wages or from lost business income, even from lowered credit ratings because of having to take mortgage holidays or missing payments or any of these kind of things.

A lot of us have suffered. You think, how have these losses affected us? Have they highlighted really how much of a hold that money, our financial security really had over us?

Did we miss our creature comforts just too much? And as the cost of living goes up, will we find ourselves in that situation again? This parable doesn't condemn wealth.

[21:00] Rather, it condemns improper use and improper treatment of it. It's where our heart is that truly matters. There's those famous verses from Matthew 6.

Do not lay up yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. We have great wealth, we have great greed, and then finally, then we have great cost. And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.

Relax, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, fool, this night your soul is required of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?

So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God. According to worldly standards, the farmer is quite wise, putting away his great wealth.

[22:15] for the truth of the matter is laid out for him by none other than God himself. To God, he is not wise, he is a fool.

All those things you boasted in were not yours. I gave them to you. You kept them all for yourself, relishing in the easy life they would bring you, but that is not going to happen for tonight.

I require your soul, tonight your life is over. The man was a fool because he believed his life would unfold in the way that he desired it, that he planned it.

He thought he was in control, that he could keep everything for himself, but his deeds cost him greatly. The truth is, our lives often hang by a thread.

We don't know how long it's going to be until that thread breaks. Thomas loves balloons. Whenever he gets hold of a balloon, he clings onto it, he hugs it, he waves it around, he pokes it, he pulls it, and eventually, of course, it's going to pop.

[23 : 29] We know it's going to pop, but we don't know how much play it's going to endure until it does pop. We know our lives will come to an end.

We know how horrible and how sad it is. We also know it wasn't meant to be this way. We don't know how long it will be for us.

So we need to be sure we are not like the rich fool. We need to make sure we don't hoard our wealth because in doing so, we are stealing from God because that is what we do if we don't give back to God and we don't give him our thanks.

The rich man never once considered the possibility of tithing. He never once considered giving back to God even one-tenth of what God had given him.

Would it have cost him so much to have done so? One of the things that you may not know but I'm sure church treasurers and deacons courts know all too well is the sad truth that the overwhelming majority of professing Christians in the West today do not give to the church.

[24 : 57] Now I'm not telling you this to make you feel guilty or make you feel like you need to give more if you already are. If you are, fantastic. God loves a cheerful giver. But the sad truth is there are many who don't and when you're working out your finances and you're trying to build God's church and there's not a lot in the bank and you think you know the walls really need painting but we just don't have the money or we could really do with hiring an evangelist but there's just nothing.

In some churches they've got no hope of calling a minister because there's just nothing there although they're quite small but you get the picture. People are absorbed in wealth.

They make excuses. They say how oh we just can't afford it we're already stretched too thin. or they make promises to give later on when they're in a better position.

Off really in the way and it's a great danger to us. Our possessions risk becoming so important to us that we risk withholding God his portion.

We risk robbing God himself. Again I'm not looking on anyone here. I I've only been here a few weeks. I don't know a lot of your situations. I don't know about your finances.

[26 : 25] I don't know about your giving. That's not what I'm doing. I just need to warn you of the dangers of robbing God and being ungrateful for his blessings because as the parable suggests it will cost you dearly.

I bet that man who asked Jesus at the beginning if he would settle his inheritance dispute was regretting his actions now. Now not giving back to God will cost us greatly.

But do not think we're being shortchanged. Do not think we're being shortchanged. If you're being asked to sacrificially give to God think about what God has sacrificially given for you.

God has already done so much for us. It's already cost him more than we could imagine. Whatever we are able to give will never make up for the great cost that God has already paid.

And that cost is of course his only son. God's love for you cost Jesus his life. The Lord of all creation was humiliated, tortured and executed for you.

[27 : 42] And he suffered this great cost willingly. for you. God knew that you would be here today that you would be hearing these words today.

He knew that back in eternity past when he planned for Jesus to die for you he knew you would be here. Before the earth was made Jesus planned to die for you and for you to hear it and be reminded of it here today.

if we truly understood what our salvation cost if we truly appreciated the price that Jesus had to pay then I doubt we would ever begrudge tithing or volunteering or giving ever again because he gave up so much.

Not obeying God will cost us greatly but obeying God cost Jesus more. Be wary today of covetousness.

it is sneaky it is dangerous and quite often don't notice it until it's too late it can destroy relationships and families and churches whole communities but remember Jesus died for that sin too it's not too late to ask for forgiveness it was too late for the rich fool it's not too late for you so if you find yourself if you examine yourself and you think you know what maybe maybe I have been a bit too

covetous with my wealth or whatever then make today the day that in your heart you repent and confess go back to God and receive the blessing of forgiveness maybe some other sin is ruling your life

[29 : 48] I don't know confess and receive the blessing of forgiveness if you don't know Jesus at all then make the day today be the day that you do for forgiveness for forgiveness for forgiveness for life so that we may be called children of God so let today be the day of salvation in your life be truly wise don't be a fool let's pray almighty God we thank you for this warning of Jesus that reminds us of the danger of covetousness the danger of greed the danger of thinking that we own what we have forgetting who it came from who blessed us with it in the first place and what good it can do for your cause and for others we thank you that you have blessed us and we pray you would help us to manage that blessing well help us to be wise help us to follow your word help us to obey your son and help us to truly count the cost of his sacrifice for us

Lord we thank you that you it cost you so much that the blood of your son was shed that his body was pierced for our transgressions that he hung on a cross that he was cursed for us what a cost and yet what love Lord help us to truly understand that cost and to truly understand that love and be filled with joy knowing that you love us that you loved us enough for your son to die for us and help us to take this great love and to share it and to encourage others that they too may know the great love of God if they give their lives to Christ

Lord be with us encourage bless and protect us and be with those who are struggling and suffering in Jesus holy and precious name we pray Amen calculations pray