

God's Definition of a Fool

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn tonight to the passage we read in Luke chapter 12, and looking especially verses 13 through to verse 21. He often called, as you find in the title of the passage here, the parable of the rich fool.

We're calling it in our title tonight of the sermon, God's definition of a fool. And that, of course, is something that all of us should sit up and give attention to.

Here is Jesus, still on the way to Jerusalem, as we've been seeing through the previous passages, and coming across various events in his life as he goes on to Jerusalem.

And here he finds someone who calls out to him from the crowd and says, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. But he said to him, Man who made me a judge or arbitrator over you.

And then he said to them, Take heed and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions. And then he adds a parable which amplifies or expands on that particular statement.

[1 : 13] The statement itself is really what the passage is about, but the parable helps us to understand what Jesus was getting at and the importance of that principle of being on our guard against covetousness.

Now, of course, this is Jesus using another opportunity, just as we ourselves must use opportunities to speak for him, though, of course, we're not going to be able to do it as perfectly as Jesus did.

It is one of the very interesting facets of this journey and indeed of his life as you read about it in the Gospels, how perfectly he was able to use opportunities, unexpected things as far as we would be concerned that might catch us out, that might even cause us just to be struck dumb and not know what to say.

It's never like that with him. Every time you find events like this, somebody crying out from the crowd, and yet Jesus immediately deals with that as only he could, and uses it as an opportunity to present further important truth to those who are following him, and especially as he goes on to speak to his disciples in particular.

Now, this man that he speaks about in the parable, it's related, of course, to what he says here to the man who cried out after him.

[2 : 37] It was quite common, apparently, for rabbis to make decisions over the allocation of inheritances, but Jesus is simply not interested. This man wants him to settle a dispute with his brother as to who the inheritance is going to go to, with an obvious desire that Jesus will pronounce in favor of himself.

Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me, whether it had been cut out of his father's will, whether it was that he didn't have any part in the inheritance and wanted some of it, whatever.

He came to Jesus, and he asked Jesus to settle this for him, and Jesus said, that's not why I'm here. I'm not here to arbitrate over such worldly things, but I will tell you something.

Take heed and be on your guard against covetousness, because he saw through into the man's heart. He saw that this man was dominated by covetousness, that this man could not rest until he had what his heart was set upon, whether it was right for him to have it or not.

That was really not bothering him. What he wanted was this inheritance, as he saw it, as his right. And Jesus said, that's not for me to pronounce on, there are more important things than that.

[3 : 53] And then he went on to speak about this man in the parable. Now we're going to follow the kind of images that Jesus uses in the passage, because it's obviously a parable that speaks about a man who's a good businessman.

His ground brings forth plenty fully. He knows his business very well. He's able to manage his profits very well. He's done well over the years. He has all of these investments, and he's investing more now in his property, and he's looking to expand a little bit to store what he's got, and then he's going to put his feet up and relax, and he's going to retire and enjoy a long and happy retirement.

That's his plan. That's what his covetousness is telling him. That's where it's all rooted in his heart. We don't understand this man to have been lazy.

He's not a man who was in any way neglectful of his business, otherwise it wouldn't have thrived the way it did. Jesus is not finding any accusations against him for any of these things.

But he is actually talking about his covetousness. And it's a parable, whether it was based on someone that Jesus actually knew, very likely it was.

[5 : 13] But in any case, he tells us as if it was indeed the case that there was such a person. And this is the kind of man he was. Now we're following out the idea of investments and how we are called upon through this passage to make good investments for the future.

That's especially with a view to eternity. Because this man really, in his covetousness, as it drove him onwards in his life, he had made some very bad investments.

And there are two, especially, that we could pick out, very obvious ones. First of all, he had set up an insurance policy of materialism.

That was something that he regarded as giving him security, giving him some comfort, giving him a lasting legacy that he could enjoy for the rest of his life.

Look at verse 15 there and what you see there following it. He cared and be on your guard against covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions.

[6 : 20] That's how Jesus actually counters this bad investment that this man had made, an investment in the insurance policy of materialism, convinced that his materialistic gains would actually see him through, that this was all that he needed in life.

And Jesus turns immediately and says, you've got to actually be on your guard against such a spirit. Because a man's life, a person's life, does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses.

To be on your guard, Jesus is using the kind of phrase that you would actually find used if you were facing a very powerful enemy. An enemy that's just looking out for ways to attack you, for ways to penetrate your defenses.

You've got to be on your guard firmly. You've got to really be ultra watchful against that sort of skillful, powerful enemy. And what Jesus is really saying is, treat covetousness like that.

You've got to be on your guard against it. It's waiting for every opportunity to make its attack, to move in upon your soul, to take over possession of it.

[7 : 34] And covetousness, as we referred to this morning, is something that seeks not just things that you would like to have for yourself, but things that especially you find other people have.

Covetousness is the kind of driving desire of a heart that really can never have enough. And we know very well ourselves how most of the richest people in the world are never satisfied with what they've got.

Well yes, they might give away millions to charity. They might actually give many of the possessions they have, but they've got plenty to buy more. They've got investments coming in all the time.

They've got a return on these investments. They're in big business, so there's a lot of income coming in and generated. But look into their hearts. Are they happy? No. Why are they not happy? Because they're covetous.

Why is covetousness something that doesn't make us happy? Because it's never satisfied. You can feed it and it's never satisfied. It's still thin and required to be fattened.

[8 : 45] That's what Jesus is really saying. Life does not consist in the abundance of the possessions a man has.

Now you put that to our generation. Ask whoever it is you like that has no business with the church, that doesn't want religion, that doesn't look beyond the things of this world. Ask them, give me a definition of life.

What is life? What is it to live? What is life really about? What is it for? How would you define life? And most people of that kind would say, well life is just making the most of this life.

It's making the most of what you've got. It's adding to it. It's trying to better your life economically, financially, materially. Life is just what you make of it.

That's all confined to time and to this world and to the limits of this world and to the limits of this life. Which is exactly the way that this man in the parable was thinking.

[9 : 48] And that is what drives many of the generation that you and I belong to. It's not new. It's not something that in any way is confined to this generation and an economic crisis.

And the kind of world that we live in and have lived in for many generations now. It was part of Christ's world when he was in it. Covetousness is something that began with the fall of Adam.

And since the fall of Adam, people have been naturally covetous. Life, says Jesus, does not consist in the abundance of the things a man possessed.

That's why he went on in verse 22, then to turn to the disciples and said, Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, about your body, what you will put on.

It doesn't mean you don't make preparation for life in the ordinary sense. It doesn't mean you don't carefully work out what you are going to do for yourself and your family, materially or financially. But it means you don't prioritize that.

[10 : 55] It means that that's not the important thing. It means that you don't put it first. What then does life consist of? What is life? What should a Christian, what should you and I who know the Bible's teachings say, if somebody came up to us in the street and said, give me a definition of life, what is it to live?

Well the answer is in verse 31. Seek the kingdom of God and these things will be added to you.

Or in Matthew's version of it, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Things that the covetous live for.

God will give you enough of these. But if you look for them yourself, you'll never have enough. If you make them a priority, you will never have enough. If you make God your priority and his kingdom your priority, he will actually give you a contented heart and define for you what is enough of those things of this world.

So here's the insurance policy of materialism. What this man had invested in, what he was looking for a grand return on. And Jesus, knowing his heart, is actually saying to us, actually that is a very bad investment.

[12 : 15] The second investment was the instant access account of individualism. Because in this parable, you find that that is one of the emphases in the way the language is placed, the way that Luke describes it, and the way that Jesus taught it.

And very often, of course, you'll find individualism, people living for themselves, getting the most out of life for themselves. You'll often find that covetousness and individualism are very strongly linked together.

The person that's really covetous is very often the person that's very individualistic. Life is really what matters for me, about my getting on, about what I possess, what I want to have out of life.

And that, with covetousness, you can see how they go together. Just read through this passage, and count up the number of I's, and the number of my's, that this man actually speaks of.

He says, What shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops. He said, I will do this. I will tear down my barns. I will store all my grain, and my goods.

[13 : 39] And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry. Every single thing he mentions there, he thinks that he has possession of, that he has control over, including his soul, including his actual spiritual life.

I, my. My possessions, my barns. I'll do this.

I'll do that. Great plans. All worked out. All directed by covetousness and individualism. Investing in this instant access account.

An instant access account being one that you can get instant access to. And you can see that this man, when you think of all how he personalizes this, how in fact he's been investing, or adding to this account, or making deposits into this account, every single day, this man has been doing something to add to this account of his individualism, by thinking of himself, by thinking of his possessions, and by thinking, These are all mine.

And this is my future. This is what I'm going to enjoy. Anyway, now we mentioned, since Adam fell, that human beings have been covetous by nature.

[15 : 01] And that means you and I. Before the Lord changes us, you can say that our life is egocentric. Well, that may be a fancy term, but what it means is that self, or the I of self, is central to our life.

How life revolves around me. However much I relate to other people, however much I may be involved in other relationships, however much I may interact with other people, life without God revolves about myself.

I'm at the center of it. Just like this parable describes this man. This man is an egocentric man. This man is living an egocentric life.

I is at the heart of it. My is at the basis of it. Everything is built on that. His whole future, and the plans of his future, is all based on I.

And my. Myself. And you see, he's convinced that he's made very good investments.

[16 : 10] He's saying to himself, this is it, I've made it. I've reached the point where I can look forward to relaxing, putting my feet up, and enjoying the good things that I've managed to produce in my way of ordering my life.

And then, God speaks to him. And God says, you're a fool. You're the definition of a fool. Because you are trying to be rich, but you're only rich for yourself. And not rich towards God. So there's the first part of the passage.

Bad investments. And when God comes into our life and turns us around, the I disappears. The I goes out of the central place in our lives.

And God himself comes in instead of it. We then don't live an egocentric life. Like this parable described, it becomes a God-centered life.

[17 : 26] It is God that matters. It is what God thinks that matters. It is God's opinion of me that matters. It is what God defines as happiness that matters. It is what God says is in fact what a life consists of.

That is what is important to me. And you and I have to look at our life tonight and ask the question, what does my life revolve around?

There's nothing wrong with being happy. There's nothing wrong with having happy homes, with having happy relationships. There's nothing wrong with having a great deal of happiness in this world. That is what God has designed us for.

But if our whole life revolves around that, for you and for me, if God doesn't change us, if we don't seek the Lord, if he doesn't come into our life and we build life around him, then one of these days God is going to come to us too.

And he's going to say, you're a fool. You've been building for eternity, or rather you haven't been building for eternity, but you've been building your life around yourself.

[18 : 35] And now the time has come when I must call you to give me your account. You see, there's the contrast. The man who made the bad investments, and now we can come to, see what we're calling, the ultimate economic crisis.

The ultimate economic crisis, in the sense that here was a man who was looking forward to enjoying all of this that he had provided for himself, based upon himself.

And now he's got a crisis. It's the worst economic crisis, or any crisis a person could have. The things that he was building up and putting his hopes in, he's going to have to leave them all behind, and they'll be of no use to him where he's going.

God said to him, you fool, this very night, your soul is required of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?

They're not going to be yours, in other words. You can't take them with you. And you see, God is saying to him, here you are, and you've made all of these plans, and you're going to enjoy them in your retirement.

[19 : 47] And your soul is going to be required of you, not in 20 years time, not when you come to retire, not when you've spent most of these things and enjoyed them. Tonight! Right now, he's saying, your soul is required of you.

You're not going to see another day, never mind another month or another year. You're not going to enjoy any of these investments, because tonight God is coming to bring you before him, and your account books, the account books of your life, they're going to be opened up, and you're going to have to answer to what's in them.

That's what he's being told. It's the ultimate economic crisis. If you cast your mind back to the book of Daniel, something similar happened in the case of Belshazzar, or Belshazzar, rather, the king that was involved, as that chapter begins, in a marvelous, a great entertainment in his palace ballroom.

They were using the vessels, the utensils that they had taken from the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, and they were drinking toasts to their gods, I'm sure, and using them in their own feasts and idolatrous and fleshly and worldly ways.

What a great time. What a worldly picture of people having such a good time with all of these precious commodities before them, these vessels as well, they're taken from the house of the Lord, best quality stuff, all of these golden utensils, and here they are being used for the entertainment of this king and this special guest, and the evening is going so well, and it's such a good party, and they're living it up, and they're enjoying it.

[21 : 44] And then the scene changes. And it's no longer a ballroom, well, it's the same room, but it's been changed from a ballroom to a courtroom. Because a hand has come out and written some mysterious words on the wall.

And it's so much the king outbanned his guests pretty quickly. And Daniel is called for. And he's asked to explain and give the meaning of these words.

Many, many, take help, and Daniel tells the king and his birthday party guests, or whoever they were, this is what it means.

Many, many, take help, you person. You are called to give an account.

You are weighed in the balances and found wanting. And your kingdom is going to be taken from you. Here it is.

[22 : 52] Just in the process of a few moments, that man's whole life changed. The perspective of his life changed. He's facing eternity.

He's facing losing everything that he had worked for and that he was putting so much trust in. And there is Daniel telling him, these are the words from the Lord in interpreting his writing on the wall.

And that's where you get the phrase that's used to this day. The writing's on the wall. That's why we use these words to describe when something has really come to that sort of pass for someone.

It's, the game's up. The writing's on the wall. It's coming to an end. God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end.

You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Your kingdom is divided and given to the meats and the Persians. And here is the man in the parable with exactly the same situation.

[23 : 58] There he is looking forward to putting his feet up and then, bang! In comes God. the last thing he wanted to think about.

That's where he is. He's been brought face to face with reality. With having to meet God. And, he can't cash in his investments.

He can't get any benefit from them where he's going and what he has to do. And that's why Jesus puts these words in the parable. This night your soul is required of you.

The things that you have prepared, whose will they be? This man had left two things out of his accounting. He was a very skillful businessman.

He knew how to go about his business in worldly terms as we said. But he had left two things that he ought to have factored into his calculations.

[25 : 03] And without these two things, he was missing the most important conclusions of all. However his book balanced, whatever profits they showed in worldly terms, the two things that he had left out meant that he was spiritually bankrupt.

The two things were God and death. God and death. just listen to the man again.

There's no evidence that God ever featured in his thoughts. What will I do seeing I've got all this increase of goods? I know what I will do.

I will pull down my barns and I will build them greater. And I will say to my soul, you have many goods made up for many years. Take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.

And God says to him, you fool. Whose are these things going to be when this day is done? You'll have left them behind.

[26 : 04] Things that you've worked for, things that you've put your hope in. Whose are they going to be? He's asked the question. And so is the one who lays out treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.

You see, I and my are not in control after all. They're actually not able to do anything against God and death.

He's simply got to accept the fact that he's made the biggest, most catastrophic miscalculation of all. He's left God and death out of his reckoning.

I read recently of a student. I think it was in America or Canada perhaps. And I can't remember where I read it. But it was to do with the economic crisis that the Western world and other countries throughout the world have been facing for some time.

And there are all kinds of theories as to how does one actually, how does a country rather come out of recession? What is the best policy for a country to come out of recession?

[27 : 14] And a paper was drawn up by some very important professors across the state of America or Canada or wherever it was. And they had drawn up this paper and reached conclusions that a certain way that they recommended, I can't remember what it was just now because economics are things that just go beyond my head altogether.

But whatever the paper was about, the conclusions that these very eminent professors had reached was important for many of the countries that we hear of, including our own, as to how to get your way out of recession.

And this paper had come to be so important that governments were building their policies based on its conclusions. And this student was asked as part of an exercise given him as a student of economics to examine this paper and to give his views of it.

And he actually came up with a serious flaw that he reckoned he found in the paper. And of course when he went to his own lecturer and said to the lecturer, look this is what I believe I found in the paper, you can just imagine the lecturer's reaction.

Here was a student coming with his view of a paper drawn by these very eminent professors that governments throughout the world had looked at and accepted. And here's this man saying, look I found a serious flaw in this.

[28 : 45] So they considered it for some time, they sent it to some others to look at and they actually discovered actually the student was right. And then when they dug into it they discovered that these eminent professors had actually left some things that they ought to have brought into their calculations they hadn't actually included them at all.

So the conclusions were not actually trustworthy. And that's how it is with this man's calculations as well. Christians don't seem very capable people sometimes.

They're just ordinary people who claim they have faith. They can't see the God they claim to believe in. They can't see eternal judgment of that God, the account books of life opened yet they believe that's what's going to happen just because it's written in an old book called the Bible.

And eminent professors of theology and of philosophy are in abundance today who will tell you actually you just don't know about these things.

Okay, we'll leave you to your own conclusions and to what you believe is true of your own life and what you're basing your future upon but actually we prefer the calculations that we've made as atheists or as humanists or whatever else it is.

[30 : 14] We think you're rather foolish but we'll leave you to yourself. And you know all the time God is saying, well you're not the fool, they're the fools. Because it's the fool that says in his heart, there is no God.

So the lesson of the parable is this, don't be a fool. I have no right to call anyone a fool. And if somebody calls me a fool, well I'll have to accept it, but as human beings we have no right to call other people fools because for one thing we're foolish enough ourselves.

But when God calls me a fool, and when God gives me a definition of foolishness, and when God through his son Jesus Christ gives me a parable that defines what it is to be truly foolish, even if I think I'm the wisest person in the whole world, I should sit up and take notice and say, look, I may have been wrong, I've got to look at this, I've got to analyze my life in the light of it, because this is what God is telling me.

And it doesn't matter what you say or what I say, what our opinion is of life and how to live it and what life consists of. Let's listen to God.

Let's listen to the definition that God himself is giving us. A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses.

[31 : 49] You take a walk up to the Brahe, walk alongside the cemetery at Aganish, ask yourself the question, how much did all of these people who are now buried in that cemetery, how much did they take with them of what they worked for in this world?

Just one thing, a shroud for their bodies and a coffin. That's all. But if you go around and look at the number of headstones that show the remains of Christians to lie there, people who trusted in God, then ask the same question, how much did these people take with them?

Well, the same answer as far as worldly things are concerned. But they took a treasure with them that no one can take from them, not even death.

They were rich towards God. And that's why the parable goes on to speak about that, the final part is, so is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.

What is it? How do you become rich towards God? That really means being rich as far as God is concerned and in relation to the way God himself defines things.

[33 : 21] how do you and I become rich toward God? What's the first thing you've got to do in order to become rich towards God? Well, the first thing you've got to do is empty out your own bank accounts.

I don't mean your literal bank accounts, but your spiritual bank account, the one that you're putting self into, the investment accounts that we've mentioned, the insurance policy that we mentioned, that this man in the parable had placed so much hope in them.

Empty them out. Take everything that's in them and get rid of it. And instead, make Christ your bank.

Put your investments in him. Place your trust in the Son of God and you will be rich towards God.

You see, the problem for this man was his heart. Not his brain, but his heart. Because verse 34 brings us to that problem.

[34 : 33] Here is Jesus saying, Fear not little flock, it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, give to the needy, provide yourselves with money packs that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches, where no moth destroys.

For where your treasure is there will your heart be also. Where was this man's treasure? In this world. In his worldly investments and returns.

Where is the Christian's treasure? It's in heaven. It's deposited in the bank that is Christ himself. He's drawing from it every day as we live in this world by faith.

So Christ gives us his grace. He pays out to us what maintains us on our journey spiritually. But the policies only mature when you get to heaven to be with him.

Boy, when they mature, then you are rich indeed. you have the riches in your name now. But then you will have them to enjoy to the full.

[35 : 49] Enjoy to the maximum. Because you are rich towards God. And you will be rich with God when he brings you home to enjoy them.

bad investments, the ultimate economic crisis. The question for us tonight then is, where is our treasure?

The next question follows on from that naturally, where is your heart? Jesus is saying, your treasure, wherever that is, that's where your heart is.

If your treasure is in heaven, invested in Christ, that's where your heart is. That's what is foundational to your life. Not even death can take that from you.

But if your treasure is in this life, that's where your heart is too. And if your heart is there, and your treasure is there, it's time to change bankers.

[37 : 06] It's time to dig out a new policy. It's time to put your investment somewhere else. Put it where God himself tells you.

Put it in Jesus. Put it in life as it's defined in him. Let's pray. Lord, we pray that you would teach us in the great contrast that your word sets before us the importance of being rich towards God.

Help us, we pray, to see the bankruptcy of our own lives as we find them lived for ourselves. Help us even amongst the many rich things that we enjoy in this life, and that it is legitimate for us, Lord, to enjoy.

Enable us amongst all of that to have a right perspective on eternity. give us, we pray, that however much we may have to live in this world, and perhaps even for a long time, oh, enable us to see that it is so short compared to eternity itself.

Grant your blessing to us once more under your word, we pray. Sanctify our hearts under it, that we might find our hearts lived out in the treasure that is laid in heaven.

[38 : 26] Hear us, we pray, for Christ's sake. Amen.