

Luke 12:13 - 21 (PM)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 May 2021

Preacher: Rev. Joel Strecker

[0 : 00] In this evening's passage, we've got a short conversation and a parable on one of Jesus' favorite topics, which is wealth.

Jesus talks a lot about money in the Gospels, actually. He wants us to live life well, to live life wisely. So he talks about the things that matter, and wealth matters.

In Luke 12, we're jumping into the middle of a story. For a while now in Luke, Jesus' ministry has been impressing a lot of folks. He's healed people, he's taught with authority, he's cast out demons, he's rebuked the corrupt authorities.

So here at the beginning of Luke 12, such a crowd has formed that people are beginning to trample upon one another. As 12 verse 1 tells us, the people want to be part of this Jesus spectacle.

It's exciting. It's interesting. Maybe they think it's even the power of God at work in our midst. And that brings us to our passage for tonight. Luke 12, 13 to 20.

[1 : 05] One. And if you've got a Bible with you, it'd be good to turn to it. So in verse 13, someone from the trampling crowd pipes up and says, Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me.

Now maybe you're wondering a little bit what's going on here. So basically, this fellow who speaks up, he's living in a society where the eldest male son gets the family wealth when dad dies.

And then it's up to him to share it with the rest of the family. So in Numbers and Deuteronomy, we get some rules actually from God about how to do this well. And that means that this guy, who's obviously the younger brother, wants something that is completely legal.

The elder brother is supposed to divide the inheritance up fairly. Now one thing that I find really interesting about this short little conversation in verses 13 and 14, is that the man is not asking for Jesus' opinion.

He doesn't say, Rabbi, what do you think? He says, Rabbi, tell my brother to be fair. He's hoarding all the wealth. It's hard not to hear a bit of self-righteous indignation in the voice of the younger brother.

[2 : 16] He knows what is his, and he wants it. Now something else about this conversation that I find really striking, is Jesus doesn't do what the man asks.

Instead, he answers him with a question. Who set me as judge or arbitrator over you all? Which is kind of weird, right? Because if you're a Christian, you confess, as we just did in the Apostles' Creed, that Jesus is the judge of the living and the dead.

The judge of everyone for all time. Who better to weigh in and judge this situation than the judge? But when Jesus asks the man this question, I don't think he's quite rejecting the title of judge.

There's maybe two things going on at the same time. First, Jesus is rejecting the title as this man understands it. The man comes to Jesus and says, Help me get my inheritance.

But Jesus is not very interested in this worldly inheritance. He came to bring the kingdom of heaven, to lead people into heavenly inheritance.

[3 : 29] So he rebukes the man and says, Who appointed me as judge over you all? But at the same time, because Jesus is the judge, there is also a failure of recognition, which this man makes when he comes to Christ in this way.

The focus of the question which Jesus asks can also hang on that little word, Who? Who made me judge and arbitrator over you? By asking this question, Jesus is both rejecting the man's limited view of life, and he's also asking the man about his understanding of Jesus' authority here as rabbi.

This man comes to the Lord of the universe, the judge of all people, and says, Jesus, help me get what's coming to me. The man wants a judge he can control, who operates in a world he understands.

And in reply, Jesus is saying to him, Do you know who I am and who sent me? Who set me as judge and arbitrator over you?

And when the man doesn't answer, it becomes clear, he doesn't know, he has no answer, he never wanted Jesus in the first place, he just wanted that money. So he vanishes from the scene, without a word.

[4 : 50] And there was nothing intrinsically wrong with what this man wanted. He wanted his rightful inheritance. But the tragedy is that his understanding of reality was so limited, his thinking was so small-minded, that that was all he came to ask of Jesus.

Jesus comes to bless us beyond our wildest dreams, and give us the kingdom of heaven.

And more often than not, our hearts and our minds are preoccupied with the small things of this world, just like this man.

We all struggle with greed, or as this passage calls it, covetousness. And Jesus knows this, so as the man disappears from the story, he turns to the crowd and says, Look out, guard yourselves from all covetousness, for one's life is not in the abundance of their possessions.

And, and then to help explain what he means, Jesus gives us this punchy little parable, verses 16 to 21. A rich guy has some land, it produces more than he expects, and he's got nowhere to store it.

[6 : 19] So, being the enterprising fellow that he is, he builds bigger barns, scales up his operation, and then having solved that problem, he kicks back and retires, because his assets will allow him to live comfortably for many years.

Without worry. And then the man dies before getting to use any of that wealth, and God says to him, You idiot! What's going to become of your wealth now?

So, what was the rich man's problem? Where did he go wrong? Sounds like a pretty, reasonable, level-headed fellow. Now first, right off the bat, you can see this man is entirely self-absorbed.

When he's wondering what to do with his wealth, the only person involved in that decision-making process is him. In effect, he's saying, I decide what I should do with what is mine.

And so his solution is entirely self-focused. He's going to improve his real estate holdings, he's going to sit on his wealth, he's going to live comfortably. Me, me, me. And in a city, such as Vancouver, which is so strongly defined by affluence, and this mindset, it's very easy to shift the focus of this teaching here from Jesus to the very wealthy.

[7 : 44] Now I was chatting with a friend last week, he was telling me about a client he'd had, and this client was not particularly happy with their current espresso machine. So he bought a new one, cost about \$30,000, and then an additional \$20,000 to install it so that it would integrate into the countertop nicely and all the machinery would be underneath, out of sight.

No space would be lost. And this was done in a home where he spends maybe a month in the year. And you can look at extravagant wealth like that and very easily judge and have strong opinions about how that money could have been better spent.

Like God, in Jesus' parable, we want to stand over this person and say, you fool. And there is a certain degree of appropriateness to that desire.

when we see or hear about the selfish mismanagement of tremendous wealth. As Christians, we are called to be a prophetic witness in the world for true justice.

Justice which strives for the flourishing of all people and acts of charity and love. Justice which is a reflection of the kingdom of heaven. This is why the church has always been involved in caring for the poor, the sick, the dying, the foreigner.

[9 : 13] But there is another layer to all of this which is that Jesus told the parable of the rich fool in response to a man who just wanted a little bit more money in a little village in the middle of nowhere.

Money which was his due or so he thought. There is a deep and powerful connection between this younger brother and this rich fool. And the connection is greed which happens in our heart.

The failure of the rich fool was not necessarily his actions per se but the attitude of his heart which expressed itself in those actions. God gave the man tremendous wealth and God gave it to him so that it could be invested.

And the man focused entirely on himself blindly invested it in himself. In doing this he invested in the wrong kingdom. He invested in the kingdom of this worldly inheritances focused on his comfort his success and he cut himself off from the rich returns and the heavenly inheritance of the kingdom of God.

Saint Augustine one of the important leaders in the early church put it quite nicely this way in his sermon the bellies of the poor were much safer storerooms than the barns the rich fool built.
[10 : 38] There is nothing wrong with having wealth the question is what do we do with it? And that brings us back to greed or covetousness.

Greed is at its root a fearful response to the possibility that there is not enough. the voice of greed says no one else is looking out for you get what you can while the getting is good.
Greed says I can't trust God to take care of me I need to take care of myself. He doesn't love me or he doesn't care or he's not involved in every greedy act there is a radical distrust that God is not the giver of all good gifts that his kingdom does not truly satisfy us that he is not the delight and desire of our hearts and so instead of giving generously from all that God has given us we have this terrible tendency to stockpile stuff to insulate ourselves to insulate our hearts and then with all this stuff we don't have to face up to the fact we are utterly dependent created beings and we distract ourselves with the shallow pleasure of the moment ignoring the eternal consequence of our actions we avoid the question what is the purpose of all this stuff now I'm going to go out on a limb here and humbly suggest most of us want to be wealthy maybe not flamboyantly two yachts and a summer home in Monaco wealthy but wealthy you know to be obviously wealthy that would be tasteless and gaudy and our consciences might trouble us a little too much if we lived like that it's much easier to deceive ourselves by striving to live life with a moderate level of wealth like the man who came to Jesus asking for his inheritance we want to live comfortably to have a little more disposable income drive a better car live in a home in a good neighborhood maybe a little garden out back travel for pleasure once in a while have a few expensive toys like a carbon fiber road bike wouldn't hurt not talking about anyone in particular most of us on the surface don't necessarily look like the rich fool but look more like the younger brother after his earthly inheritance the point that Jesus is making here is that in our hearts these two are completely alike and when we see this I think our first tendency is to take action maybe we decide it's our job to decry the oppressive tendencies of the free market or to increase charitable giving buy less stuff spend more time with the disenfranchised or wrestle with whether going out for coffee regularly is okay should I buy the nice noodles or the no name noodles those things might all be healthy ways to move away from patterns of greed that choke out the life-giving fruit of the gospel but for all our noble intentions first and foremost God is after our hearts because where our heart is there our treasure is also and until we believe deep in our bones that God is the giver of more than we could ever ask or imagine we will always hold on to the things of this world with a closed fist but there is another way in this way God loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life in the midst of our profound scarcity God gives us himself he is both the giver and the gift and from his generosity we learn to be merciful to seek justice to give the cup of cold water to comfort the afflicted to be generous with our time our resources our very lives so that the world would know and receive the inheritance stored up for us in heaven

[15 : 44] Jesus came so that we might have life and have it abundantly and life does not consist in the abundance of possessions so wherever you are today turn from your greed and turn to Christ let us not store up treasures for ourselves let us be rich towards God in all that we do to him be the glory father son and holy spirit amen Herman have food heaven delicious quantities theseanno are pres