

# Big Barns, No Soul

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're looking at Luke chapter 12, and as you know, that's not Acts, it's actually the first part of Acts, though, Luke-Acts.

And during this winter, we have been going through the book of Acts, David's been preaching through that book. But we've done a few pit stops, and those pit stops, I believe, have been in God's providence, because all of them have actually had to do with marks of the church, of what a healthy church is all about.

So I preached on God's grace in suffering, which is so evident throughout the book of Acts in our lives as well. And then two weeks ago, Neil spoke about faith, the faith of the Canaanite woman, which is devotion to the apostles' teaching.

And then last week, George Sinclair preached to us about prayer, which, of course, is the directive to be devoted to prayer. And that leaves one mark, the third mark, that we haven't talked about yet, and that has to do with devotion to fellowship.

And that's what I'm going to talk about today, because Luke often describes fellowship in a way that sometimes seems unexpected. He talks about it in terms of giving away money.

[ 1 : 21 ] And so he says in Acts 2.42, where these marks of the church are, he says, they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all as any had need.

And it goes on to say, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And so you see, a central aspect of the early church's fellowship is that they would give away their possessions.

And interestingly, with that, there's this sense of exuberance and life in the early church. There's a joy that comes with that kind of giving. And so Luke says their hearts were not only generous, but they were filled with gladness and they praised God.

And Luke makes sure those two attributes go together, this sense of giving of oneself and the sense of deep joy, gladness and praise.

And isn't this the opposite to what human nature and our culture believes? Because we believe that true life and happiness and gladness comes by accumulating wealth and not by what we give away.

[ 2 : 31 ] And so a nice home and car and vacations and clothes and a worry-free retirement are those things which we ought to strive for.

And we're being formed all the time by the teaching that says, hold tight, tightly to your money unless there's something that you get a good return for. And so it's a shock to the world's ears and perhaps our ears that Christians in the Bible believe that joy came from releasing their possessions. And I have to confess that at a point in my life, this came as a shock to me as well. I grew up in a Christian home, went to church every Sunday, but for whatever reason I never thought that Christian giving pertained to me.

I thought, well, that's my parents' job. They're making the money. And then I continued on into university. I was involved in campus ministries. I was the youth director at my church.

And I wasn't making enough money, so I thought, well, that's not going to make a big difference, so why give? Well, this is confession time. And one day, the Alan Burns of our church that I was youth director at, the financial giving director, came to me and said, I want to talk to your youth group, to your senior high group, about giving.

[ 3 : 56 ] And so I said, well, that sounds good. You can come and have 15 minutes at the beginning of our time together. And she came, and she did a very good talk. I was sort of saying, yeah, that's good, talking about the importance of giving and starting early and why that's important in the Christian life and how 10% is a good benchmark.

And I was just nodding my head. And then suddenly, she did something unexpected. She pulled out a whole lot of pledge cards. And she said to the youth group, okay, I want you to write a pledge for the year as far as what you're going to give.

Well, I've got to tell you, this was the first time that I ever saw them absolutely speechless. There was this stunned silence. It was very awkward.

And she said, well, I'll just leave that with you. And she left. And the problem is that I was as shocked as the youth as well. Because all of a sudden, I was confronted with the fact that 10% of my small portion of my money giving away was an impossible thing for me to comprehend, oddly enough.

And I was just waiting for one of the kids to say, so how much are you giving, Dan? I'm glad they didn't. But that feeling of not being able to do it was very strong.

[ 5 : 09 ] And all I could think about was, you know, no gas for my car. I can forget the trip to Europe that I'm saving for. Preventing going out with friends. I was in my early 20s. These were things that came to my mind first of all.

How can I do this? Well, Martin Luther once wrote that there are three conversions that are necessary in a Christian's life. The first is conversion of the heart.

And the second is conversion of the mind. And the third conversion, he said, was the conversion of your wallet. And I think there's a lot of truth to that.

That's what this passage is about. In my life, I had had the first two conversions. I knew that in my life. But definitely not the third conversion. And it took about three years before my wallet was converted.

And I have to say, I've had a couple of wallets converted since then, too. It's probably the hardest area of one's life to actually give up control of. It is our security and our identity that are bound up in our money.

[ 6 : 16 ] And the problem is, if you do not give up control of your money, there is spiritual consequences. There is an unhealthiness about not giving.

And in fact, it's a complete contradiction of the gospel to think that your life consists of what you have. Look at Luke 12, 15.

Jesus gives a very strong warning about this. He says there, take heed. And when he says take heed, it means this is a very serious thing that I'm bringing up to you.

Take heed and beware, in other words, be on guard, against all covetousness. And of course, covetousness is something that does not apply to any of us. That's what we think.

But covetousness, actually, in the Bible, talks about all kinds of desiring of more. All different types of wanting more.

[ 7 : 14 ] Now, how many of us fall into that category? It's our human nature. All of us do. He says, beware of covetousness, for a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Jesus is saying, in the strongest way possible, we cannot secure our happiness and our future through material possessions. And you see the extreme danger of thinking otherwise, in that it shifts our trust away from God and towards our possessions and ourselves.

That's why Jesus tells the story to drive that point home. Our life does not consist of the abundance of our possessions. Look at 16 through 20.

Here's this short and very powerful story. He says, there is a rich man whose land brought forth plentifully. That's a good thing. God has blessed him. God has given him this wealth out of his land. And it probably would have taken a lot of work and skill for him to make that happen. He is a rich person who's made things happen. He's reached the top of his society.

[ 8 : 22 ] This agrarian society. The highest goal. But the problem is that in that process, his trust has been transformed. It has been firmly fixed on what he has acquired and his ability to acquire it.

This big shift. And it's striking, isn't it, when you look at this passage, the effect that this has had on him. It is an odd sort of story.

This guy just talks to himself the whole time. Look how many times in verse 17 through 18 this man says, I and my. He has become completely self-centered.

He thought to himself, what shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops. And 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. Well, it's unmistakable. Well, Jesus is doing this on purpose.

[ 9 : 25 ] He's telling the story in that way. He's actually letting us into the thoughts of a person who is in his heart completely independent from God. God is not in his picture.

All there is is his possessions and himself. And interestingly, what's the first thing that happens once he comes to that realization? It's anxiety that hits him.

And the first thing he thinks about is the future. That's the great burden for anyone who has misplaced their trust. What will happen in the future? That was the first thought when I was first confronted with the idea of giving.

What about my future? Social life? Different plans I had? Well, this is why the man built such large barns. He expresses his trust in the abundance of his possessions by saying, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.

Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry. And there it's complete. His misplace of trust. He believes now, at the point of building those barns, he would have his own future secured.

[ 10 : 34 ] He would have that security. Life has come to him through what he owns. And you know, that place of thinking is the place of our society right now.

We live in a very prosperous time where this is the prevailing thought in our lives. That we will control our future and provide for it completely ourselves.

But of course, there is one all-important thing that the rich man did not take into account. And that is that God is alive and actually owns us and owns the world.

And the way Jesus does that is incredibly creative. You've just heard this conversation with the guy himself. God suddenly breaks into the conversation with his word.

And God said, fool. And when he speaks and says, fool, that's not a trivial thing. It's an important term in the Old Testament. It means one who either acts without God or without any thought to the potential destruction that is ahead of you.

[ 11 : 39 ] Somebody who thinks nothing about God or about the potential destruction ahead. And he says, this night, your soul is required of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?

Well, it's a sobering end to the story, isn't it? It's only at the moment of this guy's death, when it's too late, that he realized that nothing he possesses was his.

And everything in his life is undercut. And the wonderful thing about that sobering end is that Jesus is giving us a key here. He's giving us a key to the wisdom about life.

Because God's word is saying that God owned that man's soul and all his barns and all his wealth, his possessions. Yet the rich fool had gone through life trusting the gifts that God gave him, but forgetting the giver of those gifts.

That God is the one who created him and sustained him throughout his life. The key to the passage, that we understand that God owns our souls.

[ 12 : 47 ] And if you're a Christian listening this morning, there's an even deeper sense in which we understand that God owns us. In 1 Corinthians 6.19, Paul writes, You are not your own. You were bought with a price.

Therefore, honor God with your body. Nobody's saying here, Jesus has bought us by his death on the cross. And because he rose again, he is our Lord.

And we truly are not our own. We have been bought, we have been taken away from the place of death into the place of life. And you know the first sermon that was ever preached in the church, outside the church actually, but by Christians, was Peter preaching.

And Peter's sermon is in Acts 2. And in that sermon, Peter's going along and suddenly there's a point in the sermon when everyone who's listening is cut to the heart, is the way that's put.

People are undone absolutely at a point in his sermon. And this is what Peter said that cut them to the heart. He said, Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this, that God made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.

[ 14 : 08 ] It was that sentence that did it. And people asked, what do we do? What can we do because God now has made Jesus Lord? Well, Peter says that you must turn to God with everything that you are and receive the forgiveness of sins.

And the faith of those joyful, generous Christians was based on the fact that God had raised Jesus from the dead and was Lord. And therefore, the obvious implication was that they and all their possessions belonged to Jesus.

And so when they knew that Jesus was Lord, the Holy Spirit actually enlarged their hearts and loosened their grips on their positions. And so gladness and generosity flooded their relationships and the way they lived out their lives.

Isn't it a contrast? The rich fool is anxious and self-centered in that story. But the early Christians who knew Jesus was Lord were joyful and focused beyond themselves to God's mission and one another's needs.

And so their attachment to the gospel was far stronger than their attachment to their possessions. Well, this passage closes in verse 21 with a clear choice that Jesus gives to us.

[15:27] He says this. He says we can be like the rich fool who trusts in possessions and ignores God or we can be rich towards God. And clearly Jesus calls us today through this passage to be rich towards God.

That is our great mission of our life. That's our personal goal. That's the loftiest thing that we can attain to in this world. To be rich towards God. And so the question that you and I are left with in this passage is, how can I be rich towards God?

How can you be rich towards God? Well, very simply, later in the chapter we will see that being rich towards God means actually turning from being overly attached to the things of this world and seeking the kingdom of God.

In other words, trusting in him with your life. And money can do one of two things to this great goal of being rich towards God. It can be a real obstacle to it, as it was for the rich fool.

It's very easy to trust God with your lips, but trust money in your heart. But money can also be used as the way to trust God. As the way of being rich towards him.

[16:44] Really a fundamental way of guarding against misplaced trust is to regularly give a portion of your money. To the spread of God's kingdom. And to be about his priorities as well.

This guards against misplaced trust. And you see an extraordinary contrast between the wealthy fool here and the wealthy men and women in the New Testament, in Acts.

Because they were about the spread of the gospel. They were actually instrumental in the rapid spread of that gospel, by the right use of money. They gave significant amounts to that mission. And they used their homes and their businesses to further the cause of the gospel. Very outward looking in their thinking. Very different from the rich fool.

And so their money was used to be rich towards God. Well, the reason I choose to talk about them is because we are in that place. We are wealthy men and women.

[17:44] In the terms of the Bible, we have just as much as those wealthy people had. Money is our greatest sense of security, however, and the means to many good things in this life.

And so every time you give, you are exercising the basic Christian faith that you are not your own. That you, along with your money, belong to Jesus. That everything good comes from God.

And in Jesus has been given to you an inheritance that can't perish or spoil or fade away. And that is actually kept in heaven for you. And I think one of the deep blessings of giving money is that it's a significant, real, tangible recognition of that fact.

That God has given us everything. And we are returning to him. And so the question that often comes up in one's mind when we're thinking about this is, How much should I give?

But I think probably a writer had it right when he said, No, the question should really be, How much of God's money should I keep? That's how you have to look at it if you look at Jesus' parable here.

[18:53] You know, the Old Testament rule for giving was 10% of one's income. And that was called a tithe. But Jesus actually put no limit on giving. In fact, his example of giving was extravagant.

It was the giving of his life so that we might become rich spiritually. It was a 100% mark that he gave to us. And you see that kind of generosity, that desire to give of what is God's reflected in the fellowship of the early church.

But it is a sad fact that in wealthy countries, the percentage of Christian giving is much lower than 10% average. And in my life, I have experienced that struggle of living in a culture where that is not the way that things are done.

It took a while for me to reach the 10% mark. But that process was a great blessing to me. There was something about that struggle of giving for the sake of the gospel that strengthened my faith. And then I got married, and we had to make a new normal part of our budget and go through that struggle again as well. But I think that C.S. Lewis probably had it right when he said, I do not believe

we can settle how much we ought to give.

[ 20 : 10 ] I'm afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. And, you know, the idea is that we ought to give until it hurts.

Of course, the problem is that many of us have a very low threshold of pain. And I think that's what Jesus is dealing with.

But you know that we do this all the time for one another when Christmas comes around. We give off until it hurts. Because we want to recognize the gift that others are to us.

And Jesus is calling us today is to recognize the gift that God has given us in Jesus. That he has bought us with his life. That every good thing comes from us, from him, that we have.

And our great help in the conversion of our wallet is that Jesus is Lord. That he has bought us with his life, bringing us from darkness into his marvelous light.

[ 21 : 10 ] And so we do belong to him. And everything good comes from him, including our salvation. So may God the Holy Spirit use this truth to give us gladness and generous hearts.

So that we might indeed be rich towards God. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen.