

The Foolish Developer

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[0 : 00] Hi. It's very nice to be here with you all. I hope that you're really kind to one another and speak to one another and make one another welcome and do all those nice things for one another in the course of coming here on a Wednesday. One of the really sort of good things about this story is that Jesus is sort of full-blown going along teaching and saying the things he has to say and the progression is going well. When somebody sort of says to him, as I see it, why don't you get relevant? Why don't you deal with one of the really basic issues?

And I often go into the pulpit on Sunday morning. People are much too well behaved to do it. But with the fear that somebody will stand up and say, preacher, get relevant. Let's deal with some of the issues that we're dealing with on a day-to-day basis. And I would, under those circumstances, will completely melt and pour out on the floor. But when this happens to Jesus, it's very interesting to watch the way he does it. One of the multitudes said to him in the midst of his teaching, teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me. Deal with one of the practical issues in life instead of all this talk about things that aren't that practical. So Jesus told him two things to begin with. He said to him, first, that's not my business. And secondly, it's not your problem.

Your problem is very different than the one you suppose it to be. The one you suppose it to be has to do with the fact that your life is totally destroyed by the fact of your brother.

You know, he is destroying you. And that's not where it's at. Now, most of us, we live our life that kind of way. We have a problem that looks like this right there. And then we're over here like this. But we're so occupied with the problem that we become obsessed with it and we can't see anything else but that. And it's not unlike the kind of pattern of what happens to you when you wake up at four o'clock in the morning, obsessed by some idiotic event of the day gone by. And that so fills your mind that you can't sleep. And it just destroys you. It becomes so big. I mean, it certainly destroys your night's sleep. Well, that was what was happening to this man. He was sure that his problem was here. And it had to do with his brother. And it had to do with the inheritance.

And it had to do with the way his brother had treated him. And it had to do with some money that he wanted to get from his brother. And everything in his life was in a mess because his brother was who his brother was. And he wanted his brother changed. And so he said to Jesus, will you get him for me?

[3 : 18] And Jesus said to the man in these wonderful words, he said, this isn't your problem. Your problem is just another form of that wonderfully varied plant that grows in human lives called greed.

And all you're dealing with is a different manifestation of it. Now, there's a million sort of variations, but it's the same plant. And that's the kind of thing that Jesus means when he says to him, beware of all covetousness in all the forms and shapes that it takes in so many different lives.

It's still the same plant. And this covetousness is the thing that has obsessed you. Because what your brother has is what you want and what you are is not really occurred to you yet.

And so he says, and this he says, not as something that should be, but as something that is. You know, I don't want you to feel admonished by this. I want you just to take it for what it says.

It says, a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. And what it means is that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

[4 : 41] That's all. Now, the fact that we have created a whole culture and a whole society, a whole way of life on which the sort of cardinal rule is that a man's life does consist in the abundance of his possessions, has nothing to do with it because that just isn't true, Jesus says.

A man's life does not consist in that. It would be easier if it did. We would understand life better if it did. Our competitiveness and our aggressiveness and our consumerism and the great machinery of our wealth and society and economy would all seem to work better if a man's life did consist in the

abundance of his possessions.

We would all understand how it works. And you'll have noticed in the papers recently, where they're now talking a great deal about ethics in business, that the terrible generation of the 80s is over, and the 80s was marked by the great principle that greed is good, but now in the 90s, we're different. You know, that no longer applies. We are now very altruistic and we're concerned for our fellow man, which means that we're just growing another kind of greed, that's all.

But that was what Jesus said. And he said that this is the reality that you've got to come in touch with.

[6 : 14] And it's very hard to come in touch with. In the same way that this was a problem for him because he didn't have it, in the same way if this is all that he has, and he identifies himself with that, he still isn't identifying who he is.

In one case, he was identifying himself with what he didn't have because of his brother's greed. And then he says, on the other hand, you've got to be careful that you don't identify yourself with what you have because that's not what your life is all about.

And so success is not based on who you are. Well, I mean, this is what happens in our culture, is that success is not based on who you are, but who you are perceived to be.

And so what you've got to do is you've got to help people maintain their false perceptions about you. I mean, that's just practical everyday life. You've got to do it. And that's the way our culture works.

But because of that, the fatal addiction happens when you are deceived by what you are perceived to be, deceived by your perceptions. And you lose contact with yourself, which is what happened to this man.

[7 : 38] He was out of touch with himself and had assumed that his life consisted in the abundance of the things which he possessed, which abundance was not very adequate.

So Jesus says, Jesus told him a parable. Now, I told you last week about parables. Parables are the stories that in this case takes about 15 seconds to read and the rest of your life to think about. And that's what a parable is meant to do. So you're meant to get hold of this story and spend the rest of your life figuring it out and working on it.

The parable was this. The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully. Now, there's nothing wrong with the wealth that this man has.

Jesus doesn't say that he acquired it in any wrong way. It just says that he happened to have it. Now, when I'm telling you this parable, there's something I want you to be careful to do.

[8 : 50] And that is, don't waste it on somebody else. Because what it's talking about is you. And if you quickly identify this somebody else and start seeing how wonderfully it applies to him and how much you wish he was here to hear about it, you'll be wasting your time and mine.

Because what the parable applies to is to you and to me. And it starts by saying that his land was rich and it brought forth plentifully.

And so that not only did he have wealth, but he also had a considerable increase in the wealth so that it was showing a very nice return. And then he goes and says to himself, What shall I do?

And of course, this is the great question in our lives. How do you answer that question? What shall I do in the circumstances of my life?

This is really, I think, a wonderful, wonderful question. And Christ puts it right at the heart of this parable. What shall I do?

[10 : 09] How am I going to respond to this situation? You can wake up this morning and listen to the news and wonder, What would I do if I was on the walls of Dubrovnik at this day?

Or what would I do if I was caught in the Golan Heights? The kind of contemplation of what shall I do?

You remember that G.K. Chesterton said, The trouble with the world is me. I mean, he understood it clearly.

And in fact, the answer to the world's problems is you too. I mean, it's right here. And the difficulty is when you realize that, what you're going to do with it.

In our society, what shall I do? We consider the possibility, well, I'll do what I'm told. And that takes a lot of responsibility off of us. What shall I do?

[11 : 21] I will bitch and complain and never come to terms with it. What will I do? I will elect a new government.

That'll solve it. What will I do? I'll pour myself another drink. Or what will I do? I will close my eyes and hope it all goes away.

You know, that's... But it's very important that, in a sense, before God, you look at the issue, see the problem as yourself and ask the question, what shall I do?

That your energies will not be consumed in waiting for somebody else to do something or somebody else to take action or somebody else to solve the problem or somebody else to come along and rescue you.

The question is, and I think there's tremendous freedom in this question, and this man has this freedom. He has wealth, and he has a great harvest so that there's more wealth coming in.

[12:29] And at that critical moment in his life, he says, what will I do? I'll do what everybody else does. Well, no, that's not a good enough answer either.

Well, when he has thought through the question, you then see the fatal mistake. The fatal mistake is marked in this story by one two-letter word.

And if you look at this story, you'll see how wonderfully that Jesus puts it to them. He says, this is what I will do. I will pull down my barns.

I will store my grain and my goods and will say to my soul. Now, there is no question that in a court of law, it could be easily established that his barns, his grain, his crops all belong to him.

They were, when he said, my barns, my grain, my goods belong to me. But when he said, my soul, he made the great mistake because that didn't belong to him.

[13:54] And he got himself caught in that fatal sequence. He didn't know what time it was because he went on and said, and said, I have ample goods laid up for many years.

He saw his life as projecting into the infinite future. Many years lay there to be unfolded. And he didn't know what time it was because, in fact, he wasn't at the beginning of a long series of years. He was at the end, at the very end. So he wasn't aware of what time it was. He was at the end of the process, not at the beginning.

And, of course, that's probably true for all of us, is that we get our kind of time sequence out of phase.

We don't know how to handle that. And it's important that we know what time it is. And the next thing he said to himself, he said that, not only did he have it, but he said, I will say to my soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.

[15:13] Now, one of the commentators with great insight says, all this junk food that he'd collected, he was going to feed to his soul. And that wasn't what his soul required. His soul was not related to the barns, to the goods, to the grain that he had accumulated.

That wasn't going to feed his soul. His soul was suffering from acute anorexia. Well, all he had was something to feed his belly.

And that wasn't enough. I was reading in the Atlantic Monthly about Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys. And I'm sure lots of you could just start doing the Beach Boy thing, but I can't.

But would anybody like to give us a rendition of one of them? Any of the... But it talks about Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys who was writing all those wonderful songs.

And while he was writing them, he was smoking five to six packs of Marlboros a day. He was eating unthinkable quantities of junk food, booze, and cocaine.

[16:24] untold cups of mega coffee, which means that it had six spoonfuls of coffee crystals to a cup and as much sugar.

And he had gone from an athletic six foot two to three hundred and forty pounds. A kind of... He was feeding the wrong side of himself.

He was... He had identified a hunger but he was feeding it the wrong way. And, you know, that's...

That's what happens to this man here. He was... He was thinking that his soul would be satisfied with the years that he had to spend the wealth he had accumulated and enjoy himself.

And he said, eat, drink, and be merry. He didn't add for tomorrow we die. That was the secular philosophers that figured that out.

[17:23] But there is a time to eat, drink, and be merry. But it's not all the time. And he thought that that was and that that could satisfy him.

And it was then, you see, that the word of Christ comes to him and says, God said to him, fool, this night your soul is required of you and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?

And so he'd... The fatal sequence had taken hold of him. He had decided that his soul belonged to him and he was going to nourish it in the way that he thought it needed to be nourished.

and Jesus and God said to him, fool. Fool in the sense of a total lack of understanding of who you are and what you're to do.

How you are to live your life. And Jesus is going back now to the brother, you know, the brother who said, tell my brother, this is...

[18 : 36] He just didn't understand who he was and he didn't understand what he was required to do. And Jesus tells him in the parable, the things you have prepared, whose will they be?

You know, that you have amassed this wealth and the great problem that you have overlooked is that you couldn't use it even if you wanted to.

It ultimately belongs to somebody else and it will have to be passed on to them. And you thought that it was there to satisfy you and your needs are much greater than it could ever satisfy and in one sense much less than it can satisfy.

And so you get Christ saying that to him and ending up by saying, this man was a fool because he had identified himself with the things that he possessed and he had made the wrong choice at the critical moment in his life and he had ended up totally poverty-stricken in relationship to God.

He was not rich towards God. And this is the wealth that belongs to us. It's not the transitory wealth that happens nor is it the increase of the wealth because in a book like Ecclesiastes it says that he who longs for silver will not be satisfied with silver and he who longs for gain will not be satisfied with gain.

[20 : 26] All he's doing is putting himself on a squirrel wheel where he goes around and around and around and the things that are necessary to him the things that are necessary to you and to me are not the objectives of the things that we're consuming our time in.

Our riches is of the wrong kind and we become as it were spiritually anorexic while in other ways we're bloated and overfed in the most unhappy way.

And Jesus ends this parable of the foolish developer the one who had taken his wealth and invested it with a view to meeting his own needs and had ended up in a situation of being utterly poverty stricken before God.

And when Christ tells us the story I guess he means that we should be enabled to hear it for the purpose that we should be able to distinguish ourselves from the portrait that we have.

There used to be I mean there is in England a picture of a bishop and he's lying here in his tomb.

[22 : 11] And this is the picture of him lying in the tomb. You may have seen one like this if you've ever traveled in the cathedrals in England where he all his finery and all his worldly attainments and everything in terms of his ambitions are met and he lies there at peace with the world having achieved great things as one of the great leaders of the church and accumulators of the church's wealth.

And so that it was customary when the bishop was buried to put something like this a kind of figure of who he was on top of it. But one bishop was smart enough to say okay but there's got to be a second story and on the second story put that you know the skull the skeleton so that people will really know what's inside the box not the fat and prosperous bishop that accomplished everything but someone who was subject to death.

And what this story is telling us is that the total potential of our life is measured ultimately in terms of our riches toward God and that riches toward God is the thing that we possess and it's the thing by which our life is measured.

Let me say a prayer. Lord Jesus says you confronted this younger brother told him his problem was covetousness instructed him that his life did not consist in the abundance of the things which he possessed told the parable to him so that he might see his own need.

So we pray that we may hear this story and that we may know that we are caught up in a culture in which the obsessive concern that we have is for the abundance of the things which we can possess and in that be deceived about our own desperate need before you and the poverty of our lives in relationship to you and that your purpose is that our life should be completely fulfilled and completely satisfied not in terms of our attainment but in terms of your mercy and grace and love towards us help us to be open to that in the circumstances of the moment and as each of us faces and answers the question that we live by moment by moment as to what shall I do we may be given wisdom in responding to it we ask in

[25 : 28] Christ's name amen