

The Parable of the Rich Fool

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Luke 12. We are continuing to walk through the parables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Right in the middle of this chapter, we're going to read verses 13 through 21.

This is the Word of God. Somewhere in the crowd, someone in the crowd, someone said to him, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

But he said to him, Man, who made me a judge or arbiter over you? And he said to him, Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

And he told them a parable, saying, The land of a rich man produced plentifully. And he thought to himself, What shall I do?

[1 : 12] For 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 my goods.

And I will say to my soul, So, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, 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?

Verse 21, So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. It's the word of God for the people of God this morning.

Yeah, this story is one of the clearest and most vivid parables of Jesus. But I fear that we don't often receive all that it has for us because we don't zoom out to notice the context.

[2 : 22] Every text has a context. It has a place where it's placed in our Bibles, a chapter, a verse. And we must always give attention to it.

In this particular context, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. Really, much of the Gospel of Luke and much of our Gospels, he's on his way to Jerusalem. And what we are to understand is on his way to his death.

Crowds continue to gather to Jesus. But in this chapter, all of this chapter, Jesus is addressing his disciples. And mainly focusing on preparing his disciples for what will happen when he dies.

He says, as it were, you will face persecution. But remember, all the hairs on your head are numbered by your Father in heaven, and he will not forget you.

He says you will be drugged before rulers and authorities. But remember, the Spirit is with you and will teach you all you need to say.

[3 : 27] He says later, you must not be anxious about your life. Your Father knows all that you need. He concludes you must be ready. He's kind of, this is a keep your lamp burning type of sermon. He's preaching.

He's saying, I'm returning in an hour you will not know and will not expect. So be ready. In the midst of this weighty teaching, someone in the crowd raises their hand and interrupts him.

And asks, teacher, tell me to divide the inheritance. Or tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. Anyone casually listening to Jesus' sermon would have been, or found the question most inappropriate.

Not because of the question. Now Jesus does play a little cat and mouse game with him, going back to him. But Jesus is a teacher of the law, and throughout history, a teacher of the law would answer questions, resolve conflicts about the law.

So even though Jesus said, who made me judge or arbiter, he knows teachers often did that. So it's not the question. It's the content of the question that's out of place.

[4 : 29] Jesus is teaching about the end. Jesus is teaching about how our lives will be in great danger at the end. And what does it matter what we leave behind?

Right? So Jesus says, take care, be on your guard against all covetousness. For one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. And then he tells a parable. As he often does, he unpacks the truths that he's teaching in a way that's much more profound in a parable.

Unlike all the other stories that we've studied, this story is about one man. There's no contrast.

There's no good guy, no bad guy. It's just one man, one rich man.

And the rich man's land produces abundantly. He has a great harvest. Now, if we're listening to this story, with this added abundance, though, he's surprisingly puzzled.

That I'm out of room. I have nowhere big enough to store all my crops after this harvest. So what should I do without any thought of God who caused the growth or any thought of the workers who brought in the harvest?

[5 : 36] He decides, I will do this. I will tear down my old barns and build larger ones. And then I can store all my grain. You know, he prepares for the future. Right?

He builds bigger barns so that he can relax and enjoy all the land he has produced. He says to his soul, so you have ample goods. Relax, eat, drink, be merry.

You know, in many ways it seems right. He worked, and now he reaped, and so he should enjoy.

It is, after all, his. Right? Right? The Lord says, not so fast.

The Lord says to him, fool. This night your soul is required of you. Things you have prepared, whose will they be? The Lord rebukes him. The strongest language, language Jesus rarely uses.

[6 : 34] He calls him a fool. That man we know from the Proverbs as the lowest man. He says, tonight you must come and give an account for your life.

And all the money and all the possessions you have will be left behind. So Jesus says, so is the one who lays up treasure for himself is not rich toward God. The assumption is clear.

The rich man treasures his money, spending it all on himself, and gives no thought to God. Jesus is not merely saying all that you have will be left behind. He's also saying all that you have has not prepared you for what's coming.

On each of our dollar bills we have in God we trust. Perhaps after this parable we would want to affix another statement.

Warning. Do not use money to buy the treasure only God gives. We want to place this on our bank accounts and on our money.

[7 : 33] Warning. Don't use money to buy the treasure God gives. We're going to unpack this parable, this wonderful parable, in three points.

The first is all your financial prosperity is the Lord. All your financial prosperity is the Lord. The parable begins, the land of the rich man produces plentiful.

There was a rich man, right? Right? We know biblically riches and honor are from the Lord. It is the Lord who brings down one man and exalts another.

And this rich man's land produces plentiful. Not only does the Lord make this man rich, he makes him richer. It's the Lord who causes the sun to shine, the rain to fall, and the seed to grow.

But one man plants and one man waters. But the Lord causes the growth. Earlier this week, I was learning about the process of growing, reading, or process of seed growth, reading an important book, Frog and Toad Together.

[8 : 47] Thought this was totally great. Frog was in the garden and Toad comes by admiring his garden and decides to go home and plant some seeds.

And he quickly finds out he doesn't know how to get this seed to grow. He sows, and then he waits on it to grow.

You know, he puts down his head to the seeds, says, Now seeds start growing. And those poor seeds didn't come. The sun continued to shine, but they did not continue to grow.

And so Toad was just trying to figure out what was going to happen. So he began to sing songs to the seeds. I guess it was grow, seed, grow. He began to read poems to the seeds.

He began to play music to the seeds. And finally, he got so tired that he fell asleep, and the seed begins to grow.

[9 : 52] Obviously, that story is just for fun. But the rich man is not to take any credit for the growth.

That's the point. Rich man may have planted. He may have watered. But the Lord calls the growth, right? The first takeaway from this parable is very straightforward. All that we own and all that we earn is the Lord's. It's the first principle in handling money. Now, we may be quick to say that all that we earn and all that we own is from the Lord. And obviously, that is true. The man is rich and becomes richer because of what the Lord gives. But this principle does not stop there. It says all that we own and all that we earn is the Lord's. Psalm 24.1 says the earth and the fullness thereof is the Lord's. It's not merely a gift. [10:49] It's his possession. Job 41.11 says whatever is under the hole heaven is mine. Soul ownership. He's not looking for a cosigner.

This means that everything we own and everything we earn are God's possession which we manage. So the error of the rich man is not merely that he does not thank God for his land harvest and all the blessing. The error of the rich man is that he treats his money and possessions as if it were his own.

Look down there. He says, verse 18, he said, I'll do this. I'll tear down my barns and build large ones. I will store up all my goods and my, or my grain and my goods. I'll say to my soul, you have ample goods. Now you don't have to teach a child to say mine, which is incredible because children have no money, no bank account, no ability to make money, no service to render to society.

Completely dependent on mom and dad. But when they receive that new toy and it's threatened by that evil little brother, they scream mine.

[12:10] It's humorous and absurd. I want to say yours? That toy's mine, man. I bought it. It's not just absurd.

It's arrogant. That's what the Lord's after with this guy. We do the same thing. We say mine over things temporarily entrusted to us.

You know, one writer says, financial prosperity often results in a proud, possessive attitude toward things. A proud, possessive attitude towards things.

Can you flip with me to Deuteronomy 11? It's your fifth book of the Bible. Deuteronomy 11. The Lord warns him about this.

After he delivered them through the Red Sea and delivered them from Pharaoh, he warns him in a striking way. Sorry, it's verse 11. It actually should be Deuteronomy 8.

[13:14] Look down there. Deuteronomy 8, verse 11. He says, Take care lest you forget that the Lord your God, by not keeping his commandments and his statutes, his rules and his statutes, would I command you today? Lest when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up.

And you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness with his fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know that he might humble you and test you to do you good in the end.

Be careful, lest you say in your heart, my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.

I mean, you read that and you see how absurd it looks. He delivered you. He fed you. He clothed you. He provided water from the thirsty ground out of rocks. And then the things he freely gives, we boast, we're one with our might.

And that's the way it so often happens. The goodness of God turns into the proud boast of men. And that's what he's after.

[14:35] All our financial blessing, prosperity is the Lord's. Point two, your excess is not for your savings or comfort.

Your excess is not for your savings or comfort. After becoming richer through the harvest, the man has a surplus, right?

His barn is full and he has a lot left over. His dilemma is what to do with this surplus, with this excess. He says, what shall I do?

I have nowhere to store my crops. What he really means is, what shall I do? For I have nowhere to store all my crops, right? He had a place and now he needs a bigger place.

So what's he do? He builds bigger barns, right? You know, it seems wise. Wouldn't it be wise to save more so that you can weather any famine, drought or job loss?

[15 : 34] Wouldn't it be wise to plan for an unknown future? And the implication here is that, no, he already has big enough barns.

You know, sometimes we read this parable and we read into it that his barns were small. The text doesn't say that, right? We assume he had small, he had less than sufficient barns.

I think the whole point hinges on the fact that his barns were big enough. And they were full. So instead of building bigger barns and stowing more away, he should have given it all away that he didn't need and depend on the Lord.

Many passages focus on the way we spend our money. We saw that several weeks ago with the dishonest manager. But this passage focuses on how we spend our surplus, our excess, the leftover.

And there should be leftover. The rich man fails, he builds bigger barns, saves too much. The second takeaway is your excess is not for your savings or comfort.

[16 : 47] And a few things, our culture, as a culture, we want more than security. We see this everywhere, you know, security systems. You just watch a show, you know, a locally run program, and you just see security system advertisements everywhere.

Or just the abundance and the prescriptions for fear-subducing or subduing medication. Or just the new insurance policies. I was reading about some insurance policies this week.

You can get an insurance policy for your facial hair. That would be helpful. Sometimes that razor goes too far down. Collect a little bit.

I'd like to see how that plays out. Or someone has insurance on their tongue. Because they're some sort of wine taster or food taster. And their taste buds are so vital to making a living.

So they better not drink hot coffee. But our culture is all about security and looks for it in so many ways. And that's what this man is all about. The rich man tries to find security in saving too much.

[17 : 53] It's not wrong to save. Proverbs 10, 5 says, He who gathers in summer is a prudent son.

It's not wrong to save, but it is wrong to save too much. The Lord promises to provide all that we need and promises that we'll never go hungry.

Often that does mean setting a bit aside in the summer so that you can make it through the winter. Setting aside some in the fat times so that you can make it through the lean times. You know, if you're a business owner, you kind of learn the trends of your business so that you can prepare for the seasons where the business is not as good.

Or if you're a teacher, you would naturally spread your paycheck over 12 months so that you don't go hungry in June and July. But this text says don't save too much.

God has designed for life to be lived in dependence upon Him. You know, strikingly to me, the very first possession God gives His people after He rescues them from Egypt is manna.

[18 : 58] Now, they're wandering for the wilderness with no homes, no farms, no animals, but the Lord sends all the bread they need from heaven every day. And He says, Moses says, eat as much as you want.

But do you remember the one qualifier He gives to that? Leave, let no one leave any of it till the morning. Let no one stow it away.

I just find it so interesting. The Lord's trying to teach something and making us daily dependent in a way that we wouldn't learn if we stowed it away. That's what's going on in that passage.

Some did, and it bred worms and stank. But the idea is that the Lord wants us to depend on His faithfulness, not our prudence. He wants the upper hand.

Oh, great, you can weather the future because of your nest egg tucked away, but He wants to do other things with that money in the in-between. That's what's going on. And strikingly, while there are very few verses about being prudent and planning for the future and rainy days, the Lord overwhelms us with promises to never fail to provide for all of His people's needs.

[20 : 05] Look, actually, flip back to our text. It's overwhelming just in these chapters. Look down at verse 7b.

He says, even the hairs on your head are a number. Fear not, you're more valuable than many sparrows. Verse 22, therefore, do not be anxious about your life, what you eat, nor about your body.

What you'll put on for life is more than clothing in the body, more than food and more than clothing. Look down at verse 31 and 32. Seek His kingdom. These things will be added.

Fear not, little flock. It's the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. That's the point. If money is not secure, the promise is. Money is not certain.

God's commitment to His people is. All of us are going to bleed dry of all our money, either by a sudden death or by the trickle of expenses as we die.

[21 : 06] The question is, will we depend on the Lord? Will we learn what money is supposed to teach? Now, that's not the way it feels. I feel, we feel far more secure when the bank account is full.

More at ease when the 401k is growing. Have you ever met somebody who said their 401k was big enough? No, and you won't. We assume the more we save, the safer we are.

This parable pushes us back, pushes up against the way we think about our excess. Saving.

What's the line between saving and hoarding? Is it 5%, 10%, 15%?

I bet it's less than you think. We've got to give until it pinches, I think, is what He's going after. How should we think about retirement?

Is it wrong to have a retirement barn? I don't think so. I think this text tells us, be very careful how big that barn grows.

[22 : 26] If it's all going to add up, then we might not need the Lord. A rich man tries to find security and comfort, too.

You know, he assumes his excess is given to him to make his life more comfortable. You know, he has that little phrase. He says to himself, soul, you have ample goods laid up for yourself for many years.

Relax, eat, drink, and be merry. Now, notice he only talks to himself about how to spend his money. Now, that's meant to stand out to us in a community where life and relationships and money would have included the counsel of others.

This rich man is a fool. He only gets his own counsel. It's a lot easier to agree with yourself than with somebody else. He decides for himself to relax, eat, drink, and be merry.

Now, this is a bit tricky. Jesus is not opposed to relaxing, eating, drinking, and being merry. He's celebrating. His first miracle was to make a bunch of wine and let a, what seems to be an ungodly party, continue.

[23 : 36] As I mentioned last week, the religious people were so annoyed with Jesus because John came fasting and you came eating and drinking. They called him a glutton and a slugger. Most likely, he wouldn't fit in to some of our gatherings.

We might get mad at him. The point is, Jesus does not teach you're more holy if you deny comfort. That's not the gospel. Many say this, and that can be a poverty theology, that holiness is found in throwing away everything and not owning anything.

I don't think the Bible thinks that we shouldn't own anything. But Jesus does teach life must not be about comfort.

That's what this rich man does wrong. It's not that he plans to enjoy some comfort. It's that he plans to enjoy only comfort. Right? Instead of thanking God for his good gifts and depending on him more and more, he forgets God and loves comfort too much.

He begins to believe that life is all about what he possesses and all about the things that bring him comfort. And there may be no more pervasive idol in America than comfort.

[24 : 54] Much of what we do, much of the way we live, much of the American way, which this week I was talking to an Australian who was laughing at so many things that are the American way, is built around convenience and what is comfortable to us.

Convenience stores are everywhere in America. Fast food restaurants are everywhere in America. One of my friends likes to use the phrase, first world problems. And he was on Instagram this week, took a picture of his daughter at a date with him.

And he put his daughter's quote, Dad, thanks for the date, but I was thinking you'd get a treat for me. So the picture was actually of her with an ice cream cone because he had to restart the date or make an addendum to the date for a ice cream cone.

Hashtag first world problem. But it's not just a struggle of young entitled kids. It's my struggle. We have so much.

I mean, I think many people would argue we're the richest nation in the history of the world. We have air conditioning, full fridges, indoor plumbing, fresh water, cars, plural, and so much more.

[26 : 08] Many of these things the rest of the world would call a luxury, not a necessity. But the love of the comfort doesn't stop there. You know, it colors the way we live. It's seen in the way we avoid pain, hard work, conflict, and hard conversations.

It's seen in the way we have almost an allergy to commitment. Will you come to dinner next week? I'll see. On Tuesday. You know, we're flaky. It's seen in the way we parent trying to catch little Johnny wherever he falls as if the comfortable life is the good life.

It's seen in when we complain. Why do you complain? Often it's the denial of comfort. But living for comfort is not the Christian life.

I'm thoroughly convinced if we make that the Christian life, the Lord will frustrate it. You know, we follow a suffering Savior with no place to lay his head. This life is not going to be comfortable.

John Piper said it like this. He was writing about Elizabeth Elliot. He said, don't get in touch with your feelings. Submit radically to God and do what is right no matter what. Suffering is normal.

[27 : 17] Comfort is the exception. It's a rare, peppered exception. Have you no scars? No wounds? With Jesus on the road to Calvary?

Don't buy the lie of maximizing your comfort. Life's not about it. You know, one of the phrases that really stood out to me, I don't know where I heard it. Some leadership talk, John Maxwell says, everything worth doing is uphill.

That's a five-word phrase that will change your day. Everything worth doing is uphill. You ever wanted a downhill slide?

That's me every morning and all day. But everything worth doing. Is it worth doing? It's uphill. Because the gospel is not about comfort.

He peppers the days with him, but it's not finally about it. Third, your security is found in heavenly treasure. Your security is found in heavenly treasure.

[28 : 24] The story concludes suddenly, right? This man, you know, it's interesting. It's all in the future tense. Did you notice that? You know, I will do this.

I will tear down my barns. I will store up my grains. I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for yourself. For many years, relax, eat, drink, and be merry.

The Lord's not just correcting him for a comfortable life that he pursued, but for the desire for it, which is interesting. But it's suddenly. The rich man assumes he's secure because of his savings and the comfortable life he has planned.

The Lord says, you're a fool. This night, your soul is required of you. The things you have prepared, whose will they be? His savings and comfort will not make him secure. They leave him exposed because he didn't use them rightly.

St. Augustine, in the 4th century, said, he did not realize that the bellies of the poor were much safer storerooms than his barns.

[29 : 29] But it's a striking play on words here. This word, be merry, literally means to expand one's diaphragm. If you're a singer, you know what a diaphragm is.

It's the lower part of the belly that you try to push out so you can hit those high notes. And so to be merry is literally to expand the diaphragm and enjoy in laughter. But the word here for fool literally means to be someone with no diaphragm left to expand.

Point is, he's a fool. He miscalculated life. He spent it saving more and more and planning to spend it all on his comfort. But suddenly the Lord returned and he has no diaphragm left to celebrate these things.

And the Lord snatches all that he has and all that he possesses before he can enjoy any of it. It's incredibly sobering because any one of us can be like this fool and live our lives for something that does not matter.

Perhaps you've heard the story about the Japanese soldier Hiroo Onoda. In 1944, he was sent by his commanders to the Philippine island in the midst of World War II.

[30 : 50] His orders were to resist the Americans on that island and to keep on fighting. Six months later, when the war ended, he never got the news.

He was isolated on this little island. For more than 30 years, he kept fighting a war that was over. It's an incredible story.

He would steal food from the villages at night, occasionally shoot at someone. I wonder about that. At one point, the Japanese army flew over the jungle where he was, dropping leaflets, saying the war is over, but he thought it was a trick from the Americans.

So he kept on fighting. Years after that, they brought a sound system to the edge of the jungle, put up a PA system, and his brother said, Come out, Hiroo. But he still didn't believe him. He thought, They just brainwashed my brother and put him out there. He kept fighting until 1974. That's 30 years. And then in 1974, the Japanese army found his commanding officer.

[32 : 04] He went into the jungle. He found Hiroo, and he commanded him to surrender. If you know anything about Asian culture, that's what it would take. And he did. He lost 30 years of his life fighting a war that was over and living for something that doesn't matter.

We do the same thing. That's what the Lord's after with his fool. He said, You fool. You've thrown away your life.

You've thrown away the point of all this. You've lived for money and possessions, and these things do not matter and do not last, and on the last day, it will be rendered.

How did we spend our lives? Do you see, he's not merely a fool because he cares about his money too much. He's a fool because he doesn't care about his life enough. The Lord rebukes him for how he spends his money, but more importantly, for how he spends his life.

Strikingly, this whole parable's about stewardship, even the end, that his money is the Lord, and so too is his life. Life is not ours. It's not a right, as our forefathers like to say.

[33 : 19] It's a gift, which we received and do not deserve. It's on loan from the Lord. One commentator says, this is one of the most major and often hidden truths of Scripture, is that our lives are not our own.

That's the implicit message of so much of what we hear in our culture, but what this text and all of Scripture is trying to say, our life is the Lord's, and if we're a Christian, it's doubly so. We were created by him, for him, and we were redeemed by him, for him.

So it's just calling us to live. Are we living for something that will not matter in the end? Are we fighting a lost cause? Or are our lives thrown into the great cause of the gospel?

It just warns us, because our hearts are so fickle and so prone to wander into loving other things too much. The Lord's not merely focused on those things.

He's focused on you, on your life, and calling us to live for him. So we must use this life to lay up treasure in heaven and be rich toward God.

[34 : 45] I think 1 Peter 6 puts this really well. What's that mean, right? That's the \$64,000 question. What is rich toward God? 1 Timothy 6, verse 17 through 19 puts this so well.

As for the rich in this present age, and we probably should put ourselves in that category, charge them not to be haughty, not to be arrogant, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of what is truly life.

I think that parable is in the back of Paul's mind when he writes that statement, that exhortation. He says, be generous. Are we working to save or to share?

Like, where's our main strategy go? To save or to share? Be rich in good works. You know, I talked about this last week. You know, good works can almost be a four-letter word in Protestant churches, and it should not be.

[36 : 00] Good works have been prepared for us, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in him. Takes the pressure off, right?

But good works are also to be our passionate desire. Romans 12, 11 says it like this. Do not be slothful and zeal. You know, you know what sloth is from these kids' stories or something like that. Don't be slothful. Don't be lazy and zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord. J.I. Packer, in a book we're reading this summer, he says, a zealous man is a man of one thing.

It's not enough to say that he is earnest, hearty, uncompromising, thoroughgoing, wholehearted, fervent in spirit. He only sees one thing. He cares for one thing.

He lives for one thing. He's swallowed up in one thing and that one thing is to please the Lord.

That's what good works mean. Because I've been found pleasing to the Lord by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, now my aim of my life is to please him more and more.

[37 : 06] Be rich in good works. Thirdly, live to the end. So many of these parables focus on the end, the talents, keeping our lamps burning.

So many of these parables focus on the surprises we'll find there. Remember the rich man and Lazarus. One was rich on earth and one was rich in heaven.

It tells true wisdom unlike this fool. Always has the end mind. That's what we want. Warning, we're not trying to use our money to buy the treasure that God gives.

We're trying to be rich where the Lord says, rich with what the Lord says is truly rich.

Father in heaven, thank you for these few minutes and just another opportunity to sit on your word.

Thank you for these stories, God. So vivid, so helpful.

[38 : 11] God, we pray that you would come and lead us by your spirit and help us. We do humble ourselves before you, Lord.

We pray just like David, search me, oh Lord, and know me. See if there's any unclean way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. We ask that you would work in us that which is pleasing in your sight.

We want to be eager to respond to the word, but ultimately, Lord, we come to you appropriately dependent on you to work and conform and propel us and energize us to live for the life to come.

Lord, open our eyes to the emptiness of living for so many of the things that are right before us. And open our minds more and more and our eyes more and more to see the fullness of living for the things to come.

We pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

[39 : 34] For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.