

The Rich Fool

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Covetousness is a deadly sin against which every child of God must guard against, or it will envelop him in its tentacles. This is true, in the first place, because we live in a world which has ungodly mammon as its god. Its motto is eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. It is extremely difficult to live in such a world and not be affected by it. Another reason we must be on guard is because our old man according to the flesh clings frantically to the material good and benefit that this world tantalizingly offers us. We foolishly forget that we must put off the old man and his deeds and seek first the kingdom of heaven.

In the parable of the rich fool, we find Jesus warning against this deadly sin. (Please take the time to read Luke 12:16-21). Here Jesus is warning against the utter foolishness of seeking this world's goods which will perish. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses."

The occasion for this instruction came when Jesus is rudely interrupted by a man while He is teaching the multitude about spiritual matters. The man requested that Jesus speak to his brother about dividing the inheritance with him.

He saw Jesus as one whose words would convince his brother to give him what were apparently his possessions. It was just as apparent that the spiritual instruction into which he had so rudely intruded had no concern for him at the moment. His only concern was the material possessions which he wanted desperately.

We can well imagine Jesus' displeasure with the man, not only because he was rude, but because he had missed the whole point of the Master's instruction about the spiritual concern for the things of the kingdom of heaven that must be evident in each child of God. Jesus now uses this occasion for the instruction which is found in the parable by laying hold of the underlying sin which beset this man. "Take heed, and beware of covetousness for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Luke 12:15

This warning and the parable, which occasioned by the request of this man, are directed for our instruction. All too often we find ourselves worrying about our mundane earthly possessions. Many times we order our lives giving priority to what I want in this world: cars, bank accounts, good pay, retirement programs, insurance, and the like. This is why the parable speaks to us.

In the parable, Jesus uses the illustration of a rich man who was in a rather enviable position of not having enough storage available for his bountiful crop which he was harvesting. He was already rich and stood to become much richer. He must now decide what to do. To him the answer was never in doubt. He would build new and bigger barns for his copious goods. He reasoned that by so doing he could enjoy his retirement in luxury and ease.

Yet Scripture called the man a fool. We may well ask what is wrong with the man? Is it wrong to be rich? Is it a sin to work so that you have an abundance? Was he wrong to use the abundance for the future? The answer is that in themselves these possessions and their use was not wrong. Job was rich and so was Abraham and yet we read in Scripture that they were God's chosen. They, as well as the rich fool, had been blessed by God with an abundance of this world's goods. What then is the sin of this rich fool? If we examine the passage of Scripture where we find this, we will find that there is an absence of an important ingredient which must characterize anyone who is going to call himself a steward of God. Nowhere does this rich fool

remember from whom he received these goods. It is as if he actually believed he was lord over all his goods. Notice that he uses the words "I" and "my" and "soul thou" repeatedly. He had no trouble putting these goods which he had gained for his selfish, self-centered use. Life had meaning only in terms of the abundance of goods he could use for himself. It is equally evident that he felt that peace, joy and contentment were to be gained through this abundance. He concentrated all his life's efforts to gain these material goods so that in the end he could triumphantly say "Soul, thou has much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry." He actually believed that his soul could be fed with these material goods. Spiritually his soul was tied to these goods of this world. His contentment was in these material things. And because he was a fool, he believed this life and the goods he had gained would last and be enjoyed by him for many years. But, God said "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee. Then whose shall those things be which thou has provided?"

We are inclined to agree that here we have a description of a real fool. Yet we have missed the point of Christ's instruction if we do not see ourselves in the ambitions of this rich fool. How often do we not boldly assert what we will do with our time, talents, and our goods without asking our Lord what he would have us do. How often do not we get caught up in the pursuit of money, houses, cars, clothes as if they can somehow satisfy our souls. Jesus is speaking to us telling us that if these things become our sole ambition in life, we are no more than fools. We are laying up for the life that perishes, thus indicating that we care very little for the life that is eternal.

In the parable, we are warned against this form of coveting. To covet means that we deny that God can and will take care of us. It means that we do not trust in Him as the one who will supply. When we covet, we are not content with God's way of providing for us, at the same time believing we can do better. Jesus, in the verses that follow, instructs us by telling us to "consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouses nor barns; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?" What can we learn from the ravens? That God provides. He as Lord over the creation will not withhold any good things from his beloved saints. Therefore, we must be content with what He gives us since we know that He knows what is best for each one of us. It also means that we must not worry regarding our daily needs, but will trust that, as the good and perfect giver, God will clothe and feed us as He does the lilies and the ravens.

But we seek more than just supplying physical needs for the body. We know that our souls will perish if we do not receive spiritual food. We are told in verse 31 to seek first the kingdom of God. Our souls need the instruction in Christian schools that we have gone to for many years, the catechism instruction, the correction of Christian parents, Bible discussion in Young Peoples' Society, and above all, we need the spiritual food and drink of the preaching of the Word. You see, Young People, the kingdom of God is spiritual, and therefore, to seek it requires spiritual activity on our part whereby we actively, willingly and thankfully appropriate these spiritual benefits. This activity the rich fool knew nothing about. He thought material goods would supply the need of his soul. God called him a fool. But we through faith must seek spiritual blessings of God's kingdom so that our soul will live even if the body perish.

Seeking the kingdom of God also implies that all the material abundance we receive we will use in the service of God. We will ask God "What wouldst thou have me to do?" with thy time, thy talents, thy money, thy car, which thou hast given me to use as a steward in thy kingdom. Then when it comes time to part with these earthly possessions, we will willingly do so because our treasures are those spiritual treasures that we can take with us into eternity.

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