THE SCROLLS

Openhanded: Releasing Our Grip On What Grips Us | Luke 12:13-21

Life Lesson

True, lasting security and freedom from anxiety are never found in the relentless accumulation of earthly possessions, because building bigger barns only feeds our self-centeredness and multiplies our worries. Instead of viewing our wealth as something to hoard for our own comfort, we must recognize our resources as tools God has graciously entrusted to us to benefit others. The tragic reality of the rich fool reminds us that we will inevitably leave everything behind the moment we die. Therefore, the only way to be truly secure is to open our hands, realizing that the wealth we joyfully invest in God's purposes is the only treasure we will never lose.

Examine Scripture

Read Luke 12:13-21

As you read Scripture, slow down and ask these three questions to move from information to transformation:

1. What does this passage reveal about who God is?

2. How is God calling you to grow or change?

3. What is God leading you to do or who is He calling you to be in your everyday life?

Simplicity: More is Less

A misconception in modern Christianity is that Jesus fundamentally despised wealth. We often read the Gospels and walk away with a lingering sense of guilt, assuming that to be truly holy means being perpetually poor. But a careful reading of Scripture reveals a different truth. Wealth, in and of itself, is morally neutral. The Bible is filled with men and women of immense wealth, such as Abraham, Job, David, and Lydia, who were deeply faithful to God. Jesus is not condemning wealth itself, but rather its selfish use and the relentless, greedy pursuit of it. The danger of money does not lie in its mere existence in your bank account, but in the ruthless, self-centered way it may be obtained and the white-knuckled grip with which it is hoarded.

One commentator states the fundamental test of our resources is whether they become tools of service that benefit others and enable us to serve God better. The great Puritan pastor Richard Baxter once warned his congregation, “If you have wealth, let it be your servant, not your master.” When we cross the line from simply possessing our wealth to letting it possess us, we enter the tragic territory of the “rich fool.” The man in Jesus' parable erred not because he was a successful farmer, but because he had an overwhelming desire to provide only for himself. His greed drove his ambition.

Many people believe wealth will relieve you of anxiety; however, it seems that greed leads to greater anxiety and worry. With our culture’s obsession with accumulation, we also see an increase in anxiety and worry. As we see in Jesus and His parable, God cares deeply about the whole of you (your heart, your mind, and your body), and He wants to free you from the suffocating anxiety that flows directly from materialism and self-centeredness. This parable is a masterclass in the economy of Heaven, teaching us that true simplicity and openhanded generosity require a radical shift in perspective: more is actually less. Jesus exposes the root of our greed, challenges how we seek security, and calls us to a life that is truly rich toward God.

Personal Notes

Vs. 13-15

As Jesus teaches a massive crowd, a man abruptly interrupts Him with a financial dispute. Jesus is treated like a rabbi, reflecting the respect He has earned among the people. Rabbis were often called upon to serve as arbitrators in certain matters. However, this unnamed man wants Jesus to force his brother to divide their father's estate. Jesus refuses to serve as a petty judge or legal arbitrator in their squabble. Instead of addressing their legal dispute directly, Jesus turns to the bigger problem: greed. We see here a profound theological issue. We often want God to fix our circumstances so we can be comfortable, but God wants to fix our hearts so we can be holy.

Jesus turns to the crowd and issues a stark warning: "Watch out! Be on your guard!" (v. 15). The Greek word for greed here is "pleonexia" (πλεονεξία), meaning a desire to have more or covetousness. It is an insatiable itch that can never be scratched. More is never enough. Puritan preacher Thomas Watson wrote, "Things of the earth can no more fill the heart than a triangle can fill a circle." Our hearts were made for the infinite God, not finite goods. Charles Spurgeon echoed this when he said, "A man may be as poor as Lazarus and yet as covetous as Dives (the rich man). Greed is a sin of the heart, not of the bank account." Jesus sets the thesis for the parable that follows: "one's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions" (v. 15). True life is found in Christ, not in our closets, garages, or 401(k) accounts.

Vs. 16-19

Jesus begins to tell a parable. Remembering the rules for interpreting parables, we realize that parables teach one main, gut-punching point that appears at the end. This helps us interpret this parable properly and see the significance of what Jesus is teaching.

In the Greek text, it is slightly more obvious that the man was already rich before his land produced this massive crop: "plousios anthrōpos" (πλούσιος ἄνθρωπος). It literally means the man was abounding in material possessions, overflowing with sufficiency. In other words, he was very wealthy. He did his part by planting the seed, but his ground surprised him with far more grain than he had expected. In a sense, he was victimized by his own overwhelming success.

What does he do? Does he look for ways to bless others? Does he look for ways to honor God? No! He gives himself what he thinks is brilliant investment advice. He decides to tear down his old barns, build larger ones, and fill them to overflowing to secure his financial future. The theological danger here is subtle. When God's blessings fall on us, we quickly attribute the windfall to our own genius. The Puritan writer John Flavel warned, "Prosperity is a very dangerous condition; it is a mercy to be delivered from the snare of it." Again Spurgeon gives words

Personal Notes

of wisdom: "A man may be as completely enslaved by the love of money as by the love of strong drink. It is a thirst which increases with drinking."

The Greek verb used here for "thought" is "dialogizomai" (διαλογίζομαι), from which we derive our English word "dialogue." But notice who his dialogue partner is: himself. He does not consult his community. He does not seek the Scriptures' wisdom. Most tragically, he does not pray to the God who sent the rain and caused the crops to grow. He is trapped in the echo chamber of his own ambition.

The man continues to display intense self-centeredness. In just two verses, he uses the words "I" and "my" five times. Much of our worry and anxiety stems directly from this self-centeredness. He considered that everything he had belonged exclusively to him. The more wealth he accrued, the tighter his grip became, yet he wanted more and more. He completely forgot that God's grace had lent him his possessions and that they were meant for the Lord's service to help the needy.

Notice the incredible selfishness and greed: "Then I'll say to myself, 'You have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy; eat, drink, and enjoy yourself'" (v. 19). The Greek word for "myself" or "soul" here is "psychē" (ψυχή); it refers to the inner person, the depths of who we are. He preaches a false gospel to his own soul; he has created heresy within his heart. He thought the time had finally come to enjoy the fruit of a lifetime of labor, believing he was financially secure and could simply retreat into a life of leisure. One commentator notes, "Jesus condemns not the man's wealth but the accumulation of wealth solely for his own selfish enjoyment." A purely selfish accumulation of possessions is fundamentally incompatible with true discipleship. True peace and freedom from worry never come from the height of our barns; they come from the depth of our trust in God's provision.

Vs. 20-21

God's voice shatters the man's solitary echo chamber. God interrupts the man's retirement plan with a devastating verdict: "You fool!" The Greek word Jesus uses here is "aphrōn" (ἄφρων). In the Old Testament, this term does not merely mean someone who is a bit silly or lacking intelligence; it describes someone who acts entirely without God, living in a profoundly self-destructive, self-centered way: "The fool says in his heart, 'There's no God'" (Ps. 14:1, 56:1). To live as if God does not exist, or as if He has no claim on our resources, is the ultimate foolishness.

Notice the terrifying precision of God's decree: "This very night your life is demanded of you" (v. 20). The literal Greek reads, "They are demanding your soul from you." First-century rabbis often

Personal Reflection

1. How often do I find that my worry and anxiety are directly tied to my desire for more possessions or my fear of losing what I already have?

2. When evaluating my financial decisions, do I operate in an isolated echo chamber of "I" and "my," or do I actively recognize that my wealth is graciously lent by God to serve others?

3. In what specific ways am I tempted to preach a false gospel to my soul, seeking ultimate security in earthly comforts rather than in God's provisions?

4. Do I currently view giving away my resources as a painful expense, or am I treating my generosity as a strategic kingdom investment to fulfill God's purposes?

5. If my life were demanded of me tonight, would the evidence of my time and money point to someone who built bigger earthly barns or to someone who was truly rich toward God?

Commentaries

ESV Expository Commentary: Matthew-Luke (Volume 8) by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar

Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition): New Testament Edited by Kenneth Barker

Luke by John MacArthur

Mt. Zion's Mission

Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to ***MAKE***, ***MATURE***, *and* ***MULTIPLY*** *disciples of Jesus Christ.*

used the third-person plural ("they") as a reverent way to avoid speaking God's name directly. The Hebrew word for God, "Elohim," is plural. The man's soul was being called in for an immediate audit amid his foolishness.

The tragic irony is inescapable. The rich man believed he could not possibly outlive his money, and he was entirely correct. But his earthly assets plummeted to zero value the exact moment his heart stopped beating, because possessions have absolutely no value to someone who is no longer around to possess them. Then God asks, "Whose will they be?" It is not a gentle prompt for the man to set up a trust fund for his children. In the context of the parable, the possessions are to be thought of as totally and eternally lost to him.

Jesus pulls the lens back from the parable and applies it directly to the crowd and to us. The man was not declared a fool because he was wealthy; he was a fool because he selfishly hoarded his worldly goods while utterly failing to benefit from them eternally. His life revolved completely around accumulating wealth for himself, taking absolutely no thought for God.

What does "rich toward God" mean? Commentators note that this phrase does not strictly refer to giving money to God, since God needs nothing; rather, it refers to giving to the poor, which amounts to storing up treasure in heaven. The rich man had to choose between treasure on earth and treasure in heaven, and he chose poorly.

We must learn to view our generosity not as an expense but as an investment. When we define generosity merely as giving away our resources, it feels like a loss. However, when we define it as giving away our resources to fulfill God's purposes, it becomes a strategic kingdom investment with the expectation of an eternal return. Wise stewardship is not just blindly giving money away; it is putting our money to work for what matters to God.

If we want to be free from the crippling anxiety of our modern age, we have to recognize that much of our worry is deeply rooted in our own materialism. We want more, and then we fear losing it. Jesus offers the only lasting remedy: we must rest entirely in God's goodness, trusting that He will always provide exactly what we need. When we shift our focus from building bigger barns to serving others, our self-centeredness shrinks, and our worry begins to evaporate. A life fully focused on Christ has far less reason to worry.

The Lord cares about the whole of you: your mind, your body, and your soul. He invites you to cast your anxieties upon Him, tear down the barns of self-reliance, and open your hands. The great missionary Jim Elliot puts materialism and greed in their rightful place when he wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."