

## STUDY ON THE PARABLES OF WISDOM

### The Parable of the Rich Fool

Read Luke 12:13-21

*“God said to him, ‘What a fool you are to trust in your riches and not in me. This very night the messengers of death are demanding to take your life. Then who will get all the wealth you have stored up for yourself?’ This is what will happen to all those who fill up their lives with everything but God.” (vv20-21 TPT)*

This is entirely about foolishness. The folly of being preoccupied with riches. The emphasis on wisdom comes out only at the last, when the Lord tells His listeners to be "rich," not in this world's things but "toward God." The setting of this story is like this: as Jesus was teaching, someone rudely interrupted to say that his brother had refused to divide an inheritance with him and to ask Jesus to tell his brother to share it. The demand was entirely out of line, as Jesus immediately pointed out. He was not a Judge in Israel. There were courts to settle such things. But rather than let the incident drop. Jesus went on to warn against an attitude that would be so preoccupied with material possessions. "Watch out!" [He said.] *“... For your life can never be measured by the amount of things you possess.” (v15 TPT).*

The mere statement “Beware of covetousness...” actually scarcely does justice to the force of the word – beware - the idea is that we all are under attack from covetousness, and we must protect ourselves from it. Other versions put it this way:

*“Watch out and guard yourselves against every form of greed...” (AMP)*

*“Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed...” (CEB)*

*“... be on your guard against covetousness in any shape or form...” (PHILLIPS)*

*“Be alert and guard your heart from greed and always wishing for what you don’t have...” (TPT)*

That statement is strong in itself for long, serious meditation, particularly by people living in our modern culture where the opposite is apparently true. We measure the worth of an individual largely in terms of his possessions. But the Lord did not stop at that point. He went on to tell of a rich fool. According to the story, a man had an abundant crop one year, so large that he did not have room to store it. He could have distributed the surplus to the poor - that may be what Jesus is suggesting - but he did not. Instead, he said, *“I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’” (vv. 18-19).* That was worldly wisdom, the kind many people practice today. But Jesus said that God regarded that as the height of folly. *“But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ (v. 20).*

The Lord concluded, *“So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” (v21)*

### **MISUSE OF WEALTH**

There are not many places in the Bible where God calls people fools, so the fact that He singles out a preoccupation with things as folly is striking. In the Old Testament the man who says there is no God, that is, the atheist, is called a fool (Psa. 14:1). So, if that rich materialist is called a fool, it puts him right up there in the company of the God-deniers. In fact, there is an obvious connection, for regardless of his intellectual opinions, the man who operates like the fool of Christ's parable is a practical atheist after all.

Why was that man foolish? There are several reasons.

First, he misused the wealth God had given. He would probably have denied that it was God who had given him the wealth. He had ploughed the fields, planted the grain, tended the soil, and gathered the harvest. He had done it himself. The wealth was his, and he had no responsibility to anyone. But that is not the way Jesus viewed the matter. Jesus did not say, "A certain man worked very hard and accumulated a great fortune." He said, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully" (v16). Jesus undoubtedly meant that the man's prosperity was from God, who made the ground and prospered the harvest. The man had worked, true. But apart from the blessing of God, he might have suffered blight or drought and thus have had no harvest at all. The rich man's blessing was from God, but he failed to see that. He regarded the wealth as his rather than God's, and therefore misused it.

The Bible is not against possessions when they are properly viewed and used; we are going to come back to that point.

Many biblical examples of wrongly acquired or misused wealth should alert us to the danger. In the book of Joshua, we are told of the sin of Achan that caused the defeat of the armies of Israel at Ai. Israel had been victorious at Jericho and had dedicated the spoil of the battle to God as God intended. But there was a blemish on the victory. During the battle Achan had come upon a Babylonian garment, two hundred pieces of silver, and an ingot of gold. Because he coveted them, he hid them in his tent. It was a small thing, but it was disobedience to God and caused Israel to be defeated in its next engagement (Joshua 7).

Solomon allowed the love of affluence to ruin his life. Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Lord about money, pretending that they had given the full price of a sale to the church while actually keeping back a portion. They were struck dead (Acts 5) Paul wrote in one of his letters about a man named Demas: "*for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed*" (2 Tim. 4:10).

We see the same thing today when people put a home and the care of it above the need for Bible teaching and will thus mow the grass on Sunday when they should be at church. Or men will direct their efforts toward amassing a fortune (or part of one) while neglecting their families and the essential spiritual life of their home. No wonder Paul told Timothy, "*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*" (1 Timothy 6:10).

The Bible does not teach that money is evil in itself or that things in themselves - produce evil. The fault is in those who use it. Today, when a person surrenders to God and allows Him to redirect his life, a process begins in which things are removed from the centre and God is again reinstated on the throne.

## **POSSESSIONS WILL PERISH**

Misuse of his wealth was not the only reason God called the rich man foolish, however. In fact, it is not even the chief reason. The chief reason and the second reason the man was foolish is that he allowed his concern for riches to eclipse the far more important concern that he should have had for his soul. That was bad business even from a worldly stand- point because possessions are perishable goods while the soul is intended to dwell with God forever.

Think of it. This is the story of a dying man, a man leaving this world to spend an eternity in hell without God. In such circumstances Jesus could well have argued, "Consider what you have gained in terms of what you are losing. Compare your present pleasures with your future deprivation and suffering." He could have said. "Weigh the value of your soul over against your possessions." But that is not what He said. He knew the man had no regard for such things. He did not value his soul. So, the Lord comes down to the level on which he is operating and talks about his possessions only. His argument is, "'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for

yourself!" The one thing that might possibly get through to such a man was the thought of someone else enjoying what he had spent his life to gain. Think of that if nothing else will move you.

Everything you have must one day be left behind. It is yours now to use or abuse, but one day it will be taken from you and you will stand naked before Him who is your maker. How will you stand in that day? Will you stand as one who has put God first and has therefore come to see possessions as a gift from Him to be used for God's work? Or will you be one of many who have sold out to possessions, to the exclusion of all else, and have died without hope of salvation?

## **RICH TOWARD GOD**

In the last three words of the parable, Jesus gives a clue to what the goal of the wise man should be. He should be "rich toward God," Jesus says (v21). A phrase like that could be elaborated at great length, but its basic meaning is quite obvious. It means that one is to be rich in spiritual things, which will last, as opposed to being rich only in material things, which will not last. One spiritual treasure is faith. James says, "*Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?*" (**James 2:5**). Another treasure is good deeds. Paul told Timothy to instruct those under his care "*Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*" (1 Tim. 6:18-19)

What must we do to achieve such riches? There are two prerequisites.

First, we must determine that we really want them and that we, therefore, are willing to serve God first and foremost, rather than our possessions. The Lord Himself said, "*You cannot serve God and money*" (Matthew 6:24).

The second necessary thing if we are to become rich toward God is that we must empty ourselves of anything that would take the place of those spiritual riches. We must become poor in spirit before we can become rich in spiritual blessings (Matthew 5:3). We must empty the heart of greed, pride, and other sins so that the riches of God can flow in.

