

The Heart of the Matter

Scripture Passage: Luke 12:13-21, NRSV

(13) *Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."*

(14) *But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?"*

(15) *And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."*

(16) *Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly.*

(17) *And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?'*

(18) *Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.*

(19) *And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'*

(20) *But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'*

(21) *So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."*

Introduction:

"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me" (vs.13). The start of the conversation that we see in this text is quite peculiar. It starts off right away with someone telling Jesus that he has a family issue and he needs Jesus to fix it. But not just any family issue, an uncomfortable issue concerning the splitting of an inheritance between his brother and him.

Now, during this time period, it was not uncommon for a person to find a rabbi or scribe who could act as an arbitrator in family matters, such as a dispute over the way the inheritance was being split.¹ More than likely, the brother just wanted his share and could care less if his part of the inheritance stayed within his family.

What a way to start off a conversation. "Hey, Jesus, my brother isn't willing to split our inheritance. I need you to take care of this and talk some sense into my brother about divvying out the family wealth." Some of you think that it is fair for this man to ask Jesus to help settle this dispute. But, in all reality, the man asking was probably asking more out of greed and just wanting Jesus, a well-known rabbi, to help him get an equal share of the inheritance from his brother, so he would not have share it with the family.

But, in verse 14, Jesus puts a stop to this and says, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" Jesus' mission was not to come and settle earthly matters; Jesus is not concerned about these kinds of things. But Jesus is concerned with the actual motives behind this request. Instead of brushing off this man who asks him to settle this dispute, Jesus takes the time to rebuke him and teach those who were in the crowd, saying, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (vs. 15).

First, the Rebuke: (15) *And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."*

This isn't the first time Jesus warns people about problems that come with greed and storing up riches for one's self. We see in Luke 8:14, the parable of the sower, Jesus talks about the seeds that fell into the thorns, "As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they

are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.” Greed causes us to ignore others and only focus on our own needs and own pleasures.

When reading the parable of the rich fool, we see that “the land of a rich man produced abundantly” (vs. 16). It is important to note that nowhere does it say anything good or bad about this rich man, we just know he was rich and the land he owned produced abundantly. I would say this is pretty awesome that God has blessed this man’s land with an overflow of abundance of crops!

How many of you know a farmer or someone who owns a lot of land? My grandfather is a farmer and he has about 1000 acres. For those of you that don’t know the size of an acre, 1 acre is 43,560 square feet or about the size of a full football (soccer) pitch. Imagine a thousand football fields all planted in the springtime. You wait all summer and into fall. When it comes time to reap the harvest, there is an overflow because all the fields have produced a bountiful crop. My family, along with my grandpa, would be so grateful and happy for this overflowing abundance, since you never know what a field will produce. We would praise and thank God that he has blessed our grandpa’s fields.

There is nothing wrong with the blessings of abundance that this man has experienced here, but there is a problem with how he reacts to this abundance. We see it right away in his first response, “What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops” (vs. 17).

This rich man has found a problem for himself, but he believes he has found the solution. He comes up with a plan and continues, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. (19) And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry” (vs. 18-19).

The Heart of the Matter:

The whole time, this rich man has been devising a plan for his well-being. He is faced with a pleasant problem of what to do with his surplus, but he does not even seem to think about giving anything away.² Instead he is focused on his own needs, wants and desires. Nowhere in this plan does he say, “I think that I have enough and my barns are full so I will give to those who are in need.” He instead decides that the barns and buildings he has will not suffice, so he must build bigger and larger barns to hoard his grains and goods. To top it off, he ends by saying, “to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry” (vs. 19).

Some of you might think this man has worked hard, he has had some good fortune, so it is time for him to take it easy. But Jesus ends this parable by saying, (20) “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ (21) So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

This man was a rich fool. He stored up all these treasures for himself and, in the end, they were nothing to him. This rich man was not being rich for God. He did not even thank God for what he was given. He didn’t think about giving to others in need or even giving to those servants or workers that had helped him gather the bountiful harvest. This man lost sight of what is important. He became greedy with what he had and was self-focused. His focus was not on God or he would have seen the stewardship of his possessions as foolish.

Wealth is not condemned in this passage of scripture. Jesus is not saying it is bad to be wealthy, but he is warning his hearers about the dangerous “eternal” implications of wealth.³ Having much wealth or wanting more for oneself can lead to complacency, self-sufficiency (or self reliance) and covetousness.

In this parable of the rich fool, Jesus is not condemning the rich fool for being rich, nor saying having plenty of possessions is bad, but he is addressing the heart of the matter that being rich and wanting more is harmful. One who is rich has a responsibility to be a good steward. In 1 Timothy 6:17-19, it says, “(17) As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. (18) They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, (19) thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.”

All we have is from God. What we receive we are to give to others. To live a life of giving is what we are called to do. We are called to take care of the widows, the orphans, the aliens, the marginalized, and that even means the Syrian refugees that we encounter. We need to be reaching out to the Syrians who have lost their homes, have little to eat and are not able to provide for themselves. We are called to meet the needs of those who cannot meet their own. When our stewardship comes about meeting our own needs, we become the fool. We are not living generously and, before you know it, our lives have been taken or “demanded from us” (vs. 20) and all that we have stored for ourselves becomes useless to us.

Living generously is living your life for God and others. That is what it means to be rich toward God. When we give to the church or to others, we should not be focused on our own needs. Living in Christlike-ness is to seek God and to put others' needs before our own. When we are given an abundance of possessions, like the rich man in the parable, we must not think only of ourselves. We must train our minds and our hearts to think of others and give to those who are in need. We don't even need be given an overabundance to give to others. I believe we are called to be good stewards in what we have no matter how rich we are.

Conclusion:

More than likely, the man who asked Jesus to help divide the inheritance was not thinking about how he could help others or give back to God. To be good stewards of what we have been given, we must first realize everything that has been given to us is from God. We must learn to keep our focus on God and steer away from greed that generates complacency, self-sufficiency and covetousness. When we are focused on God, we start to truly understand that being Christlike is to live generously and to give out of the abundance that God has blessed us with. As a church, we are to share the abundance that we as a collective have received. We are not to hoard our resources. We are called to meet the needs of creation by being the hands and feet of God. When we don't help or give to those in need, we are neglecting God's creation and neglecting God.

May we not be blinded by our greed, to where we no longer seek to meet the needs of others. May we be good stewards of what you have given us, Lord, so when you entrust us with more we may be able to give richly for you. Amen.

1 Stock, Elliot. *Jesus as a Teacher*. The Sunday School World. Google Books, 27 May 1875. Web. 29 Mar. 2016.

2 Mugabe, Henry Johannes. 2014. *Parable of the rich fool: Luke 12:13-21*. Review & Expositor 111, no. 1: 67-73.

3 David Lose, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=720