

# The Riches of God

**Luke 12:13-21 NKJ** <sup>13</sup> Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." <sup>14</sup> But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" <sup>15</sup> And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." <sup>16</sup> Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. <sup>17</sup> "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' <sup>18</sup> "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. <sup>19</sup> '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.'" <sup>20</sup> "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?' <sup>21</sup> "So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

It would be a very bad doctor who said to you, "You have a cough, stop coughing."

You might reply to him, "I know I have a cough I want to know what is causing it. I want you to find and treat the problem not just the symptom."

A good doctor will ask you about your symptoms. He may also examine you and test you to find more symptoms. Having considered all your symptoms, he arrives at a diagnosis of the underlying problem.

Remember that Luke himself was a physician. He knew this process and he often presents Jesus as the good physician. That is exactly what we have in our text today. Jesus examines and presents to us all the symptoms and arrives at the end of our text with the diagnosis.

"You are not rich towards God."

Unfortunately, especially with this parable before us today, people often focus on the symptoms and miss the real problem. The real problem of both the man who comes to Jesus and the man in the parable is that they are not "rich towards God."

Is it a sin to be rich? Is that what this man does wrong? God's word answers NO.

**Job 1:21 The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.**

That is a very popular idea these days that it is wrong and sinful for some people to have more and others to have less. Many think the government should take more and more from the rich and give it to the poor, that the government should be the equalizer.

You often hear people complain these days about how the divide between the rich and the poor is getting bigger and bigger. They seem to think it is self-evident that there is something inherently evil about some people having more. Many would even claim that this is Christian attitude, but it is not so. Jesus does not condemn the rich simply because they are rich.

This is in fact exactly the attitude of the man who comes to speak to Jesus. My brother has everything. I have nothing. Make him share it with me. Like many people today this man seems to think that Jesus' purpose is to make things even and fair on this earth. Jesus rejects this role.

Jesus responds with a question. Who made me an arbitrator? Another good way to translate the word is divider. Who made me one whose job it is to divide the resources of this earth? No that is not Jesus purpose it is not why he came.

So what is the sin? The fact that he stored his riches in a barn instead of using it to help the poor? The fact that he decides he doesn't have to work anymore? Is his sin laziness? The fact that he is going to "eat drink and be merry?" He shouldn't spend the rest of his life partying. People have tried to make all these things and more the central lesson of this parable.

But Jesus is clear, these are all symptoms, the true problem, the diagnosis comes at the end of our text. "He is not rich towards God."

Those who are not rich towards God have a big problem. They will find out when their life is over that they have nothing at all. All their earthly, wealth, friends, fame, power etc will disappear in a flash and they will stand before God's judgement with nothing to protect them from His wrath.

If one is wealthy, even if one is covetous, but has the riches of God that our ours through Christ Jesus, one will still lose all those earthly riches that you worked so hard to accumulate but robed in Christ's forgiveness will enter into life. As Paul reminds us in:

**Ephesians 2:7-8** <sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God,

Unlike earthly treasure the riches of Christ are not something we work for but are given to us freely. Whoever has Christ has life, even if they are also covetous and greedy.

Nevertheless, Jesus does warn against covetousness.

That parable of the rich man reminds us of the words of James:

**James 1:14-15** <sup>14</sup> But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

What happens to the rich man in the parable is that he allows his greed to grow to the point where it produces death.

Jesus talked about this in the parable of the Sower and the Seed. In the ground with weeds the weeds grew until they choked out any care or concern for God and for Christ.

This man is a hard worker. He manages his estate well. He saves for the future. He has a good retirement plan. These are all things that we would admire about him. These things in and of themselves are not necessarily a bad thing. But he allows the concern for and love of these things to become his focus so that he no longer cares about Christ or His word or the forgiveness Christ gives.

The weeds grow up and choke out all other concerns.

The solution is not to stop working and take a vow of poverty, nor to give away all that we have to the poor. The solution is the free riches that are given to us in Christ Jesus who forgives all our sins, who washes away all our iniquity. Jesus warns us to watch out for greed lest they overwhelm your faith but put your trust in the riches of Christ.

Let us then return to the question of the symptoms. What are we watching out for? How do we know the sin of greed or covetousness?

You know my whole life, from the time I was little, every summer my dad has told me to watch out for poison ivy and described or even showed my pictures of it. One would think by now I would know what poison ivy looks like. Yet almost every summer I must double check. I look up a picture on my phone just to be sure because there are a lot of plants that look similar.

We might think we know what the symptoms of greed are but Jesus calls us to double check?

The man who comes to Jesus might not seem greedy to us. He only wants what is rightfully his. He only wants what is fair. Isn't he right, shouldn't his brother divide the inheritance with him?

Yet Jesus recognizes this attitude as a symptom of greed.

It's not fair. Why should he get more? I deserve this or I deserve that. All these words are symptoms of greed. I need, I want, I deserve, it would be fair if. If we hear ourselves saying words like this we need to stop and think about what is important. What is important is the riches that are ours in Christ Jesus.

Paul reminds timothy:

**1 Timothy 6:6-7 <sup>6</sup> Now godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out.**

The attitude of the man in the text is not one of contentment but one of trying to get what he thinks belongs to him.

What about the rich man in the parable? What symptoms do we see there? Notice how many times he says I. Notice how many times he says my or mine. This man sounds like the seagulls from *Finding Nemo*, "mine, mine, mine, mine." This is another symptom of greed. This desire to claim and protect what is mine.

There is nothing wrong with working hard and saving up for retirement, but that singular focus on this is mine and I have to make sure that I protect it is certainly a sign of a greedy heart. It is not having riches that is the problem but that desire to grasp and hold them tight and make sure no one else gets what ought to be mine.

Rather Paul reminds us that we ought to have the attitude of Christ Jesus:

**Philippians 2:6-7 <sup>NAS</sup> 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant,**

Rather than grasping the things of this world, grasp or take hold of the riches that Christ brings to us.

The attitude of the world is the attitude of the rich man, “let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.” They have nothing else than this earthly life and these earthly riches, therefore they grasp and hold on to them, and whine and complain when someone has more than they do. But we know that Jesus died for our sins. We have the riches of Christ and the glory of His resurrection. Let us take hold of Christ and all the grace that He gives us freely. Grasping firmly those riches we don’t need to worry so much about the riches of this earth. And when we have been covetous and greedy, we know that we are forgiven through His blood, so that we are rich towards God through Jesus. Amen