



Westminster
Presbyterian Church
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

**The Rich Fool
Luke 12:13-34**

I don't know if I need to apologize up front, but today is that dreadful day when the preacher has prepared the Stewardship Sermon. I cringe at the number of times I have heard someone say, "Well, I don't go to that church, because every single time I show up the preacher preaches about money."

Well, let me say up front that though stewardship has to do with money, it has much more to do with our relation with Jesus Christ. It has everything in the world to do with what it means to be a Christian. Stewardship is about gratitude. It is about commitment. It is about faith. Actually, it is particularly about faith, for it is the belief that God has made us stewards of his gifts, making us responsible for how we are going to manage, for God's glory, what God has graciously given.

Within our Reformed Tradition, or our Calvinism, or for that matter, for you former Methodists, Lutherans, Catholics and whatever background you have, it is basic to our faith that all the good gifts we have come from God. Our houses, our cars, our jobs, our bank accounts, our families, friends, the gift of the Earth, even our lives do not belong to us, but to God, and we are made stewards of these wonderful gifts, to use them for God's glory

As you can imagine, as a pastor, I have been asked, "Well preacher, how much should I give to the church?" They know that I will say something about tithing, which only ends up with the asker of the question feeling guilty for not giving that much, or the person quitting, when asked about why they quit the church they will say those very mortal words, "Well, at that church all they want is my money."

Well, the church does not want your money, nor does it need your money. What is important is what does our Lord Jesus expect of us? Simply this – faithfulness, that is too understand, that all we have is God's gift to be used by us for God's glory. To focus on self, though it may make life comfortable and secure, is a poor way to live. To focus on Jesus, though it may take faith and force us to move outside our comfort zone, is the rich way to live. What did Jesus say? **"What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and forfeit their soul?"**

When Jesus preached, people understood that he spoke words of life; therefore, it seemed that the entire countryside came out to hear his words.

I remember when we lived in Mt. Pleasant and the high school football team was in the state playoffs. They had a game in Dallas, and someone put a sign out on Interstate 30 that read, "The last one out of town please turn out the lights." On this occasion people heard that Jesus was about to speak, and someone must have put a sign on the road leading out to where Jesus was, "The last one out of town please turn off the lights."

Luke tells us there were many thousands gathered, so many they were trampling on one another. Then Jesus began to teach his disciples. Basically, it was a stewardship sermon, that is, a sermon about commitment.

Now it is hard for me to believe it is possible for someone in the congregation to come to church and not listen to the sermon. Actually, I once heard that preaching is the fine art of talking in someone else's sleep. It is an occupational hazard. Remember the story of the young man who fell asleep when Paul was preaching, and when his head drooped, he fell out of a window. Have you ever heard someone snore during a sermon? Well, it happens.

There seems to be an individual in the crowd who was listening to Jesus, but he was so concerned about a family squabble that he interrupted Jesus. In the middle of the sermon, he walked up to Jesus, elbowing his way through the crowd, and here we come to our text for today, Luke 12:13-21:

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Have you ever witnessed the problem that can be caused when siblings are dividing up their parents' estate? It can be ugly, or it can be a time to build deeper relationships with your family and with Jesus. My father gave his children a great example. His family was so close and cared so deeply for each other that when my grandfather died, my father and his brothers and his sister argued about who would get the family farmhouse. No one said, “Well, I think I should get the house, and if I don't get it, I'm calling a lawyer. But they said, “You should get the house.” It seems that not the house nor the value of the house was important. What was important was the love they had for one another and the respect and love they had for their parents.

In the middle of Jesus' sermon, a man broke through the crowd and demanded, **“Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”**

There he was, standing in the presence of the God of heaven, and his mind was fixed on gold. Jesus said to him, **“Man, who has made me a judge or a divider over you?”** Jesus was saying, “You have stood here and missed it. You somehow think that I have come to settle the disputes between two warring brothers.” And the reality of the situation was that if this young man could take his focus off his covetous heart and learn the lesson Jesus was teaching, his problem would have been solved.

Jesus then turned to the crowd and said, **“Beware of covetousness, for a man’s life does not consist of the things he possesses.”** As we enter the crazy shopping season that precedes Christmas, I would love to see that verse plastered on shopping mall billboards, **“Beware of covetousness for a person’s life does not consist of the things he possesses.”**

Haddon Robinson wrote, “We don’t take covetousness very seriously. We somehow think God had nine good, solid commandments, but he wanted to round out the list and make it an even ten, so he threw covetousness in at the end of the Ten Commandments.” We don’t take the Tenth commandment seriously even when we are celebrating God’s gift of Christmas. Yet covetousness has led to much of the suffering we see in the world today.

In our culture, there is one message that comes to us in 10,000 seductive voices that says, “Grab whatever your eye desires.” You can see it on five hundred billboards as you drive to Houston. It is the message that life does consist of your possessions. You cannot get away from the message, and we have all fallen prey to it. We are like the donkey that has the carrot extended before it on a stick. The donkey sees the carrot and wants it, so the donkey moves toward it, but the carrot moves too. The carrot is always there, promising to fill the appetite. But what it promises it does not deliver.

To stress his point, Jesus told a story about a man who had made his money in agriculture. He was a wealthy farmer. The people of his day thought he was a huge success, for like us, they believed the measure of a person was the size of his house, the model of his car, and the number and size of his barns.

Now, don’t misunderstand--to be rich in and of itself is not evil. Some of the great saints were men and women of great means. Abraham and Sarah were considered by the standard of their day as very wealthy. Job was a righteous man, and a man who not only lost a fortune, but regained one. King David was a very wealthy man. Joseph of Arimathea who provided the tomb for Jesus to be buried was described as a man of wealth. In the book of Acts there were many wealthy Christians who allowed churches to meet in their homes.

But for every verse in the Bible that tells us the benefits of wealth, there are ten that tell us of the dangers of wealth, so be on your guard, for money has a way of binding us to what is physical and temporal, and blinding us to what is spiritual and eternal.

Years ago there was a missionary in Africa by the name of Dan Crawford. He was returning from Africa to the United States one time, and to do so he was leaving the inner part of the continent to go out to the coast to catch his ship. So that he would not have to make the trip alone, four of the men to whom he had ministered walked with him. As they walked, Crawford told his friends about the glories of the coast. He told them about the light that did not have

flame, about wagons that did not have animals pull them, and about storing their food so that it would not spoil.

As he walked and talked, three of the men entered into the conversation. The fourth man, however, seemed strangely unimpressed. And after a few days, as they were sitting one evening, Crawford found it irritating that this one man did not seem at all excited about going to the city. He said to him, "Aren't you eager to get there? I mean, don't you want to see all wonderful inventions?" The man responded with a word that I wish could be put into the schoolbooks of our nation. He said, "Mr. Crawford, to be better off is not to be better."

So picture this rich, industrious, progressive farmer who seems to have everything going for him – until one night he noticed some chest pains. You can imagine him sitting at his desk, burning the midnight oil with the town architect. On the desk are blueprints, and the farmer says, "There was a time when I had the best farm in the community, but it grew into the best farm in the whole valley. Now I want the farm to be the envy of the entire country. Finally the architect says, "I'm tired and I have to get home and tuck my kids into bed. We can work on these plans tomorrow."

The farmer was too excited about the future possibilities, so he continued to make plans when there was a knock at the door. However, before he answered the door he felt a stronger tightness in his chest and sensed that whoever was at the door was already in the room. And the rich man said, "Who are you?"

"I'm Death."

"Death? What do you want?"

"I've come for you."

"No! There's been some mistake! I'm making plans for the future of my farm, and no one told me you were coming."

"Oh, yes, I've told you. I just don't think you were listening. I told you when I took that man down the street a few months ago. I told you when I took your partner a year ago. I told you every time you opened the newspaper and saw the obituary column. I told you every time you saw a cemetery. You have been told, you just were not listening – ten, nine, eight, seven . . ."

"Wait! Look, we can make a bargain. You can have half of everything I have collected. You can have half of my barns, half of my money, half my farm. Just let me live."

What do I have to do with that? Six, five, four . . ." "Wait, wait! You can have it all. It's yours, take it. Let me start over again! I can do it, but I am just not ready for you."

Death with a grin waved his hand, and the rich man was counted out of the picture.

It seems that this rich farmer had prepared for all the contingencies, but he ignored life's only inevitability. When his wife noticed her husband had not come to bed, she went looking for him and found him slumped over his plans for his new barns. The funeral was planned and thousands came and the preacher said that he was a model to the community. People talked about his success in the farming business, then they took him to the cemetery and over his grave

they put a large stone. On the stone were some wonderful words from the Bible, something from the poets, and a statement that he was a noble, successful, visionary, and progressive. Then the crowd went home.

That night the angel of God walked through the cemetery, and over all that people had engraved on that marvelous stone, and he wrote one word: FOOL. The farmer realized too late that you cannot take it with you. All your treasures in heaven are sent ahead of time, but this man had stored all his treasure on earth.

I know this sounds harsh. It is not the words of comfort and hope you come to church to hear, but we say we believe in Jesus, we trust his word, but do our actions reflect what we say we believe? Being a farmer, I am sure this man believed in God. For sure, it is hard to be a farmer and not believe in God, for God causes the seeds to grow, but he lived as though God did not exist.

Do you think the young man who came to Jesus demanding that Jesus tell his brother to divide the inheritance learned anything? Have we?

One preacher gave this bit of wisdom, "When you measure what you'll give your life to, don't measure it in the flesh of youth, the anticipation of your teens or twenties. Stand by the side of a grave, and then look back and ask, 'Is it worth your life to get what you are after? We amass things and we leave them all behind. Is that worth living for?'"

Jesus says, **"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself and is not rich toward God."**

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear, for life is more than food, and the body more than clothes." Don't make the acquisition of things the focus of your life. If you want to have life, then make Jesus the focus.

Jesus concluded this text saying, **"Don't set your heart on what you will eat or drink. For the pagan world runs after such things, and your Father knows you need them."**

We all have needs. There is tuition to pay, mortgages, utilities, the expense of clothes and food. We have children we must care for. Our Lord does not instruct us to forget about our responsibilities as citizens and providers, but he does tell us not to worry about them. Instead concentrate on what is most important, that is to **"Seek first the kingdom of God."**

Does the way we give our lives reflect our commitment to the Kingdom of God?