

A Parable on Living Without Life (Luke 12:13-21)

1. The Miser's Demand (v.13-15)

- As Jesus was teaching His disciples about the consequences of discipleship, which included public witness, the leaven of hypocrisy, and standing firm in the power and help of God despite opposition, someone in a crowd interrupted His teaching.
- Luke adds an indefinite pronoun, "someone." The unidentified man may have been a Pharisee or Scribe, as most times in the Gospel of Luke, those identifying Jesus as a "teacher" are consistent with such men. Typically, disciples refer to Jesus as Lord or Master.

What did this unidentified man demand?

- It appears at the surface that he wanted Jesus to arbitrate between him and his brother in a judicial matter: his inheritance (Num. 27:10-11; Deut. 21:17).
- This man comes to Jesus because he is a teacher (rabbi). Rabbis travel from village to village with their disciples. Residents often ask respected teachers about civil and judicial decisions not brought before the "courts."
- There is a tremendous irony about this man: he is demanding his inheritance as Jesus has been teaching His disciples the consequences of following Him, including loss of life and possessions (v.5-7, 11).
- We are unsure of the legal and family circumstances in play because Luke does not care to explain it.
 - Was he the younger? (Most likely). Was his brother with him? (Possibly).
 - There was family drama concerning the division of the deceased wealth.
- Jesus tells the man that He is not the judge and arbiter. He will not play the "middleman" between two selfish, self-indulgent, covetous men fighting over someone else's possessions. They want him to be like Moses, who settled disputes (Exodus 2:14).
- The issue with the man (and presumably his brother) is covetousness.
- The man uses "justice" as a mask for covetousness: he doesn't want to explain the situation to Jesus; he wants Jesus to rule in his favor.

Covetousness: uncontrolled idolatry of the "appetite" that posits itself in several "faces" within the flesh. It is a lust that manifests itself in many ways.

- It can be translated as "greed," an inordinate desire for someone else's wealth or possessions. It is idolatry (Matt. 6:24; Col. 3:1-4).
- In the NT, covetousness is a principled sin (10th commandment in the Torah).
- It comes from and engrosses the heart (Mk. 7:21; Ezek. 33:31; 2 Pet. 2:14), is idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5), is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:0), is never satisfied (Ecc. 5:10; Hab. 2:5), is vanity (Ecc. 4:8). It leads to adultery (Ex. 20:17), injustice, oppression, and domestic problems (Prov. 28:20; Mic. 2:2), foolish lusts (1 Tim. 6:9), a departure from the faith and misery (1 Tim. 6:10), lying (2 Kgs. 5:22-25), murder (Prov. 1:18-19), theft (Josh. 7:21).
- Covetousness must not even be named among the saints, as it is improper (Eph. 5:3-4).

2. The Miser's Dilemma (v.16-19)

- Jesus takes this opportunity to teach them (the disciples), along with this unidentified man, a parable concerning wealth, planning, and various kinds of "life."

The rich man, the bumper crop, business ventures, barns, and obsession with himself:

- The land of a rich man produced plentiful crops (v.16). The man was already rich and is now even more wealthy. This is called a "bumper" crop, which signifies a bountiful harvest.
- There is so much yield that the rich man, who already has barns, will tear down the old ones and build bigger new ones (v.18).
- He is exercising prudence and shrewdness in his business, as he may be strategic in his planning since the local market might be oversaturated (because it is tied to the weather).
- He must also build more barns for the "goods" accompanying his booming business (v.18).

*There is nothing sinful or unethical about business ventures, planning, and expansion. The issue is not wealth but calculated, presumptuous, God-rejecting self-centeredness and self-absorption.

In Greek, the parable has fifty-four words. Eighteen are first-person words like "I," "me," and "my":

- His inner dialogue verifies his self-absorption. This rich man is obsessed with acquiring stuff and storing it: "my crops, my barns, my goods, etc." Not only does the rich man want to plan for future business ventures, or perhaps his "401K," but he wants to spend the next several years "relaxing, eating, drinking, and being merry."

Where is God in this man's thoughts? He has no desire, concern, or interest in God or His ways.

3. The Miser's Drama (v.20-21):

- God calls the rich man in this parable a "fool." The "soul" of this man will be "required" of him. The "required" is a banking term: the man's life was a loan, God expected interest, and He is coming to take what belongs to Him: the man's life.
- There is a motif of "life" in the text. The NT uses three main Greek words for life. Two of the three are used in the text:
 - A. Psuche: the qualitative life (values and relationships constituting personhood), including the breath/soul (seat of affections, will, or desire).
 - B. Bios: the quantitative life (how one has lived and how many goods one has acquired) can be a tangible outworking of the *zoe*, but not necessarily (1 Tim. 2:2; 1 Jn. 3:17).
 - C. Zoe: The quintessential life (the life that is offered to mankind) is to follow God, commit one's life to Him, and have the ultimate revelation of that life in His Son, Jesus Christ (Jn. 6:38, 68; 8:12; 10:10; 14:6; 17:3). It is primarily relational: between man and God.

The "wordplay" of "life" in v. 15, 19-20:

- Jesus' initial words (v.15) can be translated: "Be on guard against all covetousness, for one's *zoe* cannot be improved, measured, or assessed in the accumulation of stuff."
- The inner dialogue this rich man has with himself can be translated as follows: "I will say to my *psuche*, 'Psuche, you have many goods...'" (v.19). God then says to him, "Fool, this night your *psuche* will be required of you, and what you have prepared (stuff), whose will they be?"

This man is a fool. He has false assumptions about what constitutes life and thinks his only purpose is to "collect" or "store" new stuff.

- He has a false estimation of time: he has assumed that he has "many years" (v.19), yet God terminated his life that very night (v.20).
- He has a false sense of purpose: "Take it easy" (v.19b) instead of being rich toward God (v.21).
- He has a false sense of control: "You have many good things" (v.19). God sobers him with a question: "Whose will they be?" (v.20).
- He has a false sense of value: he is focused on many good things (v.19) with no thought for his soul (v.20). He thought his possessions belonged to him, yet God showed him his life, and his possessions belonged to God.

What do we learn about the foolish rich man?

- A. He devoted his time, energy, and planning to a short-term and false estimate that he could attain *zoe* through an improper *psuche*. God will take away from him everything that constituted and resulted from his *psuche*. This man's possessions possessed him. Ultimately, the rich man's *psuche* has not, cannot, and will not usher in the *zoe* he labored to acquire and enjoy. His affections and desires are misplaced.
- B. He is foolish, not because of his wealth, but because of his attitude toward God. He imagined that things were equivalent to life in the substance or accumulation of the thing. This man was living (*psuche*) yet did not possess life (*zoe*).
- C. The one who is rich toward God is generous toward God and His kingdom. Instead of accumulating *bios* or *psuche*, he lives, breathes, and is animated in the *zoe*.