

"The Rich Fool"

Luke 12:13-21

Baxter Exum (#998)
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Introduction:

This morning I would invite you to turn with me to **Luke 12**, as we consider a request that has been made by one of our members—a request on the fact that we can die at any moment without warning, and that we should obey God sooner rather than later. What a positive request! Ultimately, that is where we are headed with this morning's lesson. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on **page 1624**. If we skim over the first few verses of **Luke 12**, we find that Jesus was teaching some very serious lessons. He taught about the sin of hypocrisy and the fact that those things we speak in private will one day be proclaimed from the housetops. He spoke of God's great love and concern for us and the fact that the hairs on our head are numbered—God loves us that much. He spoke concerning the sin against the Holy Spirit. And yet in the middle of these very important lessons, in the middle of these profound thoughts, someone interrupts the Lord with a demand that Jesus settle a dispute about an inheritance. If you have ever been in a family fight over an inheritance, then you know that it can get nasty in a hurry! A family feud over money is one of most intense fights that a family can ever have.

According to the Law of Moses, when a father died the oldest son was responsible for distributing the estate, and the oldest son was to receive twice the amount of any remaining younger sons. The purpose was to keep the land in the family and to continue the family name. But it appears here that something went wrong. We do not know exactly what happened, but we do know from history that the Jewish people would often take their disputes to a rabbi, and the rabbi would make a judgment. So here in the middle of this profound sermon, the man comes running up and interrupts with what (in his mind, at least) was a very urgent matter as he ordered Jesus to force his brother to divide the inheritance with him.

He was not really looking for advice, but he was looking for someone to stand on his side and to tell his brother what to do. He ordered Jesus to step in and make a decision. However, we are about to notice that Jesus did not fall into the trap. As He often did, Jesus answered the man's demand with a question, and so Jesus forced the man to think about what he was really asking. In response to the man's question, it is interesting that Jesus does not hand down a legal verdict (as the man was expecting), but Jesus answers with a parable. Jesus knew that this family fight over money was merely a symptom of a much deeper problem, and Jesus knew that the underlying problem would not be solved with a legal ruling. But instead, the only way to solve this particular problem was with a change of heart. **»PPT»**

If you will, please look with me at **Luke 12:13-21**...

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, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?"¹⁵ Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."¹⁶ And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive.¹⁷ And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?'¹⁸ Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear 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 many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry."²⁰ But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'²¹ So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

This morning, I would like for us to focus in on the fact that Jesus calls this man a fool. Here is a man who, by all earthly standards, was a great success. Here is a man with a good occupation. Here is a man who was planning for more success. Here is a man who did not waste his earnings as other people often do. He worked hard, saved his money, planned for the future, and retired—figuring he could live quite well for a long, long time—his life was an amazing success. And yet we find that he is described by the Lord as being a **"fool."** It is so interesting that our society tends to honor the type of person that God calls a fool. It has been suggested that this man would be a candidate for **"Farmer of the Year."** If there is such an award, this man would get it, and yet he is described by the Lord as being foolish.

As we think about this conflict, then, I would like for us to consider several reasons why such a successful person is labeled by God as being a **"fool."**

I. One of the first things we notice is that **IN PLANNING FOR HIMSELF, THE FOOLISH MAN FORGOT HIS NEIGHBORS. **▶▶PPT▶▶****

In **verse 16**, we notice the parable begins as Jesus tells us that, ***"The land of a rich man was very productive."*** In fact, it is interesting that this man's great prosperity had led to a problem. His great success and his great wealth had made his life more complicated, because as he looks over the piles of grain, he begins reasoning to himself, saying, ***"What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?"*** His great wealth had caused a complication. He did not want to lose his harvest, and so he decided that he would tear down his barns and build larger barns. How strange, though, that it apparently never crossed his mind to share part of the harvest with those neighbors who were less fortunate.

But instead, his first instinct was to ask, **"Where can I keep it? Where can I sock it away? Where can I keep it safe where other people can't get to it?"** In fact, it sounds like he was only thinking of himself—even to an extreme. If you have not done so already, I would encourage you to go through **verses 17, 18, and 19**, and underline all of the personal pronouns where this man refers to himself—how selfish! **"What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry."'"**

Did you notice...the only time he uses the words **"you"** and **"your"** he is speaking to himself! What a selfish man! Certainly there had to be poor people around, and yet in his selfish arrogance this man had forgotten the widows and the orphans and the poor. He had forgotten his neighbors and friends. He had forgotten the homeless, and the sick, and the lame, and the blind. He had forgotten the words of God in **Leviticus 19:18**, **"...you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD."** What a foolish man! He valued physical possessions more than people who were made in the image of God. The foolish man forgot his neighbors.

It is easy to see how foolish someone else is, but we need to let the story sink in a little bit. Are we ever foolish in the same way? It has been said that something in the reflection of gold and silver tends to blind us to the needs of others. It has also been said that God wants us to love people and use things, but that we often love things and use people. Sometimes our priorities get a little twisted. Several years ago, a farmer from Indiana ran an advertisement in the local paper, **"Local farmer wants to marry woman, thirty-five, with tractor. Send picture of tractor."** There was a man who needed to make a little adjustment! But in the same way, it is so tempting for us also to focus more on things than on people. Jesus, then, is making the point that this man's greed had blinded him to the needs of his neighbors. Because he was so focused on stuff, he forgot to share with those in need—a very foolish position.

II. As we go back to the parable, we also notice that IN CONSIDERING HIS GREAT WEALTH, THE RICH MAN WAS FOOLISH IN FORGETTING THE GIVER. **»PPT»**

In other words, the rich fool forgot to include God in his plans. In the Bible, a fool is not necessarily someone who lacks intelligence, but a fool is someone who refuses to acknowledge God. In the words of King David from **Psalms 14:1**, **"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'"** A foolish person, therefore, is someone who leaves God out of his plans—someone who lives without God in his life—that is a foolish person. And in the same way, the rich fool had been blessed tremendously, but he had refused to acknowledge God. He forgot to include God in his plans.

And once again, we notice that he referred to, **"My crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, and my soul."** In reality, though, all of that belonged to God. This man's

grain grew on God's earth, was watered by God's rain, and was warmed by God's sun. Every blade of grass on this man's land grew because of God. Every seed that germinated did so with God's permission. Not only that, but this man's barns were built with God's trees, on God's land, with wisdom and knowledge that came from God. The man himself was kept alive with God's air, and God's water, and God's food. Even this man's soul was a gift from God. God meant everything to this man, but he refused to admit it.

This man had now forgotten the most important commandment in all of Judaism, ***"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind"*** (**Matthew 22:37**). In his great wealth, though, this man had selfishly neglected to love and honor God and to include God in his plans. It is interesting that God predicted through Moses that financial success would tempt the people to fall away from God. In **Deuteronomy 8:11-14**, Moses said, ***"Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."***

We certainly remember Paul's words of encouragement to the young preacher Timothy in **1 Timothy 6:17-19**, where Paul said, ***"Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed."*** Like Moses, Paul, then, also reminds us that our blessings come from God. This is something that the rich man in **Luke 12** failed to do, and for that reason he is described by Jesus as being a ***"fool."***

III. As we look back at the parable, we come to the third (and what I believe is the most important) lesson here, and that is, IN PROVIDING FOR HIS BODY, THE FOOLISH MAN FORGOT HIS ETERNAL SOUL.

»PPT»

We notice that the rich man forgot that he could die at any moment. He thought that he had many years of life left to live. In **verse 19**, the rich man said to himself, ***"Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry."*** From all outward appearances, this man had it made. His barns were running over. He was all set to live for many years—but he did not realize how quickly life can come to an end. In **verse 20**, God said to him, ***"You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?" "Your soul is required of you."*** Literally, the word ***"required"*** refers to demanding something back. It refers to a loan that needs to be

repaid. Our souls, then, are on loan from God, and there is a day coming when payment for that loan will be **"required,"** when payment will be demanded.

We look at this man, and we say, **"Yeah, that was foolish."** But we may forget that some of us here this morning may not live to see tomorrow. Tomorrow morning (as a preacher), I could be meeting with a family. I could be preparing a funeral. And then again, there may be a preacher meeting with my family. Tomorrow morning, there may be a preacher preparing my funeral. And so as a man whose soul may be **"required"** at any moment, I must be prepared for that time to come.

I remember reading an article about a young paratrooper who was getting ready to make his very first jump. As he prepared to leave the plane, he asked his instructor, **"If the main chute fails, how long do I have to open the reserve?"** At which point the instructor answered by saying, **"The rest of your life."** In the same way, if someone asks me how long they have to obey the gospel, I would also say, **"The rest of your life."** Of course, we do not know how long that may be—but like the Rich Fool, it may be very, very brief. His soul was demanded **"that night."** He did not know it, his friends did not know it, but God knew it. And it is interesting that his soul was still in existence. The man's body was about to die, but his soul was called before God. He would leave his piles of grain behind, he would leave his blueprints for new barns on the table, but his soul would live on to face God in judgment.

This morning, then, we need to learn a lesson from the Rich Fool, and we need to be aware that our souls could also be demanded at any moment. Over the past few weeks, we have awakened on several mornings to find that various activities have been cancelled due to the weather. But there is a time coming when tomorrow itself will be cancelled for each of us. And like the Rich Fool in **Luke 12**, death may come for each of us when we least expect it.

We might be tempted to say, **"That is so sad—this guy dies just when everything was going his way—he leaves so much behind."** But that is not the point! The point is what is still coming. This man was about to die having forgotten his eternal soul. This man was facing an eternity without God.

Augustine once very wisely said, **"God has promised us forgiveness for our repentance, but God has not promised us a tomorrow in which to repent."** We may not know it, but it is possible that our tomorrow has already been cancelled. And if our tomorrow has been cancelled, think of it this way: Ten seconds after we die, who really cares how much grain we had in a brand new barn? Or, as Jesus put it at the end of **verse 20**, **"...now who will own what you have prepared?"** In other words, it does not matter!

But as it was, the Rich Fool made a terrible miscalculation. The Rich Fool made a horrible mistake. A lot of the mistakes we make in this life do not really matter. We may think we go another 40 miles after the gas gauge hits **"empty,"** and if we are wrong, who really cares. But when it comes to eternity, let's not miss it! Let us not be short-sighted like the Rich Fool. By waiting for **"just the right time,"** we can miss it. We can end up being lost forever.

As James said in **James 4**, our lives are like a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Like breathing outside on a cold day like this, our lives are like that vapor. And so (since life is so short) our conclusion needs to be the same as that of James in **James 4:17**, **"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin."** Every time we see our breath this week, let us remember the lesson from James and the lesson from the Rich Fool. Life is short; therefore, let us do the right thing while we still have the opportunity. To know the right thing to do and not to do it is **"sin."**

Conclusion:

This morning we have looked at a man who was described by Jesus as being a **"fool."**

- He was a fool because in planning for himself he forgot his neighbor—instead of sharing with the poor, he was consumed with stockpiling his wealth—he forgot to love his neighbor as himself.
- He was a fool because in considering his wealth, he forgot the Giver of everything—he forgot that God **"richly supplies us with all things to enjoy,"** he forgot to honor God, he forgot to include God in his plans.
- And most importantly, this man was a fool because in providing for his physical body he forgot to provide for his eternal soul—he forgot that his soul could be demanded at any moment.

This morning we need to realize that what happened to the rich man can also happen to each of us. Our lives will end, and it will be up to our families to sort through all that stuff that we at one time thought was so important. This morning, let's make sure that we are ready for that day to come. The truth is found in **2 Corinthians 5:10**, where the apostle Paul said, **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."**

This morning we have a unique opportunity to make things right with God. Perhaps there is something in your life that we need to pray about as a congregation. We would encourage you to write it down and bring it to the front as we sing the next song. Maybe you are having a difficult time spiritually—we can pray about that. Maybe you are struggling with some family situation—we can pray about that. Maybe you are wrestling with a secret sin—we can pray about that. Maybe you are just tired and worn out—we can pray about that. If you are a Christian and you are not yet ready to stand before the judgment seat of Christ—we can pray about that.

On the other hand, maybe you are not yet a Christian. The Bible teaches that Jesus gave up heaven, He was **"poured out"** in human form, He came to earth, and He died as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. The Bible teaches that we respond to that sacrifice with faithful, loving obedience. We reject sin, we turn our lives back toward God, and we allow ourselves to be immersed in water so that our sins can be washed away. If you have any questions, we would love to speak with you and study the

Scriptures—we can do it right after the service. But if you are ready to become a Christian right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org