

### **Know the Worth of Wealth!**

(Luke 12:13–21) <sup>13</sup> Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” <sup>14</sup> Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” <sup>15</sup> Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” <sup>16</sup> And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. <sup>17</sup> He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ <sup>18</sup> “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” <sup>20</sup> “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?’” <sup>21</sup> “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

In Christ Jesus, who became poor to make us rich, dear fellow redeemed,

I was 4 years old. My sister, Marsha, was 2. We were in church with our parents, sitting in our usual pew. The sermon was over. The ushers were making their way to the front with the offering plates. My dad gave my sister and me each a coin to serve as our gift to Jesus. That’s when it happened – the great offering meltdown. You see, the coin that my dad had given my sister was considerably larger than the one he had handed me, a fact I felt obligated to point out. My dad, a banker by profession, tried to give me a quick lesson in economics, explaining to me that the thin dime in my little hand was worth twice as much as my sister’s nickel, and besides, in just a few minutes we’d be giving both coins to Jesus. None of that mattered. I was convinced I was being cheated and that everyone in church should know it. So in the loudest, whiniest voice I could muster, I chose to make my great unhappiness a matter of public record. What happened next is a bit of a blur. I was off my feet and in dad’s arms within seconds. That lesson in economics was about to continue privately in the narthex. To this day, I don’t know if dad was more embarrassed by my tantrum or the fact that I didn’t know what a dime was worth.

Today our Heavenly Father has a lesson to teach us in what we might call biblical economics. Through his Holy Word he says to us followers of Jesus: Know the Worth of Wealth! 1) Material wealth, 2) Spiritual wealth.

The offering meltdown I described for you seconds ago was the result of my sinful inborn greed. I was sure that my sister had gotten more than me. Jealousy and greed are the stuff that sibling rivalries are made of. We see these forces at work in the Scripture before us.

A crowd had gathered to listen to Jesus when someone said to him, **“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” (Luke 12:13).** We’re not told if the man had a legitimate complaint and we’re not about to find out because Jesus replied: **“Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” (Luke 12:14).** As a rabbi, Jesus was recognized as an expert in the Law, but he had no calling and no desire to step in and serve as an official of the court. Jesus came to teach about the damning nature of our sin and to point to himself as Savior from the punishment we all deserve.

And so, the Teacher does what he came to do. He instructs his students then and now: **“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”** (Luke 12:15). To the man who wanted Jesus to intervene in the matter of his inheritance, our Savior issues a stern warning: “Don’t think the measure of your life has anything to do with the amount of money you have or don’t have.” Do you buy that? What Jesus is saying here goes against everything we are by nature and everything we learn from society around us. Ask someone what they’re worth, and if they’re willing to give you an answer, they’ll will most likely do so in dollars and cents, as they add up the value of their home and the investments they’ve made. In other words, we tend to equate the value of our lives with our material wealth. Such thinking fuels the greed that is part and parcel of our sinful nature.

But maybe you object to being called greedy. After all, you’ve watched greed play out in the lives of some terrible characters. Greedy people embezzle company funds or set up Ponzi schemes and other such scams. Greedy people rob banks. They play the lottery with money they don’t have. Greedy people are thieves and crooks. That’s all very true, but then again, the Teacher makes it clear that there are all kinds of greed. For example, consider the man in Jesus’ parable. He’s a rich farmer, who, by all indications, happens to be good at what he does. He works hard, plants seed, and his ground produces a good crop, making him even richer. Rather than let what he has go to waste or be stolen, he cares for and manages his wealth, building barns big enough to house his harvest. What’s wrong with any of that? Nothing in and of itself. But as the parable plays out, there are some strong indicators that something is wrong with this man’s heart. Can you spot these telltale signs?

First of all, the man lacks a grateful spirit, one which should give God both the credit and the thanks he’s due. Anyone who has ever planted anything knows that you can work as hard as you want, but that doesn’t mean the soil is going to produce. God must grant the harvest or there will not be one. This lack of gratitude goes hand in hand with the second warning sign. The man in the parable suffers from a terrible “I” disease. Look at all the times he uses the pronouns “I” and “my” in two short verses: ‘What shall **I** do? **I** have no place to store **my** crops.’<sup>18</sup> “Then he said, “This is what **I’ll** do. **I** will tear down **my** barns and build bigger ones, and there **I** will store all **my** grain and **my** goods.” (Luke 12:17-18). Here’s why there is no thanks to God. This man sees himself as the master of his fate and the captain of his soul. Which points to yet another sign that this man is in grave spiritual danger. In his greed he has stored up everything he’s ever worked for. He shares nothing. Why? Because he’s counting on the fruits of his past labor to provide his future security: **“I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”** (Luke 12:19).

This man’s greed has given way to the sin of idolatry. He finds the value and meaning of his life in the abundance of his possessions. He actually worships his wealth, trusting in it to furnish the security that only God can provide. That man was dead wrong. God told him so: **“You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”** (Luke 12:20).

In these words of God from Jesus’ parable, we find the worth of material wealth. Money and the things we can buy with it are great gifts from our loving God. Jesus doesn’t say one bad thing about material wealth. His warning is aimed at the thoughts and attitudes of sinful hearts. The purpose of his parable is to get us to examine ourselves and our ideas about money. Like the man in Jesus’ story, do we regard money as something we earn and deserve rather than acknowledging that all we make and have are gracious gifts from God? Do we hoard wealth, rather than sharing

it? Do we do this because we believe money is the only thing that can provide us with security now and in the years to come?

How foolish we are! I laugh at my 4-year-old self for not knowing the value of a dime. But here I am all these years later more foolish than ever. I don't know the real value of material wealth. I expect it to do things for me that only God can do. Money can't secure my future. It can't even guarantee that I will live to spend it. Most important of all, money can't do anything about my eternal fate. Jesus says in Matthew 16:26 **“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”** Money cannot pay my sin-debt or buy me a place in heaven. That's not what earthly wealth is for. But sadly, if I spend all my time chasing material wealth I will forfeit my soul. Not because such wealth is evil, but because my misspent time and misguided efforts will have kept me from focusing on the words and promises of the One who has saved me. As Jesus says: **“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”** (Luke 12:21).

The words “rich toward God” are key to understanding the blessings that Jesus intends for us. The word “toward” in Greek signals direction. A better translation might be “rich in in the direction of God” that is “rich in respect to God” or “rich in relationship with God.” In other words, it isn't that God is looking for us to throw some material wealth his way. No, he wants us to be heavily invested in the wealth he offers – spiritual wealth. In other words, rather than devoting our lives to storing up material wealth for ourselves, we want to spend our time and effort receiving the blessings God has for us in Christ, the same Jesus who **“...though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”** (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Real, lasting wealth comes only through Jesus who left the riches of heaven for this sin-ruined world. He came here to credit our spiritual bank account with all the holiness he produced with the perfect life of love he lived in our name. Through faith in Jesus the debt of our sin is canceled. We are forgiven everything, even for those times when we have worshiped our money and the stuff it buys rather than God who gives us all good things. How blessed we are! Our life does not consist of the abundance of our earthly possessions, but rather in the value God himself placed on us when God's own Son shed his holy blood to buy us back from sin's guilt and curse. Think of it! You are worth nothing less than the blood of Jesus, the rarest and most valuable substance in all the universe.

You are rich, spiritually rich in Christ Jesus. What does this spiritual wealth mean for your earthly life and future? Everything. Paul writes in Romans 8: **“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”** (Romans 8:32). Better than a billion dollars in the bank, you have God's promise that in the same love that sent you Jesus, he will supply you with all that you need for as long as you live in this world. He may do that through the material wealth he has allowed you to acquire, or he may do it in another way altogether, one which at this moment is unforeseen and totally unexpected. Know this: God will not forsake you -- not in this life or the one to come. For **“...in his great mercy [God] has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”** (1 Peter 1:3-5). The only inheritance that matters is the one our crucified and risen Savior has earned for you and me. He's keeping it for us in heaven, even as he's keeping us his own by faith until that day when we will be with him to enjoy the riches of his company and the wealth of his kingdom forever and ever. Amen.