

“Priorities”

Luke 12:13-21

Today’s Old Testament and Gospel readings contain some direct lessons warning us against misguided priorities involving the material gifts of God – all of those things that we can see, touch, or taste. Solomon’s entire purpose for writing Ecclesiastes was to lament over the wasted years of his life. The Lord had blessed him with wisdom beyond that of any other human, and in addition to having “the light on upstairs,” the Lord also richly blessed him with gold, silver, and all the so-called good things of life.

The book of I Kings records that in the days of Solomon, silver was as common as stones in Jerusalem. He was most likely the wealthiest man to ever live in regard to having the largest percentage of the world’s wealth at any one time.

But Solomon realized that all his hard work to expand his treasuries and his sphere of influence had not gotten him anything that truly mattered. It did not bring him closer to God. In fact, as you read Solomon’s history in I Kings, it seems that the more Solomon gained for himself, the farther he moved away from God. It is not until late in his life that Solomon repents of his ways and is drawn back to worshiping the Lord in the way he did in his youth.

What Solomon learned only late in life is the lesson that Jesus wants to teach all of His hearers before it is too late for them. Solomon was blessed with a long enough life to see the error of his ways – unlike the fool in Christ’s parable whose life was demanded of him before what he viewed as being the right time.

Greed, that is, the love of money, manifests itself in all kinds of forms and causes all kinds of problems. After all, it is the root of every kind of evil. The person who succumbs to the temptation of greed is trying to establish and measure his life by what he *has*. Such a person does not understand who he *is* in relation to God and others.¹

The center of the parable tells us of this foolish man’s decision concerning the abundance he has received. He does not understand that everything he has is a gift from God. He has more than he needs. But having the abundance isn’t the problem – having himself as the priority is the problem. He decides to tear down his old barns, build new ones, and retire to a life of ease. There is no talk of using God’s gifts to do good for his neighbors. There is no talk of returning thanks to God.

Why should He? He congratulates himself on the wisdom of *his* plan. He pronounces his present, and his future, to be secure and all laid out according to *his* plan. He consults with no one – not with God in prayer, not with family or community. He makes himself completely alone in his decision.

¹Just, 506.

The man said, "I'll say to my soul, 'Soul, you have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; relax; eat, drink, and be merry.'" He must speak to his own soul, because the man does not have anyone with whom to share his abundance. He can only tell himself to relax; eat, drink, and be merry. His greedy heart has sentenced him to celebrate alone.

But before he can rest in his self-pronounced security, the Giver of every good and perfect gift speaks to him. God comes as an uninvited guest and spoils the party. The fool did not recognize that the gifts he had received were from God. And he should not be surprised – but he is – that his very life is also a gift from God; but it is a gift that may be demanded back from him at any time.

The fool in the parable is the perfect example of what Christ was talking about when he said, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world yet lose his soul?" This is why he is a fool. His possessions actually possessed him during his life, and they are now meaningless when that life is demanded back by God. If only the fool had learned the lesson that King Solomon did before it was too late.

If only the world would learn, if only we would learn this lesson. It is such a beautiful thing to behold when you see a child of God recognize God as having His proper place in ranking of priority. But far too often, we look at the blessings we have received, and we act like the fool, pat ourselves on the back, and dream of ways we can relax; eat, drink, and be merry. And we forget that everything comes from God.

Solomon and the fool in the parable were in the wrong because they

had their priorities wrong concerning God's gifts. They ignored the gifts that will last forever like the gift of salvation; they ignored the gift of the promise of a Savior; they ignored the gift of God's Word. All of their attention, for a time, was placed on the temporary gifts that they could see, touch, and taste. They even ignored the blessing associated with material gifts. Their wealth left them empty and alone. Solomon had the wealth of the world, 700 wives, and 300 concubines, and when you read Ecclesiastes, it is clear he was empty and alone.

Having wealth was not the problem. Money is not the root of all evil – the love of money, Scripture says, “is the root of all kinds of evil.” It's when our priorities get out of balance that we find ourselves alone, empty, striving (chasing) after the wind.” Usually, when someone gets focused on and sets a high priority on the joys of life that we can see, touch, or taste; finding peace, finding joy, finding contentment becomes increasingly difficult because the lie you tell yourself is the I can have peace, joy, and contentment if I can just have a little more of what I see, touch, and taste.

It is all an illusion. It is all just chasing after the wind. Being rich toward God is far more important and beneficial than being rich on earth. Through Christ's death and resurrection, we have been ensured of receiving the richest of all rewards – the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. All of this temporary stuff will not last. As the Psalmist sang and the church has echoed for 3000 years: “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His mercy endures forever.” Amen.