

## A Tale of Two Kingdoms

### The Rich Fool

Luke 12:13-21

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#### Introduction

We've had a great year of sermon series—Lament, Heaven, Daniel. We thought we'd do something different in July, change of pace. We're going to be looking at 5 parables of Jesus. With vacation schedules, stand-alone sermons can be kind of nice. But they do all have a theme: The Kingdom of God. And as many messages as you can hear, the more you will understand what Jesus wanted us to know about His Kingdom. So if you're gone on vacation, still tune in to the stream. As some are right now. . .

Why parables? ~1/3 of Jesus' recorded teaching in the Bible is in the form of parables. Parables are made up stories to open a window into a spiritual truth. John MacArthur defines a parable as "an ingeniously simple word picture illuminating a profound spiritual lesson." (xxvi). It comes from two Greek words, *para* and *ballo*, meaning "alongside" and "throw", so literally means to place alongside. A parabola is a curve where one side precisely mirrors the other. So what a parable does is put a commonplace reality alongside a profound spiritual truth to help us understand the spiritual truth.

How do they work?

**1. They are mirrors.** Parables are an earthy teaching style, one that the Jews were familiar with. You remember how the prophet Nathan got David to realize the awfulness of his sin with Bathsheba? He told him a story about a poor man's little lamb. David was drawn into the story, condemned the rich man who slaughtered the poor man's lamb, and then was unable to avoid the personal implications when Nathan said, "You are the man!"

This is exactly what the American playwright, Arthur Miller, author of *Death of a Salesman*, meant when he said, "In every successful drama there is something which makes a person say, 'Hey, that's me!'" The story becomes a mirror in which self-recognition produces self-understanding. So to read parables properly is to see ourselves. And a good one will leave us with no way of escape! "Parables break through mere words and make us ask whether there has indeed been any real difference in our lives." (Boice) No one was better than Jesus at getting through pretense to reality.

Once Cromwell said to his troops, "We speak *things*." He meant he was not talking about abstract ideas but concrete realities. This is what Jews loved! Greeks loved arguments for the sake of argument, and they didn't really care whether it had any practical value or now. But the Jewish mind was intensely practical and wanted to know what difference these high falutin' ideas made and what action was required. Most of us are probably just like that; we tend to think in

pictures and have difficulty grasping abstract ideas. For instance, philosophers can argue all day about a definition of beauty or of goodness. But if we can point and say, “This is a beautiful woman or that is a good man,” then beauty and goodness become intelligible.

Barclay, “There are certain stories which are not so much the heritage of the scholar and the material of the theologian as the possession of every man; and such are the parables of Jesus. Even in an age when men know less and less of the Bible, and care less for it, it remains true that the stories Jesus told are the best known stories in the world.” (p. 9)

**2. They become windows into the heart and mind of God Himself.** (Inrig). A parable always points toward heaven. An earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus knew that we have trouble understanding spiritual truth because we are so grounded in this earth. And so He helps us by starting with something we do understand and by so doing enables a flash of light that allows us or even forces us to see things we had never seen. They move us, seamlessly, gently, irresistibly from the known to the unknown realms. Truth is learned in the unknown realm by what is familiar in the known realm. Each parable helps us understand one facet of spiritual truth, so we really need them all to get a full-orbed understanding of the Kingdom.

**3. They are also veils.** Parables aren’t always used to help people understand; for some people, they become even a further barrier to understanding. What do I mean? In Mt. 13, after Jesus had told the parable of the sower, His disciples asked Him in v. 10, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” We would have expected Him to say, so that they understand. But He seems to say just the opposite, v. 11, 13: “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given... This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear nor do they understand.” Jesus used parables to hide the truth!

Jesus spoke to mixed audiences, believers who wanted to learn and skeptics who wanted to criticize. In parables, Jesus doesn’t argue; He puts out a story and those with ears to hear will listen. But to others, who just want to defend themselves, who aren’t interested in changing, the story will be opaque, they won’t get the point. So for those with ears to hear, parables illustrate and clarify the truth; but they have precisely the opposite effect on those who oppose and reject Christ. The symbolism actually hides the truth. And yet the graphic imagery can keep the truth rooted in their memory so that, at some future point if their hearts soften, it can spring up and bring life.

So parables both hide the truth and reveal it. So as we start our study of parables, which are you going to be? There is gold here—if you want it. “Truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.” (Mt. 13:17) It was news from a different Kingdom, a far off place, and yet one that intersects mysteriously with our earthy life.

For example... Lucy and the Wardrobe, a different world, qualitatively different and better, and available to us now if we will walk through the wardrobe. Shall we do that?

### **The Setting, vv. 13-15:**

**v.13**, “Someone in the crowd said to Him. . .” **12:1**, thousands. Jesus was saying really important things about what it meant to follow Christ and this one dude is absolutely not paying attention, he has a one-track mind, he worms his way to the front of the crowd, and interrupts with his agenda.

“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Apparently the father had died and this man, no doubt the younger son, was eager to get all he could. Now Jewish law was clear: the firstborn got 2/3 and the rest of the sons got the remaining 1/3. So what his issue was is unclear; what is clear is that he wants more than he was about to get and he wants it now, so he appeals to Jesus, not to make a fair ruling but to help him get his stuff. Jesus was not amused.

Look at Jesus’ response, **v. 14**, “Man,” far from cordial, a harsh form of address. If there was a legitimate beef, there were courts and judges for these sorts of things; rabbis could interpret the law, but this wasn’t a matter of interpreting the clear law, it was a man trying to get more than was his right. As Barclay says, “He was a covetous creature who sought to inveigle Jesus into being an ally of his covetousness.” So Jesus declines to arbitrate, says who made me a judge over you? But He doesn’t leave the matter there. He has detected a lurking evil in this man’s soul and now He wants to expose it and in so doing teach a very important lesson to the whole crowd.

Take care and be on your guard. Two strong words, “guard” is the same word used in 2 Thes. 3:3, “He will guard you against the evil one.” There is an enemy out there and it wants to get inside our camp and so we must be vigilant, like a soldier on sentry duty, to ward off this evil at its every advance. But it doesn’t come in the front gate, it slips in at night, underground, in the air and in the water. Present imperative verb: constant vigilance is required.

What is it? Covetousness, or greed. Stems from a word meaning “hunger” and means: the consuming desire to have more. Insatiableness, avarice, wish to have more. Ps. 17:12, like a lion greedy (hungry) for its prey. Never have enough, always want more. The opposite of contentment.

Jesus is about to do some precise surgery here, so let’s differentiate. Covetousness is wanting things. Greed, practically a synonym for covetousness, is wanting more things. Envy is wanting what others have or more specifically not wanting them to have what they have. Jealousy is worrying that others will take what you have. Not getting into those more nuanced sins here, flat our greed, always wanting more. Do you know what we’re talking about?!

Notice he says, “all,” means every kind of. There are many kinds of greed. It is a slippery, slithery creature, it slides in unseen and undetected, under our radar screens, and coils itself around our hearts and chokes out the good and the lovely.

Do we need this, as American Christians? This weekend as we celebrate the founding of the greatest country not just in the world but arguably in the history of the world, it would be a good time to evaluate where our freedom and our prosperity has brought us.

1. There are 300,000 items in the average American home

2. The average size of the American home has nearly tripled in size over the past 50 years. And still, 1 out of every 10 Americans rent offsite storage in one of 50,000 storage facilities in the U.S.—the fastest growing segment of the commercial real estate industry over the past four decades. While 25% of people with two-car garages don't have room to park cars inside them and 32% only have room for one vehicle.
3. U.S. children make up 3.7% of children on the planet but have 47% of all toys and children's books.
4. While the average American throws away 65 pounds of clothing per year ([Huffington Post](#)).
5. Currently, the 12 percent of the world's population that lives in North America and Western Europe account for 60 percent of private consumption spending, while the one-third living in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa accounts for only 3.2 percent ([Worldwatch Institute](#)).
6. Americans donate 1.9% of their income to charitable causes ([NCCS/IRS](#)). While 6 billion people worldwide live on less than \$13,000/year ([National Geographic](#)).
7. Americans spend more on shoes, jewelry, and watches (\$100 billion) than on higher education ([Psychology Today](#)).
8. Shopping malls outnumber high schools. And 93% of teenage girls rank shopping as their favorite pastime ([Affluenza](#)). Women will spend more than eight years of their lives shopping ([The Daily Mail](#)).
9. Americans spend \$1.2 trillion annually on nonessential goods—in other words, items they do not need ([The Wall Street Journal](#)).
10. Over the course of our lifetime, we will spend a total of 3,680 hours or 153 days searching for misplaced items. The research found we lose up to nine items every day—or 198,743 in a lifetime. Phones, keys, sunglasses, and paperwork top the list ([The Daily Mail](#)).

We have invented a new disease, affluenza as "a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more." Where else would a teen who killed 4 people DUI have his attorney argue for lenience because it was on account of affluenza and now Ethan Couch has his own Wikipedia page?!

Becomingminimalist.com: The research is confirming our observation: we own too much stuff. And it is robbing us of life. What? Haven't I heard those words before? Oh, yeah, 2000 years ago, Jesus said the same thing, **v. 15**, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." That's what the world says, that's what makes sense to our flesh. He who has the most toys wins. No, Jesus says, life is more than that. There is another Kingdom.

## The story, vv. 16-20

But now after a one verse sermon, Jesus figures this guy is not getting it, he's not going to change just by me telling him that his life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions because he really believes that it does and that's why he's so concerned about his inheritance that he would push to the front of the line and interrupt my teaching. So it's time for a story, a parable, to help this man see, if he wants to, what his heart is really like. The flow of the story is pretty simple:

**1. He is an egotist**, vv. 16-18: a person who is excessively self-absorbed. The man was already rich, probably a good farmer, manager, v. 16, although even here there is an indication that his prosperity came ultimately from the Lord, "the land... produced..." But now look where his focus is. Ten times in vv. 17-19, the words me, myself, and I. He was the most important person in his world. In fact, he was the only person in his world; as far as he was concerned, no other world existed. One author, Rita Snowden, wrote of a self-centered lady: Edith lived in a little world, bounded on the N, S, E, and W by Edith. Diagram of universe. Calvin and Hobbes, "People are so self-centered. The world would be a better place if people would stop thinking about themselves and focus on others for a change. Hobbes, "Gee, I wonder who that might apply to?" Calvin, "Me, everyone should focus more on me!"

But it wasn't a bad plan was it, really? If you have more stuff, you really do need more barns to put it in. True—but in his little rich man world he betrayed that he didn't know something very important. The second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself, and here he has zero awareness let alone concern for his neighbor. His first love was for himself, his own comfort and enjoyment. It is all about him. An egotist.

**2. He is a hedonist**, v. 19: a person who believes that the pursuit of pleasure is the most important thing in life. Why does he want all this stuff? To relax, eat, drink, and be merry. He wants to use his money to make sure that for as long as he lives he has everything his body could possibly want. Perfectly captured in the lyrics of "Me, Myself, and I" by the rapper G-Eazy (coming to Klipsch July 14)

*Oh, it's just me, myself and I  
Solo ride until I die  
Cause I, got me for life (yeah)  
Oh I don't need a hand to hold*

*I just need space to do me  
Give the world what they're tryna see  
A Stella Maxwell right beside of me  
A Ferrari, I'm buyin' three  
A closet of Saint Laurent, get what I want when I want  
Cause this hunger is driving me, yeah  
I just need to be alone, I just need to be at home*

*Understand what I'm speaking on  
If time is money I need a loan  
But regardless I'll always keep keepin' on*

But what he had no way of knowing was how long that would be. We aren't told how old he was but probably not too old because he was planning for "many years" of uninterrupted pleasure. He forgot that even though he had plenty of stuff he didn't have plenty of time. Barclay's story of 3 apprentice devils, "I'll tell them there is no God," "I'll tell them there's no hell," "I'll tell them there's no hurry." Go! The rich fool planned for his future, to be sure—he just didn't plan far enough out!

**3. He is an atheist**, v. 20. Now how do we know that, it doesn't say that in the text? "Fool" is a strong word, in Ps. 14:1 it says, "The fool says in his heart there is no God." Whatever his philosophical bent might have been relating to the existence of God, the reality of his thought processes and his actions prove that he didn't really believe in God at all. He was living life not only apart from any concern for other people but apart from any awareness at all of God. He betrays his violation of the first and greatest commandment, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind. Which Jesus had just taught, by the way, two chapters earlier in 10:27. But he had probably missed that sermon while he was arguing with his brother. In the face of the arrival of the Kingdom, to be concerned with inheritance rights and goods is folly indeed.

And so God decides now is the time to show this man the other Kingdom because I'm going to finish his right now. He was given no time to amend his ways. This night your soul will be required of you, a commercial term used of a loan; the master can call it in at any time. And so he dies, that night, with dreams of big barns and lavish tables and bottomless glasses of wine. The man who thought he was set for the future will now have no future, or, as we will learn later in the month, a very nasty future. He thought he was master of his goods and of his soul—but he was neither.

The question asked of him is, now all this stuff, whose will it be? You've worked hard—for nothing! Eccl 2:18,19, "I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity." Poof, like a puff of smoke, he's gone—and now what will those groaning barns do for him? You see the other Kingdom, the next world, is of a very different quality from this one, and you can't take any of this stuff with you. The Spanish have a saying that shrouds don't come with pockets in them. Or for us, hearses don't come with trailer hitches on them. Our lives in this world are a mist, one day they will be gone, just like that.

The rich fool is not the only one in the Bible to be done in by greed. Achan in Josh. 7; Gehazi in 2 Kings 5; Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.

Why does Jesus warn so strongly against greed? Not because he's mean, but because He loves us!

Greed never satisfies. Jewish saying, “Whoso craveth wealth is like a man who drinks sea water. The more he drinks the more he increases his thirst and he ceases not to drink until he perishes.” When J.D. Rockefeller was asked how much money was enough said, “One dollar more.”

Remember what Jesus says about Himself and His Kingdom? To the Samaritan woman, drink this, thirsty again; Drink water I give never thirsty again! **GOSPEL!**

### **The summary, v. 21.**

Jesus now makes His point: this is what it will be like for everyone who is like this man. If you lay up treasure for yourself, God will one day call in the loan of your life and your breath and you will be done. Go on in your egotism, your hedonism, your atheism if you insist. But one day, and perhaps sooner than you anticipate, God will literally take your breath away, and then what will you have left?

What, rather, should the rich man have done? What should we? Be rich towards God. And it looks like at this point Jesus stops talking to the crowd, v. 22. He’s told His story, He’s made His point, and now He just lets it sit there. Rich toward God. . . If you had been as enough said, “One dollar more.”

If you had been there, what would you have asked next? If you don’t know, you haven’t been listening! The next question is, “So, how do I be rich towards God? And if I do that, how do I know I’ll have enough to live on?” He answers that in the next few verses—but we’re out of time ;)

In a nutshell, He says if you are one of God’s children then you don’t need to worry about crops and barns, about food and clothing, because your Father in heaven will take care of all that. That’s all lower, visible Kingdom stuff and you don’t need to overly concern yourself with that. What you need to do is focus on the other Kingdom, the things of God, v. 31. And if you do that, the visible Kingdom stuff, the things you do need to live here on earth, will be given to you.

The rich fool was a great farmer, a good businessman. Jesus didn’t condemn his possessions or how he got them. But He did say what He did with them was very foolish. He was invested in the wrong portfolio. Currency example, manat, Confederate money, the greyback. "SIX MONTHS AFTER THE RATIFICATION OF A TREATY OF PEACE BETWEEN THE CONFEDERATE STATES AND THE UNITED STATES", the "CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA "...WILL PAY TO BEARER ON DEMAND [amount of bill]"). What happened? Well, one kingdom won and the other collapsed.

It all depends whose Kingdom wins! Jesus was saying to the man in the crowd, don’t invest in the visible Kingdom like the rich fool, because that kingdom is going to collapse; one day it will be like confederate money, worthless. Material things are designed for this life, not the life to come. A millionaire’s accountant was asked how much his employer left behind: “Everything.”

Being rich towards God means putting your treasure in heaven, v. 33. Invest in His Kingdom, the invisible one—and it will last for all of eternity. David Gooding, “Heaven is hardly a reality to a man who is not prepared to invest hard cash in it and its interests; but by that same token, it becomes more of a reality to the man who is.” (p. 241)

And to help you do that, here's what you need to do: v. 33, sell your stuff, give to the poor. I need to just make a quick comment on that. I don't think Jesus means you should hand out cash to the homeless person on Michigan Ave or the slum dweller in Nairobi. Helping the poor in a sustainable way is a notoriously difficult task and is best done through your church or a responsible agency. But that's a different topic! Jesus' point here is: divest yourself of shares in the visible Kingdom and invest them instead in the invisible. Because that will provide a lasting return.

But it will do more than that, much more. It will keep your heart in the right place, on Jesus and His Kingdom, the only place you will find true joy and pleasure. It is more blessed to give than to receive, Jesus said. Because it reminds us that there is a different Kingdom than the one we see, there is a King, Jesus, who loves us and cares for everyone and He invites us through the wardrobe to live in His Kingdom, even while we live on this earth.

You see the problem with the riches of the visible Kingdom is not just that they don't last, it's that they deceive us into believing that the visible kingdom is the most important one. Greed leads a person to direct his aim at the wrong things in life and ignore what really matters to God.

Mt. 13:22, the parable of the soils, the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the life of the plant. Lk. 16:13, "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." When the Pharisees ridiculed Him, because, the text says, they loved money, Jesus replied "For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God." The love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10,11), because it draws our hearts away from the invisible, eternal Kingdom and makes us think all that really matters is what we can see and touch. That's why Heb. 13:5, "Keep your live free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

So what do we do with our stuff? It's dangerous, it's a trap. Best to give it away—and let our hearts follow.

## **Questions**

Do we save? Well, the Bible says 1 Tim. 5:8, "If anyone does not provide for his family he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." 1 Thess. 4:11,12, "Work with your hands, so . . . you may be dependent on no one." We are to work with our hands so that we may have something to share with others in need (Eph. 4:28). The only thing I could find in the Bible about saving money is "Don't!", Mt. 6:19, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven..." Where is the line between providing for your family and storing up treasures? Well, the Bible doesn't say! The details are between you and God. And they won't be the same for everyone. But you need to think seriously about this, look at your investment portfolio, open it up before the Lord, and see if you need to make some withdrawals from one and investments in the other.

Other ways to be rich towards God? Good deeds, 1 Tim. 6:18,19



## **Conclusion**

Do you think this is not that big a deal? If you think this is a small matter, look at Mark 7:20-22, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

1 Cor. 5:11,12, “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.”

Col. 3:5,6, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming.”

Eph. 5:3,5, “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. . .For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

Our wealth opens up choices for us that allow us to pursue our own interests in a variety of ways. But do we use our resources as tools of service for the benefit of others?

Have things become your god? Do you think more about your home, car, vacation, bank a/c, clothes, make-up, or investments than God?

Is generosity a habit? Or does compassion take a back seat to our personal desires? We are tempted to hoard our possessions because we live as if this life is all there is. You only go around once so grab for all the gusto you can get!

Real practical: 1040's; checkbook; delay or deny purchases so you can give money to the Lord through His church and His servants.