

Sermon: 31 July 2022

Luke 12: 13-31 -



Shrouds Don't Have Pockets

Summary: Lessons from the Parable of the Rich Fool

Prayer: Our Father, we thank you for your Word and for the eternal truths that guide us day by day. We thank you most of all for the living Word, Jesus Christ, and the sureness of his presence. Teach us how to turn unto you, so that your thoughts may be our thoughts, and your ways our ways. Amen.

Story: An atheist was sitting under a tree one day smugly thinking: "God, I know you don't exist but if you do exist you must be really stupid. Look at this huge oak tree. (Must be in front of St Hilda's!) It's got a little acorn on it. And look at this huge marrow carried by such a puny marrow plant. Now, if I had been you, I'd have created the oak tree to carry the marrow and the marrow plant to carry the acorn. While he was reflecting on his wisdom, suddenly an acorn fell and hit him on the head. Thank God that wasn't a marrow!" he exclaimed.

Yes, our thoughts are not God's thoughts.

So it is with the man in the Parable of the Rich Fool in this morning's Gospel reading.

Or should the parable be more appropriately entitled: Shrouds don't have pockets!

There are three elements to the story

1. The abundant crop.
2. The rich man's attitude
3. God's condemnation of that attitude.

Jesus called this rich man a fool not because he was rich but for the following reasons :

- I. He forgot about God.
- II. He forgot about others.
- III. He forgot death.
- IV. He forgot about judgement.

Conclusion: Don't base your life on your stuff because either you will leave your stuff or your stuff will leave you. Be sure that you own your money instead of your money owning you.

Lets look at those 3 elements to the story of the rich fool.

1. The abundant crop

This parable would have been quite shocking to the 1st Century Jew. Because he would have equated a good crop with God's blessing.

Wealth was seen as a gift from God.

We can see this idea - for example reflected in the book of Job. When Job has successfully gone through all the tests Satan put before him, and has stayed true to God - he is blessed with wealth. (see Job 42:10 onwards).

So when God in this parable says "You fool" – it must have really jarred the ears of Jesus' hearers.

What could the man have done to lose God's blessing.

I think the key is to be found in the rich man's attitude.

2. The rich man's attitude

In the parable, Jesus reveals the rich man's thinking. His motivation was purely selfish – he was out to have a good time. The Rich Fool says:

"You have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry".

The whole focus of his life was greed.

The man thinks he has many days of ease ahead of him, when God says to him:

"Fool. This very night your is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

A very sober question. It jars.

Shrouds don't have pockets.

Jesus says "he who lays up treasures for himself, and is not rich toward God".
v.21

Death is the one great leveller in our society. Rich and poor alike will die one day.

Psalm 49 16 (in the Message) puts it well:

“Be not afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases. For when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not go down after him. Though when he lives, he counts himself happy; and though a man gets praise when he does well for himself he will go to the generations of his fathers, who will never more see the light.”

Story: I thought about this parable of the Rich Fool when I was working on changing the investment manager for superannuation fund for the company I last worked for. I realised that you always needed funds for your retirement, but how much? How long will we be retired? Will we be going on overseas trips, will we need to move home, will we have to replace our car, will we need to go into care and pay for it and how long, and so on....

I remember the advice we were given by the representative of the investment company – you need to budget based on your guesses and invest what you can afford, but most important was that you do not worry about your investments. They might go down in the short term, but it is a long term view that you need to take.

In my parents’ days people always considered what would be left to help the family. I do not think that that is so important now days as families tend to try to look after themselves and with today’s inflation, who can guess at what is an adequate sum to leave to your family?

3. God’s condemnation of heat attitude

You might be tempted to think that this parable means that Jesus taught that wealth is evil. I don’t think it does.

Wealth – money is in itself neutral. There is nothing wrong with having wealth. We all store up things for a rainy day.

What is Jesus condemning then? He is condemning our attitude to what God has given us.

Jesus condemns those who are not rich in God’s sight. Those who live for themselves and not for God.

Our wealth is a gift from God and we are to use it wisely.

The Rich Fool in the parable had enough and wanted to hoard more - instead of sharing his good fortune with others. It is interesting to note that he did

nothing to improve his lifestyle let alone the lifestyle of those around him with his extra wealth.

It is clear that money – wealth - was his god.

Jesus said in Luke 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 Mammon.”

Paul said that it is “the love of money is the root of all evils” (1 Tim 6:10)

Note the love of money not money itself.

Story: The Great Evangelical Revival of the 18th and 19th Centuries was able to take root because of those who used their wealth to promote the Kingdom of God.

John Thornton, for example was one of the richest men in England. He prayed about how God would have him use his wealth and he responded to God - by sponsoring people to preach the Gospel. He used his wealth wisely.

4. Conclusion

I believe that the challenge of the parable is a challenge to review our attitudes.

How do we use the blessings God has given us – and I am not just thinking of wealth. It could be any of the abilities God has given us, like cooking, playing a musical instrument, being a handyman. Or even simply giving our time in visiting those who are in need.

The key to understanding Jesus’ point in today’s story is at the very end of the parable. After God tells the man, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” Jesus says, “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not ... rich toward God” (Luke 12:20-21).

Those last three words are the key: “rich toward God.” I don’t think Jesus is saying an abundance of possessions is in itself a bad thing. There were lots of rich people in the Bible who followed God with all their heart: Abraham in the Old Testament was extremely wealthy, and he is the Bible’s very definition of faith. Wealthy Joseph of Arimathea was a secret follower of Jesus, a member of the Jewish religious elite, and the one who funded Jesus’ burial before his

resurrection. Lydia was a successful businesswoman who helped Paul start the first church in Europe. And the list goes on and on.

Lots of modern day people have used their wealth to honour God in massive ways. Truett Cathy, founder of an American chicken sandwich food chain, and David Green, founder of an American arts & craft chain, close their stores on Sundays as a testament to their faith. Green has given away over a ½ billion dollars to charity. Others, such as Sam Walton (founder of Walmart), John Rockefeller, and Tyler Perry (American actor/producer), have used their businesses to honour God and to fund Christian endeavours.

So wealth doesn't necessarily corrupt you. But it did the fellow in today's story. He began living for himself only, and then his life was over. It seems like Jesus is warning us that if we're not careful, wealth can corrupt us, too. We can end up like this fellow making our life goal to take care of our possessions. Someone once said, "You possess your possessions and then your possessions possess you!" You think you own your stuff. But then you have to service it, clean it, repair it, mow it, wash it, and update it. And you discover that you don't own your stuff so much as your stuff owns you!

Do I see what God has given me as mine or as something God has entrusted to me.

God's blessings are like an egg in your hand – squeeze it tightly and you will have yolk all over you.

Let it lie gently in your hand.

Ask God how you should use it and respond to God's leading.

Then I believe, you will find yourself "rich before God too."

Amen