

Luke 12:13-21August 8, 2010 – 11th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Live Rich Toward God

✦ **Guarding against greed (vv.13-15)**

✦ **Treasuring your soul (vv.16-21)**

In the name of Jesus, who became poor to make us rich, dear fellow heirs of heaven:

So much of life today revolves around the “entitlement mentality.” Sometimes we try to sanctify it, but we’re infected too. We make assumptions about God’s goodness and how things ought to be.

For instance a teenage boy just got his driver’s permit, so he wants to talk to his dad about using the car. But Dad says, “Son, here’s the deal. In the next six weeks, you raise your grades from C’s to B’s. Show you can read your Bible regularly. And get a haircut. Then we can talk about using the car.”

Six weeks, and Dad is impressed. “Son, your grades are better than B’s. And you are reading your Bible more. But I’m a bit disappointed you’ve not cut your hair.”

“Dad, here’s the thing. I noticed in my Bible reading that Samson had long hair. John the Baptist had long hair, and so did Moses. There’s even good reason to believe Jesus had long hair.”

Without batting an eye, his dad replied, “Did you also notice that they walked everywhere?”

Do we make assumptions about our heavenly Father’s things? Just because our parents had a car, should we assume we will too? Just because we graduate, does someone owe us a job or a divine call? Today Jesus demolishes foolish assumptions and teaches us to **Live Rich Toward God** – first of all...

✦ **Guarding against greed (vv.13-15)**

If you ever want to find the cracks in a family, just dump in a huge pot of money. Everything can be going along swimmingly until a rich relative dies. Then come the squabbles. It happened that *someone in the crowd said to [Jesus], “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”*

Most religious leaders would jump at that. To control the estate might give “a little taste,” if you know what I mean. “Jesus, set this relative of mine straight. He should not be so greedy with my share!” Greed is like a relative’s portrait hanging on the wall. You get so used to it that you rarely stop to look. Inheritances can make you feel like a picture gallery of all our greedy relatives glaring from the walls. The more money, the meaner the glare. Maybe you wish Jesus would settle things, but then He says, *“Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”* Jesus refuses the job of executor.

And then He gets really personal. *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.”* Look closer at the nearest portrait, and it’s not your uncle Hank or his green eyed wife. It’s you! Now God just opened us up for a major heart transplant. *“All kinds of greed”* harden the arteries. How about those closets and dressers too full to find the one shirt or skirt you can wear at a time? In the land of “10,000 lakes” and three-car garages we still have no room for cars? Could reality TV for the *Obsessed* and *Hoarders* give any indication why our church and synod budgets sometimes lack support to spread God’s Word? Or why our schools have to keep deferring maintenance year after year? About the time you think you whipped your greed, someone in the family dies and your own heart proves the need for Jesus’ parable.

Our loving Lord Jesus understands all this very personally. Remember, in heaven He had everything the human heart desires: family, friends, fun, riches and happiness beyond passionate pleasure. But He left it all because of our greed and the need in every human heart to be freed from the shackles of selfishness and sin. Yes, *“you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”* (2 Corinthians 8:9 NIV) By faith in Him, **Live Rich Toward God – Guarding against greed, and...**

✦ Treasuring your soul (vv.16-21)

Did you wonder at first what could possibly be wrong with this? *“The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’”* Sounds like a good problem to have. But the Greek original hints that something is wrong. This man is not at all happy. You see, what’s translated as **“ground”** here, means more like *countryside*. His farm stretches as far as the eye can see with servants working for him. Then comes a bumper crop one season, and he’s upset. He’s like a spoiled stock broker frustrated which side of the limo to ride.

But, hey, this man did not grow high and mighty by indecision! He’s got a plan. Again, you might ask, “Anything wrong with this?” *“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.’”* I’ve known some very devout Christian farmers with big barns and silos. One even had his own grain elevator and seed company right on his farm. Anything wrong with that? Then Jesus turns up the volume inside the man’s brain: *“I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”* Does Christ and His religion have a problem with people enjoying themselves?

Without God, yes. It’s blasphemy to take the Creator’s gifts, then ignore the Creator as if you made the seed grow in the ground, or blazed the sunshine and gave the rain. Did you move the molecules and structure the DNA so fruit bears fruit and grain bears grain according to their kinds? Twin sins of presumption and pride harden our hearts to believe we can control our own economy or our lives.

Here’s God’s answer to pride and presumption: *“You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”* Whether in a barn or the stock market, the rich man thinks his pleasures are *tucked away* for as long as he pleases without thanks to God or care for his neighbor. Could an apnea mask insure another night of breathing when the Almighty Judge comes to call in his debt to God? Could healthcare reform prevent the loss of his soul in hell?

One of the most famous musicians of all time was Beatles’ star John Lennon. Did you hear what Lennon said in the August 12, 1966, issue of *TIME* magazine? “Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn’t argue about that. I’m right and I will be proved right. We’re more popular than Jesus now; I don’t know which will go first – rock ‘n’ roll or Christianity. Jesus was all right, but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It’s them twisting it that ruins it for me.” But which is gone, Lennon or Christianity. In 1980, my college graduation year, five bullets fired by a psychopath on the streets of New York City took down the famous rock star. Now he must deal with the One who said, *“Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”* (Romans 12:19) “Any man is a fool, regardless of his intelligence or accomplishments, if he fails to reckon with the God of the universe. It’s that simple.”¹

Our Lord of love and truth wants to bring this up close and personal: *“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”* The Christ of God came to save our souls from selfish desires and give us eternal riches. When *“He died for all,”* He died for you and me. *“And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”* (2 Corinthians 5:15 NIV)

How wonderful when God can bless as He desires. This is what an African American sister in Christ was telling us a in WELS Stewardship video years ago. She felt set free from materialism and greed by always giving God the first fruits. She gave God the credit for getting her there. Sins forgiven, heaven is our home – the Gospel powers love for God and for our neighbor. No entitlement or earthly inheritance can come close to what God has promised in heaven for body and soul. **Live Rich Toward God – Treasuring your soul, Guarding against greed**, for the best is yet to be. Amen.

¹ Dobson, Dr. James C., Ph.D. *FOCUS ON THE FAMILY* magazine, June 1994, p.5.

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