

“Rich Toward God!”—Luke 12:13-21

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is “Rich Toward God!”, is Luke 12:20-21 → *But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

“Who wants to be a millionaire?” “You too can be financially independent!” “Dakota Magic . . . the place where everyone is a winner!” Slogans like these try to promote the opportunity for you to become rich and have everything you’ve ever wanted in life. Even though money is very important in life for living and surviving, it is a very common misconception that being rich financially is the key to security, happiness, peace and joy.

Think about it: What would you be willing to do for a buck? Would you be willing to take on a job or promotion that you didn’t really enjoy because of a big pay raise? Do you get excited when you receive an unexpected amount of money in some way? Or when you know that a substantial amount of money is coming your way do you make plans for it before you even have it in your possession, whether those plans

involve spending it or investing it?

The answer to these questions will tell you a lot about your concept of money and its importance in your life—not just your living in relationship to the world around you but also in terms of your relationship with the LORD. That’s right . . . it can also say something about your relationship with God. This was the point Jesus was trying to get across in His teaching from our text. He took a financial situation placed before Him and brought it into a spiritual perspective for those listening. His question would not be “Do you want to be a millionaire?” but rather “Do you want to be rich toward God?”

Jesus was confronted by a man who tried to pull Him into a family squabble concerning the inheritance which he believed rightfully belonged to him. This is a very common problem today as well—children fighting over their parents’ possessions and money, sometimes even before their death. Jesus’ response was rather simple, basically stating that He wasn’t going to get involved in something so trivial as inheritance desires.

However, the problem was more than just an inheritance issue. It was the deeper problem of greed as His warning in Luke 12:15 states: *Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.* Coveting—the desire for something which does not rightly belong to you—is simply one more

form of idolatry. It is the act of desiring something so badly that the acquiring of it is more important than anything or anyone, including the LORD Himself.

In our text, Jesus did not respond by saying whether it's right or wrong to be rich. He recognized that our lives constantly involve possessions of one kind or another. His warning is directed toward a wrong tie with those possessions so that we end up **serv**ing them rather than **us**ing them as God's blessings for daily living in service to Him by serving our neighbor.

It's not so much being rich or poor, having much or little, that is important. Each of these situations in life present their own challenges in your relationship with life **and the LORD!** In Philippians 4:11-12, as Paul thanked the Philippian Christians for the financial support they had given him, he reminded them that He had *learned in whatever situation . . . to be content . . . In any and every circumstance*, he had learned the *secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need*.

Rather than being rich or poor, well fed or hungry, living in *plenty* or being in *need*, the issue has to do with being *content in any and every circumstance* with your focus on Jesus Christ. What is the *secret* to this contentment? Philippians 4:13 states that you *can do all things **through Christ** Who strengthens you*.

It is just as difficult to be content with lots of stuff as it is to be content with a little bit of stuff. Why? Because it really has nothing to do with your stuff. Rather, it has to do with your attitude, your devotion, your heart. God says in 1 Timothy 6:6-10 that *there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*

In our text Jesus is saying that there is a real **spiritual** and **eternal** danger for us of trusting in possessions and money for security, peace, happiness and contentment. This was the focus of the parable about the rich man who thought he was set for life with his wealth.

However, this man acted as if God didn't have anything to do with his life, including his blessings. When his time of death came he was in desperate trouble in two ways. From an earthly perspective, the acquiring of all his stuff would mean nothing in the end and someone else would get it all. If this parable doesn't seem real to you then simply sit down and take a look at everything you own, that you've worked so hard to acquire and maintain, those things that mean so much to you.

Now ask yourself this question: “What would happen to all this stuff if I were to die today?” Does it put things into a different perspective?

The writer of Ecclesiastes lamented the idea of leaving all his stuff with someone else, stuff for which he had worked so hard. He gave his *heart up to despair over all the toil of his labors . . . because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it, . . . and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool in what he does with it* (cf. Ecclesiastes 2:18-23). From a human perspective it truly is a meaningless life when we’re focused so strongly on our possessions, only to find out they mean nothing in the end.

From a spiritual perspective the man in Jesus’ parable was in desperate trouble because he neglected his relationship with the LORD and thus he would go to hell. Instead, God wants us experience life to the full, a life which can be realized only by faith in Christ Jesus.

Real life is lived when you recognize that **all things**—possessions, money and even relationships—are given by God, are to be enjoyed and used to the glory of God and are dependent upon God. Then you realize that you are truly “rich” because of your relationship with Jesus Christ and not because of your earthly circumstances.

This is what Jesus meant when He talked about being *rich toward God*. It is focusing on His **grace** and **providence** in your daily life, being

“rich” in faith. 1 Timothy 4:4-5 says: *For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the Word of God and prayer.* It is so important for us to worship the Creator and not the created as Jesus’ warning in verse 21 of our text says: *So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.* If you serve the created you will lose everything in the end, most importantly your eternal salvation because it is a breaking of the first Commandment: *You shall have not other gods before Me.* (cf. Exodus 20:3)

Being *rich toward God* means that you receive all you have with gratitude as an undeserving sinner. You recognize that no matter how hard you’ve worked for something you are still not deserving of it and that it is a blessing **of grace** from God’s hand. Even the ability to do the work to get the things is dependent upon the LORD giving you that ability.

It also means that you **use** your possessions in a God-pleasing way in service to Him. 1 Timothy 6:17-19 instructs us *not to be haughty, nor to set our hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, Who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.* We are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share . . . so that we may take hold of that which is truly life. Notice God *richly provides us with everything to enjoy*—**not for hedonistic pleasure or security.** Notice also how being rich is described as doing *good, to be rich in good works,*

to be generous and ready to share. This definition of rich goes beyond worldly ideas and embraces being rich in terms of our faith relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Thus, being *rich toward God* also means focusing our lives primarily on the spiritual blessings we have received in Christ Jesus. It is a life in which every area is focused on God's grace for us sinners in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 8:9 puts it this way: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.* Jesus *became poor*—He gave up the glory of heaven to live the perfect life **for you**, die the perfect death for the forgiveness of your sins and rose again to bring you into the glory of heaven through faith in Him.

Being *rich toward God* also involves recognizing how poor you are in your sins, how needy you are for forgiveness and how Jesus is the only “treasure” that can meet your need. Focusing on Jesus Christ gives you a proper understanding of “rich”—**rich in grace, love, forgiveness and heavenly blessings!**

Is it time in your life to stop coveting in greed and envy, thinking that somehow all your problems would be solved and life would be fulfilled if you had more money? Do you need to get focused off of striving to keep up some kind of “standard of living” at the expense of your soul? Is there a need to “downsize” your life in some areas in order to meet

Jesus more through His Word, at His Supper in worship, in prayer and Christian fellowship?

Jesus has made it possible for you to have the greatest treasure in this world **and the next**. Bring your greed, envy, coveting and idolatry to Him in repentance and He will give you a new perspective on what it means to be “rich” in forgiveness. You will be rich in grace—forgiven completely of sin and freed under His Spirit’s power from satan’s hold on you. You will be rich in life—seeing every part of life as an opportunity to both enjoy what God has given you as well as use what He’s given you to serve Him and others. And on that day when *your soul is required of you*, you will have the riches of God’s grace in Jesus Christ to take you into eternal life! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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