

# Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA August 8, 2010

*Luke 12:13-21*

## Which riches Do You Seek?

1. *What would you do for money?*
2. *The Parable of the Rich Fool*
3. *The Spiritual Meaning*
4. *Christ's Solution*
5. *Our Response*

Hymns: 225 – 355 – 477 – 321(v.1,4)

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

<sup>13</sup>Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

<sup>14</sup>Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" <sup>15</sup>Then 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."

<sup>16</sup>And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. <sup>17</sup>He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

<sup>18</sup>"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. <sup>19</sup>And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."

<sup>20</sup>"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

<sup>21</sup>"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

"Meaningless, meaningless," says the Teacher, "Everything is meaningless!" What do you think? Do you agree with Solomon's words? Is everything just a "chasing after the wind?" I don't know. It doesn't seem like it is too difficult to find a conversation that has the economy as its focus. When will it recover? When will they be able to buy this and afford that? When will things be back to normal? It seems that "things" are still very meaningful to people. And so Jesus' question, given to us in the Gospel of Luke, still rings very true. "Which riches do we seek?" Do we seek the riches that the world offers or the riches that heaven offers?

As we look at the parable of the rich fool, it is important to know a little about the context of what is going on. Jesus was preaching to the people and he was telling them through a variety of examples that they did

not need to concern themselves with the matters of this world. This is the sermon where he talked about the birds and the lilies. As he is telling them this, a man comes to Jesus with a request concerning earthly matters. We read, "**Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.'**" The situation could not be set up better for Jesus. Here he is warning people of the dangers of the world and its cares and this man comes and gives Jesus the perfect starting point for an object lesson.

Jesus' answer to the man shows his real reason for being on this earth. This man came to Jesus seeking answers to his earthly problems. He wanted Jesus to use his wisdom and power to solve the problem that greed had created for him and his brother. But this was not what Jesus was there for. "**Jesus replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?'**" The Jews had a government set up to solve the problems that this man had. It was not why Jesus was on earth. Jesus did not come to judge these petty earthly problems, he came to teach and to save. The man did not see the reason that Jesus was there, he was blinded by his greed. Jesus used this as an opportunity to teach the man and the crowd a lesson about greed.

**"Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed;'"** Rather than solve the man's problems the way he wanted, Jesus gave him a different answer. It was an answer that the entire crowd, including the man, needed to hear. Greed was not something that only tempted that man. Every single person in that crowd was tempted by some kind of greed and Jesus' words were for them.

Jesus also states that "**a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.**" Possessions don't make the man, they are not what make or ruin life. Jesus then illustrated this lesson through his parable.

Jesus begins by introducing us to the rich man. "**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.'**" God had blessed this man with very fruitful fields. Year after year, they continued to produce for the man, so much so that he had no room for all his crops. Yet, even though the Lord was so gracious to him, we see the thoughts of the man and his selfish attitude shines through. Every pronoun he uses is in reference to himself. He thought he was responsible for all this good that had come in his life. There was no time to thank God. The main concern was how to make sure he could keep these things for himself.

But, the man was able to come up with a solution to his "problem". "**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.'**" Again, by himself, the man is able to come up with an answer. The things that he currently owns, probably nice by the world's standards, are no longer good enough for this man. He craves bigger and better things and he gets them.

The man has found the riches that offer him a paradise on earth. This great harvest was his ticket to the good life. "**I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good**

**things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.**" This man has set himself up to live however he wants, the goal for most people on earth. His new life motto is the same as Solomon spoke in Ecclesiastes 8, **"So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry."** This easy living is the only thing a man concerned with earthly things can strive for. He has it all in terms of the riches the world offers.

However, God points out a flaw in the man's thinking. **"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'"** This is the first time God enters the parable. The rich man had given him no thought, but God has always been there, watching the man act in his "me-first attitude." God calls out to the man, "Fool!" The word that Jesus uses here in his parable is an Old Testament word for a man who lives his life without giving God any thought. The man has spent a considerable amount of time gathering his earthly riches, but instantly God is taking it back. God had given these to the man. They were like a loan from a bank. Just as the banker can call in the loan and demand payment, God has demanded that the man give what was God's back to Him. All his selfish work on earth had done nothing for his eternal well-being.

And now as abruptly as this man's life ends, Jesus ends the parable. He moves away from the rich man and fastens his eyes on the crowd standing around him and says, **"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."** Those who allow greed to dominate the plans in their lives are in for a rude awakening. The riches the world offers have no answer to God's demands.

This was not just a warning for those people listening to Jesus that day. This is how it will be for us, also, if we allow ourselves to become overly focused on the things of this world. Even in a time when the money isn't as readily available as it once was, greed is still something that comes easy. It is so easy to forget to be thankful for the great "crops" that God continues to give us, both at home and in the church. Instead, we often turn our eyes away from the things we have and focus on what we don't have. As people who have grown accustomed to having so much, it can be difficult for us to adjust when God has made things different. Our temptation is to always long for more and more. This is no different from the rich man who said, "I need bigger and better barns."

The billionaire John D. Rockefeller was once asked, "How much is enough?" His answer, "Always one dollar more." It would be easy to laugh that comment off, but how often don't we carry that attitude in our own lives?

Even then, it is easy to shrug this want for better things off as a petty thing, like it is not a big deal. Of course, it is okay to want nicer things once in a while. But those wants can sometimes dominate our lives. God's reaction to the rich man tells us what will happen if we let this chase for "things" start to takeover our lives. Just as God called the man a fool and demanded his life from him, we also will someday stand before God. On that day, the

things of this world are going to mean nothing. The possessions we acquire, the good things we do, they don't supply the answer that God will be looking for.

And turning people's focus away from this world and what we can do towards that right answer is something that Jesus fought often. Even when it came to his work, people had their eyes focused on this world. People were always trying to make him an earthly figure. They thought he was there to rule as King of Israel. Jesus' preaching, then, sought to direct people's eyes to the real riches being offered through his work.

In that work, Christ showed the opposite of greed. He gave up the glory that he had in heaven to live as a humble servant. Christ was selfless. Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians, **"For 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 Cor. 8:9) These riches that Christ offers are not like the riches that the world offers. In the last few years, many people have seen just how fleeting earthly riches can be. Here one day, gone the next has been a hard hitting reality in people's lives. The assurance that retirement funds and stocks once offered is gone. But Christ offers full assurance of heavenly riches. He tells us, **"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."** (John 14:2) Christ promises that because he gave up everything for us, we will have everything in heaven. We will be with God and that is all we could ever need. Certainly, these are the riches that we want to seek.

With the focus of our lives turned towards those heavenly riches, the riches that God has given to all of us on this earth can be viewed and used in the proper way. Being rich toward God, as Jesus puts it, is no longer another bullet that falls somewhere on the list of bills, but a priority and a pleasure. We all have many blessings. And while some have more than others, we all have the opportunity to be good stewards and be rich toward God. Through our actions, we can show that we know what is most important. Remember how the rich fool only referred to himself and what he could do with his money. We can do the exact opposite and always think of what we can do for God and others. We are told that, **"Your attitude should be like that of Christ Jesus."** (Philip. 2:5) Christ's attitude and grace will make us want him to be our model for living as those who are being rich toward God in the use of whatever earthly riches God may give to us.

The riches the world offers fade and do not last. As Solomon said, they are meaningless when it comes to eternity. But not everything is meaningless as Solomon said. He was pointing us to the riches that heaven offers. Christ offers these riches to us freely by his grace. These are riches which shine bright and last forever. These are the treasures that we can have forever. May we continually seek after these heavenly riches as we live in this world.