

WEEK OF MAY 8, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Serve God by valuing the eternal things he values.**

UNIT: Luke (Part 2)

THEME: Jesus the Storyteller

LESSON TEXT: Luke 12:13-34

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Matthew 6:19-21, 24

STUDY

THE STORY OF THE POOR RICH MAN

BY MARK SCOTT

The title of the lesson is an oxymoron. How can a rich man be poor? Of course, we know there is more than one way to be poor. One way is through what I call “affluenza” . . . for the “flu” of material possessions can afflict rich or poor.

Jesus delivered the Luke 12 discourse to perhaps his largest crowd ever. Many thousands (myriads) had gathered to hear Jesus. The crowd was so large they were literally trampling one another (Luke 12:1). Jesus wove several themes into this discourse, not the least of which were the twin themes of riches and trusting God. The discourse had two interruptions. The second one was from Simon Peter (v. 41). But the first one was from a man who was at odds with his brother over the family inheritance.

Possessed by Possessions

Luke 12:13-21

Teaching in the ancient world involved much more dialogue than today. So, the unnamed *someone* in the text felt comfortable interrupting Jesus. Since funerals can sometimes bring out the worst in people, this *brother* pleaded for Jesus to solve a family squabble about an inheritance. The boy sounded similar to the famous prodigal of Luke 15:11-32.

At first pass, Jesus’ reply can be off-putting. He might not have wanted to jump into the middle of a family fight since he was in the middle of a sermon. Or maybe Jesus was teasing out the man’s response in order to teach him a lesson (since Jesus’ words will someday be the basis of all judgment—John 12:47-50).

Jesus read this man’s heart and knew he was in deep water. He urged him to *guard against greed*. We must conclude from Jesus’ answer that the man suffered from being greedy and was possessed by his possessions. Jesus went on to teach that life is not about who has the most toys—an upside-down teaching both then and now.

This teaching is referred to as the parable of the rich fool. The man was a farmer (as almost everyone was in Jesus’ day). He had done well (sometimes God blesses rich unbelievers). His dilemma was he needed more storage space for his crops. This narcissist gave no regard for his community. He was wrapped up in a puny little universe called “me”; notice some form of that personal pronoun

occurs 10 times in verses 17-19. He built larger barns to accommodate his crops, and then he sat back to watch the world go by.

This is one of the few parables where Jesus inserts “God” into a secular story. God called the man a *fool* (not an atheist but someone who has no moral compass). Death is a great wake-up call. If the man in the story had died that night, then who would own the barns full of grain? The parable has a tagline on it, “*This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.*” The man was a fool (and so, possibly, was the man who interrupted Jesus).

Perspectives with Possessions

Luke 12:22-34

After the interruption, and after telling the rich fool parable, Jesus took a tangent for several verses and taught his disciples about material possessions. The text contains imperatives, two illustrations (object lessons of sorts), and a heartfelt appeal.

Returning to themes exposed in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:19-34), Jesus shared some words about fretters. He said not to worry—about food and clothing. Those are real needs, and God promised to provide them for us. Two object lessons drove this home—i.e., ravens and lilies. The Middle Eastern raven was an ugly, small, and cheap bird. Arguing from the lesser to the greater, Jesus taught, “If God took care of the ravens, he will take care of you.” Worrying about such things only subtracts; it never adds to your life. Worry does not increase stature or supply more rest to the worrier.

The second object lesson is about lilies. God takes care of them to the extent they exceed Solomon’s glory. Lilies last only a short time in contrast to God’s people, who last for eternity. God knows that unbelievers are consumed with acquiring everyday needs. God wants his people to trust in him for those needs.

The text ends with a heartfelt appeal from God. Shifting from birds and flowers to sheep, Jesus wants his followers to depend on him as sheep rely on a shepherd. We can afford to be wildly generous (sell, give, and provide) because God will take care of our needs, and our generosity on earth shows that we have *treasure in heaven*. ■

DON'T BET YOUR LIFE ON IT

BY DAVID FAUST

Greed is a weed in the garden of the soul. Have you noticed how gambling companies, sports leagues, and media outlets have joined forces to promote sports betting? Over the last four years, U.S. dollars spent on sports betting have increased dramatically. The amount wagered by sports gamblers now exceeds a staggering \$7 billion per month.

Here's how Bloomberg.com described the trend in a December article called "The Sports Gambling Gold Rush Is Absolutely Off the Charts":

Legal sports betting in the U.S.—once confined to Nevada—has gone mainstream. Since the Supreme Court in 2018 ended federal bans on the industry's expansion, dozens of states have legalized it, and a multibillion-dollar betting boom is afoot. . . . As betting expands, the boundaries that once separated gambling from sports media and professional sports leagues are disappearing. Digital apps make sports betting possible on mobile devices, which gives it a foothold across America and threatens the business of brick-and-mortar casinos. And this is only the beginning; the industry is poised for explosive growth.

The authors noted,

The Puritans believed gambling was sinful. And for much of U.S. history, that cultural disdain prevailed. . . . But the expansion of state lotteries and legalized casino gambling over the past several decades, along with greater cultural permissiveness toward many activities once seen as vices, has made gambling ubiquitous today.

Big Barns, Small Faith

I'm a sports fan, but I'm alarmed by the swift expansion of sports betting. Gambling is addictive and it threatens the integrity of athletic competition. Small bets might seem like harmless fun, but can anyone seriously argue that the massive growth of the gambling industry is improving our society? Whenever we try to get something for nothing or rely on luck instead of the Lord, something is seriously wrong.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 cautions, "Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless." Jesus warned, "Watch out! Be on guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15). To illustrate his point, Jesus told a parable about a rich farmer who made three big mistakes:

1. *He overestimated his earning capacity.* He assumed that a huge harvest one year guaranteed big harvests every year, so he built bigger barns to contain the expected yields. But things don't always turn out as planned.

2. *He misaligned his priorities.* His goal? "Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." But there are more noble purposes to pursue.

3. *He overestimated his lifespan.* When he died that very night, his big plans would quickly fall apart. Someone quipped, "Americans seem to think death is optional."

Big barns don't matter if our faith is small.

Weed Out Greed

To avoid the mistakes made by the rich fool in Jesus' parable, here are three ways to counteract greed.

1. *Recognize it.* It's rare for anyone to confess the sin of greed. It's easier to see it in others than in ourselves. We secretly judge what our neighbors own and buy, while rationalizing our own indulgences. As with other sins, victory over greed requires sincere repentance and confession.

2. *Replace it with gratitude.* Instead of being greedy, let's be thankful for what we have.

3. *Redirect it toward generosity.* Instead of accumulating an endless stash of things for ourselves, let's make it our goal to "excel in this grace of giving" (2 Corinthians 8:7).

Personal Challenge: Ask the Lord to shine the searchlight of his Spirit on any bit of greediness in your heart. Decide that you will fight against greed, replace it with gratitude, and be generous with what God has provided instead of always striving for more. **L**

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did you receive mercy or care from others during the past week?
2. With whom did you share last week's lesson?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 12:13-34** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to paraphrase what happened in the passage, as if telling it to a 10-year-old.

3. What connection do you see between dividing an inheritance, building larger barns, ravens, and wildflowers?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - What do you learn from Jesus' initial response to the man who asked Jesus to intervene in an inheritance matter with his brother?
 - Recognizing that we all must "make a living," how do we strike a balance between earthly possessions and being rich toward God?
 - In the parable, what might the farmer have done with the bumper crop so as not to have been called "You fool!" by God?
 - Why are heavenly deposits a better investment than earthly deposits?
 - What happens when we "take control" of our lives vs. "releasing control" of our lives to God?
 - What special meaning do you read into Jesus referring to his disciples as "little flock" (v. 32)?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. Jesus gave several commands to obey in this passage:
 - "Do not worry about your life."
 - "Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink . . ."
 - "Seek his kingdom."
 - "Do not be afraid."
 - "Sell your possessions and give to the poor."

Choose one of these and share how you will seek to obey it this week.

8. With whom will you share this passage?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. If you were to worry about something this week, what would it be?
 - Let's follow Paul's good advice and "not be anxious about anything, but . . . by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present [our] requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

For Next Week: Read and reflect on Luke 12:35-48. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. **L**