

## **Being Rich Towards God...**

Luke 12:13–21

Dear Friends in Christ

It is said that a rich person is not the one who has lots, but the one who needs less. It is also said that being rich is not dictated by how much we have but what we do with what we have, and our Gospel reading for this morning Jesus teaches us to be “rich towards God”

Being rich is usually equated to financial and material abundance. And truth be told, we want to have it all, or at least to live comfortably, that’s the standard of the developed world. And that’s the aspiration of many in developing countries.

That standard focuses on the business of amassing wealth and seeking security in material possessions. The problem is that focusing on the material possessions for security and peace of mind, will eventually leave us naked, discontented, and dirt poor. And focusing on material possessions only will dwarf our God’s given potentials on this earth.

And a frantic effort to amass riches, will lead us to lose sight of the bigger picture, that which should matter most, that God is the provider of everything we have—both our physical and spiritual welfare. But if instead we focus on God, everything else in life, will fall into its proper place. The way God has planned it for us.

That’s the focus of the Gospel reading for this morning.

The reading begins: “Someone in the crowd said to [Jesus], “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” <sup>14</sup> But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” <sup>16</sup> And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully...”

Notice what Jesus says, he is not saying that we shouldn’t have possessions or the abundance of it. V 15 says: “for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

That's not a declaration against having. Jesus is not prohibiting having an abundance of possessions, nor is it sinful. But what we do with what we have makes the difference. That's what the story of the rich man is teaching us. "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'" (vv 16–20).

So, what are we to do when our field—whatever our field may be—yields a rich harvest? Should we abandon the harvest, thinking that that would please God? Well, by no means, the fact is that even if someone were to abandon all his possessions that alone would not satisfy Jesus' demands. Should we feel bad then when we keep those rich harvests? No, that's not what the Gospel is saying either.

On the contrary, I think Jesus is helping us to appreciate what we have because it does require investment of resources and hard work to get a successful harvest.

Just as a good farmers do, for farmers to be successful they must acquire and use of possibly expensive modern machinery, fertilizer, transport, and storage. Lots of work and time is needed to keep such a business going. Just to sit back and let nature do its thing once the seed has been sown will simply not guarantee, humanly speaking, a good crop. And it's a proper Christian thing for us to thank all those involved in bringing food to our table by producing a surplus of crops beyond what the farmer needs for himself. The same applies to other sectors of the economy, where individuals work hard to make a good living for themselves and others.

And more, to say, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (v 15) also does not reject the replacing of small barns for bigger ones to hold and store a rich and abundant harvest. To meet the needs of the population in this country and around the world, grain storage, cooling or drying rooms, and larger transportation are required. This reminds of Joseph, who in his time in Egypt took a similar approach to avoid the lean years ahead (Gen 41:32–36). The rich fool in the parable acted similarly, and it would be unimaginable for a country not to manage and

plan its economy in such a way that it can meet the potential strains of future times. Even in the Lord's Prayer we pray that there will be food: "Give us our daily bread" as a sign of dependence on God but also of good planning.

Now, if that is the case, if Jesus is not against looking forward to an abundance of harvest, why is calling the rich man of our text, a "fool"? it is a matter of focus you see. That man was a fool because he was living in a false security. He is not called a fool because he planned, and he seems to be a very avid planner, tearing down his barns and build bigger ones. His road to success and wealth must be attributed to his shrewdness and willingness to act fast. A visionary if you wish.

The reason he was fool, is because he left out of his planning, something, someone very important. This rich man left out of his planning, the very One from whom he receives his life and to whom it belongs. He left out God's plan for his life, he planned his life solely on the economical, on the crops he stored (v 19). He forgot to include the one who has power over the very life he was trying to preserve. So he hears: "This night your soul is required of you" (v 20).

No life insurance of any kind, including bigger grain bins; not even a good health insurance policy and preventive care, and no sound political economical plan of his government, could have made a difference. At this point, this rich man's life is in the hands of God.

Yet he is focused on this: "Soul," he tells himself "you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." "Relax and be merry!" Isn't that the activities of many in our society today, and it is also the dreams of many others!

But in that expression, we find a deep expression of selfishness. His plans, his thoughts related solely of himself. He is not thinking in anybody else but his material possession and himself. There is nobody else expressed in that statement. There is no God either, the One who gives it all to him as a gift.

Now, does he officially reject God or deny his existence? We don't know that. At least he is not doing it openly. But in this story, we see how easily and quickly God can be left out of the picture. That we are not to think and plan our lives, the length of it or even the quality of it, based only and solely on material terms. We must recognize that

behind all possessions is a loving God who is dearly concerned about his creation and provides and cares for it.

The rich man is a fool because he does not see life as a gift from God, and he is not concerned with the afterlife, either. For him to see that all his hard work results in eating, drinking, and being merry, is what the wise Solomon calls vanity. Outside of God, all is vanity, a chasing after the wind. And more than vanity, it is tragic.

This tragedy Jesus says is because the rich man laid “up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (v 21).

The true purpose of life then, is to be “rich toward God.” But what does that mean, to be rich toward God? For starters, it could mean that we should rid ourselves of all of our possessions by selling them and giving what we made to the poor (12:33). The first Christians did it, that’s what the Book of Acts teaches us. That the early Christian Church followed that plan voluntarily without forcing it on anyone and any other community. And it seems that on occasions, Jesus obliged others to do so as well, as in the example of the rich young man who went away sad (Lk 18:22), and also Jesus’ own disciples (14:33; 16:9; 18:28–30). That’s because wealth can come between God and us humans. Wealth can be a wall that separates us from God. As Luther puts it, “Whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god” (LC I 3).

Being rich towards God also implies that we should not cling to our belongings and display all kinds of greed (v 15) that we forget who we are and what’s our purpose here in this world.

And being rich towards God, means among other things that we use those resources God has given us to help in the betterment of our neighbors and, of course use them in the service to God. Being rich toward God is to open one’s heart to God and let him lead our lives, our ways, our future. And it also means that we take the neighbor seriously, so much so that we work toward helping those who are in need, here in our community, our nation and the world.

It's interesting to see that many Christians in developing countries, are happier than in developed countries. While the South—South America, Africa, much of Asia—is spiritually alive, it is materially poor. But while the North—Europe and North America—

is wealthy in material terms, it's becoming more and more spirituality poor, dirt poor. It's not good to think only about oneself and one's destiny that we fail to connect it to the neighbor and to God.

So that when the time of death comes, for dying we shall, then riches will welcome us in heaven, that is what it means being rich toward God.

No riches and material possession prevented the rich man from God letting him know that his time was up. Unfortunately, only then, after he planned his life apart from God, he now realizes that God exists behind all the material possessions he has. But now he stands alone and naked before God!

Then what? Know that for those denying and rejecting God now, will be rejected by him. But those who trust in Christ, we will recognize that there is one who "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). Became poor, stripped naked, on a cross, that we would be rich in much more than earthly possessions. By Jesus' death you have the eternal riches of heaven.

We do not live by bread alone. To be rich toward God means that we are aware of our dependency on God in all the areas of life and that we cannot live an autonomous life apart from him. Being rich toward God means we recognize God as the provider of all our possessions and all our needs. Rich in God means to turn to him in times of wealth and need, especially in our salvation. To be rich in God is to know that in him we find mercy through the death and resurrection of his Son. To think that one does not need God is to be poor in God, poor in life, and dirt poor in the spirit.

So, for those who are in Christ, instead of us speaking of themselves, no matter their stage in life, a rich man—any man, any woman, any child—in whatever field we find ourselves in, we hear, we reflect and give thanks to God, because he is the one who provides all! For now, we say thank you!

For now, we pray "I thank you, my heavenly Father, that you have kept me this day, and I thank you for what I have received daily from you, through which you keep and preserve my life. Teach me to keep my heart on you, that I may thank and worship you daily, in Jesus name. Amen.