

How Much Is Enough? The Rich Fool

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Jesus and the Rich Man Series (Part Two)

If the first lesson in this series, The Love of Money, gave some men heartburn, this one will undoubtedly lead to acid reflux! The story Jesus tells in Luke 12 is (in my opinion) the most troubling of all His discourses on *a man and his money*. Most Bibles head it – *The Rich Fool* – for good reason.

Before we go there, the Spirit led me to write the following, not as a disclaimer, but a word of truth about “riches used right”. Being rich is not a sin. There are wealthy Christian men (need more) who love the Lord first and best. Their giving and philanthropy absolutely reflect that. **They see giving as a “get to” not a “have to”**. They are mindful the Lord prospered them or allowed them to become prosperous. It is not their own doing. They take to heart Jesus’ words that follow the texts used to write this lesson.

“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.” (Luke 12: 48b ESV)

Our hope is Christian men of all means will read this lesson to completion. However, particular attention should be paid by men of great wealth who have allowed Satan to deceive you into becoming prideful of your accomplishments and all the possessions (toys) collected as a result.

Justification and **rationalization** are two of the devil’s best weapons because they are painless at the time of use.

Let this strong reminder or sharp rebuke -whichever fits best- cause you to humble yourself before the Lord to confess, as needed, before it is too late, as was the case for the Rich Fool we are about to discuss.

This sad story begins in what might seem comical if it did not end so tragically. Two brothers had been arguing over the family fortune. (That never happens today!) From a crowd, one brother shouted to Jesus, "Make my brother divide the inheritance with me!" Jesus responded sarcastically, "Man, who appointed me judge or arbitrator over you?"

(The first thing for me that jumped off the page about that exchange was the self-centered arrogance of this brother. If we were going to make one request of Jesus, would it really be about our inheritance?)

After that initial response, Jesus gave a strong warning about **greed** to the brother (and those in the crowd).

*"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of **greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.**"* (Luke 12: 15 NIV)

But He did not stop with that admonition. As He often did, Jesus told them a parable, and this one would not end well. Here is the first part of the story.

*"The land of a rich man was very productive. And **he began reasoning to himself**, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'This is what I will do: 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 many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry."**"*** (Luke 12: 16-19 NASB)

It does not take a mature Christian to read this part of the

story and understand the heading, *the rich fool*. Pay close attention to the words, "**he began reasoning with himself**".

Left to our own cunning or the deception of Satan, we can reason ourselves into all kinds of trouble that, on the surface, seems "reasonable". **Note there was no thankfulness in his heart or inquiring of the Lord to whom he should give or how to best use his excess.** Pride, arrogance, and greed ruled his heart.

One of the scariest verses in the Bible. I like the simple translation:

"But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?'" (Luke 12:20 NLT)

Reasoning with yourself can get you killed. Note Jesus brings God the Father into the conversation. God calls the rich man a *fool*. As if that is not teeth-rattling enough, God tells the man he is going to die that night. Then comes the sarcasm again. Dead men seldom benefit from the abundance of their possessions or excess. The bigger barns and all they contain become someone else's benefit or burden. Jesus ended this parable with very troubling words.

"This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:21 NIV)

A Business Analysis of a Spiritual Problem – A Statement of Cash Flows

It seemed appropriate to close this part of the lesson using one of the three basic business statements to analyze the condition of our hearts with regard to the Lord and our wealth/money.

Source of Funds. In more than forty years of business experience, I have known many wealthy men. Most are reasonably smart, but not geniuses. Some work harder than

their counterparts. Others are pretty average guys. Their sources of funds (wealth) tend to flow from one of the following buckets:

- Hard work over a career—good at maintaining personal positive cash flow and savings
- Created something of value, built a lot of sweat equity, and sold for a lot of money
- Born into rich family
- Married into rich family
- Right place/right time to enjoy stock appreciation based on company success

Note, only two of these five relied on their abilities or work ethic to achieve what the world would deem *success*. Three of the five did not work for or earn such favor, but they received the benefits.

Use of Funds. This is where I really run the risk of making men angry if I pick on an area of spending that hits too close to home. Using categories may help avoid that for now.

1. Lifestyle – the level of luxury at which one chooses to live
2. Man-toys and Hobbies – stuff from which men draw great pleasure and enjoyment
3. Philanthropy – contributions to causes we feel strongly about or pressured to support
4. Investments & Savings – Wealth preservation and growth. Risk Management
5. Kingdom Building and Expansion – paying it forward in the eternal sense of the concept

Rethinking ASSET ALLOCATION

God gives so that we may enjoy His gifts. Thankful men of God gladly receive them and use them to bless others. How men treat the first four 'Uses' depends on their relationship with God. The last one – a command, not a suggestion – applies to

every Christian, regardless of financial position. Consider these biblical thoughts on each.

1. NT Christians and their church leaders did not think about lifestyle. They thought about staying alive or forfeiting theirs for Christ's sake. They understood modest, even sacrificial, living.
2. How much is enough? Now let's pick on a few areas that can become 'excesses'. How many sets of clubs and memberships, homes-primary or vacation, cars, guns, vintage wines, clothes, shoes, or other 'man-toys' with which we indulge ourselves can we use or do we really need?

Gluttony is a popular sin among Christians that has nothing to do with food.

3. So many needs and causes to support. Wealthy men are hit up for donations from all sides and many sources. Discerning among those with eternal vs temporal value is one wise approach.
4. Notwithstanding the fact that Jesus did not own anything or invest/save a dime in His life, we know from the last lesson, He told some to give it all away because wealth got in the way of following Him. And He also told the parable of the talents and wise use of gifts/resources entrusted to us. It is an issue of the heart more than the wallet. That leads to the last Use.
5. Simple path to the truth. Open your financial software or ask your accountant to run a cash flow report. Look at the amounts by spend category and see where your heart is. I say it that way because Jesus did. *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Matthew 6: 21)

The Lord is sending the message He is weary of affluent Christians and churches of Western culture espousing identification with New Testament Christians and churches when

*so little evidence exists to support such a claim. Too many have fallen into one of Satan's favorite traps – the secular trappings of **affluence** and **excess**.*

“Building bigger barns” is a sure sign that should not go unheeded. The consequences, according to Jesus, can be a killer!

My dear brothers, this has been a hard lesson. Thank you for persevering through it. Now take it before the Lord and ask Him to guide you into the truth He has for you regarding your “treasures”. That will be the best investment (time) you can make this year! The final part of this series will follow next week.

Walter