

Text for Sermon November 17 @ First Presbyterian, on the subject of Giving

“Building Bigger Barns”

What’s Money?

Money in itself is simply pieces of metal and pieces of paper, and the reason they are of any concern to us at all is that in our culture we have established that these pieces of metal and paper will function as currency. They will represent value. So money is significant for us simply because we exchange it for what we value.

What you do with your money shows what you value with your heart.

Money Represents Value

We value life and taste, so we give money for food. We value education, and so we give money for books and tuition. We value entertainment (probably too highly), and so we give money for Netflix and ballgames and concerts. We value the ministries of the church and the spread of the gospel, and so we give money to the church and other ministries.

Our text of study this morning is Luke, chapter 12, verses 13 to 21. And for context, there’s always something to be studied in and around any specific verses... let’s dig in;

Jesus said in [Luke 12:34](#), *“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* The movement of your money signifies the movement of your heart. Where your money goes, your heart is going. You exchange money for what you value, what you treasure.

The paper (that money is made of) is nothing, but its expression of the treasures of your heart is everything.

The Conviction of This Message

The conviction behind this message today (I hope) is threefold: (1) do we – the royal “we” - treasure God above all that money can buy?

And (2) do we understand the biblical teaching that the movement of your money expresses the movement of your heart?

And (3) do we grasp that the local church is crucial for God’s work in the world, and that it is our responsibility to make sure the church will have what it needs to pursue God’s mission of mercy and evangelization, and to build up the body of Christ; and all the while every member and family in it will be cared for.

So let’s get into today’s text, [Luke 12:13–21](#), and learn all you need to know about Building Bigger Barns!

Confronted with a Choice

Context of this passage in Luke: In the Scripture we are looking at, Jesus has been teaching people by the thousands (Luke 12:1). He warned them of Pharisaical hypocrisy (12:1). He told them not to fear those who kill the body but those who can cast them into hell (12:4-5). He encouraged them to confess the Son of Man before people (12:8-9). He told them that they will face opposition, and assured them that the Holy Spirit will give them the right words when they are dragged before the authorities (12:11-12).

In the midst of these heavy, serious concerns, though, a man comes forward ... and interjects a request for help with his inheritance.

In doing so, he reveals that he has not heard Jesus, but is concerned only about his personal problem. His interjection is actually quite trivial

by comparison with the teaching that he interrupts, and so it is (very much so) inappropriate and disruptive.

This man approached Jesus and said in [Luke 12:13](#), “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Now Jesus is confronted with a choice — Will he get down into the nitty-gritty of the inheritance dispute, or not?

Jesus replies in verse 14, “*Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?*” In other words, My calling is different from what you are asking of me. I do have something relevant to say to you, but I am not the one to be drawn into the details of this dispute. And then he gives a warning about how hazardous this inheritance is. He says in verse 15, “*Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*”

He sees a man losing his grip on his portion of the inheritance. And he sees in him some evidence that the hazard of the inheritance is deceiving the man. This is why Jesus refers to “the *deceitfulness* of riches” in [Matthew 13:22](#). This inheritance was lying to the man. This is why money is so hazardous. It lies to us. It tries to deceive us. What was it saying?

How Money Lies

It was saying: “If you lose me, you lose a very large part of your life. If you lose me, you lose what life can be for you. I am your life. Do you realize how big I am? Life will be *real* life — truly life — if you have me.” That’s what the inheritance was saying.

And Paul knew that’s what riches say. Which is why he told the rich in [1 Timothy 6:18–19](#), “Be rich in good works . . . be ready to share . . . take hold of that which is *truly life*.” In other words, don’t be deceived by the message of money that woos you with the words:

And to this Jesus says in verse 15, *“One’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”* In other words, It’s a lie. Don’t listen. *“Take care, and be on your guard.”*

This lie can and will awaken covetousness, and covetousness is idolatry ([Colossians 3:5](#)), and therefore the hazard here is huge. Not only is this inheritance not your life, it is about to take your life.

Which is exactly what Paul said about the hazard of money in [1 Timothy 6:9](#), *“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”*

What Life Really Is

“for a man’s life doesn’t consist of the abundance of the things which he possesses” (v. 15). The man who brought the grievance has focused his eyes close-up on possessions so that he sees nothing else.

Jesus calls him to pull back so that the whole of life comes into view, an exercise that puts possessions in perspective.

Possessions are still in the picture, but look smaller when seen against the backdrop of the rest of life.

Jesus quickly turns the discussion from this man’s inheritance to his real need—defense against greed and opportunity to become “rich toward God” (v. 21).

This is a valuable lesson for all of us today - How vulnerable the fallen human heart is — yours is... mine is — to feeling that having lots of things equals being really alive. And Jesus is urgent and passionate (verse 15): *your life does not consist in having lots of things. Life consists in knowing God.*

[John 17:3](#): “*This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*” Life is not having things. Life is knowing God. Now Jesus is coming to that.

So Jesus tells them a parable. Not just for the man who asked the question, but for *all* of us. We are all listening in.

So it says in verse 16, “*He told them a parable.*” saying,

“The ground of a certain rich man brought forth abundantly.

17He reasoned within himself, saying, ‘What will I do, because I don’t have room to store my crops?’ 18He said, ‘This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns, and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19I will tell my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.’”

Let’s unpack that. Let’s break this down verse by verse, because there are a lot of little gems hiding here:

“The ground of a certain rich man brought forth abundantly” (v. 16).

The man was rich prior to this harvest, and the harvest simply increased his wealth. Jesus portrays a windfall harvest—a harvest far in excess of the rich man’s investment in planting and tilling—a harvest that is truly a gift of God. This abundant harvest raises the question of stewardship.

Let’s hold this question for a moment: What responsibility do we incur when we acquire more than we need?

“He reasoned within himself” (v. 17a).

The man talks with nobody but himself. He is so inwardly focused that he requires no counsel. He certainly has not asked God for guidance.

“What will I do, because I don’t have room to store my crops?” (v. 17b).

Most of us would be glad to be in this position—having more money or possessions than we know what to do with. This man certainly seems glad. However, money is all that he has. He mentions nothing of family or friends. He has no sense of community. He has no inclination to help the poor or to donate to worthwhile charities. He is rich in money and poor in everything else.

“I will pull down my barns, and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods” (v. 18).

The abundance of the harvest exceeds the rich man’s expectations, requiring quick decisions regarding storage or disposal. And for the record, Jesus does not suggest that the man has come by the great harvest dishonestly.... There is no suggestion that the man misused his hired hands or harvested grain from his neighbor’s fields.

And here is Just an observation:

The first hint of a problem lies in the man’s use of the first-person pronoun. Go through the parable and circle the words “I” and “my” to get a sense of the man’s self-absorption. In his short conversation with himself, he uses the word “I” six times and the word “my” five times. He gives no thought to a bonus for his hired hands or a service project for his community. He offers no word of thanksgiving to God for this tremendous harvest. Everything is “I” and “my.”

“Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease, eat, drink, be merry” (v. 19).

Jesus presents the man's self-absorption with crystal clarity. He has more than enough to meet his needs—more even than he needs to live in luxury. His future could not be more secure. Now all he has to do is to enjoy his wealth, and that is his plan.

Here's the way I would put it: the way he used the increase of his riches, he gave no indication of being rich toward God. He kept **building bigger barns**.

That might be ok — if you're storing the grain for a use that shows God is your treasure. But what does the farmer say? Verse 19: *"I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" The use he plans to make of his wealth says one thing: "My treasure is relaxing, eating, drinking, and fun. That is my life. And the riches in my barns make it possible."*

What's wrong with that? Nothing, if there is no infinitely valuable God and no resurrection. That's why Paul said in [1 Corinthians 15:32](#), "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'" But there is a God, and there is a resurrection. So what's wrong with this man's way of handling his riches is that he fails use them in a way that shows he treasures God more than riches.

Faith in Wealth Crowds out Faith in God.

Verse 20:

"God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you.' The things which you have prepared—whose will they be?'"

Rich toward God

Here's the key concluding verse that makes the point most clearly (verse 21): ***"So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."***

The phrase “rich toward God” is unusual. What does it mean to be “rich toward God”?

The meaning is plain from the contrast: it is the opposite of laying up earthly treasure for yourself. Being rich toward God is the opposite of treating the self as though it were made for things and not for God. Being rich toward God is the opposite of acting as if life consists in the abundance of possessions not in the abundance of knowing God.

Being rich toward God, therefore, is the heart being drawn toward God as our riches. “Rich toward God” means moving toward God as our riches. “Rich toward God” means counting God greater riches than anything on the earth. “Rich toward God” means using earthly riches to show how much you value God.

This is what the prosperous farmer failed to do. And the result was that he was a fool and lost his soul. That is what I meant when I said, Jesus considered money hazardous. It lures us out of love for God. It lures us away from treasuring God.

Again the issue isn't that the man's fields prospered. The issue is that God ceased to be his supreme treasure. If God had been his treasure what would he have done differently? Instead of saying, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry,” he would have said something like this:

“God, this is all yours. You have made my fields prosper. Show me how to express with my riches that you are my treasure, and the riches are not. I already have enough. I don't need a bigger and bigger safety net. I don't need better food, better drink, better parties. I do indeed want to make merry, but not in self-indulgent parties with rich friends. I want to make merry with the people who have been helped by my generosity. I

want the fullest blessing of giving. Because you taught me, Lord, it is 'more blessed to give than to receive' ([Acts 20:35](#)).

Some Risky Application – Are you “Rich Towards God” today?

Friends, today we are thinking about, and talking about giving. In this effort, perhaps it is best to taking our cue from [2 Corinthians 9:7](#) “*Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*” Not under compulsion.

I want you be radical, generous people (to be “rich toward God”) because God is your treasure, not because someone demanded that you tithe, or made you feel shame in some way. Cheerful givers!

Five Ways to Guard and Maximize

So here are five things I do to guard against the hazard and maximize the helpfulness of money. I hope they inspire you to figure out your way as well:

1. I study to see and savor the supreme value of Jesus above all earthly things.

This means being in the Word daily with on this quest so that we can say with Paul in [Philippians 3:8](#), “*I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.*” I am daily on a quest to see him this way.

2. I pray that this pursuit would free me from the love of money.

“*Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!*” ([Psalm 119:36](#)). “*Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days*” ([Psalm 90:14](#)). There is space for

a personal prayer that God would expose the deceitfulness of riches, by revealing His superior value.

3. I trust in God's promises for every need to be met (for my family and the church).

"God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" ([Philippians 4:19](#)). "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work" ([2 Corinthians 9:8](#)). "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." ([Matthew 6:33](#)). Rest your soul on these promises.

4. I set aside electronically our regular gift to the church, and then add spontaneous gifts in the worship services.

I take my cue here from Paul's teaching that giving should be regular and free — disciplined and spontaneous. For example, he says in [1 Corinthians 16:2](#), *"On the first day of every week [on Sunday, the worship day], each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come."*

This points to the wisdom of planned, regular, disciplined giving. Sporadic giving with no plan will probably mean you are not treating giving as an integral part of your worshiping life.

For my own personal giving, I secure the disciplined part of giving by going online.

And since we want to make plain and teach our children and remind ourselves that giving is an essential aspect of our heart's worship we have always built it into our services. That's the meaning of that moment in worship: "We treasure you, God, in this very service by valuing you over the money that we are giving up. We prefer the joy we

receive in seeing your mission advance.” That’s what we say with our offering in worship every weekend.

And if you ask “how much?” my answer starts with the Old Testament standard and builds on that, as God prospers you. It is hard for me to imagine the children of God after the glories of the cross give less to the church than the saints of the Old Testament.

5. Finally, I put protections in place against bigger barns and I turn the prosperity of my fields into blessings for others.

Jesus and the apostles considered money hazardous and helpful. It can be hazardous and therefore I encourage you to put limits on how much of you keep for yourselves — not how much you make, but how much you keep. And it’s helpful, which means you get the incredible joy of giving more and more to the causes that you love.

God As Our Riches

And lest there be any misunderstanding, if you are a businessperson and turn a \$200,000 business into a \$200,000,000 business not by glittering your lifestyle, but plowing profits back into job creation and the expansion of worthy goods and services, you have done the right thing. The issue is not that the farmer’s fields prospered. The issue was: *What did he do with it?*

May the Lord grant us all the joy — the sheer unadulterated joy — of finding our life not in possessions, but in the abundance of all in God, and in fulfilling our covenant commitments, and in showing the world what it means to have God as our riches.

Will you pray with me please?

“God, everything in my life is all yours. You have made my fields prosper. Show me how to express with my riches that you are my treasure, and the riches are not.

Lord, I already have enough. I don't need bigger and bigger barns. I don't need better food, better drink, better parties. I do indeed want to make merry, but not in self-indulgent parties that are wasteful. I want to make merry with the people who have been helped by my generosity. I want the fullest blessing of giving. Because you taught me, Lord, it is 'more blessed to give than to receive'". **Amen.**