

The Greedy Fool

Jonathan K. Dodson | Luke 12:13-21 | June 9, 2019

What's the Problem?

A man emerges out of the crowd instructing Jesus to divide up an inheritance with his brother. Jesus objects and tells a parable about a man of means who comes into even more **wealth**. He issues a stiff warning about greed. Why is Jesus so abrupt? The guy just wanted his share of the inheritance. Is Jesus against wealth? Does he have an anti-material agenda? Well Jesus doesn't condemn the notion of inheritance, success, or even strategic investment in the parable. In fact, Jesus benefitted directly from wealthy women who supported his ministry and disciples who were described as "rich." Oh, and all things were made through Jesus—he owns everything! So, Jesus can't be anti-material. Then what's he saying? He says "[life does not consist of the abundance of possessions](#)" (15). Life doesn't equal what you make, own. David Brooks describes our society in terms of mountains. The first mountain is the mountain of success, career goals, achievements. The second mountain is the mountain of relationships, spiritual joy, character, community. Most people, he says, never reach the second mountain. Why? They spend too much time and energy trying to summit the first. Jesus tells a story about a first mountain man. He'd worked hard to get where he was, has others working the land for him. He would have been in the top 1%. He's made it but experiences a significant bump in income. (what do you do with this?) Now some of you are saying, whew, this doesn't apply to me. But notice Jesus doesn't tell the parable to just the rich man. He speaks to the *entire crowd*, "[And he said to them](#)" (15). "Them" is the 99%. Jesus warns *everybody*. He's pointing all of us to the second mountain, to laying up treasure in heaven. So how do we get there? We have to go through a valley. Valleys force us into deeper reflection, where we get below the surface busyness of life and often discover patterns, defects, sins we didn't know were there. One thing we'll find is **greed**. The translation "covetousness" is misleading. What's greed? Greed is *desiring more than you have*. It's running the numbers over and over to see if you can get the car that's out of your budget; it's daydreaming about that outfit or new pair of shoes. *It's spending more than you have to get what you want*. You're greedy if you find yourself regularly thinking, If we just had a little more we could...You don't have to be big spender to be greedy. The husband who squirrels money away, refuses to buy his wife or kids nice things, is just as greedy; he

just “spends” on his savings. Why are we greedy? It’s not the possessions themselves but what the possessions promise. Greed isn’t having money; it’s loving money, loving what we think money can buy us: security, attraction, comfort, respect. If we spend less here, here, and here, and put it in savings we’ll be really *safe*. If I get that outfit, people will *notice me*. If I get that new house, we’ll have so much more *room*. If I reach this goal, I’ll show them. It might not be love of money but *anxiety* about money. Will we have enough, what about the future? Anxiety about money causes overworking, overworking distance from Christ and community. *Greed will distort you!* Jesus says, *Take care! Be on your guard!* It could cost you your *soul*.

How do We get There?

Since my wife started working, we’ve had a bump in income, and I’ve found myself shopping for new shoes, not just when I needed shoes. Scrolling through sites. I didn’t use to do that. I bought a pair but now I want another. How do we become greedy? Jesus talks about money way more than sex. Why? Because, as Tim Keller points out, we know if we’re sleeping with someone else’s spouse or watching porn, but greed flies under the radar. It’s deceptive. How? There’s always someone else more successful in your income bracket to compare yourself to and say, “Well, we don’t live like that.” But comparison to others isn’t what determines greed. What does? How did the rich man end up a fool? He made two big mistakes. First, ***he isolated his thinking***. Look at verses 17-19: **What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops? And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down; my crops, my barns, my investments. The repetition is glaring. Me, myself, and I. He speaks to his soul, Soul you’ve got plenty: eat, drink, be merry.** Notice how isolated he is in his thinking. His self-counsel isn’t informed by anyone else. There’s no mention of a spouse, wise friends, an involved community. Remember, greed is an insidious sin. We *need* people speaking into our financial decisions, checking our greed. Before we bought a new house to move closer into the heart of our city, I called up an elder and here’s where we are do you think we should do it? He asked me some good questions. Some of you may not be in an accountable relationship with others because you think your self-counsel is enough. You’re duped. Jesus says it harsher, You’re a fool. It’s not about the wisdom of the expense but the foolishness of your heart. When it comes to finances many of us esteem our own perspective more than

God's. But he says, [Blessed is the one who God reproves](#) (Job 5:17). Blessing, joy, comes by going through the valley, repenting of the greed, to get to the other side. Prov 17:10 "[A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.](#)" The wise person knows people who can correct her, and invites correction, takes it in to change her soul. The fool is told a hundred times and never changes. Do it in a FC. Ask the hard questions. But the greedy man stays aloof; *isolated in his thinking*. Second mistake, **he restricted his resources to himself**. He doesn't think to use his wealth for others, his city, or God's purposes. The first mountain is blinding. When shining sun of success comes out, it can blind us to God's grace. It can be tempting to attribute success to ourselves. To not consult God; in fact, God isn't even mentioned in the story. The God who gave him his mind, body, intuitions, skills. He doesn't see those as divine blessings but natural strengths. He doesn't give back to the kingdom that gave it to him in the first place. *He's restricted his resources to himself*. This blindness comes from a cultural lie. *Eat, drink, be merry* was an Epicurean philosophy. Live like there's no tomorrow. But actually your soul will be required of you. There will be an accounting. But we've picked the lie up: Retirement Planning. You can gear your whole life to have plenty to play with after 65. Retirement from work doesn't mean retirement from service. Quite the opposite, it means you're more free to serve than you were before. I think of older members who serve our church faithfully, use time to volunteer at the hospital, mentor younger people, serve non-profits. One recently told me: I want to finish my life with an "empty my quiver." When I'm dead, I want to have emptied all I have for the kingdom of God. *Now that's how you go out!* Have you been duped, embraced the cultural lie: eat, drink, be merry? Or are you emptying your quiver for the kingdom? It doesn't start at retirement; it starts now. Are you giving, serving, looking to bless others because god has blessed you? Or are you isolated, self-absorbed? An expert in parables notes, "[Foolishness consists in thinking that responsibilities end with securing one's own economic future.](#)" Our responsibilities *increase* if we have a bright economic future—you possess *God's* resources to help others and further *God's* kingdom. That starts now. With generous giving, sacrificial service, hope in God, love for others.

Wise Person, not a Fool

We've looked at the Problem (greed), How We Get There (isolate/restrict), and now How do we do it—use money wisely, not like a fool? First, **take care**. Be on your guard. Apply this sermon. Have a frank conversation with your fight club, city group, spouse, friends. Be attentive to financial holiness as much as you are to finances. Second, **include God**. Go straight to him and repent. The fool says in his heart there is no God (Ps 18); he acts like God doesn't own everything. Confess *he* is sovereign supplier of all things. Ask him to forgive you for greed: love of money, anxiety about money. For replacing Jesus with false security, comfort, attention, notoriety. Third, *budget* if you don't. If you don't control your money, your money will control you. Review it. Plan to give or you won't give much at all. Fourth, *be rich toward God*. The man in the parable was poorer than he thought. He thought he owned all his stuff, but he didn't even own his own soul, **But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'** (Lk 12:20). Be rich toward God. How do you do that? Literally, be rich *into God*. The way to be wise and not a fool, to be rich into God, is to get more of Christ in us. It's not enough to say, I'll budget; I'll give; I'll empty my quiver. We need something to replace our false gods of security, worth, comfort. That way we don't fall for lie. The only way to get into God is if God empties his wealth into us. Philippians tells us Jesus emptied himself taking the form of a servant, humbled himself to the point of death, so he could get into us, so he could bring us life, joy, comfort, security that can't be found anywhere else. He emptied the storehouse of his love for us, on a cross. When Zacchaeus the tax collector realized how humble, dignifying, gracious Jesus was do you know what he did? He gave half his possessions away and paid back his debts four times the restitution. He emptied his quiver *for the kingdom*. Why? He'd become rich in Christ! *Will you run out cultural lies, and let Christ in?* He's way more satisfying, and he lasts! Imagine how joyful and helpful to others you could be by living on the second mountain!