

Luke 12:13-21

“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me”

From nowhere, the man in the crowd interrupts Jesus' teaching; “tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me” The man's self-interest clashes sharply with the context in which he makes his request. At the beginning of the pericope, Luke 12:1ff, Jesus has been teaching thousands of people warning them of the hypocrisy nature of the Pharisees. 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). Amid these serious concerns, the man interjects a request for help with his inheritance case. In doing so, he reveals that he has not heard Jesus, but is concerned only about his personal problem. His interjection is trivial by comparison with the teaching that he interrupts, and so is inappropriate and disruptive.

Jesus is not condemning wealth but in many cases the person who desires wealth is tempted to make its acquisition top priority. Sometimes the person who has wealth is tempted to devote his or her life to guarding and growing it. Some of us we are all tempted to believe that we can find true security in wealth. There is a saying which goes like, “Faith in wealth crowds out faith in God”. 1 Timothy echoes the same sentiments, “It is not money that is the problem, however, but love of money”

This man's issue is not the amount that he has inherited, but rather the fact that his father has left the inheritance to his two sons jointly. This man does not want joint ownership but wants to be independent of his brother. His love of money supersedes his love for his brother.

Closely analysing the man's request we can intelligently guess that he should have been the firstborn son, because Deuteronomy 21:17 provides a double portion of the inheritance to the firstborn son so he was expecting to get more.

While the man addresses Jesus as teacher, he does not request for Jesus' advice but instead, he tells Jesus what to do. He wants to take advantage of Jesus' moral authority

and seeks to use Jesus' authority to gain power over his brother in the dispute over their inheritance.

After refusing to be abused by this man, Jesus uses the opportunity to teach about the danger of greed hence he began to tell them about the parable of the rich fool. In this parable the man was rich prior to this harvest, and the harvest simply increases his wealth. Jesus portrays a windfall harvest, a harvest far more than the rich man's investment in planting and tilling, a harvest that is truly a gift of God. As we shall see, the abundant harvest raises the question of stewardship. What responsibility do we incur when we acquire more than we need? In this parable, after acquiring more the man talks with nobody but himself. He is so inwardly focused that he requires no guidance even from God.

The rich man said, "What will I do, because I don't have room to store my crops?". Most of us would be glad to be in this position, having more money 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 is not prepared to help the poor or to donate to worthwhile charities. He is rich in money and poor in everything else.

In this parable, the abundance of the harvest exceeds the rich man's expectations, requiring quick decisions regarding storage or disposal. 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.

The rich man's key problem is selfishness, 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 servants or a service project for his community. He offers no word of thanksgiving to God for this tremendous harvest. Everything is "I" and "my." 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 must do is to enjoy his wealth, and that is his plan. However, as we will see, his plan will soon go wrong.

We should not assume that this verse applies only to Microsoft Millionaires. We need not be wealthy to be in jeopardy. The jeopardy applies to any person who “lays up treasure for himself” and who “is not rich toward God.”

The problem is not the man’s wealth but his selfish accumulation. Some wealthy people are tempted to accumulate money, stocks, or bonds, and others to squander money recklessly. However, poverty does not render one immune from selfishness. Some poor people share unselfishly with people in need, but others accumulate endlessly. The problem is not wealth but selfishness.

So, the key question we must answer as we conclude is, “what does it look like to be rich toward God”? First, it must surely mean being thankful to God for our blessings. Second, it must mean stewardship that returns God’s portion to God. Thirdly, it must mean generosity toward the neighbor whom Jesus has charged to love (10:27), and to our enemy, whom Jesus has also charged us to love (6:27). Being a Christian entail considering others before ourselves. May God bless you all, Amen.