

Lifestyles of the Rich and Foolish

Introduction

The Text

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” ¹⁴ But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:13–21)

The Richest City and the Gospel of Luke

- A. USA Today recently put out an article entitled: [25 Richest Cities in America](#). And, no surprise, do you want to know which city topped the list? Here’s a hint: You live in it (San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, California). And I quote: “The San Jose metro area is by far the wealthiest in the country. The area’s median income surpasses incomes in the next wealthiest metro area — nearby San Francisco — by over \$13,000. San Jose covers much of Silicon Valley, a tech hub at the southern end of the San Francisco Bay Area. The area’s high incomes are attributable to the presence of some of the most recognizable and innovative companies in the world.”
1. It should come as no surprise, then, that within the wealthiest city in America everybody’s talking about money, everybody’s worried about money, everybody’s chasing after money. And, sadly, this can be the case even in the church.
- B. Our text for this morning is unique to Luke’s gospel. Many of the stories in the four gospels overlap and correspond in one way or another. But this text, with its vivid and almost troubling parable, is found only here.
1. One of the interesting things you can do when comparing the various gospels is identify where each one differs from the others. When you do so, you find certain emphases, certain themes, more characteristic of one gospel than of the others.
 - a. Well, one of the emphases scholars have noted somewhat unique to Luke is his concern for money and material wealth. Often, when a certain teaching or story is unique to Luke it is dealing in some way with money and possessions.
- C. That certainly is the case with our text this morning. And, truth be told, back when I was praying about what book of the Bible to take us through as a church, this fact is one of the main reasons I chose Luke.

1. You see, I'm aware of how rich this area of the country is. And I'm also aware of how devastating such a context can be for the spiritual life and the advance the kingdom.
- D. So, this morning, we're going to talk about material possessions in general and money in particular. Using this text as our guide, I want to outline what I think our three basic options are when it comes approaching money. It seems to me we can either see our money as: (1) Savior; (2) Enemy; or (3) Opportunity.

(1) Savior

Brother Against Brother

- A. Notice, this whole discussion in our text arises because a man wants money, a man wants what he thinks is his due. In the midst of Jesus' teaching, it would seem, he interjects with a personal matter weighing heaven on his heart: *"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me"* (v. 13).
1. Now Jesus, always apt to attend to the requests of others, perhaps a bit surprisingly, pushes back on this man in a way that seems almost uncaring and gruff: *"But he said to him, 'Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?'"* (v. 14).
- B. It's startling at first but we come soon to see what He is doing. He is loving this man well. Money has become too big of a deal to him, more important even, it would seem, than family. It's brother against brother in v. 13.
1. No doubt you've heard, and perhaps you've even experienced, something of the nightmare that can ensue upon the death of a loved one as siblings and relatives fight over the money and estate that remains—like vultures circling a carcass, only the carcass is a mother or a father or a grandparent.
 - a. It's a horrendous thing. But it is all too common. And it seems it is happening here: *"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me"* (v. 13).
- C. Now this brings up the first and most common approach to money, I think. We see it as a sort of Savior, as a god in many ways. And, hence, we are willing to sacrifice other things, even other people, to get it.

Three Reasons

- A. But why? What does money do for us? What does it promise us? Let me give you three ways this plays out.

(1) Security

- A. First, we give ourselves to the pursuit of money because we think, in some ways, it can save, or cushion, us from the unknown and the frightening prospects of life. Put positively, it promises us security, stability, a sense of control.

- B. In the parable that Jesus goes on to tell in [vv. 16-20](#), this idea is seen, in particular, there in the first part of [v. 19](#). The man's land had produced abundantly. He builds bigger barns for his grain and goods. He's amassed significant wealth by the standards of the ancient world. And so he sits back and says something to his soul: "[Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years . . .](#)" ([v. 19a](#)).
1. In other words: "You have security, stability, control. The future is no longer a frightening prospect because you have money." It's a false assurance (as we'll soon see), but it's assurance none the less. He feels good about tomorrow because he has money today.
- C. Aren't so many of us just like this? We kind of think we'd be secure if we just got more money. And we're quite anxious and concerned until we do. Isn't money at the top of the list of things that cause stress in a marriage? If we don't have financial stability, isn't it hard to feel like we have any stability at all?

(2) Pleasure

- A. But there is more that we look to money for. We give ourselves to the pursuit of money because we think it can save us from discomfort and pain. Put positively, it promises us ease, indulgence, pleasure.
1. We think money offers more than just security, protection from everything we fear. We also think money is the key that opens up the door to everything we could ever want.
- B. That's where the man in this parable goes next. Let's continue on in his little self-talk there: "[Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry](#)" ([v. 19](#)). "It's not just stability and security that I have. Because I am secure, I am now free to do whatever I want. I don't have to work. I just get to play."
- C. Now come on. Be real with me. It sounds good doesn't it? "[\[R\]elax, eat, drink, be merry.](#)" That's why we work. So we can take ridiculous vacations or retire by the sea and do just that.
- D. We've all seen how this plays out in our own hearts, right? Am I the only one who scrolls through Facebook and sees all those people posting about traveling here and there, eating this, drinking that, living it up . . . and kind of gets jealous?
1. Sometimes I find myself thinking: "Maybe I picked the wrong career path." If only I had money. I could do whatever I wanted. The world would be my oyster. I don't even like oysters. I like bacon. The world would be my strip of bacon. Ease, indulgence, pleasure. I'm going to be renting for the rest of my life in this ridiculous city.
- E. Last week, I mentioned that article in the New York Times that outlined some of the sexual misconduct of a few top Google execs. Well, in that same article, the author mentions that the wife of one of these men recently filed a civil-suit against him where she claims "[he had multiple 'ownership relationships' with other women during their marriage, paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to them. . . . The suit included a screenshot of an August 2015 email Mr. Rubin sent to one woman. 'You will be happy being taken care of. . . . Being owned is kinda like you are my property.'](#)"

1. Clearly this is depraved behavior, but you see the same baseline approach to money. "Because I have money, if I want it, I get it."

(3) Identity

- A. One more thing I would say quickly here, because I think it's particularly pertinent for us in the West. Often we give ourselves to the pursuit of money because we think it can save us from obscurity and mediocrity. Put positively, it promises us a sense of identity, status, prominence, respect.
- B. You know, in Eastern cultures, an individual more often finds his/her identity within the context of relationships and the community as a whole.
 1. But here in the West, and in America in particular, an individual defines his/herself not by how they fit within the community, but how they stand out from it, how they're set apart. Our identities are individualistic, often attached to what we've done and accomplished, how successful we've been.
 - a. And our money and stuff becomes a sort of barometer for this success. Am I good enough? Am I important enough? Am I worth anything? Well that depends. What kind of car do you drive? What brand of clothes do you wear? What side of the city do you live on? Do you get your groceries at Wal-Mart or Whole Foods?
 - i. I mean, consider this, in our culture it is commonplace to talk about a person's worth in terms of dollars and cents as if that is the essence of their value, as if somehow that tells you how important that person is.
- C. And so there are so many pursuing money because they think if they can get the six figures and the stuff they will be saved from obscurity, they will finally get respect, they will finally have an identity.

"Fool!"

- A. But Jesus shows us the fragility, the vanity, even the foolishness of such pursuits.
 1. He hints at this in His opening assertion: "[O]ne's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (v. 15b). Your life is about more than stuff.
 2. But then in the parable He works this out for us and the whole story ascends to the climactic point there in v. 20: "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'"
 3. And He sums up the meaning in all this for us in v. 21: "So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."
 - a. Who cares how much money you have. If you are not ready to stand before God, you have no lasting security, pleasure, or identity. You are a poor fool of a man. "[W]hat will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Matt 16:26a).

- B. Money cannot save you from death. Money cannot buy you eternal life. Money cannot pay the penalty due your sin. Money cannot bribe you into God's favor. Money cannot redeem your soul from hell. And, therefore, whatever security, pleasure, identity it can get you on this side of death, it will ultimately fail you in the end. You will go to write the check and the check will bounce!

Tremors before the Quaking

- A. And, of course, for men and women, created in the image of God, designed to find their lasting security, pleasure, and identity in Him, all along the way, even for the for the rich and famous, there is a sense of the foolishness in this pursuit. There is a sense that there must be more to life.
- B. Markus Persson (the dude who created Minecraft and then got crazy rich after selling the rights to Microsoft), in a moment of telling vulnerability, once tweeted out: "Hanging out in Ibiza (an island in the Mediterranean Sea) with a bunch of friends and partying with famous people, able to do whatever I want, and I've never felt more isolated."
 - 1. Interestingly, Business Insider retweeted this saying: "Billionaire Minecraft founder Markus Persson proves money doesn't buy happiness." One follower wrote in the comments: "Give me his money I'll prove otherwise." I imagine some of us might be inclined to feel that way as well.
- C. But, nonetheless, something is coming to light in this. Something of what Jesus is saying back in our text is being illustrated here: "[O]ne's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (v. 15b). Hence, you can have the world, and still feel like you have nothing, empty, wanting more, unhappy.
 - 1. And O the vertigo that such a person is left with. O how dizzying, how disorienting! When you have nowhere else to look. When you have all that you've been laboring for, all the world has to offer, all that they told you life is about, and yet still you find it lacking.
 - a. I tell you, such a person is, in those moments, either on the verge of suicide or salvation. They are ready to either kill themselves or come to Christ.
- D. I was reminded of CS Lewis' wise words here: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." If money and stuff can't fill the hole, have you ever considered the possibility that maybe God can?!

(2) Enemy

From Prosperity Gospel to Poverty Gospel

- A. Now there's another approach to money that I want to consider (and we'll have to move quickly on this). But it's seeing money as, not a Savior, but an Enemy.
- B. Now I should back up and at least say this: Sadly the Christian church has often been tempted towards the first option we just looked at. And what they've tried to do is baptize this greed in such a way that they actually make it seem holy. I'm talking, of course, in particular about things like the Prosperity Gospel.

1. To put it simply, the Prosperity Gospel attempts to measure your spiritual maturity by your material prosperity. You know you have God's pleasure when you have lots of the world's stuff.
- C. Now many of us may see the foolishness, the blatant lack of biblical warrant for something like the prosperity gospel. But, as is often the case, whenever you so push back against one extreme, you end up making yourself quite vulnerable to yet another one.
1. So those who push against the Prosperity Gospel may very well find themselves entangled in what we might call the Poverty Gospel. Regarding this, Tom Nelson writes: "The poverty gospel often fuels a blinding, pietistic spiritual pride that asserts the greater the material poverty, the more spiritual the person. Inherent in this distorted biblical teaching is that material poverty brings spiritual riches, and material abundance inevitably brings spiritual poverty."
 - a. If the Prosperity Gospel measures your spiritual maturity by your material prosperity, well the Poverty Gospel measures it by precisely the opposite. The more poor, the more destitute, you are, the holier you must be. You've forsaken all for Christ. The one sets up prosperity as the means of justification before God, the other poverty, but both, in their extremes are missing Christ.
 - i. Underneath the Poverty Gospel, then, is a sense that money and stuff somehow is an Enemy to the spiritual life. It's inherently evil in some way.
- D. But, to counter this approach, all we need to once more is go back to our text in Luke. For, while admittedly it is not quite so clear as with the first, nonetheless, here we see that money is not really the problem at all.
1. No, as Paul would say, it is "the love of money [that] is a root of all kinds of evils" (1 Tim 6:10). This is precisely what Jesus is getting at with His initial warning there in v. 15 (which I have held off reading until this point): "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."
- E. The word translated "covetousness" here, pleonexia in the Greek, is defined as "the state of desiring to have more than one's due, greediness, insatiableness, avarice" (BDAG).
1. The issue is desire for money. Money is not the evil at play here. Money simply provides the occasion for the heart to expose its true colors. The problem is not with something outside of us, but something within us. And Jesus is saying, "Take care, be on your guard, for that."

(3) Opportunity

- A. So money is not Savior, but it's also not Enemy. What we come to see from the Scriptures is that it is an Opportunity . . . a kingdom Opportunity, whereby we can bring glory to God in the way that we

are both grateful to Him for it and generous to others with it. Let me back up and explain to you what I mean.

A Giving God

- A. Consider with me for a moment who our God is, what He's like. In particular, consider how He handles His wealth.
- B. When our God looks at the abundance of His possessions, does He store it up in barns, hoard it for Himself? Is He selfish and stingy? Or is He not the fountainhead of all life, the source of every blessing, the giver of every perfect gift: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17).
 - 1. I mentioned this last week, but in [Gen 1](#), God creates the heavens and the earth, the sea and the sky, and He fills this place with sun and moon, plant and animal. But the whole sequence of events, the days of creation are ascending to one climactic point wherein on the sixth day He creates man and woman in His image.
 - a. And what we come to realize is that all of creation prior to this point was like the preparation of a gift. In the same way that many of you will likely soon be preparing gifts for loved ones to give away at Christmas, God, in creating this place, was preparing a gift for you and I, so that when He created man and woman on the sixth day, He could say: "Look, see, it's all yours": " ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ²⁹ And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food" (Gen 1:28–29). In other words: "It's all yours!"
 - i. And, sadly, like greedy little kids on Christmas morning, we unwrapped the gift, looked at it, looked back at God, and said, "I was hoping for something better!"
- C. So what does God do? How does God respond? Does He say, "Well okay then. That's what I get for trying to be generous. I'll take my stuff back and keep it locked up safe here in my barns. I didn't want to give it to you anyways." No!
 - 1. The surprise of the gospel is that when we rejected God's gift of creation, demanding something better, God, in love and grace, in an overflow of generosity, gave us something better. He gave us His Son, His one and only beloved Son. The best He had.
 - a. He didn't store His Son up in a barn for Himself, He sent His Son down to a rebel humanity to be born in a barn for the sake of the world—to live the life we should've lived and die the death we should've died, so that if we would repent and receive Him we can be forgiven of our sins, counted righteous in Him, and become heirs of the world to come!

Gratitude And Generosity

- A. Let me tell you something, when you know this God, this gospel, this grace, everything changes. Money is no longer your Savior, God is. Money is no longer your Enemy. It doesn't have that kind of power. Instead, money becomes an Opportunity—a kingdom Opportunity whereby you can bring glory to God in the way that you are both grateful to Him for it and generous to others with it.
- B. Gratitude and generosity. It is on these two points in particular that the man in this parable faltered. He had a chance. He came to a point of decision there in [vv. 16b-17](#): ^{16b} “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’”
1. “What shall I do?” He had a chance to do the right thing with his wealth! But instead of going upward with gratitude and outward with generosity, he caved inward with greed. “And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones [. . . for me!]’” ([v. 18a](#)). He wasted a precious opportunity to love God and love neighbor because he loved himself above all. He “[lay\[ed\] up treasure for himself \[but was\] not rich toward God](#)” ([v. 21](#)). Hence, though the world may call this man wise, God calls him a “fool” ([v. 20](#)).
- C. I don't want to be a fool. I don't want you to be fool.
1. I'm reminded here of those now famous words written by Jim Elliot, the man who was murdered on the mission field in Ecuador: “[He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.](#)”