

BELPRES CHURCH

The Only Man In the World Hand Crafted: In a Fast Food World

Rev. Scott Mann
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¹³ Someone in the crowd said to [Jesus], "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

¹⁴ Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" ¹⁵ Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

¹⁶ And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

¹⁸ "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, "[Self] you have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

²¹ "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.

³⁰ For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. ³² "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke 12:13-22, 30-34
New International Version

God, we do thank that everything is yours, including my words, so Lord, Holy Spirit we ask that you would come. Open our hearts and minds to hear what you would have for us to say this morning. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Well good morning. Good morning to all of you here and especially to those of you in the community center. Glad you're here, and those joining us online. Thanks for being with us. I'm Scott Mann, one of the many Scott's around here. Ten years ago when I preached my very first sermon here, I began by saying these words, "I've noticed that when Scott Dudley begins his sermons, he starts by telling a joke he thinks is funny."

This summer our sermon series is on Jesus' parables. Parables are like jokes. There's the story part, and then there's some sort of a punchline or surprise at the end that makes people laugh. Tone and timing are critical. Explaining a joke ruins the effect and can be painful, right? This summer, you are going to totally enjoy it as your preachers take 20 minutes to explain Jesus' one liners. Awesome.

I love to teach the parables of Jesus. Jesus is famous for his storytelling, and people loved hearing Jesus' parables because they were surprising and funny and he used everyday things to make spiritual truths easy to understand. What's a parable? It's a story that invites a response from the hearers. Did you get that? A parable is more about the hearers than it is about the story itself. A parable tries to get the hearers to change.

Parables only work if the hearers understand, but sometimes we don't understand, so the parables don't work on us, or they become so familiar, the surprise is ruined. Or worst of all, we don't find ourselves in the story, and it loses the power to change us. That's the secret power of parables. They get past our defenses and reveal whether our hearts are hard toward Jesus' words, or soft and ready to change, to follow him better.

They challenge us to respond differently. Let's walk through today's passage and see how Jesus delights and challenges his hearers. The passage has three parts. First, someone in the crowd calls out to Jesus, and he responds with a warning. Second, he responds with a parable, and finally, he responds by applying all of this to his disciples afterwards. "So, teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." This is a common request. Teachers like Jesus were often asked to judge family matters. I bet it's common in our families to hear something like, "Hey, it's mine. That's mine. Mom, tell him to give it to me." Or, "Dad, it's my turn for the X-box or the car or whatever."

Instead of judging the matter, and deciding who's right and wrong, Jesus does his classic third-way thing. He looks right through the situation to discern what's most important. He warns the guy that his priorities are messed up. Your brother is more important than your stuff. Jesus responds to the man with a warning for everyone. "Watch out. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

Your relationships matter more than your stuff. To illustrate this, Jesus tells a funny parable making it up right on the spot. Now the parable depends on several cultural details being understood, or it won't work on us. But it totally worked on the people that Jesus was talking to because they lived in the same poor rural Middle Eastern culture. They all knew this story of a rich man pondering to himself, would never happen. It's ridiculous on several levels. So here we go.

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"The ground of a rich man yielded an abundant harvest, and he thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops." Now everyone knew that God makes the ground productive and especially an abundant harvest. It's not the rich man's own doing. Bible experts like Ken Bailey remind us that Middle Easterners don't do decision making alone. They think out loud to each other, using hand motions and often at the town entrance where everybody is. This guy acts like he is the only man in the world. He is the only character in his own story.

In college, I waited until the last possible moment to declare my major because I just could not decide. I agonized over this decision for months, over a year, and finally, I chose biblical studies, and I was so relieved to tell my family and friends. Every single one of them said something like, "Well of course. What else would you study?" It never occurred to me to ask my community.

Now you know how people start to smile during a joke in anticipation of the punchline? Well the crowds are starting to smile now, not only because no one would really be as individualistic as this rich man, except maybe me, but because they're listening to a man whose main problem in life is that he just has too much stuff, and he doesn't know what to do with it all. That's laughable to any third world farmer barely scraping by, and it never occurs to this rich man that God might have blessed him with more than he needs in order that he could share with others.

There are no others as the story continues except for the hearers who are thinking a man like this should share with people like them. Well next, to deal with his first world problem, the man hatches a first world plan. "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my surplus grain." Jesus uses the pronouns I and my as many times as possible to characterize this silly isolated man. He's even going to spend his wealth to tear down perfectly good barns and spend more wealth to build bigger ones just so he can hoard more effectively.

The crowds think this caricature is totally outrageous. Nobody is really this absurd. Everyone is smiling in anticipation because something is about to happen, but Jesus isn't done describing this ridiculous rich man. "And I will say to myself, self ..." It really says that, in the Greek. Jesus is in full comedy mode here. "Self, you have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy. Eat, drink and be merry." Jesus pictures this guy talking to himself in the mirror as if no one else in the world exists. Even the you pronouns refer to himself.

Everyone in the crowd knew the code words "Eat, drink and be merry." In all the ancient Near Eastern countries, these were classic descriptions of a foolish person who doesn't value wisdom or justice or righteousness. This is cross-cultural selfishness, and it was universally scorned. This man isn't just silly and isolated. He is a fool, and fools never prosper. But not only that. Jesus quotes several key words from Isaiah 22 to remind the crowds of God's judgment on foolish, rich, sinful people in Isaiah's day who chose to party and die rather than repent and be saved.

They threw a party, and they said the words, "Let's eat and drink for tomorrow we die." That Isaiah reference sets up the punchline, everyone has been waiting for. "But God said to him, "You fool. This very night your soul will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have

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prepared for yourself?" The only man in the world forgot about God, who breaks into his extreme isolation and reminds him that others do exist, and they're going to get his stuff after he's dead.

Jesus' crowd cheers as the fool gets what he deserves, and unnamed people like themselves get a windfall from what he hoarded. The crowd easily locates themselves in this story. They aren't like the rich fool. They're like the unnamed people who will get his horde because he had no inheritance. Now, remember, parables are mainly about our emotional response, but sometimes people don't get the joke. If you didn't feel like cheering when the rich, greedy fool didn't get to enjoy his horde, it may be because you located yourself in the story differently than the people Jesus was teaching.

It's easy to forget that Jesus himself and most of his hearers were poor people, living in farm country, and few had savings accounts or retirement plans. Most people's retirement plans were their kids. Often the only financial security people had was if parents left some inheritance. So in response to this guy's inheritance request, Jesus challenges him to remember that life is about our relationships, not our stuff. Then he tells a funny story, emphasizing just that point, but Jesus has one more surprising one-liner up his sleeve.

"This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward ..." Wait for it. "God." He meant to say rich toward others or toward their family or toward the poor right? This whole scene is about sharing with siblings, about selfishness, isolation, greed, injustice. Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. The moral of the story, isn't it, that rich people should share their abundance with poor people like those in the crowd, listening to Jesus? Isn't Jesus saying that they should get the horde?

Jesus surprises everyone with his final zinger. While the crowd was cheering the man's downfall and the community's windfall, Jesus got past their defenses, pulling them into the story and challenging their own greed. He reminds the crowd to be on your guard against all kinds of greed, including wanting the rich man's horde. The true moral of the story is to be rich toward God, just as God was rich toward the fool, and the inheritance brother and to all of us.

Well after his warning and his parable, Jesus knows he needs to explain his application to his disciples. He talks at length to them about possessions and God. Here are just a few applications highlights from the disciples debriefing. Jesus says, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will wear. For the pagan world runs after all these things and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and all these things will be given to you as well. Don't be afraid little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Jesus wants to give us life to the fullest, so in this situation, he says life is not about being rich with possessions, but about being rich toward God. Jesus wants us to be shaped by the heart of God and his kingdom, not by our predominant culture, which produces greed and anxiety and fear. Jesus warns against all three in this passage. You don't need to be greedy. You don't need to worry. You don't need to be afraid. Your loving, heavenly Father offers you a better life, being rich toward God.

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Here are three ways to practice that in everyday life. First, be grateful. Say thank you because God is generous toward us. He gives the abundant crop. He provides for us. It's all from God. Part of being rich toward God is setting our minds and our hearts on him. We remember his presence and his goodness when we say a prayer before a meal, but also throughout each day. We say thank you often, but even more importantly, we live gratefully, mindful of God moment by moment.

Some people remember God throughout the day by using their different senses. Maybe you program your phone with a ringtone to go off that reminds you to think of God, or you feel something in your pocket that you've put there to remember. Some people put something up in their home or their car or their office. Some people wear something on their body that helps them remember God throughout the day. Be creative. What can help you practice gratitude to God throughout the day.

The first way to be rich toward God is to gratefully enjoy his presence and his gifts, not ignoring them, not ignoring God as if I'm all alone in the world. Second, we can be rich toward God by being generous, not greedy. Now we all know what it's like to feel a little greedy, and we can agree that it's not fun to be around greedy people. They demand, "That's mine. It's my turn." They don't care about others or what's fair, but greed can be disguised. The rich man's greed is obvious, but the greed of the inheritance brother and the crowd is disguised. They're more like us. Most of us spend most of our time somewhere in between greed and generosity.

I think of this in-between place as the realm of responsibility. The Bible teaches in many places that God wants us to be responsible with everything God entrusts to us, but God shows us that practicing generosity, not responsibility, actually brings the abundant life that he wants for us. A while back I took a very popular assessment called Strengths Finder. Many students and business people take it. One of my top three strengths is, no surprise to some of you, responsibility. I love being responsible and doing the right thing. I know that my best self is winning when I go past being responsible, and generosity comes easily, but I have to be careful that my shadow self doesn't morph my responsibility into an attitude of independence or building bigger barns or greed disguised as responsibility.

How responsible is responsible enough? How much is enough for retirement or college savings or the vacation fund? These are all good things God wants us to be responsible about, but how do I know when I've left the realm of responsibility and moved back into greed or forward into generosity? One of the clearest examples in scripture of how to move from responsibility to generosity deals with money. God knows we deal with that. The bible says being merely responsible towards God starts at least by tithing God's 10% of our income. Even before I had my own money, my parents gave me money to put in the offering so that I would learn this, but we can be rich towards God by freely and generously giving beyond his 10% to God's kingdom somehow, and to determine how generously we give, we rely on the Holy Spirit and our life situation and other sermons that we don't have time for.

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That's money. A second example that the scripture talks a lot about is time. Of course, God wants us to be responsible with our time. Good stewards, but he really wants us to share the abundant, generous life that he gives to us. The bible says being merely responsible with our time starts at least by celebrating the Sabbath, going to church, working hard and doing our chores, taking care of our bodies, serving our families and so on. Then we can be rich toward God by freely and generously giving our time beyond our own family and friends to God's Kingdom somehow.

The rich man wasn't judged a greedy fool because he was irresponsible, but because he wasn't generous toward God and others. He served himself. The antidote to greed is generosity. A third way to be rich toward God is to practice courageous trust. Not giving into worry or fear but stretching beyond ourselves to serve the poor. Jesus says, "Seek his kingdom ... Sell your possessions and give to the poor." Just hearing this command might cause anxiety and fear, but Jesus repeatedly reminds us, trust is the antidote to anxiety and fear.

We heard last Sunday, Jesus urges us to believe God is a good Father who knows what we need and loves to give good gifts. When we truly believe that, trust beats anxiety and fear. We don't need to hoard because God knows what we need. We can dare to serve others before ourselves, even before we know how it's going to turn out for us. Here and throughout the Bible, God says "Be courageous." Serve the poor, the orphan, the widow, the sick, the outcast, the immigrant. How are you serving someone who lacks money or friends or health? Maybe you're one of our global child sponsors, or you've befriended a kid at school or here at church. Maybe you volunteer in our community. Get connected can help you find a place to serve or just look around wherever God has placed you for people you can love as Jesus loved.

Most importantly, Jesus wants your heart for his kingdom. He wants your relationship with the poor. He wants each one of us somehow to love our neighbors, personally. Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also. The parable of the rich fool challenges us with a negative example. Don't imitate the fool. Instead, imitate Jesus who was rich toward God and others, especially the poor. He modeled a missionary life of gratitude and generosity and courageous trust and calls us to do the same. Would you pray with me?

So Jesus help us to trust you and obey your call. Save us from greed and anxiety and fear. Make us rich toward you and others, especially the poor. Amen.

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Discussion Questions

1. What motivates the disciples to ask Jesus about prayer?
2. In Jesus' model for prayer (verses 2-4), what two concerns related to God come first? Why? What personal concerns then follow? (See also Matthew's version in 6:9-13).
3. What does the parable in verses 5-8 teach us about prayer? How do verses 9-10 relate to the parable?
4. What is Jesus main point in verses 11-13? What is he trying to communicate about God? About us?
5. What is the most valuable gift God can give? Explain. 6. What valuable gift has God given you in the past? 7. What stands out in this passage as most relevant to you right now? Explain.