



‘But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’

2 Peter 3:18

August 1

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Gospel reading: Luke 12.13-21

Pray for growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus and read the passage together.

The Parable of the Rich Fool

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

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

¹⁶And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷He 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 all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things 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 anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Looking around

a. Immediate context

The immediate context for this parable is given back at the beginning of chapter 12:

Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered ... Jesus began to speak, saying ...' (12:1)

We are to imagine this very large audience then, when we read in verse 13 of someone in the crowd appealing for Jesus' arbitration and, thereby, provoking this parable. Already Jesus has been teaching about God's protection and provision (12:4-12), and in the section that follows this parable – verses 22-34 – Jesus continues on the same theme with reference to God's providential care of the ravens and the lilies of the field. This broader discussion of our dependence on God's generous goodness frames this parable of the rich fool who 'stores things up for himself but is not rich toward God.' Here Jesus turns from the preceding teaching on the need to trust God in the midst of persecution to the obstacle that money can be to total devotion to God.

b. Its place in the structure of the book

Following Darrell Bock's analysis of this Gospel it does seem that Luke packaged his material into five basic sections:

- I. Luke's Preface and the Introduction of John and Jesus (1:1-2:52)
- II. Jesus' Preparation for Ministry: Anointed by God (3:1-4:13)
- III. The Galilean Ministry: Revelation of Jesus (4:14-9:50)
- IV. The Jerusalem Journey: Jewish Rejection and the New Way (9:51-19:44)
- V. Jerusalem: The Innocent One Slain and Raised (19:45-24:53)

This incident, then, happened during that long Journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:44) where Jesus teaches the new way of his kingdom amidst the rejection of the religious. Back in Luke 9:51 Jesus 'resolutely set out for Jerusalem' aware of what would happen when he got there. Here he makes it absolutely clear to us that his way rejects the way of greed since it is a way that is pursued with the awareness of God's secure providence and the ultimate insecurity of both life and money.

c. Its contribution to the message and purpose of the book

As Luke 1:1-4 spells out, the Gospel was written to fill out and firm up faith in the 'things fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.' The teaching Jesus gave during that final journey to Jerusalem fills in what it means to live in the light of those 'fulfilled things'.

One element of Jesus' teaching that is particularly clear in Luke is his focus on 'the poor' and consequent critique of 'the rich'. Many of the stories and parables that are found only in Luke and not the other Gospels address this subject. This parable is one of those parables unique to Luke's Gospel. Negatively it serves as an example of the red herring of riches in this age which aren't what constitute real life. The man's request leads Jesus to make this brief comment on the danger of focussing on possessions – a danger echoed later in Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31) Through refusing to enter into the dispute, Jesus notes the kind of problems that greed can cause. One cannot present a suitcase full of riches to God for admission into heaven. God desires other priorities.

d. Is the passage or part of it quoted elsewhere in the Bible or does it quote other parts of the Bible?

As just mentioned this passage is unique to Luke and not repeated in the other Gospels or directly quoted elsewhere in the New Testament. Interestingly, God's pronounced judgment in the parable (12:20) echoes Amos 5:11 where, in the context of the imminent exile, the prophet speaks of the people not enjoying the riches they have stored up for themselves – because they were about to be taken out of the land of the promise.

What's more, when God says to the man 'You fool!' it's hard not to think of the fool in Proverbs. There being a fool has nothing to do with a low IQ but comes down to being foolish enough not to fear the Lord and instead following the way that leads to death (Proverbs 9:13-18). This rich fool would have benefitted from heeding the wise warnings of Proverbs.

e. How the passage contributes to our understanding of God, Jesus, humanity, God's salvation, life together as Christians, discipleship

Following Jesus clearly involves a different way of thinking about our possessions. At its heart this parable is all about greed. Greed is a problem because it can fuel disagreement and disharmony. The danger of the pursuit of possessions is that it can make us insensitive to people whom we are made to love (10:26-28). Greed can create a distortion about what life is, because the definition of life is not found in objects

but relationships, especially to God but also the people he has made in his image. It is interesting that the man in the parable does nothing unjust or wrong in acquiring his riches – and the parable condemns neither wealth nor planning; what God condemns as wrong is the man’s attitude towards them. In Colossians 3:5 and Ephesians 5:5, greed is called idolatry because it tends to become a god that drives one to do things that are not good. Here the problem is that it squeezes God out of the man’s frame of reference. Real life is tied to God, his offer of forgiveness of sins, his values, and his reward. Jesus tells us that real life, which is truly rich, is rich toward God, not things.

The APBA prayer for today sums up the new attitude we find ourselves asking God to give us as his people:

Living God, Judge of all,
you have placed in our hands the wealth we call our own:
through your Spirit give us wisdom,
that our possessions may not be a curse,
but a means of blessing in our lives.

Looking Behind

a. Relevant historical, political, social, geographical information helpful for understanding the passage

Jesus being cast in the role of arbitrator, asked to resolve a family dispute over an inheritance, should not come as surprising. At that time Jews would often take such disputes to their rabbi. So the request is a natural one, reflecting a surprisingly high degree of respect for Jesus and his judgement.

Looking Within

a. Movements or structure in the passage

The structure of this passage is quite straightforward:

- 13 The Man’s Request
- 14-15 Jesus’ Brief Warning
- 16-20 The Parable
- 21 Jesus’ Application of the Parable

b. Important or repeated words, ideas, themes

The passage is tied together around the subject of the riches and good things that can distract and ensnare: ‘his possessions’ (15), ‘a good crop’ (16), ‘all my grain and my goods’ (18), ‘plenty of good things’ (19), ‘what you have prepared for yourself’ (20), ‘stores up things for himself’ (21).

c. Important contrasting words (but, although, whereas, whilst) explanatory words (therefore, so that, for, because, since, in order that), timing words (next immediately, after, when)

- 16 ‘and’ (he told them this parable): This is the connection between the request from the man and the parable Jesus gave.
- 18 ‘then’ (he said): It is at this point of transition that the man makes his fatal error.
- 19 ‘and’ (I’ll say to myself): There is a sense of escalating error here.
- 20 ‘but’ (God): The man’s estimation of himself and God’s view are radically contrasted.

- 20 'then' (who will get...): There is a sense of both timing ('after that happens') and a logical inference that follows on from God taking away the man's life.
- 21 'this' (is how it will be): Jesus' applies the parable by thus indicating the comparison between the fictional man and the real audience.

Looking Clearly

Using all of the above, work out the passage's main idea and supporting ideas:

Main idea

Supporting ideas

Try to summarise these in a clear, succinct statement:

Try to represent what the passage says and means with a drawing. No art show entries necessary! Invite willing people to explain their drawings, unpacking what is being said and the meaning.

Looking at Jesus

Doing this helps grow disciples of Jesus...

How has this study enlarged or enriched your understanding of Jesus and his claims, call and promises?

How do you respond to Him?

Looking in the mirror

Doing this helps grow disciples of Jesus...

What personal and corporate (your home group or church) beliefs you hold does this study confirm to be true?

What personal and corporate beliefs has this study challenged and corrected?

What personal and corporate values, attitudes and priorities has this study reinforced or challenged?

What personal and corporate behaviour and traditions has this study endorsed or challenged?

Looking forward

Doing this helps grow disciples of Jesus...

What encouragements, comforts and changes will you or your group take with you today?

Resolve to help one another move forward in repentance and faith.

Prayer and praise