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## LK 12:1-59: THE LESSON OF THE RICH FOOL

*No. EE1*

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**T**housands of people crowd around Jesus to hear what he says. He warns them against hypocrisy - the leaven of the Pharisees (1-3).

Jesus then addresses a problem plaguing many of his listeners: if we should resist the Pharisees and their religious system, we would be persecuted. The intolerance of these religious leaders for dissenters is displayed in their actions later against Jesus. This is why the Lord continues from verse 5 to tell his audience about the loving kindness of his heavenly Father for all those who should suffer persecution for his Son's sake, and why He warns prospective disciples not to deny Him (9-10).

However, while Jesus is busy teaching this essential message, a man rudely interrupts Him. Rather than taking the words of Jesus to heart, this chap is preoccupied with entirely different affairs: he is embroiled in a scuffle with his brother concerning their inheritance (13).

Jesus does not deny that this could be a grave problem, but the legal system was put in place to address this kind of issue. Jesus notices that this man has a greater and more profound problem: avarice! Consequently Jesus tells the parable, and in the process discusses something that, throughout centuries, but especially today, robs the church of vitality and causes many to miss eternal salvation.

### THE PARABLE IN A NUTSHELL

A rich man harvests a vast crop, and ends up with an enviable problem: his sheds are too small. He

builds greater barns, and that done, sits back contentedly and, so to speak, pats himself on the back: "Old chap, you finally have enough to retire! There is plenty to keep you from wanting in your old age. How well you did for yourself! This is everything of which you've ever dreamed: after all your hard work, you deserve to enjoy your life!"

After all, in our society, that is every man's dream, isn't it? This is the castle in the air for which millions slave away all their lives.

That night, however, the man unexpectedly dies. Of all that stored wealth he cannot take a cent, not a crumb, not even a wisp into eternity with him.

This was not the worst, however: for nothing can be more terrible than God's judgement of him: "You fool!" The old chap had *one* life and *one* chance - but wasted it. All that remains is unutterable woe for eternity.

### WHY IS THIS MAN A FOOL?

What is foolishness? It is the refusal to see and judge the world around you for what it really is. It is to apply an untrue yardstick; it is to pursue the wrong priorities; it is to convince yourself that good is bad and bad, good; it is to deceive yourself.

This man is a fool because he holds two basic assumptions that are very wide of the mark. And here the issue is not secondary; it is an issue of vital, and eternal, importance.

The man's views on material property are essentially flawed; and His opinion about what life really is, holds fatal consequences.

### Concerning possessions he errs in four ways.

- Firstly, the man imagines that his earthly possessions belong to *him* - that he therefore has full authority over it. This is shown in the way he talks about *his* harvest, *his* barns, *his* wheat, *his* things, *his* soul. But he misleads himself: nothing is actually his. Whose ground was it that yielded the crops? Who was it that sent the rain? Who was it

that even granted him wisdom and skills and strength? What do we own that we have not received?

Truly, when the Lord gives, and when He takes, He does so as sovereign Owner - and who can dispute it? We are merely servants, stewards, at most managers, in the Lord's service.

- Secondly, the man takes it for granted that his wealth will last forever - or, in any case, "for many years" (19). He does not calculate on fires destroying his barns, earthquakes devastating his house, or the stock market crashing.

- Thirdly, the man is convinced that his possessions are there for his enjoyment - to make the world a more pleasant place. But God lends us possessions to serve Him - in *His* interest, for *His* glory, for *His* gospel, *His* church, *His* poor.

- Fourthly, the man believes that his possessions can satisfy his soul. Indeed, he addresses his soul when he anticipates the pleasures awaiting him (19). But the human soul can enjoy neither a sumptuous steak, nor a glass of good wine. Peace of the soul cannot be achieved by owning gold rings or satin dressing gowns. Nor can an adrenaline rush satisfy a soul.

### Concerning life, he errs in three ways.

- As far as the life of the here and now is concerned, the man only takes his *bodily* existence into account. Even as he addresses his soul, he tries to satisfy it with fleshly delights: rest, eating, drinking, and pleasure. The internal man and his spiritual well-being does not even feature on his list of priorities. But in essence it is man's spirit that is of importance; it is that part of you that is indestructible and immortal.

- Moreover, the man lives his life as if this life is all there is. He lives, as Ecclesiastes puts it,

"under the sun". He does not prepare himself for the life to come at all. He ignores the fact that this life and the next are directly linked - that our lives *here* will decide where and how we spend eternity.

- Thirdly, as with every one who lives as this man does, he fails to take his coming death into account. When, from time to time, he is confronted with his own physical mortality, he convinces himself that *that* time is surely so far away in the future that it is completely unnecessary to consider it now.

- Such is the life of a fool. He chases after wind, living in a fantasy world of his own making. He only deals with those realities that suit him. He always chooses the path of least resistance.

## TO BE RICH IN GOD

□ If one reads this parable inattentively, it would seem as if Jesus only issues a warning, but does not go on to give a positive alternative. But the punch line here is the last verse (21). In this parable the Lord confronts us with an unavoidable and radical decision. It cuts to the quick of our being. *Are you hoarding up treasure on earth, or are you rich towards God?*

Once one has worked through all the options available on this earth, only one final choice remains that *must* be made: are you living for this life, or are you giving all for the next? And a compromise is not possible: you can live for only one of these two alternatives. This is the message of Jesus.

And this is what He talks about in the rest of the chapter. Although it is impossible to consider it here in detail, an overview is useful to give the general impression.

- Jesus firstly assures his disciples not to be concerned about their sustenance should they choose to pursue richness in God (22-34). Compensation in this world always equates money and possessions. How can one survive without

scrimping and saving compulsively? No, Jesus guarantees us: your heavenly Father will care for you in the tiniest detail - providing you seek the kingdom of God devoutly (31).

Thus, says Jesus, do not hoard, but give liberally and cheerfully (33). This is not only a way of overcoming the suction power of this world, but is a wonderful way of investing in heaven, and becoming rich towards God.

The Lord reminds us, in conclusion, it is the intention of your heart that is crucial - and it is an inescapable rule: where your treasure is, your heart will also be (34).

- The Lord says, secondly, that this is not a hobby or sideline event that can be taken up or dropped at your leisure (35-48). Not at all! He describes an expectant waiting on the Lord that utilises every day for the glory of the Lord and earnestly desires the coming of His kingdom. It is like a slave who knows that his master might return on any day, and therefore makes sure that everything is constantly perfect for his arrival. Nothing is as important as pleasing his master.

Jesus' disciples live everyday with single-minded devotion in the light of eternity, unlike the farmer who simply wants to sit back and enjoy.

- Thirdly, this lifestyle and devotion has serious implications (49-53). It wars with the values of this world and causes strife with those who live according to those values. And this fallen world does not easily tolerate non-conformists - those who would appeal to its conscience.

Disciples of Jesus must therefore realize that this life will as a rule not be a bed of roses. After all, they are investing in heaven, and not the earth.

- The Lord Jesus concludes this crucial teaching with a reproof and an urgent call (54-59).

Why are His listeners blind to the importance of the moment? Why do they not realise that it is the long-awaited Messiah addressing them? Why can

they not realise that God's kingdom has arrived with radical new values and priorities? Why would they want to continue in the same way as always? Why do they wish to continue marching to the beat of this world?

Come, Jesus calls to the people, judge for yourself. Do my words not echo what the Word of God has always taught? (57). Does it not make sense? Of course, of course!

□ Therefore careful consideration is urgent, and people cannot defer making crucial decisions. Nobody knows how much time he still has on this earth. And to arrive in the hereafter with no investment in heaven is too terrible to contemplate. To appear naked before God's tribunal - while all your possessions lie rotting in storage on earth - would be a worse fate than anything that can befall one on earth. From the prison of God's judgement one cannot escape!

One word will echo again and again through the halls of judgement one day: *Fool! Fool! Fool!*

Truly, nothing, nothing at all, is as important at this moment as hearing the word of King Jesus clearly and living fervently according to it.

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