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***Rich Toward God***  
***Luke 12:13-21***

*Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.”* <sup>14</sup> *But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?”* <sup>15</sup> *And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”* <sup>16</sup> *Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly.* <sup>17</sup> *And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’* <sup>18</sup> *Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.* <sup>19</sup> *And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’* <sup>20</sup> *But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’* <sup>21</sup> *So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”*

The context of this parable is very important.  
Jesus doesn’t want anything to do with this situation.  
Someone in the crowd has just asked him to help  
get some inheritance!

Jesus not only ***declines to intervene, he warns against greed,***  
and thinking that life is about possessions.  
Then he tells the story of a ***rich farmer.***

Situations like these are really not that unusual, are they?  
***We’ve all seen ugly situations after someone’s death.***  
Someone feels slighted because their inheritance wasn’t what was expected.  
Someone feels like they are ‘owed’ a certain amount, because of what they have  
done for their loved one....

***When someone dies and leaves money and possessions,***  
often there is disagreement over who gets what, and why.

So Jesus ***addresses that head on---***by denying the request to be a arbitrator,  
and instead offering a ***very stern warning, and a story,***

All about greed.

***Most people don't consider themselves greedy.***

We think the green monster doesn't ever visit our hearts.

But it does.

Instead of greed we call it '*just wanting what's fair*'.

'*getting what we've earned*', or '*what we deserve*'.

That's not greed, is it?

Jesus would say, ***it all depends on your heart.***

And Jesus certainly ***knows the motivations*** of our hearts!

***What exactly is Jesus worried about?***

When you first read this story,

the request in the crowd doesn't seem entirely ridiculous—

I mean, ***wouldn't Jesus be a really fair judge?***

And the story of the man building bigger barns ***doesn't seem too crazy either***—

I mean, ***shouldn't we be wise*** with our finances,

and save for emergencies, or retirement?

Especially if we are blessed with abundance?

This farmer seems to be a very hard ***worker***, very ***smart***,

And one year he had a very good ***harvest***...

Jesus doesn't say that he has been dishonest in any way—

he worked hard, and had success.

so much so that he decided to build bigger barns to store everything.

He was so smart that he stored up enough to secure his future....or so he thought.

But then God calls this smart, successful businessman a ***fool***.

For his life will be taken from him tonight, right at the height of all his success.

***"You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.***"

This ***man is a fool*** for thinking he can actually secure his own future.

***"I will pull 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."***

He didn't realize that *no one's future is secure*,  
At any moment life can take a dramatic turn, right?

What's even more disturbing than this man's *actions*,  
is his *heart*, right?

In the heart of this smart, rich farmer, this man blessed with abundance,  
is an *attitude of selfishness*.

He IS in fact greedy, because he is solely concerned with *his OWN welfare*,  
and his *OWN future*,  
not that of anyone else,  
not those who are less fortunate.

It's like he *definitely hasn't heard Jesus* talking about money or possessions  
before...or saying things like  
whatever you've *done for the least of these*, you've done for me!

In his sixty spoken words this man says *"I", or "My" 15 times!*  
For this guy, it's all about him—no one else!

You don't hear anything about *gratitude to God*, do you?  
You don't hear anything about *generosity*, do you?

It reminds me of what Jesus says just a little later in Luke 12,  
when he says *do not store up treasures on earth that can be destroyed, but  
treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

So what does Jesus mean when he says we should be *rich toward God?*  
And have *treasures in heaven?*

How are *we rich toward God?*  
*Or are we?*

And *where are our hearts right now*,  
when it comes to our stuff?  
How is God creating a generous heart in you and I—  
a heart that *cares more about blessing others than being blessed?*

That's part of this story isn't it?  
How life—*real life*—the kind of life that stores up treasures in heaven,  
Is *about blessing others, more than being blessed.*

It's about *our attitude* toward what we have.

*15 And Jesus said, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."*

Isn't that true?

When we *get to our last breath*,

will we really be worried about what kind of house we had, or car we drove?

Do people at the end of life show regret for not having enough money, or stuff?

I can say with near certainty, *people do not regret those kinds of things.*

If people do have regret, it's for lost or broken *relationships*,

for time that they didn't spend with family and friends,

*for working more than loving, and serving, and helping others.*

When we *remember someone after their death*,

We don't sit around and talk about someone's abundant possessions, or great retirement savings---we talk about their *heart*.

Their *love, their joy, their service, their compassion.*

*Why?*

Because those are the things that make up *real life*, the kind of life where our treasures are in heaven, and our purses don't wear out!

Real life is not about greed, or desire,

*it's about blessing more than being blessed.*

Or as Jesus said, it's about how it's *always better to give, than to receive.*

Isn't that so true?

So, how are we *making the most of our days*,

By blessing others around us?

By sharing, serving, extending our resources to those in need,

By offering what we have to the kingdom of God?

This week I was reading the *Christian Century*, and Peter Marty

told the beautiful story of *25 year old twin sisters*, Bethany and Hannah Goralski.

Their Dad died of kidney failure,

and to *honor his generous spirit* with others, they decided, each of them, to donate a kidney to a complete stranger!

Their decision set up a chain reaction of anonymous kidney donations, at

Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago, soon it was ten donors and recipients, with potentially more to come!

Their dad's generosity

Inspired their generosity, which inspired the generosity of others,  
who all wanted to bless someone in need.

Marty wrote: *What inspires people to behave in such generous ways? I'm convinced that bone-deep generosity is a way of life that has **nothing to do with means, and everything to do with desire**.* Peter Marty, Christian Century, July 31, 2019, pg. 3.

I love that.

Being generous, blessing others, sharing from our abundance,  
**Does NOT depend on us having a big bank account, or lots of 'extras'.**

It has to do with our *hearts*.

Christ calls us to have *hearts that want to bless*—

and when we do, our lives are changed, as is the world around us.

Because generosity begets generosity.

And Joy is contagious!

A few years ago I read the great book called

**7:An Experimental Mutiny Against Excess,**

by a great Christian author named Jen Hatmaker.

In her book she documents her journey to go without some of the possessions and  
privileges of the average American,

because we have so, so much.

So much more than we need,

So much that can help those who are in need.

Hatmaker writes in her book, "*a child says 'me', an adult says 'us'*."

*Maturity* deciphers need from want, wisdom from foolishness.

*Growing up* means curbing appetites, shifting from me to we,

understanding that private choices have public consequences.

*Let's be consumers who silence the screaming voice that yells "I WANT"!*

*and instead listens to the quiet 'we need'....*

*What if we...wrote a **new story**....*

*I suspect we'd find that elusive contentment,*

*storing up treasures in heaven like Jesus told us to."*

Jen Hatmaker, *7:An Experimental Mutiny Against Excess*, Nashville: B&H, 2012. pg. 94.

Wow.

What if we did *spend more time thinking about how to give and bless others,*  
than how to get and save for ourselves?

What if we could experience that *contentment, and joy?*

I have a little girl I've adopted through Compassion in Uganda (if you're interested that is a great program!). It's the 3<sup>rd</sup> child I've sponsored since college,

I've seen two girls grow up and become nurses!

I sent extra money to little Lillian and her family for her birthday, and you know what they did? They bought a goat, some maize, oh, and some sweets—to share. I love it. It's a joy to give, and a joy that they pass on!

You know, Jesus never says that the problem with the rich fool is that he is *rich*. Jesus doesn't condemn money itself.

He condemns the *love of it*.

He condemns *greed*—a word which means in Greek *a yearning for more*.

The problem isn't just that he was *storing* for the future.

It was that he thought that would *set him up for life*.

HIM. Not others. Not those in need.

He *built bigger barns* to house his bumper crop—for himself,

Begging the question, how much does one person really need?

This man is so concerned for *himself*,

That he never mentions *God's grace*

that allowed him to have all such an abundance!

His attitude is *I did it myself, I'll keep it for myself....*

Now, I don't know about you, but I don't think of myself as *greedy or selfish*.

But don't we all struggle sometimes, with deciphering *a need versus a want?*

Aren't we all faced with *choices on what we buy, and how much,*

On what we *save, and for what purposes?*

Don't we all wonder how much we should be *giving,*

When we have been *blessed with so much?*

There's a reason Jesus talks about *money and possessions A LOT* in the Gospels.

He wants us to know that ours is a *God of abundance and blessing,*

*So that, we can be a blessing* to others!

*Isn't it in blessing others, that we become rich toward God?*

What does rich toward God mean to *you?*

Right now, with what you own, with what you have in the bank?

What does it mean for us as a *church* to be rich toward God?

We can see how wrong it is for this guy to think only of himself,  
No gratitude to God,  
No care for those less fortunate.

But lest we just judge this guy, while there's a plank in our own eye,  
Why don't we ask ourselves, *where are WE falling into a similar trap?*  
Where are we caring more about what we *have*,  
than our *gratitude* to God for every bit of it?  
Where are we caring more for our own *stuff*,  
than *helping* the least of these?

Because here's the truth.

*None of us is the sole source of what we have.*

It is by *God's grace alone* that we are born where we are,  
and given the opportunities we have received.

Sure, we have worked hard to be successful,

but *not without the help of God*,

And *not for the sole purpose of helping ourselves!*

*Jesus followers* are called to a higher standard,

A better way of life,

*A life that actually brings deep joy and contentment.*

In *America*, talking about being *dependent* on anyone *sounds strange*.

We are a *pull yourself up by your bootstraps* kind of people.

We are *self-made men and women*, right?

Actually, No.

As followers of Jesus,

We are *in this life together*—connected *and dependent* on one another,  
and *totally dependent* upon God.

With a purpose--*to bless and love* one another.

In August 1967 in Chicago, Martin Luther King, Jr gave a sermon entitled, "**Why Jesus Called A Man A Fool.**" (Delivered at Mount Pisgah Missionary Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, on 27 August 1967.)

He said, ..... "this man was a fool because he failed to realize his dependence on others. ....because he said "I" and "my" so much until he lost the capacity to say "**we**" and "**our**." He failed to realize that he couldn't do anything by himself. This man talked like he could build the barns by himself, like he could till the soil by himself....

Maybe you haven't ever thought about it, but you can't leave home in the morning without being dependent on most of the world. .... No matter where you are today, **somebody helped you** to get there..... Don't forget those who helped you come over. There are a lot of fools around. Because they fail to realize their dependence on others.

As Christians, **we are called to humility**, when it comes to our resources. We are called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, and **even Jesus acknowledged his dependence** on God and others.

And Jesus, certainly **gave** of what he had,  
He **lived to bless others, to help** others.  
To show the **love and grace** of God!

**What about us?**

**Are we living to bless** others? To help others?  
To show the love and grace of God?

Because friends, **none of us know how long** we have in this life.  
None of us has a guarantee on days or years on earth.  
So, how **will we make the most of every day we do have?**  
How can we **share, and give, and bless?**

There's an old **Quaker** saying:  
*I expect to pass through this world but once.*  
*Therefore any good work, kindness, or service I can render*  
*to any person or animal, let me do it now.*  
*Let me not neglect or delay to do it,*  
*for I will not pass this way again.*

**It's always the right time to share, and give, and bless, isn't it?**  
We will not pass this way again.  
So, as we are passing now, what will we do with our lives?

And do we realize that we often we **meet Jesus, face to face,**

*in the lives of those in need?*

In the people we decide to bless?

Jesus is talking to each one of us when he says:

‘one’s **LIFE** does not consist in the abundance of possessions’.

Life is not about what we *have*, or what we *can get*.

It’s about what we *give*.

***How we bless the people and animals around us.***

So, when we find ourselves wanting just a ***little bit more***....

More clothes, more electronics, more food....

More house, more car...

***What if we stopped to think about who we could bless,***

***With a little bit more.***

I am convicted by what Mark Hinkley Shore says in a sermon on Luke 12:

*As for that grain in your barns, that work you are good at, those accounts you manage – they are worthless for the purpose of soul-securing. Worthless. But ...*

*Our time, our talents, our possessions – they are just what God needs to answer our neighbor’s prayer for daily bread. Mark Hinkle Shore, “On Securing the Soul”, Pilgrim Preaching, 2010.*

What if we strived to be ***rich toward God?***

sharing, serving, helping with what we’ve been given?

Being the answers to our neighbor’s prayers!

***It isn’t always easy to give....***

When life is insecure, we seek security.

And our stuff sometimes gives us a false sense of security.

But aren’t we called to an eternal security? To treasures in heaven?

***And ultimately the question is this:***

***What kind of life do we want?***

Do we want the ***joy and contentment*** that comes from blessing others?

***And what about our legacy***---what do we want others to learn from our lives?

How to store or hoard? Or how to give, serve, and share?

Friends, hear the ***Good News*** of the Gospel:

The life of ***joy, and contentment*** is ours---

If we live *to share, and give, and bless* those around us,  
This is what it means, to be *rich toward God!*  
And to that, all God's people said, Amen.