



-- Read Luke 12:13-21. Pray.

I saw on YouTube what I think is a very good illustration of the point Jesus is making in this parable. It is a clip of a dog race that went awry when a real rabbit wanders onto the track. **This clip shows what happens as a result.**

The world at large, I suggest, is a lot like the majority of the dogs in that race. That is, the world at large is intent upon chasing after a worthless goal. And even in the presence of real meaning and purpose, they continue on their mad dash to catch a prize that isn't real. Despite our obvious need for forgiveness from God and even in the midst of the glorious prize of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our culture chases after deceptive treasures, such as wealth, fame, and power over people.

I suggest that the one dog with good sense in that video is actually the one which, upon seeing the real rabbit, stopped chasing the phony one. The real hero of this story is the dog who wanted the prize that was real, and therefore cast aside his pursuit of the bait set before him by people who were trying to deceive him into running a worthless race.

In our text today, Jesus is urging us to stop running the wrong race. In our experience, the false prize is riches, and the world at large is in a foolish pursuit to grab it. And our **Big Idea** this morning is this: **Riches can't make you happy; they merely reveal your heart.** To build barns is to miss life.

I want to begin our study of our text today by making an important observation the man who approaches Jesus in our text. Notice that he's not asking Jesus to change his heart, just wanted Jesus to change his fortune. He didn't really want Jesus, he just wanted what he thought was justice. He didn't want the Savior, He just wanted stuff. In my estimation, this very same misguided mentality is the real motivation of much that passes for the church today. Sadly, I don't think we have to look very long or far to find churches that seem more than willing to cater to self-centered, self-indulgent churchgoers. They are all over our nation, in our own community, and everywhere on TV.

The most egregious manifestation of this "me-first" mentality is the so-called "prosperity gospel," which is also called the "Word-of-Faith" movement, the "Positive Confession" movement, or simply the "Faith"

movement. Whatever you call it, it is the fastest growing segment of Christianity today – and not just in the United States. The prosperity gospel is spreading extensively in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and especially in Mexico and Korea.

One of the key factors to its growth is the massive amounts of money its leaders are able to extract from their adherents. This influx of cash allows for the construction of huge buildings, extensive ministries, and more importantly, wide exposure on television, all of which translates into more followers. Not only do many Word-of-Faith preachers broadcast their own services and campaigns, but Word-of-Faith leaders Paul and Jan Crouch own the largest Christian-based television network in the world. The Crouch's Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), with an estimated net worth of \$600 million, is capable of televising all over the world.

The most significant reason for the growth of the prosperity gospel, however, is that the sinful nature wants treasure more than truth. Thus, its adherents are frequently assured that their financial offerings to the preacher's ministry are "seeds" guaranteed to grow health and wealth into their lives. According to Word of Faith teachings, God is essentially obligated to give you whatever you ask for in faith. (If this is the case, why they always praying for money and rarely praying for the salvation of the nations.)

Though they rarely describe this false doctrine in such unveiled terms, what Word-of-Faith preachers are really teaching is that, by faith, a believer can command from God health and wealth and prosperity. I bring up all of this because that mindset sounds a whole lot like the mentality of the man who approaches Jesus in passage, *doesn't it?* Notice the man's tone in **verse 13**: He very boldly attempts to order Jesus to give him what he wants, saying, "*Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.*" Notice: This is not a question, but a command, and **he comes to Jesus to get what he wants most – money – not what Jesus most wants to give him – eternal life.**

Jesus, however, has no interest in catering to the man's command. In **verse 14, he replies**, "*Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?*" Instead of delving into the details of the man's grievance against his brother, Jesus goes straight to the heart of the matter, and the heart of the

matter is the heart of this man. **Rather than deliberating the man's dilemma, Jesus diagnoses his desires.** In verse 15, Jesus continues His response, saying, *"Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness..."* Jesus has little interest in settling this man's dispute, because his dispute with his brother was not his biggest problem. Rather, their dispute was merely a symptom of a greater problem in their hearts--covetousness.

The way Jesus handles this situation is informative for us. That is, in His response, He shows us the wisest way to counsel ourselves and others. Too often, especially when dealing with our own sins or those of our children, we try to correct our dilemmas without correcting our desires. We focus on the behavior but forget about the heart. As a result, we often end up with behavior that is acceptable to people, but hearts that are unacceptable to God. So Jesus' here emphasizes the importance of addressing the spirit on the inside and not just the circumstances on the outside.

With that in mind, I think we will be blessed to take a quick look at another place in Scripture where God stresses the paramount importance of addressing the heart behind our problems and not just addressing the problems themselves. In **Ezekiel 14:1-5**, Ezekiel records his encounter with some idolatrous men who come to him seeking God's help. He writes, *"Some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat down in front of me. Then the word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all? Therefore speak to them and tell them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: When any Israelite sets up idols in his heart and puts a wicked stumbling block before his face and then goes to a prophet, I the LORD will answer him myself in keeping with his great idolatry. I will do this to recapture the hearts of the people of Israel, who have all deserted me for their idols.'"*

In these instructions to Ezekiel, we see essentially the same response that Jesus gives the covetous man in Luke 12. In this case, some elders of Israel come to Ezekiel hoping that he can convince God to liberate Israel from its captivity in Babylon. However, what they discover is that God is far more concerned about the desires of their hearts than the details of their hurts. This is not because God is indifferent to their pain; Scripture makes clear that God cares deeply about every aspect of our lives. Just two weeks

ago, we learned that the very hairs on our heads are known and numbered by God. However, God cares more about the true state of our hearts than the specifics of our hurts for this reason: Our hurts are only temporary, but our hearts are eternal. Though our circumstances will come and go, our spirits will live forever. And while our happiness matters greatly to God, it is not nearly as important to Him as our holiness, because God knows that our happiness ultimately *depends* upon our holiness.

Therefore, when the man in verse 13 comes to press Jesus for a resolution his inheritance problem, Jesus sets aside the lesser issue of the man's money in order to address the weightier issue of the man's motivations. And based upon the parable that follows, it is clear that Jesus knew that the man's main motivations were covetousness and greed. He coveted what his brother had, and he was greedy for Jesus to get it for him.

So, instead of solving the man's dispute, Jesus speaks directly to his heart in verses 15 and following. He begins with a warning in verse 15, saying, "*Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness.*" In other words, He is saying to him something like this: "You'd better proceed down this path very cautiously, because you are squarely on the road of covetousness, and that is a really dangerous place to be."

And then, in the last half of **verse 15**, Jesus tells the man why his covetousness is so dangerous. He says, "*...for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*" In other words, "Watch out for covetousness and greed, because there is nothing about them that has anything to do with anything that truly matters." **Simply put, chasing after money is a total waste of life.**

John Piper put it like this: "The person who thinks the money he makes is meant mainly to increase his comforts on earth is a fool... Wise people know that all their money belongs to God and should be used to show that God, and not money, is their treasure, their comfort, their joy, and their security." Whether we have a lot of it or a little, the key question with our money is what it says about our desires. *Do we treasure God or do we really just want His gifts?*

This rich man, you see, is condemned as a fool not because He has great wealth, but because He foolishly used his wealth to prepare for a few years of leisure instead of eternity with God. He is a fool because he had his eyes

on a false and worthless prize. So it will be for us: If we spend our lives building barns for our own comfort, we are sure to miss out on God's gift of true life. Let us, then, be like the dog in the race. I pray you and I will **catch God's vision of God's real prize and abandon the worthless race for riches that is exalted all around us.** Let us, as Paul exhorted in **Philippians 3:12-14**, "*...press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of [us]. Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, let us press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus.*"