

Luke 12:13-21

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” ¹⁴But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵And 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.” ¹⁶Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ ¹⁸Then 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. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰But 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?’ ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

You fool! These words seem so harsh to our ears. And this story seems so harsh to our sensibilities. Isn't it understandable that the younger brother wants to have his rightful portion of the inheritance? Isn't it a good thing that the rich man wants to store his grain for later? Most of us must choose what to do when we have a little extra money, knowing we will probably need it later. Isn't it be responsible to be prepared? And most of us will deal with inheritance or know someone who must deal with it. It's only natural that we want what is fair.

As I read this scripture text, Jesus bothered me a little bit because he really doesn't care about fair and unfair. It's a little troubling, because I know this is exactly the kind thing that we pray to God about all the time. Lord, please make my brother do what is right and come and fix the roof that he messed up....make him reimburse me, make him share the inheritance with me, make wait for me like I waited for him, etc.

This scripture bothered me because God doesn't really seem to think fairness is as important as I do a lot of the time. When God doesn't answer prayers to make things right, many people get angry.

This man wants his brother to be fair but Jesus just wants him to wake up and see that he is wasting his time worrying about his share of the money when he doesn't even know how much time he really has.

Jesus isn't really concerned about who wins the battles over property, but he is concerned about the people who fight those battles. Whether they win or lose, they need God found in Jesus Christ. Jesus does not accept this man's plea to be the judge between him and his brother because money matters so much to this brother.

The bigger issue here is that money becomes a distraction. In fact it is nearly impossible for money to not be distracting. That is its danger.

Last week, when Jesus taught the disciples to pray you notice that the Lord's prayer was free of distraction; squarely focused on the identity of God, God's sovereignty, and trust in God's providence. This kind prayer is very different from the prayers that we've all prayed – prayers for fairness. In the reading a couple of weeks ago of Mary and Martha, it is Martha's distractedness that Jesus takes issue with. Jesus urges Martha to be free of distraction, her focus on many things, when only one thing mattered.

The disgruntled brother and the rich man in our story today are not distracted by many things, but by a fixation on one thing...how many resources they will have.

Immediately following the scripture reading for today Jesus tells the disciples not to worry about their food and clothes. Jesus is concerned about all that distracts our focus from God's central place in our life as Lord.

The privilege of having enough money to do what we think we need can make it really hard for us to discern God's presence in our life.

I think we understand that. I know focus on God is a daily struggle for me. Maybe you can sympathize with the sentiments of this man I read about a few years ago. In a televised interview, while his house was in flames from wildfires in California, he said that his brother had recently said they should be careful not to let their possessions possess them. With only the shirt on his back remaining from his home, he said the reporter, in unexpected triumph, "Now I am a free man!"

"The allure of money is that it creates the illusion of independence." We know for all the great things money brings, it always costs us with new distractions.

But, the most dangerous thing about money is that it makes us forget that we are vulnerable. When we can take care of most of our needs by buying something, we forget that we are dependent on others – and dependent on God.

Jesus wants us to be rich toward God. And I think that means realizing that we are dependent on God. But, that is very difficult for us and we need lots of prayer to stay focused.

One way we can renew commitment to God is through this Dave Ramsey class that we will be starting in the Fall. I think it will help us pursue answers to the question, What does it mean to be rich toward God?

You might think that the church is an odd place to offer a money management study, but Jesus talked about money more than any other subject, except for the kingdom of heaven. If Jesus was so concerned with our concern for money, we had probably better study what

Scripture has to say about it, especially since money and possessions do play such a central role in our lives.

What Jesus says about it in this story is that, if we aren't careful, the things we think we own can end up owning us. That's the way this really translates from the Greek. Jesus says to the man, "You fool! This very night they (that is, the possessions) will demand your life!" Maybe this means that the man will die and not enjoy the fruit of his labors. Or maybe it means that the man will miss out on what is really important because he is so consumed with accumulating more and more and more. Either way, he has lost focus on what is really important, and on his true dependence on God.

For most of us it is easy to forget our dependence on God, because even if we struggle with finances right now, relatively speaking most of us are wealthy beyond the imagination of the majority of people in the world. And if we are given much, then much is expected of us. From the earliest days of the church, the work and mission of the church was almost always financed primarily by a few wealthy benefactors. Others gave what they could, but if those who had been blessed with wealth didn't share out of their abundance, things would have been much different. And even today, the people who the church is still called to reach out to – the poor, the hungry, the homeless, and the neglected of our society – are often unable to help us pay the bills. And so God calls us to be generous, so that we can respond to God's call in the world.

One of the lessons the Israelites had to learn in the wilderness was to trust God each day for their survival. God sent manna from heaven, but they were only to gather as much as they could eat in one day, except in preparation for the Sabbath, when they could gather enough for that day, too. If they tried to store up extra manna, it turned rancid overnight. But the manna they stored for the Sabbath stayed good.

Having savings is a good thing, which is something that Dave Ramsey or any other financial management expert will tell you. But we have to have a right relationship to it. Have you ever heard that money is the root of all evil? The actual quote is that the love of money is the root of all evil. Money in and of itself is not evil, and it is necessary to do many of the things that God calls us to do. But when we start to love our money too much, to place too much trust in our money rather than in God, then they will demand our very life. And that is the foolishness that we must avoid at all costs.

Children's Sermon

Do you save money or know that parents save for them. Savings is part of our life. Today we are going to talk about a guy who saved money, but Jesus said the man was too worried about saving for the future and not appreciating what he had today.