

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: October 27, 2013
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE?”

Luke 12:13-34

[1] Our bank is technologically up to date: send them a text message, and they'll text back your balance. That's a cool feature, right? Only, instead of getting numbers, I just get these letters: 'L.O.L.'

[2] This little boy, Billy, is always being teased by the bigger boys on his block for being stupid. Their favorite joke is to offer Billy his choice between a nickel and a dime, and he takes the nickel every time.

One day, after Billy takes the nickel again, a neighbor man pulls him aside and says, "Billy, those boys are making fun of you. Don't you know that a dime is worth twice as much as a nickel, even though the nickel's bigger?"

Billy just grins and says, "If I take the dime, they'll stop doing it. So far I have made \$20!"

These next two riddles are for the kids:

[3] Q: How much money does a skunk have?

A: One scent.

[4] Q: Where do penguins keep their money?

A: In a snow bank.

[5] Now this last one is for everyone. Q: Who was the first female financier in the Bible?

A: The Pharaoh's daughter. She went down to the bank of the Nile and drew out a little prophet.

I thought that starting with a little humor might loosen things up. I know, I know: it was a *very little* humor. But it's good to be able to laugh about money.

□ Please turn with me to Luke 12:13-34. The text is divided into two sections.

◆ Section one is verses 13-21. Its unifying theme is *do not be greedy; be rich toward God*.

■ In verses 13-15 "**Someone in the crowd**" (he has to be a younger son) calls out to Jesus, "**Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.**"

The Lord replies, "**Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?**" He declines to get tangled up in this private dispute.

The next minute, he is in everybody's business when he says to the whole crowd, "**Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.**"

Does anyone here take issue with this? Would any of us argue, 'Pardon me, Lord, but you are mistaken'?

○ Of course not! We know that "**greed... is idolatry**" (Colossians 3:5). We know that our "stuff" is not the source of life.

Then again, it is one thing to know this and another to live accordingly, is it not? Greed is not always so easy to spot, especially in one's self. And as for possessions, we are prone to fall in love with our "stuff", aren't we?

"Be on your guard against all kinds of greed" is not aimed only at the 1%. **"Life does not**

consist in an abundance of possessions” is not relevant only to hoarders. These words are spoken to all of us.

- So is the Parable of the Rich Fool. Verses 16-19:

“The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”

The man is **“rich.”** Most first century Jews assume that, with some glaring exceptions, wealth is concrete evidence that of a person’s righteousness and God’s favor.

The rich man’s land yields **“an abundant harvest,”** so abundant it exceeds current storage capacity. In a low tech era with simple farming techniques and rustic tools the farmer has little control over plant yields. Hence, a bumper crop is seen as indisputable proof of Almighty God’s blessing.

The **“rich man”** is the conventional hero. He is the guy everyone else wants to be.

- Verse 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?’**

“You fool!” You trust in your wealth.

In saying **“I will”** you lay bare your reliance on wealth to master circumstances. But what if thieves steal it

or a fungus rots your hoarded crops or a fire devours everything?

In saying **“eat, drink and be merry”** you lay bare your reliance on wealth for satisfaction. But what if it leaves your soul hungry and empty?

In saying, Self, **“You have plenty of grain laid up for many years”** you lay bare your reliance on wealth to defer death. But what if **“your life is demanded from you” “this very night”**?

Wow. Am I relieved that I am not rich!

☑ {Global Rich List} Well, not here in the United States. Yet by global standards, I am very rich: a total annual income of \$25,000 puts a person in the top 2% worldwide; \$35,000 vaults you into the top 0.81% of all human beings.

Besides, the poor can also be greedy. If the rich tend to be fools because they invest their trust in the wealth they own; the destitute tend to be fools because they invest their hope in the wealth they hope to own.

Back to this particular rich man in Luke 12. **“You fool!”** Your greed is matched only by your self-centeredness:

“What shall I do?” you ask. **“I have no place where I may store my crops.”**

“This is what I will do,” you say. **“I will pull down my barns and I will build larger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain and my goods. And I will say to myself, ‘Self, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be glad.”**

Where is the dependence on and gratitude to Sovereign God? Where is the care for your neighbor?

■ Let us take to heart this cautionary word in verse 21: **“This is how it will be with those who store up things for themselves but are not rich toward God.”**

Are we **“rich toward God”** in gratitude?

Do we give thanks to God frequently, specifically, and profusely? Do we give thanks for his goodness and generosity, revealed in the blessings of work, income, food, shelter, clothing, other possessions, and so on?

Are we **“rich toward God”** in service?

○ {Mt 25:40, 45} Do we feed the hungry, supply the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, and care for the sick and imprisoned? **“Whatever [we] do for...the least of these, [we do] for”** the Son of God.

Are we **“rich toward God”** in offerings?

Do we bring offerings in corporate worship – sacrificial offerings from the top, not skimpy offerings from the leftovers! And do we intentionally honor God by how we use the money we don’t put in the plate?

We will not be **“rich toward God”** if we do not trust the LORD more than ourselves and our wealth.

◆ Which brings us to Section two in verses 22-34: its unifying theme is *do not worry; trust God*.

The Messiah empowers us with three great principles here.

■ In verses 22-23 he teaches: **“do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.”**

✈ Principle # 1) There is more to life than material experience.

Probably 99.9% of North American churchgoers agree with that statement; but a large percentage of them are materialists. They speak and act as though bodily health and material abundance is *the* greatest good and sickness and material poverty is *the* greatest calamity. Yet there is much more to life than material experience.

■ Skipping down to verse 31 we read: **“But seek his kingdom”** (the Kingdom of God) **“and these things will be given to you as well.”**

✈ Principle # 2) Make God’s reign your highest priority and everything else will fall into place.

God does not promise unlimited food and clothing if we surrender to his lordship. He does not even guarantee steady rations of bread and water. But when we make his kingdom our highest priority we are enabled to trust God despite deprivation, because his domain does not depend on what we eat and wear.

■ Next, down to verse 34: **“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

✈ Principle # 3) Invest your treasure where you intend to spend eternity.

I have officiated 93 funerals and attended dozens more and I have yet to see a hearse pulling a U-Haul. It is true, what they say: **“You can’t take it with you.”**

But the cliché is missing a vital phrase, and I am lobbying to amend it: **“You can’t take it with you, but**

you can send it on ahead.” And where you send it, your life will follow. Sink your money into transient things and when moths consume them and rust corrodes them and thieves steal them, your soul will be consumed and corroded and stolen.

Some of us want to be rich toward God. We do not want to be greedy, we hate worrying. But how?

■ Verse 24: in the New Living Translation it reads: **“Look at the ravens. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for God feeds them. *And you are far more valuable to him than any birds!*”**

■ Verses 27-28: **“Consider...the wild flowers... They do not labor or spin. Yet not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, *how much more will he clothe you.*”**

■ And verses 29-30: **“Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.”**

Luke 12:13-34 is the Word of the Lord.