Rich Towards God

Luke · Luke 12:13-15; Luke 12:16-21; Luke 8:14; Luke 9:24-25; Ecclesiastes 8:15; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

AT A GLANCE

Rolanda, one of the pastors on staff, preaches Luke 12:13-21 in the ongoing Luke series, following last week's call not to be anxious. Jesus refuses to be a tool for a brother's inheritance scheme and exposes covetousness and hoarding alike: life does not consist in possessions. Being rich toward God is not a checklist but a response to God having first been rich with us.

- Desire is God's gift, but it turns into coveting the moment we expect a job, a home, or a person to give us life.
- The rich man's fault was not building barns but planning as though his life, crops, and soul were his to secure.
- Held loosely, possessions and time become things to steward and give; held tightly, they become weights or carrots on a stick that never deliver life.

> *"To be rich towards God, we need one fundamental truth: to remember that God has first been rich with us."*

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

Luke 12:13-15 — [13]One of the men in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, our father just died and left some things for us. Tell my brother to share them with me." [14]But Jesus said to him, "Who said I should be your judge or decide how to divide your father's things between you two?" [15]Then Jesus said to them, "Be careful and guard against all kinds of greed. People do not get life from the many things they own." (ERV)

Luke 12:16-21 — [16]Then Jesus used this story: "There was a rich man who had some land. His land grew a very good crop of food. [17]He thought to himself, 'What will I do? I have no place to keep all my crops.' [18]Then he said, 'I know what I will do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger barns! I will put all my wheat and good things together in my new barns. [19]Then I can say to myself, I have many good things stored. I have saved enough for many years. Rest, eat, drink, and enjoy life!' [20]But God said to that man, 'Foolish man! Tonight you will die. So what about the things you prepared for yourself? Who will get those things now?' [21]This is how it will be for anyone who saves things only

for himself. To God that person is not rich." (ERV)

Luke 8:14 — "What about the seed that fell among the thorny weeds? That is like the people who hear God's teaching, but they let the worries, riches, and pleasures of this life stop them from growing. So they never produce a crop." (ERV)

Luke 9:24-25 — [24]Any of you who try to save the life you have will lose it. But you who give up your life for me will save it. [25]It is worth nothing for you to have the whole world if you yourself are destroyed or lost. (ERV)

Ecclesiastes 8:15 — So I decided it was more important to enjoy life because the best thing people can do in this life is to eat, drink, and enjoy life. At least that will help people enjoy the hard work God gave them to do during their life on earth. (ERV)

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 — [19]You should know that your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit that you received from God and that lives in you. You don't own yourselves. [20]God paid a very high price to make you his. So honor God with your body. (ERV)

The argument

Desire Becomes Coveting When We Ask It to Give Us Life — Jesus' rebuke of a man who wanted a rabbi as his instrument

A man in the crowd asks Jesus to make his brother divide the inheritance. Bringing an inheritance dispute to a rabbi would not be unusual, Rolanda notes, but this man is not asking for wisdom; he is telling Jesus what to do. "Jesus is a tool in his own scheme to get what he wants." Jesus names the motive as coveting. Wanting, Rolanda says, is "the flat word"; coveting is "more like a need or a craving," a compulsion toward what is hard to get, often brewing for some time. Desire itself is God-given, whether for a job, a home, friendship, or a partner. "Those are wonderful things to want, except when we expect those things to give us life." Then a good desire becomes a trap.

> **Insight** — *A good desire turns into coveting at the point where we hope in it, rather than in the Lord, to give us life.*

The Rich Man's Fault Was Possession, Not Barn-Building — Keeping and coveting are two sides of the same coin

The parable concerns keeping more than coveting, yet Rolanda calls the two "two sides of the same coin." The man's wealth came honorably, and his wish for security and rest is one many would share. The barns are not the problem; Joseph built barns to feed people. The problem lay in what the man thought and believed: "It was his life, his crops, his barn, his goods, his soul." He neither prayed nor gave thanks; he was building his own kingdom and assumed he governed his own life and death. Luke 8:14 names the thorns, the cares, riches, and pleasures, which either weigh us down or dangle like a carrot on a stick. Luke 9:24-25 names the cost:

gaining the world, he forfeits himself.

> **Insight —** *Prosperity and planning are not sins; the sin is the unspoken belief that life is ours to secure.*

The Same Words Can Mean Thanksgiving or Escape — Ecclesiastes 8:15 as a mirror of the rich man's "eat, drink, be merry"

The man's refrain, "relax, eat, drink, be merry," recalls Ecclesiastes 8:15, a verse often quoted approvingly. Rolanda calls it a mirror verse: "They're practically the same verse," and yet the contrast is beautiful. The author of Ecclesiastes knew the world is broken and fleeting, that we have very little control, and that work and pain are a given. Seeking wealth and ease is pointless, so all that remains is God, and food and drink are enjoyed as thanks "in the midst of darkness." The rich man reaches for the same enjoyment to avoid the world's pain. "He flips something good and makes it an idol." He was rich toward himself but not toward God, and he has nothing to say when his soul is required.

> **Insight —** *Enjoyment is received as thanks when it is offered to God, and becomes an idol when it is used to escape reality.*

Responsible Living Can Conceal the Same Greed — Rolanda's confession about being a good person

"In our area, we value being responsible": saving for retirement, completing to-do lists, succeeding in order to honor God. Because these are good things, greed is easy to justify and to miss. Rolanda asks how we tell wisdom from masking fear, selfishness, and withholding, and answers that only the Lord knows our true motive, including when we hoard time, resources, forgiveness, and grace. Then comes the disclosure. The parable hits close to home not only because of greed uncovered, but because "I allow the stuff and the cares of this world to crowd out my deepest desire to be with God. I covet being responsible and a good person." Even that image can crowd out time with the Lord.

> **Insight —** *Respectable, responsible goals can quietly crowd out the Lord, and only he can expose the motive underneath.*

Being Rich Toward God Is a Response to God's Prior Riches — Generous, lavish giving grounded in stewardship, not a checklist

"Rich" here implies "generous, lavish, to freely give," joyful and without compulsion; toward God it means wanting to be with him and giving him access to everything. Rolanda refuses a checklist: "We need one fundamental truth, and that is to remember that God has first been rich with us," humbling himself, taking death on, and bringing the broken us alive. From 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "you are not your own," so breath, time, and money are his, and we steward them, sometimes enjoying and sometimes giving away. With Jesus at the center, coveting turns back into desire, unmet wishes into grief and prayer, grudges into forgiveness,

and time becomes interruptible. George Muller, in the telling, spent his life and fortune on orphans and is quoted as saying that life is worth as much as it is spent for the Lord's service.

Insight — *We loosen our grip on the world only as we are held by a God who gave everything for us first.*

Cross-references

- Luke 12:11-12 — Recalled from last week: the Spirit teaches disciples what to say when dragged before authorities, setting a sober tone
- Genesis 41 — Joseph's barns stored crops to feed people, showing that building barns is not the rich man's error
- Psalm 4:7-8 — Closing prayer: joy greater than abundant grain and wine, and safety in God alone

DEVOTIONAL

Open the drawer and the shirts stand upright in tidy rows, folded the way a Netflix special taught us in a strange spring. It feels like freedom, and we crave it because we are suffocated: too much stuff, too many demands, too many inboxes. So we reach for less, or quietly believe that more would finally let us breathe. Jesus is not a minimalist coach, and he will not be made a tool in anyone's scheme. He looks past the drawer and the barn to the one holding them. The rich man was not wicked; he was planning well. Yet every noun in his story wore the same possessive: my crops, my barns, my goods, my soul. Then one night the soul he spoke to was asked for by Another. The unnerving part is how respectable the hoarding looks. It looks like savings, schedules, and being a good person. Only the Lord knows the motive beneath it. But the turn in this text is not a demand to give more. It is a memory: God was rich with us first. He humbled himself, took death on, and raised the broken, grasping us. The soul that remembers this can unclench. Coveting shrinks back into desire, desire into prayer, grief into trust, and the day becomes interruptible. The man in the parable had no time to take stock. We do. The quiet tap on the heart is an invitation, not an audit. Look at what you are holding, and let Jesus be the treasure that does not need a barn.

Reflection

- Finish the sentences "If only I just had..." and "I can't give up..." honestly. What do your answers suggest about where you expect life to come from?
- Where might your responsibility, planning, or image as a good person be masking fear or withholding, and what would it take to let the Lord look there?
- What would it mean to treat your time, money, and forgiveness as entrusted to you by God, and to hold them so that you could be interrupted or give them away?

Closing prayer

Father, life has so many distractions, burdens, fears, and pleasures, and it is easy to hide our coveting and greed, fixated on our plans and to-do lists and missing you. Help us to take care and be on guard. We confess that we want to surrender all to you, to hold this world loosely and to live with you at the center. Show yourself to those who do not yet know you. Grow our hearts to match Psalm 4: you have put more joy in my heart than when their grain and wine abound; in peace I lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. Amen.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

Everything I hold, from breath and time to money and heart, is already God's; I am a steward, free to enjoy it or give it away.

This week

This week, finish the sentences "If only I just had..." and "I can't give up..." and write your answers down. Then pray over them, asking what the Lord is doing in your heart and whether something is his invitation to loosen your grip or give.

Return to **Luke 12:15**