Luke 12:13-21; Matthew 6:19-24; The Parable of the Rich Fool I. The Context of Coveting II. The Parable on Possessions

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, when Steve Jobs died, how much of his money did he leave to his family? The answer is- all of it! Money is a divisive issue, and it causes many conflicts. I have seen families hold grudges for years after a death in the family- and that fight almost always centers around the division of assets. Something was not fair! Last week, with the Parable of the Talents we found a man rebuked for his sloth. This man was lazy and he refused to use the talent entrusted to him. This week, the man in our parable is not slothful! He is not lazy, but he is extremely ungrateful! Last week we saw that we must be good stewards of the earthly riches that God has given t us. This week we find that we must be grateful to God who has given us these gifts- as we must also use the earthly wealth in a way that reflects eternal and spiritual realities. Many years ago, it was common to find a bumper sticker that read “He who dies with the most toys wins.” But that mentality is so very shortsighted- it takes no account of what comes after this life. And this materialist mentality is also superficial- it has no consideration of spiritual realities. So as we return to our parables this morning, we consider this theme: Jesus Christ warns against coveting and ingratitude with the parable of the rich fool.

**I. The Context of Coveting**

In our first point we consider the context which brought about this parable. In Luke 12 Jesus has been teaching about the need to acknowledge Him before men- that to deny the identity and work of the Holy Spirit is to commit the unforgiveable sin- and then it seems like this this man interrupts Jesus out of the blue. Someone says to Jesus- tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me- v. 13. So it seems like this man comes to Jesus with a request- not to be healed- not that he would see or that his son would raised from the dead- but that his brother would give him money. So evidently, there are two brothers who are fighting over the inheritance after their father has died. As an aside- Jesus has the power to raise this man’s father from the grave- but that is not in the interest of this man. He only wants his share- he feels like he is being cheated by his older brother. It was the eldest responsibility to settle his father’s affairs. But evidently this younger brother feels like it is taking too long or not being divided evenly. So this man comes to Jesus as a one coming to a rabi or a teacher. Now the OT law did make provision for this- in Ex. 18 Moses appointed judges in the land to settle disputes among God’s people. And Dt. 25 says that if there is a dispute between men, they are to come to court and judges will decide between them. So this man in our text is going to Jesus to settle the dispute- he wants Jesus to rule on this case on his behalf. But is this man motivated by justice or by greed? Does he only want his share because he respects his father’s wishes or does he have a more sinister desire? Well, Jesus flatly refuses to get involved for two reasons. First of all, Jesus refuses to get involved in v. 14 on principle. Who made me to be a judge over you in a matter like this? Basically, Jesus is saying that He has not come to earth in order to settle disputes of this nature. He was not willing to be sidetracked or distracted by going to court. He would not be this man’s attorney because Jesus has more important things to do. So what has Jesus come to do? To seek and save the loss! He came to preach good news to the captives- to proclaim the way to salvation and to provide the atonement necessary for His people! Not that Jesus did not care about physical things- His miracles prove that He cares for the physical needs of people as well- but his primary calling was to become the sacrifice for our sins. For Jesus to forsake his calling in order to sit in an attorney’s chair would be a distraction! Jesus had a limited time on earth- his ministry spanning a little over 3 years. Jesus did not come to give legal advice, but to lay down His life for the lost! To put this in today’s terms, it would be like a church canceling its worship services in order to help people file their taxes. Or having a church send out their preacher to mow people’s lawns on Sunday instead of preaching. There is nothing wrong with works of mercy- but at what cost? Should churches neglect the means of grace? No- that would be unwise- let the church be the church! The church has to minister the means of grace- and Jesus came to preach the good news and secure our salvation. Anything that would delay this work would be shunned by Jesus.

But there is another reason Jesus refuses. The second reason Jesus refuses to get involved is because he sees the heart of this man who has come to him. Jesus knows what is really motivating this man. Jesus refuses to get involved because of the nature and desire of this man. So Jesus rebukes him in v. 15- take care and be on guard against all covetousness. Jesus could see the greed in this man’s eyes. For Jesus to secure more earthly wealth for this man would be to simply tie another millstone around this man’s neck! More money would not be a blessing but rather a hinderance to his well-being! It is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven- easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for this man to enter the kingdom of God! This man has no real interest in submitting to the teaching of Jesus, he is only looking for an authority figure to secure his desired wealth. This man wants Jesus to do something about his missing money- he is not here to listen and obey. That is because this man’s heart is filled with coveting desire. To covet is to want or desire something that God has not given you. To be jealous for the things that others have. Coveting is wanting, desiring and craving in a sinful way. Indeed, the 10th Commandment warns against coveting anything that belongs to your neighbor. But this man is convinced that his life would be better if he had an abundance of things. But the fact is- the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. As I Tim. 6 wars us. (Read I Tim. 6:6-10) Jesus knows this temptation and refuses to be a part of this man’s scheme to get more possessions. Life is more than money- loving God and loving your neighbor leaves no room to love money. As we saw last week, we show that we love God when we use money rightly- instead of loving money as our God we love God and show it as we steward His gifts. So if our God gives you money -if He blesses you with earthly treasure- what will you do with them? How will you view them? Be on guard against covetousness! That is the very warning that sets the stage for our parable.

**II. The Parable on Possessions**

So after refusing to get involved in this man’s scheme to get more money out of his brother, Jesus tells a parable in v. 16 and following. The parable is rather short- a rich man had a bumper crop; so he builds bigger barns. He thinks that he will have many years of plenty and ease, the only thing is that he died that night and his plans came to nothing. That is the parable in summary. Many are the plans in the heart of man, but the purposes of the Lord endure. But in telling this parable, Jesus reveals the wicked desire and action of this rich man. Through the parable we find that this man is incredibly selfish and self-focused. He thinks within himself about himself. I, me and mine are key words to describe his focus. Everything he does is about his own desires and ease. Everything he gains is used for his own needs. He does not have a steward mindset- but rather he is greedy for gain. He amasses wealth for his own personal use and life of ease. Not only does he have no regard for others, he has no regard for God! He is not thinking of how this money can be used for the good of others or the glory of God! So his first major flaw is that he does not think of anyone but himself. He is selfish! Now to be clear, there is nothing wrong with saving for the future. It is good to store up grain for future use. Prov. 13:11 says whoever gathers little by little will increase. So building bigger barns is not in itself a sin. But again, why is this rich man gathering such a surplus? Not to bless others surely- but to use for his own desires and gain. So saving money for future kingdom use is commendable, but storing up for yourself so that you can live a life of ease at the expense of others and the church is condemned. Added to this selfish nature, this man is also incredibly ungrateful. He never acknowledges the Lord or gives thanks to God for these blessings. You will remember that Job also was a very rich man, but Job confessed that the Lord gives and takes away. Job blessed the Name of the LORD! But the rich man in our parable has no thought to acknowledge God as the fount and source of every good and perfect gift. He does not give thanks to God- but credits his own wisdom and planning for this success. He is rich towards himself- but poor towards God as v. 21 critiques. We see this lack of acknowledgement of God in v. 20 where this man is called a fool. What is a fool- or how is a fool made known? Well, as Psalm 14 puts it, the fool says in his heart, there is no God! (Psalm 14:1-4) So this man is a rich fool- he refuses to acknowledge God! Refusing to praise God is the chief form of ingratitude! For what do we have that we have not first received from His hand? Who gives you the ability to make money? Who gives the sunshine and the rain by which these crops can grow? How you use and view money reflects the state of your heart! When we remember that we ourselves have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ- we cannot help but thank God for this and all the blessings that we have from His hand! But not this man- his thoughts are only on himself. And even more tragic- this man has no thought to the life to come or the state of his soul. There is only a physical peace and comfort that he cares for. He says in v. 19- self, you can be at rest. I have rest for my soul- or so he thinks. Relax- eat, drink and be merry! What he did not know was that his soul would be called to reckoning that very night. As v. 20 states- his soul was required of him. Thinking that his soul had rest because his body was well fed was his fatal mistake! The LORD judged his heart and found him lacking- his very soul was called to the judgement seat and he lost it all! This too is a foolish act! To store up much earthly treasure so that you think you can have a life of ease while ignoring the weightier matters of your soul and its relation to God! He was physically rich but spiritually poor- bankrupt in the sight of God! For what can a man give to God as a ransom for his soul? No amount of money in the bank or grain in the barn can be given in exchange for your soul! Only the blood of Jesus can ransom you and pay the debt for your sins! But this man cares little for spiritual things! He has barns to build and fields to harvest! He treasures the things of this world alone. You fool! Don’t you know that where your treasure is- so also your heart will be! Luke 12:34. This grain would all be consumed. These barns would rot and decay. But where would this rich man find eternal rest? Not in the barns he built to be sure! Instead of being poor towards God, God’s people will learn to be rich towards God. We will learn to use our earthly treasure with an eye to eternity. Earthly wealth used for heavenly good- to benefit a Spiritual Kingdom! You can use your money in such a way that God sees it – and will in fact reward it as we saw last week. You can support Christian ministries that further the cause of Christ on earth. Being rich towards God does not mean that God owes you- but rather that you can be a good steward of His gifts here below and by doing so, receive treasures in heaven that will not fail as v. 33 states. So the sins of this rich, foolish man are coveting, ingratitude and pride. The solution would have been godliness with contentment- stewardship, gratitude and humility. That is what we are called to have in our lives today.

To conclude, do you know why hearses do not have hitches? Or why there are no U-Hauls in a funeral procession? Because you can’t take your earthly treasures with you after you die! But you can send riches on ahead- if you are a good steward. The man of v. 13 who wanted the inheritance was in danger of being the rich fool. Jesus exposes his covetous and ungrateful heart with this parable. Riches can be a blessing or a curse. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God, while the fool says in his heart that there is no God! Freely we have received from God- so we must freely give! Everything we have is a gift- so we must be grateful, generous and thankful! So on the day of reckoning, will you be a fool who looks to his own wealth for peace, or will you be wise and trust in Jesus and use his gifts for His glory?