

Theme: Rich towards God (3/8/25)

Text: Col 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

In my pastoral ministry I often told stories about family issues involving mostly mothers and grandmothers. And they ended up becoming part of our prayers. Sometimes ago I conducted a monthly Service and Communion at Homewood Aged Care when Bill and Joyce Eames and Joyce Ketchmer were residents there. A mother of 4 boys from an Egyptian background always asked for prayers about the tensions among her boys, since the eldest son sold their family house in order to get her to the Aged Care facility. In another case in England, I conducted my smallest funeral service of a mother in a Crematorium Chapel. There were only four people who attended – two sons, a girl friend of one, and a taxi driver. I found out afterwards that they hurried the funeral service in order to avoid uncles and other family members coming along, for fear of disputes involving their family land. Family inheritance and property can cause divisions and quarrels among siblings and families, if they are not sorted out properly. Today's story from Luke 12 is one of those stories. A brother was disappointed about his family share, and he came and asked Jesus for help.

1. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed (13-15)

In the beginning of the chapter, as Jesus amongst the crowd was warning his disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy (1), Someone in the crowd said to him, ¹³*"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."* Jesus replies: ¹⁴*"Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"* In Jesus' time, inheritance which is usually land or cattle was divided among the sons. The eldest got half of the property, and the rest will be divided among the other sons. We are not told what actually happened, but it's likely that the man did not get his fair share, or none at all, from the family inheritance.

Inheritance money has and still causes a lot of heartaches and tensions in family relationships even today. Siblings fight over items in the house, and money in the family bank account. In some cases, they can be very messy and ugly. Just like the man of our story. He couldn't handle the family property issue privately, but he brought it to public. The man might have a vague idea that Jesus is going to set up a kingdom and rule the earth. He resolves to make an early application to have the portion he wishes to have from the family property.

Friends, how many people even today who come to Church to hear the gospel preached, but they couldn't concentrate because of the issues or unresolved

problems they carry around with them. Let alone issues like what this man had – family and sibling issues which Jesus refused to talk to the older brother. But he speaks to the heart of the matter in everybody's hearing: ¹⁵*"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

Jesus does not only scratch the surface of our lives. He gets to the root of our problems. Two days prior to my brain surgery in October 2023, my severe headache was completely gone, my taste came back and I regained my strength and felt perfectly okay. In the morning of the surgery, I asked the surgeon; "Were there any other alternatives since everything was okay with me in the past two days?" The surgeon said to me, "Tevita, the surgery may not directly be related to your headache, but we have found a large tumour in your brain which needs to be removed."

Friends, Jesus knows the roots of our every problems. He deals with the root causes beyond every symptom. "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed". Our series on the Ten Commandments highlighted the place of the tenth Commandment ('You shall not covet'), which sums up nicely the last six Commandments. Covetousness is a root of all social evil. It begins with a basic dissatisfaction with what God has given us. That is why Jesus warns us in this passage, because covetousness is a gateway sin which leads to stealing, killing, lying and many other sins. It calls us to be contented instead, on God's provision which is always the best for us in the long run.

2. God is the provider (16-18)

Jesus makes His point clear by telling us a story: ¹⁶*"The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷He thought to himself. 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'* It sounds that the man was so excited of his great harvest. He was over the moon and he needs no-one to talk to. He discusses everything with himself. ¹⁸*"Then he said, 'This is what I will do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grains and my goods. ¹⁹And I'll say to myself. "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink and be merry."*

Many of us might argue that the man of our story is being a wise and responsible farmer. His farming business is thriving. He knows how important it is to set aside the profits for the next season. So, he plans to pull down his barns and build bigger ones (fantastic idea) in order to store all his grains and all his goods.

Then, he will have enough savings for the future, and you can imagine what the golden years would be like for him – “*take life easy, eat, drink and be merry.*” Isn’t this what we’re encouraged to strive for? Work hard! Be wise! And save for the future? Perhaps many people who come towards retirement would love to hear this – “sit back, relax, and enjoy the fruit of your labour!”

Not exactly. ²⁰*But God said to him, “You fool!”* Jesus calls the top guy and the big shot of today’s society, ‘Fool!’ Why? It is not because he was wealthy, but because he appears to live only for himself. Six times the word “I,” appears, and “my” is mentioned five times in his conversation (17-19). Nothing and nobody else crossed his mind (family and neighbour, workers and the poor, God and eternity, death and hell). He was unbelievably selfish and self-centred. Everything was all for himself. “*You Fool!*” Friends, when we fail to acknowledge God as the Creator and Provider of all we need, are we fools also? When we make our own plans and do not include God, have we become the fool? This is what David says in his Psalm: ***The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” (Ps 14:1).***

On John Wesley’s sermon on “The use of money” he says: “Earn all you can, Save all you can, and Give all you can.” Friends, it isn’t a bad thing to work hard and save money for the future. It isn’t a bad thing to receive a promotion and pay raise – these things are not bad when you remember that God is the provider of all those things. We should be reminded and praying hard to be good stewards of God’s good gifts, and forget not that nothing belongs to us, and there is nothing we can take with us when we leave this world. God is the ultimate provider of everything we receive, and they should be used in honour of God, and for His glory.

3. Be rich towards God (19-21)

Jesus warns us of how people of this world store wealth on earth, but not in heaven. Look with me again to verse 19: ¹⁹*Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.*” This is where the problem lies – it reveals the man’s motive and the condition of his heart.

The story shows a deeper problem which Apostle Paul identified with those who do not believe in the resurrection – If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor 15:32).

At the next verse, ²⁰*“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you.* The man forgot about God the Creator and Lord of the harvest. He remembered the gift, but not the giver.

He follows his own plan, but not the One who makes things happen. The man also forgot that life does not consist only of the wealth we accumulate. Wealth cannot guarantee long life or can be taken with us to the grave. God said to the man, *“This very night...”* Friends, this should remind us that God is fully in control. His words never return to Him empty. ^{20b}*Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’*

Friends, the most fundamental issue in life is what we know about God; He is our Creator and Provider. He cares about us and determines our destiny. This also reminds us that we must care for our souls – to sustain a rich and healthy relationship with God daily in His Word and in prayers, and today we’re reminded in the Supper Jesus has prepared for us.

Finally, Jesus sums up the story and speaks plainly to us – ²¹*This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.* What does this mean – ‘to be rich towards God;’ and how does it look like in real life? It means to know that your every breath is given by God. We owe Him everything. So, everything we have in this world including our money and property cannot satisfy our spiritual hunger for eternity. They cannot give us eternal joy, peace and life. Friends, be content and focus on spiritual values rather than material wealth. Always trust in God who is able to bless us with every Heavenly blessing in Christ. Keep building daily, and sustaining a rich relationship with God, who has secured our eternal inheritance that cannot be ruined or stolen from us.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help us to be mindful of the dangers of greed and to guard our hearts against it. Help us to remember that our life is not measured by the abundance of things we possess, but by our relationships with you and the impact we have on others. Give us contented hearts, and guide us to find joy and purpose in serving you and living life that reflects your love. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*