

9. The Rich Fool (Lk 12:13-21) and the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31)

The parables—*the rich fool* and *the rich man and Lazarus*—are two of the most often referred to parables. In the first place, both deal with the deceitfulness of riches; and in the second place, they both deal with the sudden and unexpected end to our lives and our worldly wealth. Between the telling of these parables, the Lord teaches the fundamental lesson of perspective on the material and physical blessing of this life. Immediately following the parable of *the rich fool* in Luke 12:22-34, Jesus taught that we should not be concerned about our life, even what we should eat or wear:

22 Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. 23 Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. 24 Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! 25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

The pagan world runs after worldly matters, according to the Lord in Luke 12: 30-31: "30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well." If we seek his kingdom, Jesus continues in Luke 12:32-34, God is pleased to give it to us, and with it, a treasure that cannot be exhausted:

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

The Parable of the Rich Fool

Luke 12:13-21: "13 Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

14 Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" 15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

This parable is set in the dramatic situation of a man who wants the Lord to tell his brother to divide his inheritance with him. Jesus responds that he is not a judge or arbiter in such matters and between people. It is clear that the son of God is not about material matters, nor is the kingdom of God. Material wealth has nothing to do with either. Further, to covet what a brother has is greed, and we are to guard against it. "Watch out!" exclaims the Lord. Since a man's life does not consist of the abundance of his possessions, it is nothing that we have them or that we do not have them.

Therefore, the purpose of the parable is not to criticize the man who had large crops and needed more storage. The lesson of the parable is that the riches did not prepare him for eternal life.

Luke 12:16-20: 16 And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

18 "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."'

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?'

21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Many people today are like the rich man. Instead of crops and big barns, we are encouraged to get annuities, 401Ks, stock portfolios, and other stockpiles of money so that we can retire and live the good life. We will eat, drink, and be merry, as it were. We, as the rich man, say in effect, that we have

plenty of good things, enough for many years. God may require our lives of us at any time, and we must be ready. If our preparation only has to do with earthly riches, someone else will get those. What will we have? The corollary to “is not rich toward God” is that we must **be rich toward God**. That is all that matters in the matter, one might say. Jesus stated the case eloquently in the Revelation:

17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Rev 3:17-18.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-17:1: 19 *"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.*

22 *"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'*

25 *"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'*

27 *"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'*

29 *"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'*

30 *"'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'*

31 *"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"*

This parable of the rich man and Lazarus illuminates the destiny of those prepared and those unprepared. Worldly riches had nothing to do with either man's end. Earthly riches could not get the rich man to Abraham's bosom. No one can go from torment to bliss, once the fate is sealed. There is no comfort coming, not even a drop of water. There is no way to warn loved ones still on the earth. In the parable—the elements of a parable are always true to life—there is consciousness, there is a hell, and there is a state of bliss. These states are of the spirit, and they last eternally with no second chance.

James summarizes the dire straights of those who place earthly riches first in their life: James 5:1-6

5:1 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

Conclusion

These two parables allow us to understand that earthly riches are not the answer to our security in either this world or in the kingdom of God. We must be rich spiritually in this life to inherit the state of blessedness called eternal life.

Questions:

1. Is it wrong to have great worldly wealth? _____
2. Can you relate the rich man's fate to that of the five talent man in the parable of the talents? _____

3. According to the teaching of the two parables, what did the beggar have that the rich man did not have in order to go to Abraham's side? _____
4. What was the only chance for the rich man's relatives to be saved? _____
5. What is the answer to those who hear the word, but want "hard proof"? _____