

LUKE 12:16-21

The Rich Fool

Translation

- 16 And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, saying 'What shall I do, because I have no place to store my crops?' 18 And he said, 'This is what I will do; I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grains and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have plenty goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' 20 But God said to him, 'You fool. This night your life is being demanded of you; the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' 21 So it is with one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich toward God.

Questions

- What strikes you when you read/hear this parable? What surprises you? What questions are raised for you?
- What do you suppose the reaction was of the listeners? Why?

Gospel of Thomas

- *Saying 63* - Jesus said, "There was a rich person who had a great deal of money. He said, 'I shall invest my money so that I may sow, reap, plant, and fill my storehouses with produce, that I may lack nothing.' These were the things he was thinking in his heart, but that very night he died. Anyone here with two ears had better listen.
- *Saying 72 (resembles Luke 12:13-15)* - A [person said] to him, "Tell my brothers to divide my father's possessions with me." He said to the person "Mister, who made me a divider?" He turned to his disciples and said to them, "I'm not a divider, am I?"

Antecedent in Jewish literature from the second century B.C.

- . *Sir 11:18-19* – One becomes rich through diligence and self-denial, and the reward allotted to him is this: when he says, "I have found rest and now I shall feast on my goods!" he does not know how long it will be until he leaves them to others and dies.
- May have inspired parable or directly affected it

Differing views

- No reason to question the authenticity especially due to it being found in large part in the Gospel of Thomas
- The connection between verses 13-15 and the parable is secondary. Luke combined sayings 72 and 63 from the Gospel of Thomas. The inheritance question has little to do with the parable (Bultmann)
- The Gospel of Thomas is closer to the original (Crossan)
- The Gospel of Thomas version is a simplification with the consequent loss of vividness. (Montefiore and others)
- Luke and the Gospel of Thomas are not the same story. (Jacques-E. Menard)
- Verse 21 is a later addition that in fact changes the meaning of the parable. (Hultgren)

Luke 12:13-15

- Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

Outline

Introduction – 12:16

Soliloquy - 12:17 – 19

1. Verse 17 states the problem
2. Verse 18 states the rich man's solution which portrays him as prudent and wise
3. Verse 19 reveals that rich man will not respond as expected

Response (from God) – 12:20

Summary/moral – 12:21

Broader Context

- Broader context with dispute over inheritance (13-21)
- Luke 12:13-34 – provides instruction on the proper and improper attitude towards wealth
 1. 13 – 34 – theme of covetousness
 2. 22-32 – theme of anxiety
 3. 33-34 – call to a simple life
- Luke 12:1-13:9 – readiness for the coming judgment (Culpepper)
- Found within Luke's travel narrative 9:51 – 19:27

Significant words and phrases

Πλουσιου = rich

- Luke makes reference to the dangers of wealth and God's reckoning with the rich often. One can draw the conclusion as Scott does: "The parable provides a negative example of the well-established Lukan theme of the necessity of poverty for following Jesus" (128).
- 1:51-53 – He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.
- 6:24 – "but woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.
- 8:14 – As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

Sirach 31:1-11

Wakefulness over wealth wastes away one's flesh, and anxiety about it drives away sleep. Wakeful anxiety prevents slumber, and a severe illness carries off sleep. The rich person toils to amass a fortune, and when he rests he fills himself with his dainties. The poor person toils to make a meager living, and if ever he rests he becomes needy.

One who loves gold will not be justified; one who pursues money will be led astray by it. Many have come to ruin because of gold, and their destruction has met them face to face. It is a stumbling block to those who are avid for it, and every fool will be taken captive by it. Blessed is the rich person who is found blameless, and who does not go after gold. Who is he, that we may praise him? For he has done wonders among his people. Who has been tested by it and been found perfect? Let it be for him a ground for boasting. His prosperity will be established, and the assembly will proclaim his acts of charity.

Psalm 49:1-20

Hear this, all you peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together. My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding. I will incline my ear to a proverb: I will solve my riddle to the music of the harp.

Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of my persecutors surrounds me, those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches? Truly, no ransom avails for one's life; there is no price one can give to God for it. For the ransom of life is costly, and can never suffice that one should live on forever and never see the grace."

When we look at the wise, they die; fool and dolt perish together and leave their wealth to others. Their graves are their homes forever, their dwelling places to all generations, though they named lands their own. Mortals cannot abide in their pomp; they are like the animals that perish.

Continued Psalm 49

Such is the fate of the foolhardy, the end of those who are pleased with their lot. Like a sheep, they are appointed for Sheol; death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall waste away; Sheol shall be their home. But God will ransom my soul from the powers of Sheol, for he will receive me.

Do not be afraid when some become rich, when the wealth of their houses increases. For when they die they will carry nothing away; their wealth will not go down after them. Though in their lifetime they count themselves happy – for you are praised when you do well for yourself – they will go to the company of their ancestors, who will never again see the light. Mortals cannot abide in their pomp they are like the animals that perish.

Enoch 97:8-10

8 They shall worship stones, and engrave golden, silver, and wooden images. They shall worship impure spirits, demons, and every idol, in temples; but no help shall be obtained for them. Their hearts shall become impious through their folly, and their eyes be blinded with mental superstition. (141) In their visionary dreams shall they be impious and superstitious, lying in all their actions, and worshipping a stone.

Altogether shall they perish. But in those days blessed shall they be, to whom the word of wisdom is delivered; who point out and pursue the path of the Most High; who walk in the way of righteousness, and who act not impiously with the impious. They shall be saved.

Ψυχη = soul or life

- self, or the seat of moral and spiritual qualities; in popular thinking the psyche is the impalpable essential core of a person, the agent of thought, will, and emotion, the quintessence of human life. In verse 20, it is more that the person will die.

"Eat, drink, and be merry"

- Biblical references; typically involve death that prompts attitude
- For example, Isaiah 22:13 – "but instead there was joy and festivity, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating meat and drinking wine. "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die."
- Other usages found in Ecc. 2:24, Ecc. 8:15, Tob. 7:10, Enoch 98:11, 1cor. 15:32

Αφρων = fool

- someone who "rejects the order of the world articulated by the wise, that is, one who refuses to acknowledge dependence up on God." That person then becomes presumptuous in speech and behavior, damages the community, and becomes self-destructive – (Dieter Zeller)

Scriptural usages of "fool"

- Psalm 14:1 – "Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."
- Capon makes reference to Luke – 11:40 – Jesus remarks when talking about Pharisees in response to their watching him not wash before dinner, "You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?"

Miscellaneous

- Loss of the narrator in the story
- Typical in Luke is the phrase, "And he told them a parable as well as interior monologues (12:45, 15:17-19, 16:3-4, 18:4-5, 20:13)
- There is no one human a part of the story which may signify the aloneness of the rich man.
- Use of the words "I" and "my" stress the selfishness and greed of the rich man
 - "I" is used 6 times
 - "My" is used 5 times

Key verses

- Luke 12:21 – "So it is with one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich toward God
- Luke 12:34 – "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
- Luke 9:25 – "What does it profit them if they gain the whole world but lose or forfeit themselves?"

- Hendrickx calls the parable of the Rich Fool a paraenetic illustration which he defines as an example story which displays the folly of people who try to determine and secure their identity by means of wealth

Surrounding the Rich Fool

- Luke 12:16-21 is framed by verses against covetousness and greed (verses 15 and 21)
- 22 – 31 sayings that deal with anxieties over necessities of daily life such as food and clothing

Viewed closely with verses 13-15

- In the parable of the rich fool, Jesus is responding to the question about dividing an inheritance. Instead of doing so, he points the questioner to a different understanding of life.

Without verse 21

- Hultgren believes that the parable sets forth an example of a way of living that is to be avoided. The rich fool is so preoccupied with gaining and maintaining his possessions that he is in fact idolatrous. (Psalm 14:1 – The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.')

With verse 21

- Hultgren writes that with verse 21 added, it makes the man an example of the wrong use of one's possessions. One ought to be generous and there have God's approval, 'being rich in those things which are pleasing to him.'

Plentiful harvest

- In the OT (Genesis 41:35-36), we encounter Joseph's wise response to a good harvest – saving it for the famine that was to follow. He saved it for the community.
- In the parable of the rich fool, the man was not planning on sharing.

"In the ancient Mediterranean world..."

- "...he sins against two interlocking principles. The first holds that wealth should be used for the community's good... Second, he offends against the perception of limited goods. Goods were limited so when one person hoards, there will not be enough to go around. If there is surplus today, there must be shortage tomorrow, so the rich man's saving up of his harvest to provide only for his own comfort offends against the community's possibilities, wastes God's gifts, and ensures the impoverishment of others (Scott, 137)

Problem

- The problem with the rich fool was not that he was prudent but that he was obsessed with acquiring and holding onto his possessions. The rich fool was so preoccupied that he lost sight of the call of God and to helping his neighbor. One can be "rich toward God" through being devoted to God by serving others.

Call to share one's goods with others

- John the Baptist's message in 3:10-14 – "And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?' In reply, he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none and whoever has food must do likewise'..."
- Jesus' message in 6:30 – "Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your good, do not ask for them again." Also, in 12:33, "Sell your possessions, and give alms..." and in 16:19-31 (the rich man and Lazarus).
- Acts 4:34-37 states the practice of early Christians of sharing with those in need.

The parable addresses -

- wealth's correct usage
- Idolatry, preoccupation with possessions, covetousness, and shallowness of greed
- identification of God's kingdom with community and the need to provide for the needs of others
- Dependence on God
- The question, "What difference should or faith in God make in the things of daily life?"

Ways to view the parable according to Culpepper

- A general religious truth – "The rich man's attitude is not only foolish, but also impious in that he forgets his dependence on God"
- Rich man is an image of the catastrophe which threatens those who do not accept the message of the Kingdom
- Rich man thought only of immediate advantages and did not grasp the advantage he could derive from it with a view to his happiness in the next life
- Verse 21 shifts to a demand for the right use of good ones in sharing with others

