

Rich Toward God
Hosea 11:1-11
Luke 12:13-21

What does it mean to be rich toward God? How would you answer that question? In today's text in Luke, Jesus continues his discourse on what it means to be distracted by things, and in this case distracted by money. Money and greed is a huge problem in our American culture. Many often wrongfully assume that having money will take away all our problems. But there are a lot of things money cannot buy. Money cannot bring back the life of a loved one who has died. Money cannot buy love, happiness, comfort, or peace. Money cannot reconcile fragile relationships and money cannot buy God's salvation. Money cannot guarantee us a long and fulfilling life. Yet too often, we falsely assume that money will save us from the hardships of life. The problem, as Jesus illustrates, is not money in and of itself. For in many ways, money is useful. Money helps us pay for food and shelter. Money has been an effective way to support worthy causes and care for those in need. The problem, then, is not the money itself, but the love and distraction of money.

Consider the situation Jesus faced and the illustration he used. A person in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Jesus responded, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you? Take care! Be on guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

While it seems reasonable that this person should want his fair share of the family inheritance, the problem is the greed behind his desire. I am always dumbfounded when I hear about children fighting over money and possessions after their parents die. Some engage in legal battles over the money in the bank and investments. Some enter the home and start taking things without consent and argue with those who complain. It is almost as if their greed consumes their ability to be rational and reasonable adults. This kind of greed becomes a distraction to what really matters in life. If we are so focused on getting more money and stuff, then we have less time for our faith and for God.

Having his share of the family inheritance will not get him any closer to God or salvation. Greed only gives temporary gain and often leaves us in worse shape than we were before. Greed also leaves us in a false sense of security. Those whose greed has led them to acquire possessions and strive for more money are left in a difficult bind when their job is lost and the economy crashes. And then there is the situation which Jesus illustrates that can also happen.

A rich man's land produced abundantly and the man thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" Then he added, "I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. Then I will relax for a few years and eat, drink, and be merry!" But God said, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" Jesus then adds to the illustration, "So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Here again, Jesus is pointing out that greed is the distraction that is the problem. Here this man, who was already wealthy, was blessed with an abundant crop! Yet rather than use his abundance to pass on the blessing to others, he selfishly decided to let his greed take the best of him. Yet what he found out was that his greed did not pay off for that very night he died and his abundance was left without him.

In I Talk Back to the Devil, A.W. Tozer reminds us: "Money often comes between men and God. Someone has said that you can take two small ten-cent pieces, just two dimes, and shut out the view of a panoramic landscape. Go to the mountains and just hold two coins closely in front of your eyes--the mountains are still there, but you cannot see them at all because there is a dime shutting off the vision in each eye."

It doesn't take large quantities of money to come between us and God; just a little, placed in the wrong position, will effectively obscure our view.¹ This was the point that Jesus was trying to make. We can worry ourselves into a stroke or heart attack or we can place our trust and hope in God and know that God will make sure we are cared for.

There was a reason Jesus lived a simple life without many possessions. The more possessions we have, the more we have to take care of and the more possessive we become. And too often, the more we have the more we want. Yet how much of what we actually have do we really and truly need? We need food, shelter, and fellowship. Almost everything else stems from desire and not need.

So what does it mean to be rich toward God? It means placing God first in our lives and building a rich faith in what will sustain us after death. It does not mean acquiring wealth and then wanting more. I'll leave you with this illustration:

Henry was looking so glum and depressed that a friend asked, "Henry, what's the matter with you? You look like you've lost your last friend."

Henry responded, "What's the matter? I'll tell you. Remember two weeks ago, my Aunt Molly died and left me fifty thousand dollars?"

His friend said, "Yes, I remember. What's so awful?"

"What's so awful, you ask? Remember last week, my Uncle David died and left me a hundred thousand dollars?"

His friend said he remembered that too and asked, "What's so bad about that?"

With a sad face Henry responded, "What's bad about it? This week I inherited nothing."²

¹ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/m/money.htm> (accessed July 27, 2010)

² Michael E. Hodgin. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2004. p. 164.

Prayer:

Gracious Lord,

You have give us so many blessings that we have taken them for granted. Clean air, clean water, sunshine, rain, abundant food, and we admit we only want more. Subdue our greed and help us to be thankful and content knowing that we already have enough. In Jesus name we pray.

Amen.