

Luke 12:13-21. Jesus said more about money than any other subject. He came to save sinners, to transform them into true worshippers of God. Yet, one barrier that keep people from Him is the love of money. Such was the case of a man who wanted Jesus to help him get his share of an inheritance.

Our 20th President, James Garfield, once said: “We may divide the whole struggle of the human race into two chapters: first, the fight to get leisure; and then the second fight of civilization—what shall we do with our leisure when we get it.”

Wealth creates choices, and during Garfield’s lifetime, advances in American industry produced wealth as never before. A middle class arose, and as unions shortened the average workweek, people had disposable income with time for leisure. What they enjoyed is meager by today’s standards, but it was something. Rather than endure a 70-hour workweek, you could enjoy a game of baseball, go to the theater, or spend a few hours fishing. The U.S. economy expanded and even added a new sector around this time: Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation.

There once was a time when work was viewed within the Protestant work ethic as honorable, even desirable. Leisure wasn’t an end, but a means—the means of resting in order to work hard the next day. Today, with more than 70% of all Americans saying they hate their job, it seems we view work as a necessary evil.¹ We endure Monday through Friday for the leisure of Saturday and Sunday.

Jesus never condemned riches or leisure, but He did condemn the love of these. And we love leisure, don’t we? So did the man that Luke mentions in chapter 12. The man’s brother was the executor of their father’s estate, and he didn’t receive much. He went to Jesus wanting help securing his windfall.

INHERITANCE MONEY (LUKE 12:13-14)

Luke 12:13—“Someone in the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’”

What would’ve been a great sermon was cut short, because a man in the crowd wasn’t interested. Jesus was talking with His disciples in a public setting; people crowded around to hear. The Lord warned of persecution and then comforted His men. They would never be alone. The Holy Spirit would be with them. God would provide for

their needs. They should trust Him, not being anxious about the future (Lk 12:11, 22). And then out of nowhere the moment was broken: “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!” Wow. Where did that come from? This was the younger of two brothers, and he was angry.

Jewish Law had stated for more than a thousand years that 2/3 of an inheritance passes to the oldest son (Deut 21:17). Either this young man didn’t like the law, or he didn’t like how his brother had divided the property. He wasn’t being cheated. Had his brother taken all, he would’ve had a case worthy of the local court, the Sanhedrin. A panel of judges would’ve ruled in his favor. End of story.

This isn’t what happened though, because the young man had no case. He had nothing but a discontent heart and refused to give up until he found a rabbi to side with him. *What about Jesus?*

“Man, who made Me a judge or arbitrator over you?” I doubt that’s what the young man expected to hear. He wanted Jesus to take up his case, to fight for him, the little guy... yet the Lord wouldn’t even listen. Jesus deferred to those legally appointed to hear cases. God establishes civil authorities (Rom 13:1), and the Father didn’t send His Son to be one of them.

The young man’s greatest need wasn’t for a judge or riches. His heart had become diseased with the love of money (Lk 11:39). That his brother’s windfall would be greater than his only exposed the greed dwelling deep within.

BIGGER BARNES (LUKE 12:15-20)

Luke 12:15—“And He said to them, ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’”

It doesn’t take much to want what others have. You might not think about vacationing in Fiji... well, not until looking at Facebook and seeing the pictures. Suddenly, you aren’t happy your friend had that vacation. You want it, and why? Because you didn’t guard your heart against covetousness.

According to Jesus, covetousness springs from believing the lie that life consists in the abundance of things. He wants us to see that true life—a joyful and fulfilling existence—has nothing to do with stuff. The young man who interrupted needed to learn this.

Wanting a Windfall

The Lord told a parable to the young man about a successful farmer whose land was very productive (Lk 12:16-21). The yield was *euphoréo*—euphoric or overwhelming, a crop exceeding his wildest expectations. So he asks, “What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?”

Since storage was a problem, the farmer reinvested his profit to increase the size of his barns. Nothing wrong so far, but his words reveal the attitude of his heart: *I will... I will... I will*. In fact, six times in a few short verses he plans what he will do without any thought of God or care for others. And why? Because his goal was to “relax, eat, drink, be merry” (Lk 12:19). *I'll reinvest my profits to make more money for myself, so I can kick back and enjoy the good life.*

Ecclesiastes 5:10—“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income.”

He was eager to reap the fruit of his labors and relax when eternity suddenly descended upon time, and he died. His stock was up, his net worth was surging when the bubble of his life burst without warning: “This night your soul is required of you” (Lk 12:20). Like the bank calling a loan, God suddenly called this man to account for the life he'd been given.

Life and leisure were wonderful only because the farmer never gave a thought to his own mortality. Ignorance was bliss, but ignorance was costly in the end. Like Damocles, he loved the good life... but only because he failed to see the sword dangling above his head.

The farmer thought about investing for an early retirement, which could have been fine. He did it, however, without considering the brevity of life, the imminence of death, or that he would one day stand before God. “...and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (Lk 12:20). Answer: not yours. Wealth depreciates as it passes to the next generation, often to heirs that didn't earn it, won't appreciate it, and can't manage it.

Scripture encourages inheritances (Prov 13:22). We should diligently save (Prov 6:6-8) and make educated investments (Prov 21:5) as well. Jesus wasn't disputing any of this. He told the parable to confront a young man who believed true life consists in the abundance of things (Lk 12:15).

The man who interrupted Jesus didn't need more money to feel alive, live well or even die well. He needed a whole new view of life itself. What he truly needed was a new heart.

TREASURE IN HEAVEN

(LUKE 12:21)

Luke 12:21—“So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

An inheritance can be blessing, but it can also be a destructive curse. Rather than being thankful his father left him anything, the young man was jealous his brother received more. He only received a third, perhaps not even that much. We're tempted to side with the young man, and yet, we need to remember that Jesus rebuked him.

We want to believe it's just a money problem—split the inheritance 50-50 and voilà, problem solved. That's the surface issue, but not the root cause. The young man's discontent was deeper than numbers and accounting. He believed that life and happiness does consist in the abundance of things. A wrong view of life led to wrong desires, which led to a war with his brother and a fractured family.

Jesus' parable should have been a wake-up call: *Don't be like the foolish farmer who lived for today!* Rather than laying up or hoarding treasure for yourself, be rich toward God. Bless others out of your abundance just as God has so richly blessed you out of His.

What makes for a truly joyful and fulfilling life? Rather than seeking an abundance of things for yourself, seek the kingdom of God (Lk 12:31). Set your heart upon Christ's coming, build up His people, and share the good news of a risen Savior. More broadly speaking, desire the things of God.

Phil 4:19—“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

We don't really know how the young man responded to Jesus. Did he repent and make peace with his brother? Did he realize “life is more than food, and the body more than clothing” (Lk 12:23)? I don't know about him, but what about you? As surely as God knows what we need each day, may we trust Him to provide. Rather than seeking greater riches and more leisure, let us enjoy the goodness of God. Seek after His kingdom, and not ours.