

“The Man Who Talked With His Soul”- Luke 12:13-21

Many of you who are my age or older can remember the comedian Jack Benny. He was a comedian known for his dead-pan skits especially about money. He tells this joke. He was walking down the street and was approached by an armed robber who said, “Your money or your life.” Jack does nothing. The robber impatiently queried, “Well”? Jack replied, “Don’t rush me I’m thinking it over.” All of us have a love for our possessions and a love of money. We have been looking at the parables of Jesus this summer. I have been calling the series, “Summer Stories”. We are in the fifth in this series of sermons. These parables or stories of Jesus are stories are to help us to understand the nature of God and what kind of relationship that God wants to have with us.

Jesus tells this parable because a man in the crowd asked him to intervene in a sibling’s quarrel regarding family inheritance. When it comes to money and inheritance, emotions rise very quickly. So in this emotional time, he thought Jesus would have influence and authority to get his sibling to see reason and to solve it for him however, Jesus refused to intervene and then added a warning against greed. One’s life does not consist only of abundance of possessions. So Jesus goes on to tell his story related to this warning.

There was a remarkable man who had huge financial instincts and financial success. He could run a Fortune 500 company today because he was that successful. CNBC would have him on regularly to seek out his advice. He would be a great motivational speaker or a consultant for businesses of today. We don’t know the name of the man in our story because the Bible doesn’t give it. He is simply known as a rich man and getting richer, and is known as a landowner. Well, he had a problem that many people dream of. One day he looked at his prosperity and said, “What am I going to do? I have no more room to store my crops.” And being the shrewd and bright business man that he was, he came to a sensible conclusion. “I will pull down my barns and build larger ones”. Sounds like many developers in today’s building industry. But let me tell you the most important thing about this man. The man goes on to say “And I will say to my soul, Soul you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, and be merry.”

As I mentioned earlier, this man sounds like a 21st century kind of guy. He is financially successful and he is spiritual to boot. He talks to his soul. He considers himself as a very spiritual person like many spiritual people we have today. We hear people today say that they are not religious. They are not into organized religion, church and so forth, however they consider themselves spiritual. The bookstores are filled with large sections of “Spiritual Writings” on many different subjects that are considered spiritual. This guy in our story would fit in with how many people think today. We read about and hear from stars who talk about how spiritual they are. Why there would be churches and preachers who would like and respect this man because he is financially influential and is in touch with the spiritual. He talks to his soul. He seems to have everything to be successful: money, possessions, influences, and he is spiritual.

But let’s see how God views this man differently. 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?” How may someone who is spiritual enough to talk to his soul, be condemned of God? After all, he is spiritual. He talks to his soul. God has some problems with this man.

The first problem for God is that he is rich. There is nothing wrong in itself to be rich. I know very rich people who are faithful to God as anyone else. It is, however difficult to be rich and keep your life in balance. There are a variety ways one can be rich. One can have a lot of land and money. That is being rich. Being rich means you could have a brilliant mind. Being rich might mean you have influence. When you speak people listen. They hang on your every word. Your opinion is asked and listened to before decisions are made.

The second problem for God is that the man had an “I” problem. In one of the translations of this story the man spoke 69 words and 11 of them are “I” or “my”. Every one of his referrals to self is concerned about his welfare. He may be considered a spiritual man, but whatever about him is spiritual is consumed with self-absorption. He was a man who might have had all of the facts, but missed the point.

The third problem for God is that the man left out a few things. He first of all left out God. He talked to his soul but he left out God in the conversation. Many spiritual people today somehow leave God out of their conversation also. Much of the spirituality of today is light if at all on God and heavy on self: what spirituality does to help one's job, personality, relationships, or success.

The fourth problem for God is that the man left out people. There is not a word or a thought from him about caring other people. Any spirituality that is void of caring for and remembering people is fraudulent. Instead of building more barns to fill his overabundance he never thought of giving any of it away to the poor. So what does this parable mean for us? We are invited to not be rich for ourselves but to be rich towards God. How does one become rich towards God?

First of all to be rich towards God means that we place no confidence and trust in materialism and possessions. Leo Tolstoy tells the story of a successful farmer who was not satisfied with his lot. He wanted more of everything. One day he received a novel offer. For 1000 rubles he could buy all of the land he could walk around in a day. The catch was that he had to be back at the starting place by sundown or he would lose everything. He set off at a very fast pace. By noon he was very tired but he kept going, covering more and more ground. Well into the afternoon he realized that his greed had taken him far from the starting point. As the sun was setting he was running hard and fast to get back. He staggered across the starting line just before the sun disappeared, but he immediately collapsed and soon died. Afterwards he was buried in a plot no more than six feet long and three feet wide. The moral to Tolstoy's story is: How much land and possessions do we really need? In the end all we get is a plot of land six feet by three feet.

Jesus might have asked how much barn does anyone really need? This man was a fool because he banked on full barns. Full barns were more important to him than a full heart. To be rich towards God means as the people of God we can store our money in the stomachs of the hungry, the minds of the uneducated, the bodies of the sick, and the spirits of the oppressed.

Second of all, to be rich towards God means that source of our bounty in life is God and not us. The error of the rich man in our story was that he gave himself all the credit for his success." Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Eat, drink, and be merry. Celebrate your accomplishment." In the movie "Shenandoah", James Stewart plays a Virginia farmer during the Civil War. He begins each meal with the same prayer: "Lord, I planted the seeds, I plowed the ground, I gathered the harvest. If I hadn't put the food on the table it wouldn't be here. But we thank you anyway." Being rich towards God means not forgetting God is the source of our blessings and our life.

Finally, being rich towards God means we concentrate not on what we are becoming, but keep also a sight on what we are being. We are invited not to be rich in things but rather become rich for people. We are invited not to amass things but grow closer to God. We are invited to not necessarily be successful but to also be faithful. Finally, instead of building more and more barns of financial security that may or may not always be there, bank on the eternal economy of God's grace and mercy.