

MAKE MINE MONEY
Luke 12:13-21; Luke 16:19-31
Baraca Radio Sunday School Class
First Baptist Church, Anderson, South Carolina
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INTRODUCTION

As a college ministerial student right out of high school, I preached several times in a little country church where an older, married classmate was pastor.

Deep drought had engulfed West Texas for several years. So farmers who depended on their crops for their livelihood felt great stress. During this long, difficult dry spell, my pastor friend asked me to fill in for him. As I studied and prayed in search of an appropriate message for the farmers in the little church, I thought of that part of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says not to be anxious about what we will eat or drink or wear. We should see how God takes care of the birds and the grass. The bottom line was this:

Will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (Matthew 6:30).

I had visited that church from time to time, and the members always encouraged me in my ministerial studies. But when I finished the sermon, some of them looked as though I had slapped them in the face.

The verses I used in the sermon that night give good counsel, but, in retrospect, I'm not sure how they came across from an 18- or 19-year-old youth who had zero experience running a farm or providing for a family.

Those farmers had good reason to be concerned. Going deeper and deeper in debt, year by year, during the drought. What did I know about what they faced?

TRANSITION

We have many degrees of concern over money. Folks like those farmers in Texas, thrown for a loss through little or no fault of their own. In so-called normal times, money concerns may not loom large. But people today with job losses and house foreclosures may resemble those farmers who faced drought.

Alongside folks who worry when their basic livelihood is threatened, we have people constantly obsessed with making money. Some people make money in order to live. Others seem to live in order to make money. Jesus had a great deal to say to this latter type.

Today, we have two parables addressed to people who think only about storing up treasures here on earth. Luke paints vivid pictures of self-centered men who live comfortably with little regard for anyone other than themselves.

THE RICH FARMER

Luke 12 gives the incident that prompts Jesus to tell the first story. A man in the crowd asks Jesus to settle a family fight over money. Verse 13 of Luke 12:

One of the multitude said to him, "Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me."

It might strike us as strange that a stranger would expect Jesus, a religion teacher, to arbitrate a dispute over money left behind by the father of two brothers.

But Malcolm Tolbert points out . . .

The distinctions between religious and civil matters did not exist in Israel, for all of life

was under the hegemony of the law of God. . . . [T]he older brother might be expected

to follow the ruling of a person whose authority as a teacher he recognized (Tolbert 107).

But Jesus refuses to get caught up in this family feud. Instead, He distances Himself from the dispute and warns against greed and concern over financial gain.

"Man, who made me a judge or divider over you? Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

This dispute between the two brothers concerning money, then, provides the basis for His story of a farmer.

Let's notice several things about this farmer:

He is prosperous: Jesus describes him right off as *a rich man*. Presumably he made his wealth from farming.

Then, too, he is a successful farmer: *The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully.* He says, *I have nowhere to store my crops.* He also says he has *ample goods laid up for many years.* All this indicates success with his farming. Bumper crops are no accident.

Also, he is a planner. He readily decides his course of action: *I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods.* So far, so good: A farmer making decisions on how to manage his runaway good fortune.

But the man thinks he is self-sufficient: He doesn't consult with anyone else. He thinks of himself as a self-made man. He has succeeded in his business. He knows it, and he takes pride in what he has accomplished. He doesn't seem to want any help in handling the grain crop. Old Hank Thompson sang, "No help wanted. I can handle this job all by myself.

He is self-centered: In the short story, he refers to himself almost a dozen times:

What shall I do?

I have nowhere to store my crops

And he said, I will do this:

*I will pull down **my** barns, and build larger ones;
and there **I** will store all **my** grain and **my** goods.*

*I will say to **my** soul*

No thought of sharing his good fortune with anyone. He has Eye-Trouble.

He is self-congratulatory. : *I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.*

But this man has one other characteristic we dare not fail to mention:

He is a fool. *But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'*

He plans for himself, but his self-congratulations and prideful planning wind up all for naught. Many well-heeled people in ancient times thought they could carry valuable possessions with them into the next life.

In Europe, as far back as ten-thousand years Before Christ, in the Neolithic Age, wealthy people had food and drink, weapons and ornaments, and favorite animals buried with them, as well as slaves and wives (Paton).

A few years ago, a team of Bulgarian archaeologists happened on the tomb of a woman from a noble family who lived in the third century. To prepare this woman for her future, family and friends put in a large funeral wreath made of gold; also pieces of gold jewelry, including "a necklace with a pendant, a pair of bangles, two different earrings." The dead woman had two thin bracelets around her left ankle. The archaeologists also found a bronze chandelier in the ancient tomb. Other objects included two vials of perfume or some other cosmetics; a drinking vessel in the shape of an animal horn. And, of all things, a little vial around the noble woman's neck that had contained tears her friends had cried as they mourned her death (Mokanova).

But in the parable, God tells the rich farmer he's going to die that night. God asks, *And the things you have prepared, whose will **they** be?'*

The man's family will probably not be packing his grain crop into the grave with him.

We noted first that he was rich. But Jesus ends the story by saying, *So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is **not rich** toward God.*

DIVES

Jesus also starts the other parable by saying the central character is a rich man, often called *Di-Vees*. This is not his proper name. *Di-Vees* is actually the Latin word which means *rich man*. So if you hear of *Di-Vees*, remember it means the man was wealthy.

Just as a request for Jesus to settle a financial dispute provoked the story of the rich farmer, this second story follows a harsh encounter with the Pharisees. They have a running battle with Jesus in all four Gospels. Here in Luke,

Jesus has told an earlier parable about honest use of money, and He draws this conclusion:

He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.

The the Gospel writer gives this pointed description of the Pharisees:

The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard this, and they ridiculed [Jesus]. So He aims this story about love of money at the Pharisees, as we will see before we're through.

In this second parable, we have two evidences of this man's wealth in Luke, chapter 16, verse 19. *He was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.*

The term *purple* designated "the expensive outer garment worn by royalty" (Tolbert 132).

The man's inner garments were made of fine linen. The finest clothing money could buy. And every day his meals are like a lavish buffet.

The first story had only one human character: the rich farmer. But here we have two men: the rich man and Lazarus. And we see a sharp contrast between Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man in the finest clothes. But Lazarus lies at his gate, *full of sores who desired to be fed*. Those three designators often seem inevitably linked: poor, sick, and hungry.

Lazarus lies just outside the rich man's house, wanting *to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table*. It's not clear whether Lazarus gets some of the scraps which drop from the feast table (Bliss thinks not, 254; Tolbert thinks so, 132). He probably had been placed there by family members or friends, hoping for some help. But Lazarus gets no help from the rich man.

Dogs roaming the street pay more attention to Lazarus than the wealthy home owner. They come and lick the beggar's sores. He is at the mercy of the rich man and of the dogs.

The contrast between the rich man and Lazarus in this life continues in the afterlife. This contrast continues through the rest of the story.

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.

Lazarus — neglected on earth — receives an angelic honor escort, carried to the bosom of Abraham. As father of the Jewish people, Abraham occupies a seat of authority. And Lazarus, who received no attention in his earthly life, leans on the breast of exalted Father Abraham. That language suggests the heavenly feast, where the beggar no longer has to settle for crumbs. Abraham himself provides for Lazarus.

People ate around low tables and sat on low couches. Lying on the couches, really. In John's Gospel, at the Last Supper, "the beloved disciple" leans on Jesus's breast (13:23). Here we have the same arrangement at the feast table, Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham.

Lazarus, who had nothing in this life, now has a place of intimacy with Father Abraham. Then we are told simply, *The rich man also died and was buried*. We can imagine a funeral in keeping with this man's elaborate lifestyle.

Now, we see another major contrast in their locations:

Lazarus in a place of comfort and consolation. But now we see the one-time rich man . . .

and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom.

We think of *Hades* as synonymous with hell. But the biblical word means simply the abode of the dead, both good and evil. But the rich man is not in a happy place. Part of his torment comes as he looks in the distance and sees Lazarus happy in Abraham's bosom.

The third contrast in verses 24-25 is between their conditions, elaborating on the torment the rich man is enduring:

And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

The Bible doesn't tell us a whole lot about punishment in the afterlife. We know it is separation. Not separation from God. God's Spirit is everywhere. And not separation from God's love. God loves everything in creation, including people who pull away from that love. But we can say punishment in the afterlife separates us from fellowship with God.

The rich man says, *I am in anguish in this flame*. And our general picture of Hades or Hell is of eternal fire. But this is picture language. When we die, we will no longer have these earthly bodies. So if we are spiritual beings rather than physical beings, the fires must be something that will punish spirits, rather than fire such as we had in an old-timey wood stove. Again, a big part of punishment after death will lie in awareness that a person cannot enjoy fellowship with God or the good things in life.

In this life, the rich man wanted nothing to do with Lazarus. But now, the rich man pleads with Father Abraham to send Lazarus to Hades to provide relief. The rich man continues the pattern he set in this life — selfish life, caring for no one but himself.

Father Abraham goes on to say a great chasm separates the two arenas of existence, and nobody can cross from one side to the other. "You made your bed; now sleep in it."

At only one moment the rich man shows concern for anyone but himself. If Lazarus can't come to Hades with a tiny bit of water, then let him go back to earth and

warn the rich man's five brothers, so they won't make the same mistake he made and wind up in torment.

Abraham turns down this request as well.

But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

Moses and the prophets means the Jewish Bible. The Holy Scriptures should be enough to convince the brothers back on earth to change their ways. They have a written witness, but they choose to ignore it (Tolbert 133).

The desperate man continues his appeal:

'No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

The final words of this parable offer a rebuttal, not only from Father Abraham to the rich man but also from Jesus to the Pharisees.

He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead.'"

Even a spectacular miracle — such as my Resurrection — wouldn't convince you guys. You love money so much that you ignore the poor who are all around you.

I read an article on health care for the poor that I found disturbing and beyond belief. A lawmaker from Tennessee — an active churchman — said we shouldn't provide programs such as Obamacare because it makes it harder to win poor people to Christ if they get sick.

He said government programs that help people regain their health limit "the Christian church's role" and robs sick individuals of the opportunity "to come to a saving knowledge of who God is." People who fell ill would look "to the government" instead of to God.

But this outlook comes from more than one lone Tennessee lawmaker. A survey "indicated more than one in four American and Canadian evangelicals held such a view." The Tennessean said the way to help poor people who get sick would be for churches to open free clinics (Renaud). He said, "Sickness is one of the main avenues that bring people to religion."

I find that mindset cruel and blasphemous.

APPLICATIONS AND IMPLICATION

Now what is Jesus saying to us from the stories of these two rich men who were selfish and indifferent to needy people?

We need concern for the financial well-being of our families and for ourselves. But it's one thing to be concerned and something all together different to be obsessed with getting and keeping more money.

In Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, Willie Loman worries over lack of adequate money and eventually takes his own life. At the graveside, Willie's wife said, "He only needed a little salary." Their friend Charley corrects her. He says, "No man only needs a little salary."

I think Charley is saying, None of us is quite content with whatever our income is. We think we need a little more.

In that sermon I preached to those drought-stricken farmers back in West Texas, the King James Version said, “Take no thought for what you will eat or drink or wear.” But the wording in Greek actually means “don’t be troubled unduly” over those things.

It would be irresponsible to “take no thought” at all for life’s basics. But faithful Christians should not let financial concerns become the overriding concerns in our lives.

The men in both parables were obsessed with making as much money as they could and using it all on themselves.

In time, God’s judgment fell. Both men were punished because of their obsession with wealth. The man, with Lazarus lying right at his gate, could not fail to see the poor sick man.

Jesus pronounced damnation on the man because he closed his eyes to the beggar’s need.

He had no love, no concern for the beggar so close at hand.

It is painful to see so many elected officials in Washington with utter disregard for the poor among us. The party in power is actively seeking to gut Social Security and Medicare and health care for the neediest people in this nation. Our current situation has the rich man and Lazarus multiplied endlessly, with millions of people deprived of health care. They gave massive tax cuts to the wealthiest in the country and then, suddenly, said, “We’re going to have a budget shortage. We’ve got to find way to cut back. So I guess we’ll have to go after programs that benefit the less able.”

Closer to home, you and I need to see what short-term measures we can take to help people right outside our gates. Comparatively speaking, most of us resemble the rich men in the parables.

If you have even a little money in the bank, you’re more like the rich men than Lazarus.

If the bill collector doesn’t come knocking, you’re more like the rich men than Lazarus.

If you’ll sleep in your own bed tonight, you’re more like the rich men than Lazarus.

If you can put gas in your car, you’re more like the rich men than Lazarus.

If you buy groceries, you’re more like the rich men than Lazarus.

CONCLUSION AND BENEDICTION

Now, as we close this week’s Baraca Radio Sunday School Class from Anderson’s First Baptist church, I encourage you to resolve to work and pray for the needy, the hungry, the sick. God will give you strength and courage for these efforts as we claim these promises from God:

God's love that will never let you go.
God's grace that is greater than all your sin.
God's peace that passes all understanding.
These blessings are yours through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

MAKE MINE MONEY---SOURCES

***First Given, October 4, 2009

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