

# PARABLES, “THROUGH PEASANTS EYES!”

Study 25, The Rich Fool, Part II. Luke 12:13-21

1. The Text:

One of the multitude said to him,

“Rabbi, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me.”

But he said to him,

“Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?”

And He said to them,

GENERAL PRINCIPAL

“Take heed, and beware of every kind of insatiable desire.

For a person does not consist in the surpluses of his possessions.”

1. And he told this p, saying,

“There was a certain rich man

GOOD GIVEN

Whose land brought forth plenty.

2. And he discussed with himself saying,

“What shall I do, for I have no place to store my crops?”

PROBLEM

3. And he said, “I will do this;” I will pull down my barns and build larger barns; and I will store all my grain and my goods.

PLAN (PRESENT)

4. And I will say to my soul, “Soul! You have ample goods laid up for many years,

PLAN (FUTURE)

Relax, eat, drink and enjoy yourself,”

5. But God said to him, ‘Fool!’ This night your soul is required of you, and what you have prepared, whose will these things be?

GOOD’S LEFT

So is he who treasures up for himself,

GENERAL PRINCIPAL

And is not gathering riches for God.

2. This particular cry can be characterized as a “naked cry” for justice. A demanding voice says, “Give me your rights.” We are left to assume that this petitioner is unwilling to consider his problem from any other perspective other than his own. Lesslie Newbigin states the problem eloquently;

*“If we acknowledge the God of the Bible, we are committed to struggle for justice. Jesus means giving each their due. Our problem (as seen in The*

*light of the Gospel) is that each of us overestimates what is due to him as compared with what is due to his neighbor.....If I do not acknowledge a justice which judges the justice for what I fight, I am an agent, not of justice, but of lawless tyranny. (Newbiggin).* Newbiggin precisely describes the petition of the petitioner. He has decided what are *his* rights. He only wants assistance in pressuring his bother into granting those rights.

3. The naked cry for justice is voiced in Shakespeare's tragedy, "*Romeo and Juliet*," Tybalt kills Mercutio, Romeo then kills Tybalt, who is a relative to Capulets (Juliet's family). With the bodies of the 2 dead men in full view, the cowed gathers and with them, the prince. Lady Capulet speaks for her family and angrily demands the death of Romeo as the murderer of Tybalt. Each family is only demanding rights! At the end of the play the same people are again gathered in the presence of the prince, only now there are two other dead bodies on the stage, those of Romeo and Juliet. The prince says, "*Where be these enemies? Capulet, Montague! See, what a scourge is laid upon your hate, That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love! And I, for winking at your discords, too, Have lost a brace of kinsman; All are punish'd.*" (Act 5, scene 3).
4. To grant each party their own understanding of their "rights," can lead to tragedy. A new perspective is needed. In Shakespeare's play, even the priest makes no attempt to offer a new perspective to the families or pronounce a word of judgment on their hates. Indeed, it takes a special brand of courage to tell antagonists that their naked cry for justice is not enough, that they must begin with a new understanding of themselves.
5. This rare courage is seen not only in this passage, but also in Luke 13:1-3, where nationalists report an atrocity to Jesus, as one who has been in this position many times previously. The present writer knows that the telling of such a story demands a sympathetic response from the listener. Jesus' answer requires great courage as we observe. We see this kind of response in Luke 12:13, in each text there is a strong plea for justice from a self-confident, powerless petitioner. In each case, the answer is "Look to yourself first!"
6. Jesus' answer to the demand of the petitioner 'has the tone of disapproval,' (Meyer). This is supported by modern and medieval colloquial Arabic speech, where 'ja ragul,' ("O man!") usually introduces a complaint (documented by Muir), who mentions a case of its use in the caliph's court in Baghdad in 749 A.D. Ibn Hobeira, a member of the court, addressed Abu

Jafar, the Caliph's brother as "O man!" This was taken as an insult and Abu Jafar immediately apologized as a slip of the tongue. (Muir) Moses unsolicited sought to be a judge (Exodus 2:14a) and was rebuffed. Jesus is solicited and refuses to be a judge and rebuffs the petitioner. Yet both begin with a broken relationship between the two antagonists, and try in their separate ways to achieve reconciliation.

7. These two words, 'judge and divider,' give the sense of Jesus' complaint. There is obviously a broken relationship between this man and his brother. The man wants the broken relationship finalized by total separation. But Jesus insists that he has not come to be a divider, but a reconciler. He wants to reconcile people to another, not finalize division between them. This brief dialogue is in full harmony with everything we know about Jesus. (I skipped a section of this study as it brings out a similar point in the Gospel of Thomas in a similar story.) As there is a close similarity in The Greek language, changing one letter makes (Jesus a reconciler, rather than a divider). It seems that in this p, the scholar Miller insists that in Jesus seeking reconciliation is requiring the petitioner to gain a new perspective of himself. Miller writes, *"Jesus was not showing indifference to the claims of legal justice, but was insisting that here is a greater gain than getting an inheritance a greater loss than losing it."*
8. The question is addressed in the plural, "Who made me a judge or divider over you (plural)?" Some of our Arabic versions use the dual, "over the two of you." Others maintain the plural. Is Jesus addressing the crowd or the two brothers? It is impossible to determine the precision, but the plural seems more appropriate. Jesus seems to be refusing to play the role of divider for all. After the somewhat hostile question comes the first of the two wisdom sayings that encase The P;

### **FIRST WISDOM SAYING**

*And He said to them,*

*(GENERAL PRINCIPAL)*

*"Take heed, and beware of every kind of insatiable desire.*

*For a person does not consist in the surpluses of his possessions."*

9. The first sentence is usually translated in reference to covetousness. The original language carries with the overtones of insatiable desires that make the warning even stronger. The clear implication is that the petitioner will not have his problem solved if his brother does grant him his portion of the inheritance. Sa'id observes, "Jesus becomes a judge over them, not *between* them. Jesus judges their hearts, not their pocket books." The

word life in Greek is 'Zoe,' which in contrast to 'Bia,' has to do with a special quality of life and not merely physical life.

10. The second sentence is awkward, "*Take heed, and beware of every kind of insatiable desire. For a person does not consist in the surpluses of his possessions.*" There is a repetition of the reference to possessions/surpluses. Bruce notes and understands this to be two ways of saying the same thing, "The second kind of afterthought." Marshall concurs with C.F. D. Moule that two expressions may have been combined. However, if we are dealing with a parallel repetition of ideas in a rhetorical form, then it is not an afterthought, but a necessary repetition for the completion of the form. Bruce notes that the expression here is peculiar, but the meaning is clear. People are infected with the insatiable desires of many kinds, and one of them is to acquire more possessions. They seek an enriching quality of life in these possessions and in the fond hope that if they can only get enough material things these things will produce the abundant life. T.W. Manson writes, "*It is true that a certain minimum of material goods is necessary for life; but is not true that greater abundance of goods means greater abundance of life.*"
11. Jesus cryptic answer warns the reader in two ways; First, with the presuppositions the desire for material things will prove insatiable. Second, the dreams of the abundant life will never be achieved through such an accumulation of surpluses. The insatiable desire for a higher standard of living is widespread in the modern world. The fond hope that LIFE will be the product of more consumption is also very much with us. With the natural resources of the world dwindling and the pressure for more possessions intensifying, some wrestling with the message of this text would seem to be imperative if we were to survive. Again, we note the plural, "he said to *them*," The text is meant for the all readers/listeners, not just the two brothers. This wisdom saying introduces the p itself.

