

# PARABLES, “THROUGH PEASANTS EYES!”

Study 26, The Rich Fool, Part III. 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

GOODS 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. 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*

3. *material goods is necessary for life; but is not true that greater abundance of goods means greater abundance of life."*
4. 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.

**5. STANZA ONE GOODS GIVEN:**

*And he told this p, saying,*

*"There was a certain rich man*

*GOODS GIVEN*

*Whose land brought forth plenty.*

As in the case of many p. this story has a literary background. Psalm 49 discusses the problem with wealth and its meaninglessness in the face of death. According to Ben Sirach;

*'A man grows rich by his sharpness and grabbing and here is the regard he receives for it; he says, 'I have found rest, and now I can enjoy my goods'; but he does not know how long this will last; he will have to leave his goods for others and die.'* (Sir. 11:19-20)

6. Jesus is dealing with a theme that is already well known in the literature of the audience, (Eccl. 2:1-11, Job 31:24-28). What is important is what he does with it. Here Jesus expands the teaching of Sirach's note into a drama. There are a number of distinctive features in this process. (1) Rather than one speech, we have four with two speakers. (2) God Himself is heard at the end of Jesus' p. (3) The two accounts begin with differing assumptions. Sirach's little story is directed to the wealthy who acquire their possession

(by sharpness and grabbing). In contrast, Jesus discusses wealth that is gift from God, not acquired by human effort. That is Sirach's man reflects, "What do I do with my earnings?" Jesus' person must ask, "What do I do with what I have not earned?" That he does not perceive the question in this fashion is part of what the p. is all about. (4) Jesus' version introduces the idea of "loan." The man discovers his soul to be on loan. Was his wealth also on loan? Sirach's story carries none of these subtle overtones. (5) The life-style of Sirach's character is exposed (he is sharp and grabbing), but nothing evolves from it. Jesus' story subtly and yet powerfully exposes both the life-style of the rich man and the isolation that it creates. (6) Jesus account focuses on the surpluses. His man is already rich when the p. opens. He is then given additional wealth. Sirach's man grows rich in the p. These unique features will be further illuminated as we proceed.

7. Focusing on the first stanza, we see a man who is already rich. We are not told how he got his riches, and the method of acquiring them is not criticized as it was in Sirach. This man has more than enough. On top of this, with no extra effort on his part, he is given the gift of a bumper crop. He did not earn it and he does not need it. His problem is what to do with unearned surpluses. With this problem in mind, we turn to stanza two.

#### **8. STANZA TWO—THE PROBLEM:**

*And he discussed with himself saying,*

*"What shall I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" PROBLEM*

The text gives us a continuous past, "He was debating with himself." The subject was a matter of considerable concern and the debate lasted some time. There was no thought of "I really do not need any of this, I am already wealthy!" Nor is there any thought of "This extra wealth is a gift for which I can take no credit. God has given the increase." Rather, the bumper crops are simply referred to as "my crops," and the only question that concerns him is how to preserve them for himself. Ambrose aptly observes that the rich man has storage available in the mouths of the needy (Trench). Augustine talks about a man who stores grain on a damp floor and needs to move it upstairs lest it spoil; thus treasure to be kept must be stored in heaven, not on earth (Trench). Ecclesiastes 5:10 observes;

*"He who loves money, will not be satisfied with money; nor he who loves wealth with gain; this also is vanity."*

9. For us the text relates to the very important modern questions of excess profits in a capitalistic society and the surplus value theories in Marxism.

According to Paul, the Christian should work for two reasons. The first is that he will not be a burden on others (II Thess. 2:7-12). The second is “so that he may be able to give to those in need.” (Eph. 4:28). To explore all of this for a Christian in a capitalistic society would go well beyond the intent and scope of this study. (Luther’s thoughts) We would only observe in passing that this p, with its presuppositions, speaks clearly to crucial questions of our own day. Furthermore, the man is ‘dialoguing with himself.’ One of the striking features of a ME is his gregarious nature. Life is lived in tightly knit communities. The leading men of the village still “sit at the gate” and spend literally years talking to one another. The slightest transaction is worthy of hours of discussion. The present writer has engaged with the notables in such discussion and knows that often there seems to be a subtle pressure not to introduce the information that will settle the question under discussion. The reasoning seems to be—we have a wonderful discussion going, do not close it! In any case, the elder in his community makes up his mind in community.

10. He decides what to do after hours of discussion with his friends. He does his thinking in a crowd. The text does not read, “he said to himself, as we have with the unjust steward (16:3) and the unjust judge (18:4). Rather this man dialogues with himself. He obviously has no one else with whom to talk. He trusts on one and has no friends or cronies with whom he can exchange ideas. When he needs a dialogue he can talk only to himself. Thus we begin to get Jesus’ picture the kind of prison wealth can build. He has the money to buy a vacuum and live in it. Life in this vacuum creates its own realities and, out of this warped perspective we him announce his solution.

#### **11. STANZA THREE—PLAN (PRESENT):**

*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)*

Plummer has not the chiasmus in this line;

*“I will tear down of me the barns and greater ones I will build up!”* The language of “tear down and build up,” is classical prophetic language that refers to the call and ministry of the prophet. (Jer. 1:10). It speaks of courageous acts in the name of God that call for suffering in their fulfillment. Here this noble language is sadly cheapened by this self-indulgent rich man who is determined that he alone will consume God’s gifts.