

Colossians 3:1-11

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Luke 12:13-21

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.'

14 Jesus replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?'

15 Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.'

16 And he told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest.

17 He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops."

18 'Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain.

19 And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

20 'But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"

21 'This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.'

The rich fool Luke 12:13-21

The richest person in the world today is Elon Musk, the boss of Tesla, who is estimated to be worth \$224 billion. Obviously most of that is tied up his company (and/or spaceships). But there are estimated to be 2,668 billionaires in the world in 2022. This is rising fast – in 2010 there were 1,000) and you do have to ask the question: why does anyone need that much money? I was at school with and knew quite well the Israeli businessman Idan Ofer who is worth \$10.5 billion (that's trebled in the last two years). When sadly even American church leaders have their own private jets and are regularly taking short flights in a time of climate crisis, and there are so many millions in poverty, it all seems obscene. But of course you can do a lot of good with that amount of cash. If you choose to.

Jesus of course puts his finger on a timeless human problem: greed and self interest. It's probably more relevant today than it's ever been. The poorest half of the global population owns just 2% of the global total, while the richest 10% own 76% of all the wealth. It's been largely the same story since the time of Jesus, with the tendency always for those in power to maintain the status quo for their own benefit.

The normal practice in first century Palestine was that brothers would split the inheritance of their parents between them, but that this would need the agreement of the older brother.

So the man in Luke's account is the younger brother who is trying to press Jesus to make his brother agree. The father has obviously died and they have fallen out over it. But Jesus is not about to adjudicate over such a situation.

14 Jesus replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?'

Jesus does sound a bit annoyed here, and in the middle east the implication of this phrase would be 'I'm not going to use your name, and I'm not going to call you 'friend.' I'll just call you 'man'. There is a much more important issue. A warning.

15 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.'

Jesus is concerned about where the real value in life is found. And ultimately it is *not found* in money and possessions.

The Greek word used is *pleonexias*, translated as greed. This could also more helpfully be translated as 'insatiable desire'.

There's an addictive aspect to acquiring things – if you've made a billion why the need to double, triple or quadruple it? Why does anyone need so much money? It's a complex issue, about power and control, but also about the fear of not having enough, and the idea that money sets you free from all this. It's a search for security, something I think we all experience.

Jesus then uses a parable to illustrate where he's going with this. His central character is a rich man who owns land from which he receives a great harvest which hugely expands his fortune.

Of course he has done nothing extra to achieve this – and he's already rich. The harvest comes from God.

The rich man however is debating with himself (v17) about what to do with all this fruit of his success. In middle eastern culture people normally discuss every life decision with friends, family and community, and so this man is an isolated figure. Huge wealth invariably causes people to increasingly become separate from the community around them.

Isaiah 5:8 Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land.

No one is there to listen - it's *my crops, my barn, my grain*. No sign of all the people who have helped him build this business. Or a family. Or a wife.

19 And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

This is the future plan. This is success. He imagines that this is the goal of his life. The Psalmist (42:2) says that the soul thirsts for God. The rich fool thinks that his soul is restless until he is assured of food, drink and security.

The final word however is God's in v 20 *'God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"* 21 *'This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.'*

The reality is that life is a gift. We have no right to anything but what is given to us by God.

So what is the good news?

Kenneth Bailey ends his comment on this parable by saying this, paraphrasing what Jesus is saying to the brother who is wanting half of the inheritance:

Whether the inheritance is mine or my brother's, both of us must recognise that all of it belongs to God. We're both responsible as stewards before God for our material possessions and for how we spend the days of our lives. Our wealth and our lives are on loan and both of us can destroy ourselves if we do not curb an insatiable desire for more.

If we want to hear it, the secret of life Jesus is getting at is that the value of our lives is tied up with how we relate to our creator. And as Jesus repeatedly said unless you lose your life, unless you give it back to God by giving it away to others you will never be free. What that means I think is that rather than being inward facing and focused on ourselves we should be outward facing and focusing on others. Jesus laid down his life and set the whole world free. If we want freedom, security and peace of mind we must let go of our own lives and be rich towards God.