

Introduction: Interruptions from people in the crowds often stimulated Jesus to tell a parable. That happened in the case of the parable we consider next. While Jesus was teaching a crowd, including His disciples, to fear God alone and trust Him in all things, a man interrupted Jesus. He wanted Jesus to settle a family dispute. Judging from his question, the man was a younger brother whose elder brother had received, but not divided, the inheritance due them both. The younger brother was due one-third of the estate.

Jesus declined to get involved with the inheritance issue saying, *“Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”* But Jesus perceived the man had a deeper spiritual problem. Jesus then cautioned the whole group to avoid covetousness and told the parable of the “Rich Fool” to emphasize His point. In addition to the main point about covetousness, the parable provides a good reminder that success has its own dangers.

Preliminary Comments: Jesus certainly could have settled the family dispute. But that would not have solved the man’s root problem. It is common to this day to for a person to approach Jesus in prayer asking that He solve a problem, but hoping He will do so without changing their heart to deal. In other words, please fix my problem, but don’t change my nature even though it was the cause of my problem.

Fixing surface problems without fixing underlying spiritual problems allows future recurrences of the old problem or bringing on a new problem with the same root cause. To our great benefit, Jesus deals with root causes rather than merely with eliminating symptoms. Jesus recognized the question about the family feud was a symptom of the serious problem of covetousness.

The parable is startling in the clarity with which it exposes the common problem of covetousness. Covetousness is a compelling desire for things and a root cause of many kinds of sin. Covetousness began with Adam and Eve. It has been a problem for all people ever since.

Eve coveted being more like God. Desiring to be more like God was not wrong, but was a goal that required strict obedience to God. In fact, transforming believers into a likeness of Christ is precisely God’s goal. But Eve’s desire was to be like God in knowing good and evil. Eve could only “know” about evil by becoming evil herself. Eve was tempted by an offer to achieve her goal immediately by her own actions. All she need do was eat the fruit God had forbidden them to eat. That’s what

she did. Adam repeated that act of rebellion. The result of Eve's covetousness action plunged them and all their progeny into a dreadful fallen state. Adam and Eve now knew about evil from the inside. They had become sinners.

Other Biblical examples. Lot's wife coveted staying in Sodom and was killed on the spot. In disobedience to God's instructions, Achan coveted particular items from the spoils of war, took and hid them, with the consequence that he and his family were destroyed. David coveted his neighbor's wife, too her to himself, and plunged himself, his family, and his nation into terrible trouble. "Thou shalt not covet" is the tenth commandment. Coveting can, and often does, lead to breaking the other nine commandments. Hear the parable.

Luke 12:13-21: *"Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." ¹⁴ But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." ¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." ²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."*

The Danger of Success: Worldly standards of success are power, influence, and wealth. But these are not permanent conditions. At best they cannot extend beyond mortal death. God's plan of success for each believer is that they become like Christ in character and dwell with Him in eternity. That is lasting success. We must not be sidetracked by covetous desires for power, influence, or wealth.

Power, influence, and wealth are not inherently evil but they are easily abused. Neither are they necessarily achieved through covetous actions. God is generous. Power, influence, and wealth can be used in godly ways that please God. A good example is Abraham.

Jesus says in verse 12:15, *"Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."* The view that power, influence, and wealth will gain a "good" life is totally wrong.

Jesus says one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions and power and influence are possessions as much as is wealth. A "heart" that is right with God is a treasure beyond measure. Pursuit of power, influence, and wealth is dangerous. The right path for life is to first seek God and His kingdom. God may grant you many things, and if so, they should be used in ways that please Him.

The man, who asked the question triggering this parable, thought his troubles would be over if he could receive his share of the inheritance. He was mistaken. Jesus realized he had a deeper problem.

God is sensitive to people's need for the essentials of life. Luke 12:30b, "***For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.***" Things have a rightful place in life, but things of themselves cannot make life successful. Things may have godly or ungodly impact on thoughts and behavior and will have a corresponding impact on spiritual health. Too much or too little are both problems. Enough is best. Thank and praise God for His provision. Use His provision to support family, benefit others, and to benefit God's work.

The Story: A man suddenly becomes very wealthy. His land produces an unexpected abundance. The farmer's response is satisfaction with his condition. He congratulates himself saying, "***I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."***" That is the farmer's plan, but he forgot his life belongs to God. God had another plan. Based on his full barns, the man looked forward to a life of ease, but he dies that very night. As everyone must, he left everything behind. His barns full of things provided him no benefit.

Each of us needs to ask, "What do I have or what am I doing that will go with me into life eternal?" Putting it another way, "What am I doing that will have eternal significance?" We don't know the time God will call us to Himself. For that reason, we are to be spiritually prepared at all times for God's call.

Impact of Unexpected Abundance: How did the farmer react to an unexpected bumper crop giving him success far beyond his dreams? He attributes it to his good planning and hard work. He is pleased with his good decision to tear down his old barns and build larger ones. It never occurs to him that he should thank God for His timely rain and sun which were essential in producing the bountiful crop.

In verses 12:17-19 the farmer thinks about himself. HE is self-centered as witnessed by the 12 personal pronouns he uses in his musings. My crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, my soul. He speaks as though he is the owner of himself and all

his possessions. But the truth is he is merely a steward both of his life and everything he possesses. All he is and all he possesses belong to God. In his pride he doesn't think about or thank God. It doesn't have to be that way.

It wasn't that way when Peter caught a multitude of fish by following Jesus' instructions. In Luke 5:8b Peter said, ***“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”*** Peter doesn't brag about his huge catch of fish, nor talk about how clever he was to discover where the fish were hiding. Instead, he is devastated by realizing he is a sinful man in the presence of his holy Lord.

Jacob is another example of a proper response to success. He received an abundance from the Lord, both a large family and an abundance of things. In Genesis 32:10, Jacob said, ***“I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.”***

Material blessings either act as a mirror in which we see ourself as their source, or a window through which we see that our loving God is the true source. When abundant blessings are received, a person full of pride and selfishness will think, “I am finally getting what I deserve, a proper benefit for who I am and what I have done.” On the other hand, a person who realizes all blessings, including life, come from God will thank and praise God who gives so freely.

Human tendency is to think they inherently deserve the good things they receive. Because of this, Moses warned the Israelites, as they approached the promised land. He wanted them to be prepared to properly receive the blessings God was giving them. The blessings were unearned and bestowed on them through God's grace. Deuteronomy 6:10-12 says, ***“And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers ... to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build,¹¹ and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full,¹² then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”***

Covetousness is a danger to everyone whether rich or poor or in between. This parable exposes the folly of covetousness in any form, whether for wealth, power or influence, or another person's spouse. It also exposes the error of believing a good life consists of possessing an abundance of things. God intends the material blessings of life to enrich us spiritually but not to be looked upon as the source of a good life.

Material blessings, properly utilized draw us closer to the Lord who is the source of all good things.

Responding to Success: If success, is achieved what will that success mean for life? Things cannot of themselves give “depth, length, or breadth” to life. Godly character and depth of life are heart issues which come from within. They have nothing to do with an abundance of things. But, neither is an abundance of things necessarily a hinderance to a righteous life. Abraham was a wealthy man, but he walked faithfully and steadfastly with God.

How does an abundance of things change life? One benefit is increased time and resources available to do things you couldn’t do before. The way your resources are allocated can be for personal enjoyment and pleasure or for works that please God or some of both.

A godly person will thank God for His provision. They will rejoice in having more to help others in ways that glorify God. They will certainly and rightly use a portion of their abundance to benefit their family (1 Timothy 5:8). Perhaps they will invest a portion in new initiatives.

Response to little or much is a matter of the heart. Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, ***“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*** Our eyes “see” what our heart loves. When we love God and put Him first in our life, our material blessings will draw us closer to Him. Wealth is to be our servant not our master and to be used in ways that please God. Time and resources are to be invested in that which has eternal significance.

What is Next: This is the last lesson in this series on the parables of Jesus. I hope your interest has been stirred the teaching stories of our Lord. In them we have the direct words of Jesus showing us how to approach difficult issues.