

How Much is Too Much?

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[0 : 00] We'll you turn back to the passage we registered a few moments ago in Luke chapter 12 and verse 13. Every day of our lives we are pulled in a number of directions.

We have our family responsibilities pulling us one way. For those of us that work we have our employer and our responsibility of work.

We have our obligation towards our friends and wider family. And sometimes even we can feel the obligation of the church pulling us in another.

And perhaps we're left wondering from time to time what is really important in my life. What should I, how do I prioritise things that go on?

The passage that we're going to look at this morning in Luke forces us to make a decision about what kind of life do we want.

[1 : 07] Do we want a life dependent on things of this world or a life with no guarantee of any of the world's goods but close to God.

This passage is so relevant for us today because most people that we come across in Britain today the main priority is to get enough money to live the good life.

If you've got Virgin or Sky or any of these TV things and you flick through the channels on to things that you perhaps don't normally watch you can be bombarded with television shows things like Life's of the Rich and Famous, Fabulous, Wealthy, Hydroes and our magazines tell us you know just get the next toy and you will be happy.

The problem is someone else has something bigger, better or different. I wonder even within the church the difference between comfortable and covetous may not be that great.

Jesus in Luke 12 is in the middle of a sermon teaching his disciples to feel God alone when suddenly he's interrupted by a man who is dissatisfied over what he considers to be an unfair division of his father's estate between himself and his brother.

[2 : 43] In fact it was very clear it was laid down within the Jewish law that the older brother got two thirds of his estate and the younger brother gets a third. But he wants Jesus to overrule that and so in verse 13 he says teacher tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me what he means is I want 50, 50.

Of course throughout the generations many families sadly have been destroyed over the simple distribution of assets. We all know the story where there's a will, there's a family and this man really doesn't want Jesus to make a decision on what is fair he simply wants 50% of his father's estate.

But Jesus did not answer as perhaps the man expected him to do. Look at verse 14, man who appointed me a judge on arbiter between you you see Jesus refuses to be sidetracked from his mission of seeking and saving the lost.

Instead Jesus does not make a legal judgment but through this power gives a moral one. Jesus knew that the family feud of inheritance was a symptom not the problem.

The ultimate problem was that of greed. Again it's interesting in verse 14 Jesus uses the word you a plural term.

[4 : 27] Jesus perhaps knew this family, knew of the family, knew of the dispute and realised that both brothers had a problem with greed and as long as both brothers were suffering from greed no settlement would be satisfactory.

Jesus tells the man an important thing that to solve the problem he doesn't need the money he needs his heart changed.

He needs God to change his heart. I wonder when I come to prayer, when you come to prayer how often do we ask God to change our situation rather than asking him to change our heart?

Can I suggest that in our individual even in our corporate prayers most of our prayers are that God would solve the problem in our lives perhaps our prayers should be God here is my problem please change my heart.

In verse 15 Jesus goes on says to be unguarded against all kinds of greed. The area of danger for this man was the greed of covetousness he wanted more and more, he wanted more and more money he would never be satisfied however much he had but it doesn't need to be money it can be possessions, it can be our time it can be greed whatever affects our life Proverbs 21, 26 says they are always greedy for more where the Godly love to give or the writer of Ecclesiastes says in chapter 5 verse 10 those who love money will never have enough how absurd you think that wealth brings true happiness but if we want it isn't that exactly what our society tells us how we should think if you can just have that bigger house that nicer car that pay rise that dot dot dot then we can live the good life and we've been sucked into it by our society

[7 : 03] Charles Swindle has a picture of it this way picture a shipwreck sailor on a life raft in the middle of the ocean his terrible first implies impels him to drink the salt water but it only makes him thirstier this causes him to drink even more which makes him thirstier still he consumes more and more salty water until paradoxically he becomes dehydrated and dries I wonder are we dying spiritually because we've brought into the concept that we need to consume more and more Jesus addresses what we can term the folly of seeking the comfortable life Mark and Forbes are Forbes 500 Murie reflected our society when he wrote once the one who dies with most toys wins sadly Mr. Forbes has now passed away and you will know that that statement simply is not true beginning in verse 16 is what is referred to as a parable of the rich through and Jesus gives us principles of what happens when our hearts are focused exclusively on ourselves

I wanted to look at these very briefly this morning verse 16 then, firstly when our hearts are focused on ourselves we do not give God the credit for the things he has done although it was one individual that came and asked the question Jesus answers the parable to everyone in the crowd Jesus speaks the parable to them in a plural way it's important because he doesn't just condemn the rich man he wants to speak to everybody whether rich or poor in the audience to the credit at least of the rich man it would appear that he has come by his wealth honestly and he is a believer in Yahweh God the rich man of this parable we've read as a farmer but in fact he represents all human beings who are used by all kinds of greed as this farmer looked at his amazing harvest he missed the vital point he didn't see the hand behind the harvest he didn't see the hand of God he only saw his own effort yet he is a perfect example of greed because he has much and he expects to get more those of us that live in urban cities

I wonder how often do we forget the hand of God behind everything that we have I confess that we often do say grace at home before we eat we hit the mute button do we really stop and thank God for our daily provision and all harvest has gone out of fashion in many churches but it was a helpful reminder to remind us that the conflicts we eat or the wheat of eggs or the toast or whatever the food that we have doesn't just come from saints' breads or waiters or moriscans or whatever it comes ultimately from God do we focus when we get the pay rise at work on how well we have done this year to deserve it or do we see the hand of God behind it secondly if you look at verses 17 to 18 we see that when our hearts are focused on ourselves we make plans but leave God out is this Jesus calling for a radical communist state is this Jesus putting the marker down to say capitalism is bad and socialism is good well it's an interesting debate but it's not finding this passage and it's something we might want to come back to another time you see Jesus doesn't imply anywhere here that the desire to build more barns wasn't both wise and prudent the problem lies in the fact that there is no thought of sharing it in the original Greek the personal pronoun my occurs four times and I eight times even in our translation verses 17 to 18 we see that the pronoun I appears five times and my four times notice how he says my crops, my barns, my goods he is totally missed the point he's confused stewardship and ownership it's not ours to own and here is the radical thing of Jesus teaching the house that you live in is not owned by you the car that you drive is not owned by you the money in your bank account is not yours

Genesis 1 to 3 teaches a vitally important lesson that we are called to be stewards not owners I wonder if we generally believe that the gifts that God has given us whether it's material or spiritual or natural are not ours to own but ours to steward does that help us hold them any lighter or are we grabbing on to them thinking I own this this is for me when Jesus says no you are restored of what you have use it wisely thirdly verse 19 of our passage says and I'll say to myself you have plenty of

good things laid up for many years take life easy eat drink and be merry see when our hearts are focused on ourselves we consider spending our resources only on ourselves you see this man was only concerned with a physical life he thought he would put a plan in place and he would be made for years but all this is based on the fact that this man expected the harvest to continue to keep coming and to continue to keep growing he thought he had control over the fate of future crops he envisaged the future as a continually expanding under his control and we fall into the same trap my house will always rise in price my pension will never go down my savings are safe and yet we've seen over the last few years but that is not the reality if you look at James 4 verses 13 to 16 we won't read them but read them later the Bible does not discourage us from looking to the future with great expectation in fact that's what we should do be looking to the future to see Christ coming however we are to make our plans whether in business or in relationship or in our personal life from a perspective that ultimately God is in charge in other words we need to plan with humility again I wonder what that says to those of us who are slightly older in age who are either thinking of retirement or are retired now I'm not against retirement I'm looking forward to it in 20 years time but perhaps God looks at retirement differently than we do do we see it as a time to put up our feet to be able to do what we want to go where we want to spend as we want or do we see it perhaps as God sees retirement as a time when we have more free income greater time on our hands than ever before to do some of the kingdom of God's work retirement can be sometimes the greatest opportunity to serve God whether here or in other places but our passage goes on in verse 20 Jesus says but God said to him you fool this very night your life will be demanded from you then you will get what you have prepared for yourself you see the trouble with this man fourthly was that he was storing up treasure in the wrong place the man is pronounced by a fool by God a fool in biblical language is not someone who has a mental disability but is a person who is spiritually under-nerning according to scripture a fool is a man who leaves God out of consideration Psalm 14 verse 1 the fool has said in his heart there is no God you see this man is a fool not because he said but because he lived his life as if God did not exist he's a fool in that he did not recognise that his material blessings came from God he did not realise that he had an obligation to use his possessions to honour God a fool within the Bible is anyone that leaves God out of any area in their life so Fred Caffrey would the former MEP wrote these words greed is the logical result of the belief that there is no life after death we grab what we can while we can however we can and then hold it on when we hold it as hard as we can

[18:16] Leo Toystoy once wrote a story about a successful peasant farmer who was not satisfied with his lot he wanted more of everything and one day he was challenged by the local land order who said for a thousand rubles you can buy all the land you can walk around in a day the only catch is you've got to come back to the starting point before the sun goes down and so he starts walking and running as far as he can over the land by midday he's very tired but he keeps going covering more and more ground well into the afternoon he realizes that his greed is taking him too far so he quickens his pace and he starts for home but the sun begins to sink low in the sky he runs faster and faster he becomes bigger and bigger in his hopes but the sun began to sink below the horizon he came within sight of a thinnest sunlight line grasping for breath his heart pounding using every last muscle he has he staggers across the line just before the sun disappears he collapses blood streaming from his mouth in a few minutes he was dead afterwards he was buried in a grave six feet by three feet the title of the book

How much land does a man need? How much do you need? to be a fool is to have missed the point of life the remarkable thing is that this person that God caused a fool we would call a success, he was a successful businessman he was well known in the neighbourhood, he was probably quite well liked but he was a fool Jesus said this very night your soul will be demanded of you it will be demanded back, I will take it back convene again the concept that our life is not our own it's on loan God decides when we come into this earth God decides when we will leave this earth he is in control goes on and the second half of verse 20 to say then who's then who's sorry, then those things will be which you have provided

Solomon writing in Ecclesiastes says this for though I do my work with wisdom, knowledge and skill I must leave everything I gain to God who haven't worked to earn it this is not only foolish but highly unfair what do we, what, so what do people get for their hard work their days of labour are filled with pain and grief even at night they cannot rest it is all utter meaningless you see you can't take it with you you know the Egyptians tried by building the pyramids, by putting lots of possessions in and

thousands of years later we found them everything you have will one day be left behind it's yours now to use or abuse but one day God will ask for it back do you remember the words of a missionary Jim Elliott who says he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain back which he cannot lose and then finally verse 21 when our hearts are focused on ourselves we will find ourselves in conflict with God's plan for our lives you see we've already said riches have one major weakness we've got no purchasing power this side of death we're rich towards God of those who use God and give them to others you see you can be rich with very little money depending on how you use it

Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Luke 10 were rich because they gave to Jesus the centurion who built the synagogue in Luke 7 for people to worship was rich because he gave it to God and ultimately the way we become rich towards God is to invest in his church and the lives of his people God doesn't require it doesn't force us but God wants us to give willingly to give sacrificially even for his kingdom and for his glory and why so that we will not miss out in his blessing for us we began this morning by noting that daily we are pulled in many different directions and left wondering what is really important in life ultimately the answer is found in verse 21 this is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God life in spite of all its complexities can be reduced to a very simple decision are you going to live for yourself are you going to use your possessions for yourself or are you going to use it?

for God Are you going to take your talents, that God is giving you and use it for yourself or are you going to use it towards God towards God. Let's pray.

[24 : 56] Father, we thank you that for many of us we are so maturely well off. You've given us places to live, clothes to wear, food to eat, money in our account.

And we thank you for that. And we ask that you would help us to use all that you've given us wisely. We thank you that you've given it to us as a gift to steward and to look after.

May we hold it lightly. May you give us wisdom to know how to use it.

And we commit again ourselves, our flesh to you. Our ambitions, our hopes, our dreams, our work, our leisure, our money, our relationships.

Father, may we look to you. May we acknowledge you in everything that we have and in everything that we use.

[26 : 22] Help us to be thankful for what we have. And may we go from this place, living as stewards for you in the weaker hand. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.