

Setting Our Affections On Earthly Riches Is Folly.

Text: Luke 12:16-21

Suggested Hymns:
563, 567, 814, 562T282, 565

- 1) Because It Prevents Making Provision For The Soul
- 2) Because To Those Who Want To Be Rich Death Comes Unexpected

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 12:16–21, ***16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ 18 So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” ’***

20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ 21 “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We have gathered together today, publicly to return thanks to God for this year’s harvest. This is not to be construed as though otherwise we did not think of returning thanks for the harvest, except only on this day.

I trust, individually each one has already given sincere thanks to God, when harvesting his grain with a grateful heart; for the Christian is accustomed daily to offer thanksgiving to God for all His gifts, which includes income from all sources.

If any one amongst us has not thought of giving God thanks for the harvest before today, it is much to be feared that his heart is not right before God; for our heart is to be grateful to God, giving thanks not only sometimes, but always; and not only in some things, but in all things.

Yet, though individually we have already returned thanks to God, it is nevertheless now, after all the crops have been secured, fitting and proper, that

we publicly and in unison acknowledge the goodness of the Lord and appear in His house with thanksgiving.

We all know that sometimes a harvest is plentiful but at other times not so good. Nevertheless, let us not be like the Israelites in the wilderness who, when daily receiving the necessary quantity of the best of food, nevertheless murmured, because they lusted after the delicacies of Egypt.

When God grants us daily bread, our hearts should overflow with gratitude and our lips should say: *Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!* He has given us bread for another year.

But let us not forget that singing praises with the tongue and offering thanks with the lips is not sufficient. The right and true gratitude must also manifest itself in this way, so that the proceeds of the harvest are put to a right use and the abuse of it is avoided.

When the harvest is abundant we must direct our attention especially to the abuse which must be avoided, if we are not to be found ungrateful before God.

Now in general, the proceeds of an abundant harvest may be and are abused in two ways. The one way of abusing them is to squander them. We are not to be like the prodigal son who lived a fast and riotous life, and did not stop until he had wasted all his substance. Wastefulness and high living are not Christian virtues; they are an abuse of God's gifts.

When Jesus had satisfied those 5000 men with five loaves, He told the disciples in John 6:12, *“Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.”* He wanted the surplus collected and not wasted. God does not give His gifts to be wasted. God delights in us using things well and in wise management.

The other way of abusing the proceeds of the harvest is to hoard them up and to set the heart's affections upon them. Of this our text treats. Let us therefore consider: *The Folly Of Setting Our Affections On Earthly Riches*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Setting Our Affections On Earthly Riches Is Folly Because It Prevents Making Provision For The Soul

In the parable contained in this text the Lord pictures to us a wealthy farmer who was gathering, or who had gathered, an abundant harvest. The Lord

describes this man to us in his sentiments, plans, calculations, undertakings, and in his death.

He says, "*The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.* ¹⁷ *And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'* ¹⁸ *So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.* ¹⁹ *And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."*"

From the whole drift of the parable it is clear that this man was not a stingy old miser. If he had been a miser he would have dreaded the cost of pulling down his barns and building new ones. A miser will never think of living a merry life.

No, this man was not a stingy old miser. Neither was he a wretch who had become rich by dishonesty, usury and oppression of the poor. Not with a single syllable does the Lord indicate that this man had gotten his wealth by unfair dealings and fraudulent means.

The words, *The ground of a certain rich man*, rather convey the idea that this ground was rightly and justly his own by inheritance or honest acquisition. The Lord did certainly not mean to represent a specimen of a man rarely found, He intended to present the sample of a man very frequently met with.

Take into consideration the whole text and you cannot fail to see that this man was well to do, an honourable and a very respectable country gentleman. There is no repulsive miserliness and no manifest viciousness about him. There is nothing in his sentiments or doings which the world would condemn as wickedness or meanness, or which it would ridicule as folly.

He owned a fine plantation and he was an industrious and careful farmer who attended to the cultivation of his soil. Now a year of abundance happened to come. His barns were not spacious enough to hold his profuse harvest. So he went to calculating what to do, and he concluded to build large barns with roomy granaries in which to store this fine harvest, and he said to himself, with this accomplished, he would be satisfied and would take his ease.

What was wrong with this man? Was it wrong that he owned a fine plantation? Certainly not! Was it wrong that he had a prolific harvest? No, that was God's gift! Was it wrong that he wanted to secure his grain? Certainly not! that was his duty. Was it wrong that he planned large and spacious barns? Surely not.

What would any earthly-minded man say what was wrong with this man? I expect he would say, *'Why there was nothing in the world wrong with this man; he was a wise man, a prudent man, a man with good sound common sense about him.'*

This is the maxim, this is the principle, this the sentiment of the earthly-minded and the world at large: Get rich, make provision for many years, and then enjoy easy days, eat, drink and be merry.

People of this mindset you can find everywhere, and not only among churchless people, they are not rare among church-goers. The earthly-minded think only of earthly gain and earthly pleasures; to win and to possess these is wisdom with them.

But in the Lord's judgement all was wrong with this man, because his whole heart's sentiment was wrong. His sentiment is revealed by his words, *'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'* ¹⁸ *So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.'*

Not one word has this man to say about the Giver. His whole heart, mind and soul are wrapped up in this fine harvest and his other goods. The text contains no indication that this man was a public despiser of God and His Word.

It is rather to be assumed that he, according to the law of Moses, brought the first-fruits of his harvest to the sanctuary for a thank-offering to the Lord, but this was with him only an outward, mechanical act; his heart was not in it.

The affections of his heart being centred on the gifts, he forgot the Giver; and not according to his outward works, but according to his heart's sentiment the Lord describes him here.

This sentiment is revealed still more clearly by his following words, ¹⁹ *And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take*

your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” He has not a word to say about death, heaven and eternity.

When he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath his heart remained with his possessions and his mind was filled with his plans and undertakings. Is this any wonder? Why just look how many things this man had to do!

He had to care for his fields; he had to govern his household; he had to secure his harvest; he had to make plans and contracts for his buildings, to say nothing of the many hours it daily and nightly took him to calculate the value of his possessions and the amount of his profits, and to picture to his imagination the easy days which he expected to enjoy.

This man had no time to think of such far away things as heaven and eternity. His mind was intent on his earthly possessions and plans, and no time was left for him to make provision for his soul.

The earthly-minded do not have the time to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven, because their earthly business, plans and hopes demand all their time and attention. Therefore the man in our text made a very dubious calculation when he proposed to say to his soul, *take your ease*.

He did not live long enough for this his resolution to be tested, but would he have carried it out, if he had lived? Hardly. When seeding time would have come around, it would most likely have found this man making preparation not to miss the next harvest. Gathering money to become rich is like drinking salt-water. The more a man drinks the thirstier he becomes. The more money the lover of money makes, the more he wants to make.

What is the application of all this? The parable in itself is plain and simple enough. Allow just one remark: Let no one say that this text concerns only the rich who have harvested much.

The Lord does not say: *‘So are the rich who possess extensive plantations and need two or three barns.’* No, the Lord says, *“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*

The heart of a day-labourer may be filled with the craving after money and easy days just as well as that of the wealthy farmer. It is not a sin to be poor and it is not a sin to be rich; God makes both the poor and the rich, even as Hannah,

the mother of Samuel, sang in 1 Samuel 2:7, ⁷ *The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up.*

It is not a sin to have harvested little, and it is not a sin to have harvested much; God gives the harvest. But this is the ungodliness, this is the folly, this is the madness of heart, if mind and soul is so wrapped up in earthly things as to forget death and eternity, heaven and hell. That this is indeed madness of heart is illustrated clearly by the example of the man in our text.

2. Setting Our Affections On Earthly Riches Is Folly

Because To Those Who Want To Be Rich Death Comes Unexpected.

When this man was in the midst of his calculations and plans, *God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’* Behold a man greatly to be pitied! Perhaps for many years this man had laboured and saved. Night and day had he perplexed his mind with projects how to increase his goods, and now when he had reached his object, when, he said he had enough and might start to enjoy it, now he must die. Poor man!

He had no good of his life in this world; for he consumed his years in scraping riches together, and when he had them, the time for him to render up his soul had come. To the earthly-minded death comes unexpected, because they do not have the time to think of death or to prepare for it.

How can a person be prepared for death whose mind is bent on making money? Let death come to him ever so late, it nevertheless comes too early. Before he is ready he must go, and he does not even know who will get what he has hoarded up with so much labour and trouble.

True, a common excuse for pursuing after riches is the saying: I must leave something to my children. But will your children get it? And if they do get it, will they keep it? And if they keep it, will it be a blessing to them?

If you have raised your children in the fear of the Lord and have instructed them from the Word of God, how to regard and how to use earthly possessions in a Christian manner, then the probability is, that they will keep what you leave to them, and it will be increased to them; for God has promised to bless the pious children of godly parents.

But if your heart is set on gathering money and you rear your children in the same sentiment, then your bequest will only be a curse to them. Remember, God has threatened to punish the sins of the parents in the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him.

Therefore David says of the wicked in Psalm 39:6, *He heaps up riches, And does not know who will gather them.* O surely, the love of money is a root of all evil; it destroys the owner's soul and brings a curse upon the children and the children's children.

And now, my friends, the purpose of this parable is to warn us of a danger. The germ of earthly-mindedness was in us already when we were infants in the cradle, and its nature is to assert itself and to grow from year to year.

By virtue of the inclination which is in us it is natural for us earth-born mortals to become more earthly-minded the older we get. A fine farm, a handful of banknotes, have a wonderful attraction to the heart and soul. Strong is the temptation for the heart to find its satisfaction in these things.

But a person does not need to be rich to be a slave to greed and covetousness. If his earthly possessions occupy the first place in his heart, he is earthly-minded like the man in our text.

We must, therefore, be on our guard that our harvest, or whatever work we do to generate an income, do not become a snare to us to draw our hearts to the earth. We should rather rejoice that our joy is not actually over the gift itself, but rather over the generous goodness of our Father in heaven. Then it is right, then our thanksgiving is a sweet melody in the ears of the Lord of hosts.

Finally, the abundance of the harvest ought to remind us that this should be our first and foremost care, to be found *“rich toward God.”* Now we are rich before God if, in the vessel of faith, we hold the righteousness, the grace, and the love and all the riches of Christ.

If we bring these things before God as our treasures, then we are accounted rich before Him; for these things are valuable in His sight.

The expression *“rich toward God”* in the language of Scripture properly means, as St. Paul tells us when He writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:17-19, *¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to*

trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. ¹⁸ Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, ¹⁹ storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Show yourself rich toward God by showing yourself generous toward His Church. If you are in earnest when you say that your harvest or income is God's gift, then consecrate a portion to Him. It will not be your loss. The Lord of the Church is also the Lord of the harvest, and He can return it the next year.

And do not forget the poor. Among the Israelites there was to be no beggar, and certainly the Christian Church should not allow any of her poor to knock at the doors of unbelievers, begging bread. The Church should look after those of her members who are stricken with earthly poverty, because in them she can feed and clothe the Lord Jesus Himself; for what is done to the members is done to the Head.

Let your hearts be glad, because God has again crowned you with His temporal blessings. But let this remain your first and highest care that you hold the riches of Christ with the hand of faith, and that you strive after those things, which the apostle commends; then you are rich both before God and toward God, and His good pleasure will rest upon you.

To God, from whom all good gifts proceed, even to the Father of lights,² be honour and glory through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Psalm 107:1

² James 1:17