

The Parables of Jesus: The Rich Fool

Green Valley Presbyterian Church

Spring 2021

Introduction to the Parables of Jesus

- Stories from everyday life designed to teach an important truth.
- “Short narrative fictions that seek to make us evaluate our lives.”¹
- Express a moral and/or theological truth.
- For Jesus, the subject of his Parables is the Kingdom of God: What does the Kingdom of God look like?

Luke 12:13-21 – The Parable of the Rich Fool

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” ¹⁴But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

¹⁶Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ ¹⁸Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

Themes: *Stewardship, Charity, Justice*

“The authors of the Gospels have given us the parables of Jesus in first-century settings. To strip away those settings is to substitute our own.”²

¹ Alyce M. McKenzie, *The Parables for Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), p. 1.

² Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity, 2008), p. 284.

Introduction

Here is a story which is as old as time and as new as today.
It is the story of a man for whom life was one long success.
He made his plans to enjoy himself in his own way and, suddenly,
when everything seemed set fair, death intervened.
It is the kind of story that occurs in all literature.

William Barclay, *The Parables of Jesus*
(Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1970), p. 120.

Context: A Conversation

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “**Teacher**, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” ¹⁴ But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?”

- Teacher/Rabbis of the day often served as mediators for disputes.
- Jewish law: the eldest son received two-thirds of the father’s estate and what was left was given to the younger son or divided amongst the younger sons.

Deuteronomy 21:15-17

¹⁵ If a man has two wives, one of them loved and the other disliked, and if both the loved and the disliked have borne him sons, the firstborn being the son of the one who is disliked, ¹⁶ then on the day when he wills his possessions to his sons, he is not permitted to treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the disliked, who is the firstborn. ¹⁷ He must acknowledge as **firstborn** the son of the one who is disliked, **giving him a double portion** of all that he has; since he is the first issue of his virility, the right of the firstborn is his.

Theological Principle

¹⁵ And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

Blessings Belong to God

¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly.

Dialogue with Self

¹⁷ And he thought to **himself**, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store **my** crops?’

William Barclay: Four Movements in the Parable.³

1. The man in the story **forgot** about **his neighbors** (v. 17). His idea of joy is to eat, drink and be merry.
2. He **forgot** about **time** (v. 18)
3. He **forgot** about **God** (v. 18)

James 4:13-15

¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." ¹⁴ Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.

4. He **forgot** that a man is what he is and **not what he has**.

Spanish Proverb: *"There are no pockets in a shroud."*

Self-Defined Solution – The Man Forgot about Time

¹⁸ Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down **my** barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all **my** grain and **my** goods.'

Dialogue with Self – The Man Forgot about His Neighbor

¹⁹ And I will say to **my** soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'

- Barclay says, "There was never a soliloquy so full of the first person singular as the soliloquy of this rich fool."⁴

Ecclesiastes 8:15

So I commend enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun.

³ William Barclay, *The Parables of Jesus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1970).

⁴ Barclay, p. 122.

Jewish Proverb

Who so craveth wealth is like a man who drinks sea water.
The more he drinks the more he increases his thirst
and he ceases not to drink until he perishes.⁵

Goods Left/Taken – The Man Forgot about God

²⁰ But God said to him, ‘**You fool!** This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’

Psalm 14:1

The fool (*aphrōn*) has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ ”

General Principle – The Man Forgot a Person Is Who He Is Not What He Has

²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

Possessions are bonded to deep, often irrational fear –
the fear of one day not having enough.
Regardless of how much wealth is squirreled away,
this gnawing fear presses frail humans to acquire more.
There is never quite enough because the insecurity never dies.

Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*
(Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity, 2008), p. 302.

Conclusion

Psalm 42:1-2 (NRSV)

¹ As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.

² My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.

When shall I come and behold
the face of God?

The days of our life – no matter how long or how short – are a gift from God.
How will you spend your days? How will you use your blessings?
Where will you share what God has placed in your life?

⁵ Barclay, p. 123.