

Sermon Outlines

The Parable of the Rich Fool

*“The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully But God said unto him,
Thou fool”
Luke 12:16, 20*

There were sharp contrasts among Christ’s hearers, expressive of every attitude from passive indifference, through dawning interest, to either deep devotion or downright hostility. Here is the record (Luke 11:14 to 13:9) of a continuous discourse, during which there are several interruptions or interpolations. One of them (12:13) was the occasion for a parable illustrative of Christ’s teaching against the sin of covetousness.

I. *The Spirit of Covetousness* (vs. 13-15)

A. *Manifested* (v. 13).

1. The circumstances are a matter for conjecture. The inquirer’s cause may have been just or it may not. The elder brother’s portion was supposed to be double that of the younger. Probably the claim in this case was right but the spirit behind it was wrong, for the following reasons:
 - (a) Unusually blunt exhibition of worldliness, especially considering Christ’s words immediately preceding. The hearer seized upon his reference to the law and pricked up his ears.
 - (b) It was his need which prompted his speech, and he thought he saw a chance to get the benefit of the law gratis and win his case.
 - (c) To him, therefore, Christ was only a good lawyer. There was no response from the spiritual side of his nature. He was listening to God Incarnate and yet there was no stirring in his soul.
 - (d) Often so with us: we are off on the stream of our own plans while we seem to be listening to Christ’s message, and so His words fall off our consciousness, leaving no effect behind.
 - (e) This man judged a situation by his own wishes and cravings; how often we do likewise!
 - (f) Many are ready to call Christ Master for their own advantage: Illustrations: beggar at minister’s door, promising glibly to come to church; boy at Sunday School with idea of getting good position through influencer; those who attend services for what they can get - “rice Christians,” as such are known in Orient.
2. Christ refuses the request, disapproving, as it were, the mixing of religion and politics, things spiritual and things temporal, in the man’s mind. He is thinking of two ways of change - external and internal. The first is apt to leave conditions, cases and even men as they were before; the second changes man himself and thus conditions and cases are also changed. An instance is the question of holiness. Love in the heart makes for new conditions because of a new character. In the spiritual sphere, love and truth adjust the personality to its highest form.

B. *Shunned* (v. 15).

1. Covetousness appears in many forms. Compare two:
 - (a) Clutching what is already possessed.
 - (b) Grasping for more.
2. “Take heed” - “beware”
 - (a) It has a stealthy approach.
 - (b) It has a terrible end.

C. *Condemned* (v. 15).

1. *An Incontestable Fact*

Worldly goods cannot keep the soul alive. Not even an abundance of them can do this, since in this case abundance is no better than mere sufficiency.

- (b) Grasping for more.

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2. *A Humbling Fact*

- (a) If life is primarily spiritual, not what it has but what it is counts.
- (b) “How much is he worth?” is a question often asked. It should apply more to character than to possessions.
- (c) Man distinct from his possessions and cannot amalgamate with them. Possible to buy books and yet be illiterate. All depends on capacity.

3. *An Inspiring Fact*

There is hope for those who recognize these distinctions.

II. *The Course of Covetousness* (vs. 16-19)

A. *A Worldling* (v. 16).

The rich man of Christ’s parable was doubtless considered a provident, enterprising and influential citizen - the sort of person who nowadays would preside at meetings and to whom hats would be doffed with great respect. He was an example of “getting on in life,” one “looked up to.” But his story gives us an insight into the great problem of the rich - wondering where to invest his money. He had not seen the “prospectus” of Proverbs 19:17: “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again.”

B. *His Worldly Goods* (v. 16).

- 1. They were not gained wrongly; sin came after gain.
- 2. It is not sin to have, only to hoard.

C. *His Worldly-Wise Attitude* (vs. 17-19).

1. His Meditation (v. 17)

- (a) There was difficulty in the project.
- (b) He consulted no one. What he had was not a godsend, but a windfall.

2. His Mistakes (vs. 18, 19)

(a) He mistook Body for Soul

- (1) Production - cultivated his land well - no objection to that. Ship should be in water, but not water in ship.
- (2) Prosperity - model farmer, showing industry and diligence - success a great test - still no objection.
- (3) Pondering - what to do with accumulated wealth - still not essentially wrong unless accompanied by undue anxiety or selfishness.
- (4) Proposal - eating important to him - here he errs, in thinking exclusively of body - souls do not eat, nor live by bread alone. In such a life there is often chaff for the starving mind: money, athletics, pleasure, position, business success, but no spiritual satisfaction.

(b) He mistook Self for God

- (1) Consideration - with himself - no other counsel. There should be thought but not of self alone.
- (2) Center - “I” - “all my” - the first person is often the Devil’s own pronoun which, if used exclusively, shuts out God and brother-man alike.

(c) He mistook Time for Eternity

- (1) Anticipation - “years” - he could lay up goods but not time.
- (2) Announcement - no mention of “if the Lord will.”

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III. The Penalty of Covetousness (vs. 20, 21)

A. *Classed with Fools* (v. 20).

A fool is utterly devoid of mind - so this man's sagacity much in question.

B. *Cut off from Life* (v. 21)

He thought of years but could not reckon on one night. "It is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:7).

C. *Poor for Eternity* (v. 21)

He left all behind - except himself and he was worthless.

Conclusion

A. *The Sin*

1. Covetousness is not confined to the wealthy.
 - (a) Wealth measured by position and claims.
 - (b) Any man wealthy who finds he has more than enough.
 - (c) Love of gain in poor man is as serious as sin of rich man here.
2. Covetousness is self first in everything.
 - (a) Pleasure - Comfort - Indulgence - Protection - in a word, Selfishness.
 - (b) This is possible in all, rich or poor, small or great.

B. *The Remedy*

1. Denial of Self.
 - (a) The word "deny" has two meanings - refuse and ignore.
 - (b) Compare Peter's denial of Christ - he disowned and he repudiated. Our attitude to self should be as strong as this, and it should be shown daily.
2. Displacement by Christ
This will be accomplished by:
 - (a) Crowning Him as Lord
 - (b) Being concerned with Him - absorbed in Him - doing His will
 - (c) Perpetual recognition of Him - nothing apart from Him
 - (d) Having not one penny nor ten minutes - except in Him.

Thus was Christ Himself in His devotion to the Father. To assert self is to displace Christ. To displace by Christ is to deny self. So let us yield, abide, obey, that "in all things He might have the pre-eminence."

. . . . W.H. Griffith Thomas, D.D.