

August 4, 2019
Pentecost 8, (P13)
Text: Luke 12:13-21

¹³ 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.” (ESV)

Affluenza!

When Christopher Columbus first stepped out onto the pristine beaches of the Bahamas, he greeted the native people there with words that would shape the direction of European expansion into the Americas for the next 400 years. Extending his clenched hand to the curious crowd gathered about, he asked, “You got any of this?”

Columbus then opened his hand to reveal a small variety of gold coins and trinkets. Despite all the wonder of a new world standing right before his eyes, Columbus was completely possessed by a single thought: “Show me the gold!”¹

Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that there are two things that say a lot about my walk with the Lord. One is my calendar; the other is my checkbook. My calendar tells me how frequently I’m in church, how often I’m in a Bible class, and how frequently I volunteer for the church’s mission and ministry.

And then there’s my checkbook. My checkbook serves as a record of what I value. Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”² So what’s your treasure? What’s mine? Or have we been robbing God by withholding from him our tithes and offerings?³

Let’s talk about affluenza. It’s the mashing together of two words: affluence and influenza. Affluence is having a great deal of money. Influenza is having a highly contagious and potentially fatal disease. Put together, affluenza is the disease that makes us believe that having-too-much is never enough.

It’s the mindset that makes money and possessions the ultimate aim of life. Affluenza is the spirit of our age, and it has infected us all.

In our text, Jesus takes up the subject of covetousness, i.e., greed. He says, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”⁴ We surely need to heed this admonition.

After all, advertisements and commercials constantly bombard us with the notion that if only we buy this product or that, we will be healthier and happier. Instinctively, we know this isn’t

true. Yet, it's easy to buy into the message. We actually seem to care about what's hot and what's not.

But nowhere is greed so evident as when surviving family members scheme, scratch, and crawl all over one another to see who's going to get what from the family estate. Yet, the Bible tells us to be content with what we have.⁵ It also tells us to share our bounty with those less fortunate.⁶

The Bible has much to say about money and possessions. Perhaps the most important thing it teaches is that we actually own nothing. God owns everything.

All things are his. Saving faith is a gift from above. Our money, our possessions, and even our children, have been given to us as a sacred trust which we are to manage in God's stead.

The rich fool in our text seems to be unaware of this. He thinks his money and goods are his own. More than that, he doesn't realize that he's an idolater, for his possessions have become his god. Listen to the way he speaks. He says:

"What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?" 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. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'"

In this brief speech, we find that the rich man had, indeed, forgotten the Giver. In his state-of-my-riches speech, he uses the word "I" six times and "my" five times. He thinks himself a self-made man. He has forgotten God. Have you? Have I? As Christians living in America, we have to face the twin dangers of affluenza and materialism. It is in the air that we breathe.

The rich man has also forgotten his neighbor. Did he think of using his abundance to help others in need? No, he's earned it; so why should he give it away? In Jesus' day, riches were seen as a sign that God was pleased with you. On the other hand, poverty and disease were seen as proof that God was punishing you for some unseen and terrible sin. This is not true, but it's what the rabbis taught.⁸ And wrongly so!

So, why should this rich man share his bounty with such "terrible sinners" as the poor and the disease-ridden? What we have here is a failure to care and, with it, a failure to share.

We are similarly inclined. But, as Christians, we do not belong to this world. We belong to Christ.

And God has created in us a new nature in Christ.⁹ Our new natures strive to share of our bounty. When a member or family of our congregation is in need, we find a way to help them. When tragedy strikes, as it so often does, we find a way to share out of our abundance. God does not measure the size of the gift, but the size of the heart that gives it.

But we need to consider something else about the rich man. We have seen that in planning for himself, he forgot his neighbor. But now we come to his fatal error: In providing for his body, he forgot his soul.

He was rich in the things of men, but he was bankrupt in the things of God. He never even considered the needs of his soul. How terrible, then, to hear Jesus say, “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and then who will own what you have prepared?”¹⁰ Our Lord pronounces the same fate upon anyone who “lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”¹¹

The conquistadors of old sought earthly gold. We seek heavenly gold. Heavenly gold makes us rich toward God. Jesus has earned and given it all to us.

Heavenly gold means

- that we who trust in Christ alone for our salvation have an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading, reserved in heaven for us. (1 Pet. 4:1).
- that our Lord Jesus is, even now, preparing our dwellings ... eternal in the heavens just for you and me. (John 14:2).
- that we, even now, possess spiritual life which will blossom radiantly into eternal life. (John 3:16).
- that we will receive a glorified body which, together with our soul, will live forever on the new earth. (2 Pet. 3:13).

What if my calendar and checkbook show me to be a poor disciple? Despair not! The truth is this:

- that for every dollar or check that should have been in the offering plate but wasn't ...
 - that for every time that you should have been in worship or in Bible study but weren't ...
- our heavenly Father laid all these sins on the broken body of Christ.

The Father said, “My Son, I will lay every cent of failure and every minute of absence on you. I will lay them upon you such that you shall be nothing but a curse and an abomination in my sight. Do you understand?” Jesus replies, “Yes, Father, for this I was born and for this I choose to die.”

As Christians we are, in point of fact, the richest people in the world. One man was well aware of this. Financially speaking, he had only a small income and nothing in the bank. One day a tax assessor visited his home to appraise the value of his modest property. “I am a rich man,” said the homeowner.

Somewhat surprised, the official reached for his pencil and prepared to make a long list of taxable items. He asked, “Tell me, what do you own?” The man replied, “I have a Savior who forgives me and who has given me everlasting life!” “What else?” asked the assessor. “I have an inheritance laid up for me in heaven that no one can take away from me.” “Go on,” urged the official. “Well,” he replied, “I’m looking forward to seeing all my loved ones again in heaven.” The official closed his book, stood up, and said, “You are, indeed, a rich man, sir. But that kind of property is not subject to taxation!”

You, beloved, are also rich toward God. Through faith in Christ, your name has been written in the book of life. Moreover, God has transferred Christ’s perfect sinlessness and righteousness to

your account. You have forgiveness here and the kingdom of glory awaiting you. All of this Jesus has earned for you.

So I say to you all, “Rejoice, for you are unbelievably rich in the things that will take you to God’s eternal Paradise, to that place ...

- where the streets are paved with pure gold,¹²
- where you shall see the Lord God Almighty with your eyes, and
- where you shall be enveloped with a love that surpasses all understanding.

Yes, rejoice! In the name of Jesus: Ἄμεν.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Endnotes

¹Taken from Leonard I. Sweet, “Titanic Possessions,” *Homiletics* 10:3, May/June, 1998: 65.

²Matthew 6:21.

³See Malachi 3:8.

⁴Luke 12:15, author’s translation of the original.

⁵See Philippians 4:11-12.

⁶See Proverbs 14:21, 31. See also the plight of the rich man in Luke 16:19-31.

⁷See Luke 12:17-19, ESV.

⁸This attitude was also held by Christ’s apostles. In John 9:1-2, concerning the blind man, we read, “As he (Jesus) passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’”

⁹See 2 Corinthians 5:17. About our new natures see [Ephesians 4:20-24](#).

¹⁰See Luke 12:20.

¹¹See Luke 12:21.

¹²See Revelation 21:21.