

Our Summer preaching series carries the title 'The Wise Word of Jesus' as we focus on a selection of parables from the book of Luke today, and through January.

In Luke 12:13-21, the reading just shared, Jesus' parable could carry a number of titles. Most commonly it's been known as **the Parable of the Rich Fool**.

All of us like the idea of **being rich**. Few of us like being **called a fool**. We can **spend our life's energy trying to achieve the first**, while the second can come upon us **in an instant**.

That's the story of the man in this parable. Referred to as a farmer most commonly. But those words '**a certain rich man**' in v 16 remind us that while a parable, we're **all being invited to ask whether Jesus could be talking about us?**

We landed on the title of contentment for this message. The first of 5 essentials that come from the wise words of Jesus in these parables.

So I am going to briefly ask two questions about contentment raised by Jesus' words in this parable. They're at the beginning and the end of this passage.

Firstly, from v 15, **does life consist in the abundance of possessions?**

Secondly, from v 20, **what will you do when God demands your life?**

**Does life consist in the abundance of possessions?**

Maybe this isn't the first question you would have asked about the key to contentment. COVID has rightly had us asking deeper questions about our well-being.

There's also been recent trends toward more sustainable approaches to our use of resources, and they continue to be important and relevant. But human nature suggests Jesus words about contentment – and its enemies - will never be far from the surface for most of us.

The parable may be fictional, but its truth is real. And it is prompted by a very real question in the crowd in v 13:

***“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”***

Nothing brings greed on more than someone else's will. Their abundance becoming yours.

It's not unusual to hear about the death of wealthy and well-known members of our society, only to spark lengthy and protracted disputes in the courts that all apparently want to know about.

We even resort to defining each other in terms of the abundance of possessions. 'They come from money'. 'Theirs is old money' which I don't think is a reference to how long it's been in someone's wallet.

The brother in v 14 wants a share of the family money. This part of the account is real. Jesus' response in v 14 is intriguing:

***Man, who made me a judge or an arbiter between you?***

Jesus hasn't come to divide and separate. He has looked into this man's heart and seen his own problem, let alone whatever his brother's if he should have been sharing an inheritance. I imagine the brother got the message when he heard the claim about the inheritance made public.

Jesus doesn't step in with legal advice. Note his words. V 15:

***“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”***

The desire for material possessions is insatiable. The desire for the contented life is never met through the accumulation of possessions. Jesus tells this parable to explain his point.

The most revealing part about this parable is Jesus parody of the human condition when it comes to wealth. Do you note that during the entire parable the man only talks to himself.

V 17. He thought to himself 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops? V 18 Then he said 'This is what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. V 19 And I'll say to myself 'Aren't I clever to have through such a fool-proof strategy.

If you think the abundance of possessions is the key to contentment, Jesus says the first person you are fooling is yourself.

Greed is the enemy of contentment. And there are all kinds of it, according to v 15. It doesn't come in one form.

It's not as simple as your bank balance. Greed is fuelled by comparison. It's the cousin of coveting.

Greed is fuelled by competition. Keeping up appearances. The bigger barns probably weren't just about capacity. Here was a symbol that this man had arrived and found the key to security in life.

Ironic isn't it that Jesus follows this parable with teaching about not worrying about your life. Because that too is what greed produces. Worry.

Most of us listening to this have to deal with the abundance of possessions. Not all of us. But likely most of us. We like to think it's not a problem.

We talk to ourselves like this man. Either justifying why we can't be more generous with that we have. Or living a life that reduces our obligations towards others. Or complaining about our circumstances with little regard for those who genuinely are in need.

If this is the key to your contentment Jesus has one word for you to consider today: beware.

Beware of Jesus' second question about contentment. What will you do when God demands your life?

### **What will you do when God demands your life?**

We are about to enter 2021. What is that you are wanting more of in the next twelve months? It's a reasonable question given the disruption and unpredictability of this year.

Many have genuinely suffered loss and deprivation to their livelihoods. The shadow of COVID is real, and appears to cast a long tail. Especially if it's your job that's lost.

Wherever you find yourself this day, what are your hopes for the New Year?

Listen to this man's resolution of v 19:

***Take life easy, rest, eat, drink, and be merry.***

The parable may be fiction, but I doubt they're far from most of us.

But if the character of this certain man have a sense of anonymity about them that might even make us think Jesus must be talking about someone else, we are introduced to the final participant in the parable about whose identity we should have no doubt.

V 20:

***But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'***

The God who gave you life in the first instance will call you to account for how you have lived it.

Jesus' parable highlights the God-given nature of this man's abundance. A harvest at the hand of God. James says:

***"every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows."***

God does not change. Neither does his purpose that we might recognise life is a gift from him. The blessings we receive within it are also gifts.

Life is a gift from God. It is only sin that turns it to entitlement. Entitlement leads to greed. Greed to accumulation. Accumulation to excess. Excess to independence. Independence to foolishness.

What will your wealth say about you? Nothing. But they'll happily argue and divide with one another over your inheritance. You will ultimately be valued for your money.

The gospel counters the speaking-to-self life with the life that is rich towards God. According to v 5 of this same chapter, Luke 12, God has the ability not only to give you life, but to determine your eternal future.

***But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.***

Your abundance of possessions will count for nothing on the day you have to give account for your God-given life. All your human effort will not impress God.

Perhaps the most sobering reality of this parable is that the man is already rich when the story opens. He is then given additional wealth, and the best conclusion he could come up with concerning his unearned surplus was to spend it on himself.

It is no accident the amount of times 'I' and 'my' occur in the parable. While we're busy speaking to ourselves. Often living by the fraudulent Christianised proverb that says 'God helps those who help themselves' the bible says your wealth fades into insignificance in the light of God's eternal plan.

What will you do when God demands your life? Because his word says he will. Have you understood what it means to be rich towards him?

The man in the parable speaks to his soul. It's his eternal well-being that is at stake, and yet he believes that earthly accumulation of excess is the ideal strategy. God says to him:

***'You plan alone, build alone, indulge alone, and now you will die alone!'***

Luke 9:23:

***"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.***

We may consider that losing our life is an unusual strategy when it comes to the key to contentment. Not when its loss makes way for the gain of eternal life that Jesus replaces it with.

Entering his Kingdom teaches us to use earthly blessings for heavenly benefit. To prayerfully and generously use what God has given to make a difference to the lives of others.

Our lives are on loan. The rich man in the parable assumed he owned both his goods and his soul, and he is mistaken on both counts. But this is foolish, according to Jesus, the one who gave up true wealth and became poor for us, so that we might become rich towards God.

It's easy to adopt a 'strings attached' faith. God will help us if we help ourselves. Surely God relies on us giving back to him. If I just do enough I will have proved myself to God. Some even say they'll help themselves first, and sort things out with God later.

Don't be fooled. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is a gospel of grace. The message of the parable in Luke 12 is about 'treasuring up' for God.

The New Testament writer Paul provides his assessment of this certain man of Luke 12 when he writes to a young pastor called Timothy with these instructions:

***Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. <sup>18</sup> Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. <sup>19</sup> In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.***

On the eve of 2021, what are you planning to take hold of?