

RICH TOWARDS GOD Luke 12:13-21; (Col 3:1-11) 4 Aug '13
PRAYER

*Lk 12:21 This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for themselves but is not **rich towards God**.*

We have just heard the parable of the **Rich Fool**. I wonder if you thought that this is not really meant for us. It must be intended only for people who are rich- high flying business men, politicians, super-rich entrepreneurs, Black Diamonds... In GT we live surrounded by uncomfortable contrasts of extreme wealth and desperate poverty; the 1st and 3rd world side by side. By and large, in this Cathedral family we are ordinary people- yes, inevitably some are wealthier than others. There are those among us who are working and those who are retired. Some are students, some are unemployed. But overall, we are just average people with average incomes.

Jesus was not only preaching this parable to the wealthy. This parable was directed to both the wealthy and to the poor, and to everyone in between.

Jesus was preaching about **values**. About Priorities. What is important in life- what really matters.

The parable tells of a man who was concerned for *himself* and *no-one else, with not a thought given about God*. He may have been a rich farmer, but in the eyes of God he was a fool. He was distracted by what he thought was important- accumulating possessions. He got his priorities all wrong.

How easy it is to get lured into the traps of materialism. We live in a world which says that having nice things- the more, the bigger, the fancier- will make us happy. People believe that having more things will satisfy their deepest desires. So people buy things they can't afford- on credit or HP, and run into debt. We convince ourselves that what we WANT is actually what we NEED- an upgraded cellphone, iPod, bigscreen flat TV, designer label clothes... Youngsters choose careers or jobs according to which will give them the biggest salary (no wonder we struggle to get good teachers,nurses...)

There are many traps luring people towards riches and getting rich quick. Think of the many who buy “lotto tickets” spending money in the hopes of winning a fortune? I don’t have SA statistics, but I read that in Canada apparently 3 out of 4 people spend money on gambling on a regular basis. When the Grand Casino opened near our home in Bonteheuwel, Cape Town, many people from our poor, Cape Flats community raced off regularly to the gambling machines spending their hard earned cash; ever hopeful that they would get a lucky win- loosing 100s if not 1000s rand in the process.

Perhaps like me, you too have received emails from so-called “people in need” requesting help in getting \$48 million dollars or whatever amount out of another country. To do so they would like to use your bank account number to transfer the money into, promising you a big cut of it. Other scams that often come my way inform me that I have a tax refund needing to be deposited in my bank account, or have been bequeathed a vast some of money by some distant relative- they just need to confirm my bank details... People actually fall for these traps.

Devious, greedy people trying to steal our money; and greedy people being gullible and being lured by the promises of greater wealth.

How easily we can be seduced by the desire for more money!

In Jesus' day people too were distracted by material possessions. This is evident in our passage in Luke in which a request was made for Jesus to settle an inheritance dispute between 2 brothers. (close to home for me, as now that both my parents have died, we are needing to sort out the division of the inheritance)

"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions."

Jesus continues by telling a story about a man obsessed with the idea of building bigger and better barns to store more and more of his goods- thinking that this would set him up for life. The story ends with his premature, sudden death, and God saying : “ *You fool. This night your very life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you prepared for yourself?*”

A harsh lesson on greed. Priorities gone wrong.

In our NT lesson, Colossians 3:5, we read of evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Lusting after not what we NEED, but what we WANT.

Greed is the worship of the creation rather than the Creator. When we make THINGS our priority, placing higher value on them than on God himself.

But the story goes beyond a warning concerning greed.

Here is the crunch: Jesus challenges us that the only wealth worth acquiring is to become “rich towards God” This raises a crucial question **“What might it mean to be rich towards God?”**

In attempting to answer the question, let us 1st see what we might learn from the rich farmer’s mistakes.

Mistake 1

His first serious error, was that this man did NOT acknowledge the presence and involvement of God in any way in his life. The Psalmist says: “In all your ways acknowledge Him”

He did not even recognize that it was God who blessed him with the abundant crop in the first place. We learn from the Old Testament that everything that we have comes from God. Everything that the man called "mine;" (my barns, my grain, my goods) belonged to God in the first place. God provides the soil, the grain, the rain, the sun and gives growth to the crops.

But God didn’t feature anywhere on this man’s “radar screen”.

He thought his success was entirely his own doing. He didn’t need God. There are many people like him in Grahamstown who live as if there was no God.

God calls him “a fool”!. According to the Psalmist (Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1) "*The fool says in his heart, 'there is no God.'*"

Perhaps the farmer's obsession with gathering more possessions was to fill a need inside – a need that only God can fill. St Augustine said: "Thou hast made us for thyself, and we find no rest until we find our rest in Thee." St Paul wrote (in our NT lesson -Col 3) "*Set your heart on things above where Christ is...*"

So perhaps being **rich towards God** involves recognising our need of God, and investing in our relationship with God. How important to you is your relationship with God? (Last Sunday I asked you about your prayer life. I wonder if you have been able to make prayer and your relationship with God more of a priority in this past week?)

Mistake 2

He was totally self-centred, self- absorbed.

Did you notice how the words "I," "my" and "myself" are repeated over and over again in these few short verses? (*What shall I do? I will..my crops, barns, my goods...*)

Everything is about himself and his pleasure- living the good life. He is so self-absorbed that no where is any thought given to the possibility of sharing with others, with those in need.

St Paul writes *Phil 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

I suggest that to be **rich towards God involves** looking beyond ourselves to the needs and interests of others.

- How intentional are you in striving to meet the needs of others?

Jesus challenges our priorities. Life is not about being rich in possessions, rather what matters is being **rich toward God**.

Putting God and people above possessions- surely that must be my first priority, and hold the key to becoming **rich towards God**?

What do you think??

What we value in life influences the sort of life we live., If you value God you'll value things that matter to God- like people,

relationships, family, community, working for peace & justice and seeking the common good.

So let us ensure that God is our no 1 priority. Let us remember that everything we have is from God and is God's gift to us. Let us Share with others our abundance, our possessions, our love, our talents, our time, our practical care.

In these ways, we become **rich towards God**.

Amen.

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