

**WHAT IS LIFE?
Luke 12:13-21**

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August 8, 2010**

Pentecost 11, c

¹³ *Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."* ¹⁴ *Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"* ¹⁵ *Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."* ¹⁶ *And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop."* ¹⁷ *He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops."* ¹⁸ *Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods."* ¹⁹ *And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."* 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?'"* ²¹ *"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."*

Dear friends who have everything in Jesus,

I was reading in the newspaper some time ago about someone who likes to go to garage sales. She found a priceless antique among the items they rummaged through in someone's driveway. The person recounted how she had not been the first to look at this antique, but how she was the first to recognize that the antique was not junk, but a treasure.

Isn't the Christian life like that? It's going through this world and handling many things while knowing what is important and what is not. Jesus himself recognizes this. As he teaches us it is as if Jesus was answering the following question for us: WHAT IS LIFE?

1

¹³ *Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."* ¹⁴ *Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"* ¹⁵ *Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."* Life is a recognition of proper value.

Any boy who collects baseball cards can tell you that Mickey Mantle's rookie card is worth more right now than the rookie card of Justin Upton and to trade in such cards it is necessary to recognize proper value. This is exactly what Jesus was talking about but on a spiritual level. The man in the crowd was bitter. He didn't believe he had received a just settlement from his brother who was probably older. There was nothing more important to him in life than this inheritance. Was he putting the proper value on it?

Jesus pointed him instead to something of greater value. People can have a warped view of any of God's special gifts, whether that be material possessions or education or athletic ability or family members, whatever. The most common one is probably the one mentioned by this man. I was surprised to find out how many times the Bible condemns such greed.

- Matthew 6:19 *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal."*
- Ecclesiastes 2:26 *To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*
- Ecclesiastes 5:10-11 *Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?*

This is the point of the parable too. The man in the parable rejoiced over his wealth. If he could only store up enough wealth then he would finally have it made. Then everything would

finally be OK. But he was foolish to believe such a thing. He did not recognize the proper value and the price he was going to pay was eternal.

Money and possessions are those things that Jesus calls worthless. It is true that they may have some passing value in this world, but even the world recognizes that we are unable to take it with us when we go. There are other forms of this. Setting our hearts on family or children or favorite political cause -- all of these things may be nice, but they are simply not something to set our hearts on.

Sometimes it takes an attitude adjustment to place proper value. As the Titanic was going down, there was a great scramble to get a place on a lifeboat. But there weren't enough. For those who had no seat on a lifeboat of what value was their gold? Of what value was personal beauty or wisdom or reputation or scholarly degrees? They were of no value because they do not have meaning in life.

Do you worry about such things or the lack of such things. How do you feel over the loss of such things? We need to repent. Do you sympathize with this man who was probably cheated out of his inheritance? Jesus calls him a fool. God does not expect us to become hermits living in the wilderness who have given up all their earthly possessions to the poor. In fact, he expects us to make good use of them especially for such things as spreading the gospel. But he also expects us to recognize such things for what they are. Jesus says we must recognize the proper value of earthly wealth.

2

When we do, then we will see that life is an abundance of true riches. (21) *"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."*

This young man was confused because he didn't know who Jesus was. Jesus told this young man He is not an arbiter or mediator of useless things. Jesus came to pay a price but it wasn't earthly wealth. He came to earn an inheritance but it was heaven and to free us from things of no value. Or put another way:

- 2 Corinthians 8:9 *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*
- Colossians 3:1-2 *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

And isn't that really the issue? When we have irritation and worry in our lives over things, money, job, property, it has less to do with not having enough of them and more to do with not having a rich relationship with our Savior. Jesus has promised us that he will take care of us and that he will watch over us. If he kept his promise to win our salvation for us, certainly he will also keep his promise to provide for us, too.

So how do we overcome such thoughts, such misplaced values? We have already heard it, be rich toward God. In other words, look to Jesus as your Savior. Set your heart not on these passing earthly things, but on Jesus. Learn more of him, allow the Holy Spirit to strengthen you at every opportunity. In so doing we will have an abundance of true riches.

Life isn't about who has the most toys or the most prestige or the most money. As a t-shirt I once saw says, "He who dies with the most toys -- still dies." Earthly riches may come our way and may not, but in the end they are of no more value in God's sight than money and property deeds from a Monopoly game. Be rich toward God and you will have found the answer to a question that all of the philosophers since the beginning of time have not been able to answer: WHAT IS LIFE? Amen.