

Being Rich Toward God

Luke 12:13-21

Introduction

There is a story about a man who spent his life buying and selling, working feverishly to earn as much money as he could. But this wasn't enough for him. He wanted to take it with him. So, in his will he left all his money to himself! He was to have all his assets sold for cash and buried with him. He told the undertaker to bury him in his 1989 Cadillac Seville, dressed in His \$2,500 hand-sewn silk suit, with his money stuffed in the car. When he died, the undertaker had to hire a crane operator to lift the car with him behind the wheel and all his money stuffed around him, and lower all of this into a grave. While the car was being hoisted into the grave, one of the men who had dug the grave said to another worker, "**MAN, THAT'S REALLY LIVING.**" Why would he say this, knowing the rich man is dead and being lowered into a grave which he has just help dig?

How to Measure a Life

The worker says, "Man, that's really living" because all he can see are the things he doesn't have: the fancy clothes, the expensive car, and all that cash. This is one way the world measures a life, by how much one has. The world can only measure by what it sees. So, people who are blessed with good looks are admired. The one who is blessed with strength is respected. The one who is blessed with great wealth (no matter how he got it) is envied. What we don't see is how good looks and strength fade with time, and money can't buy happiness. What's more is that all the money in the world counts for nothing in the next life.

The Trap

It's part of the plan of the devil to measure life by what we can see. When we do that, it keeps us focused on this life, on things temporal, on things that just don't matter. Remember what Jesus said in our Gospel lesson two weeks ago: "*One thing is necessary*" (**Luke 10:42**). Notice how intelligent the devil is. He doesn't try to beat us with the ugliness of the world. He keeps throwing the "good things" of the world up in our faces. He knows that if he keeps us focused on them, he'll keep our focus off the one thing that is necessary. Our focus on the temporal won't allow us to get centered on the eternal. We end up not remembering to keep the Sabbath day holy, because we'll be doing things other than church on Sundays. We won't be hearing God's Word and receiving the Sacrament but despising them.

Fleshly Focus

What was the rich man in Jesus' story focused on? (Read **verses 17-19**, emphasizing the personal pronouns). All he cares about is himself. He asks himself, "What shall I do?" Then he answers himself without consulting anyone, let alone God. He doesn't look around and see the disparity of him having so much in a world where so many have so little. He doesn't realize he could end some of their suffering with what he could spare. He doesn't want to know what to do with his wealth. He just wants to know how he can keep it.

Turning It Around

So, what's the answer? How can we turn it around? It looks like there is a choice between two courses of action. We can *lay up treasures for ourselves* or we can be *rich toward God (v. 21)*. What does it mean to be rich toward God? As we see what that means, we'll see that even poor people can be in the trap of laying up treasures for themselves.

Virtue

Cyril of Alexandria said: *He who is rich toward God is very blessed and has glorious hope. Who is he? Evidently, one who does not love wealth but rather loves virtue, and to whom few things are sufficient. It is one whose hand is open to the needs of the poor, comforting the sorrows of those in poverty according to his means and the utmost of his power. He gathers in the storehouses that are above and lays up treasures in heaven.* Cyril is saying that being rich toward God is loving virtue instead of wealth. This person can have money, but he uses it in the right way. Instead of spending it on himself or squirrelling it away, he helps others with it.

Dependence on God

Erasmus Sarcerius said: *Those people are rich toward God who do not trust in earthly things but only depend on His providence. It makes no difference whether they have plenty or little, as long as they desire their daily bread from the Lord.* Being rich toward God is taking the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer seriously: *Give us this day our daily bread*. We are rich toward God when we depend on Him for life and what we need for it.

Means of Grace

We are dependent on God for everything, whether we admit it or not. Being rich toward God is recognizing our dependence and living a life of thanksgiving. This begins at the Lord's Table. One of the names we have for Communion is Eucharist. That's a Greek word that means "thanksgiving." When we come to the Altar and receive the body and blood of Jesus, we receive it with thanksgiving, knowing that we are dependent on God for our salvation. We are rich toward God when we thankfully receive the gifts He gives to us. Then, as that dependence and thanksgiving flow into the rest of our life, our focus will be on the eternal instead of the temporal; and we won't fall into the trap of wanting to have it all now or taking it with us when we go.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
