A Life Rich Toward God
Luke 12:13–21

When Family Fights Over Money

We've all heard the stories. A parent dies, and instead of coming together in grief, the kids split apart—arguing over money, property, heirlooms. It's heartbreaking, but it's not new. In today's passage, a man says to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." We don't know the whole backstory. Maybe his brother was unfair. Maybe he just wanted more. But we do know this: a family was tearing apart over money. Jesus refuses to take sides. Instead, he warns the crowd: "Be on guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he tells the parable of the Rich Fool.

The Parable of the Rich Fool

In the story, a rich man had a problem—what we might call a "good problem." One year, his land produced such an abundant harvest that he didn't have enough space to store it all. So, he started thinking to himself: *"What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops."* And then he came up with a plan. *"I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll store all my grain and goods, and I'll say to myself, 'You've got plenty stored up for years. Take it easy! Eat, drink, and enjoy life!'"*

Now, how do you feel about this man? Does he seem greedy to you? Honestly, by today's standards, he doesn't seem like he's done anything wrong. Rather, he sounds smart. Good planning. Solid retirement. But God says, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you." You see, the issue wasn't *how* he earned his wealth. It wasn't even *what* he planned to do with it. The real mistake was thinking that his possessions could guarantee his future. He trusted his wealth more than he trusted God. That's why God calls him foolish. And let's be honest—don't we sometimes think, "If I just had a little more, I'd finally feel secure?" Money can make life easier, but money can't give life.

I learned that again on vacation. Juhee and I went back to Acadia National Park—where we camped in 2012, right after moving from Atlanta to Boston. Back then, we were grad students, and we'd planned to move into our dorm in early August, but the renovation was delayed by three weeks. Rent in Boston was too expensive for two broke international students to find temporary housing, so instead, we decided to go camping and make it an adventure.

There's a beautiful spot in Acadia called Jordan Pond, and next to it, a little restaurant. Someone had told us, *"You have to try the popovers and the lobster stew there."* So we went. It was a bit pricey for us at the time, so we ordered just the cup-sized lobster stew—it was small, but it was *so* good. We didn't say anything then, but later that night at the tent, both of us said, *"That was amazing."* The next day, we went back again—but ordered a bowl for two of us.

This year? We walk in, each order a big bowl without even looking at the price. But when we tasted it… it wasn't the same. The recipe had changed. And it hit me—money can buy the bowl, but it can't buy the flavor you remember. Comfort? Sure. Life? No.

Into the Life-Giving Relationship

Money can make life a little more comfortable. But money doesn't give life. Genesis says God formed us from dust—and we only came alive when God breathed into us. That's why, in the Christian understanding, life isn't just about breathing or having a heartbeat. To be truly alive

means to live in deep relationship with God. Life is not just a biological condition—it's a spiritual way of being, a way of living grounded in trust and connection with the Giver of Life.

When we walk in trust—trusting God and following the path of life shown to us through Jesus—we begin to experience life in its fullness. And what is that path of life? It's the way of love. The way of self-giving. The way of generosity and service. A blessed life isn't about having more, saving more, or living more comfortably. A blessed life is when we recognize that everything we have is a gift from God—and we live as faithful stewards, using what we've been given for God's purposes. When our lives become like a spring of life-giving water to those around us—that's what it means to be truly blessed.

Of course, living this way isn't easy. That's why Jesus said, *"The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and few find it."* But we believe with all our hearts that this is the road to true and abundant life. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, preached a sermon titled "The Use of Money," and in it, he gave three simple principles for how Christians should handle money. The first: *"Gain all you can."* The second: *"Save all you can."* Most of us are pretty good at those two. But the third principle is the heart of it all: *"Give all you can."* Wesley emphasized that the third one is the most important. In fact, he said that giving all you can is the only way to keep money from dragging your soul down. The only way to avoid falling into hell with your wealth clutched to your chest… is to let it go. To share it.

So giving isn't just a duty we should feel guilty about. It's the path that saves us from the hell of greed. It's a practice of salvation.

And what gives us the courage to live this way? Faith. Faith that everything we have belongs to God. Faith that God knows what we need and will provide in due time. Faith that when we give freely, we are stepping more fully into the life God created us for—the life that is rich in love, rich in grace, and rich toward God.

How to Be Rich Toward God: A Life Shared with Others

When we truly believe that everything belongs to God—including our very lives—our priorities and values begin to change. We may still do the same work, but our purpose becomes different. When I was serving the young adult ministry in Boston, one seminary student took an art class and ended up becoming a painter—painting with his feet, actually! A few years later, he opened a chicken restaurant in Kyrgyzstan. But this wasn't just any restaurant—it had a vision statement. The motto was: "Let's make the world a little more joyful than it was yesterday."

I heard that he takes this mission seriously. He's constantly looking for ways to bring joy—not just to the customers who eat there, but also to the staff who work there and the local farmers who supply their ingredients. Making money isn't his main goal. His goal is to become a socially responsible business that supports the community. He gives local artists space to exhibit their work. On weekends, the restaurant becomes a performance venue. And part of his profits goes back into the community. In short, he is building a place that brings joy to others.

I met up with this young person again a few years ago. I asked, "What brings you back to the U.S.?" He said, "There are so many talented dancers in Kyrgyzstan, but very few opportunities for them. I came to see if there might be a way for them to perform or work here." That moved me. He wasn't looking to build wealth for himself—he was looking to lift up his community. He was choosing people over profit. And I believe, in that kind of life, the life God gives flows abundantly.

So what can we do to live a life filled with that kind of life-giving joy? If you're raising children or grandchildren, teach them that there are values greater than money. So often, when I

ask kids what they want to be when they grow up, they say, “A doctor,” “A lawyer,” and when I ask why, the answer is, “Because they make a lot of money.” But for children raised in Christian homes, that can’t be the whole answer. We need to pray for them and guide them to pursue not just high-paying jobs, but higher callings—God’s calling for their lives.

And to those of you who feel that your time on earth is nearing its end and there’s not much left to do—let me ask you this: What do you want to do with the blessings God has given you? A few years ago, I had a phone call with my mom. She asked, “When I’m gone, what should happen to this apartment?” After my dad passed away, the church provided her with a small place to live. It wasn’t much in terms of market value, but for her, it was something she hoped could be passed on to her children.

During that conversation, I told her: “Mom, God has always provided for me and my brother—and God always will. So please don’t worry. If you’re open to it, maybe you could sell the apartment and start a scholarship fund at the church in Dad’s name.” After I said that, she paused and said, “That gives me peace.”

Of course, every parent wants to leave behind something meaningful for their children. But let’s not assume that the wealth we leave behind will guarantee our children’s future. That kind of thinking isn’t so different from the Rich Fool in Jesus’ parable. Instead, entrust your children not to perishable things, but to the Living God—the One who gives life. Trust that God will care for them. And use what God has entrusted to you—your resources, your time, your life—for purposes that bring life to others.

And no—I’m not saying give it all to the church. But give to causes that bring healing, joy, and hope. Choose to be generous. Choose to be intentional. Tithe. Share. That’s one way we become rich toward God.

So here is the invitation: Don’t just store up—pour out. Be rich, not in possessions, but in purpose. When we trust God and seek God's will first, God takes care of the rest. So don’t cling to what you’ve been given—let it flow in faith. And in that generous, life-giving flow, may you experience the fullness of joy that comes from God. Amen.