

PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

Luke 12:13–21

On this occasion great crowds pressed in close to hear what Jesus was teaching his disciples. So eager were people to approach him that *“they were trampling one another”* [v1]. While our Lord was speaking, a man from the crowd interrupted his spiritual lesson. *“Teacher,”* he cried out, *“tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”* [v13]



A rabbi could settle family disputes such as this. The petitioner, perceiving Jesus to be someone who commanded respect and authority, hoped to enroll Christ in his cause. But those who imagine that God can be harnessed to achieve their own goals are gravely mistaken. Responding with a sharp rebuke, Jesus rejects the appeal: *“Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”* [v14]

The crowd then hears a parable, a story Jesus tells from the perspective of a prosperous farmer with a problem: harvests have been so abundant that his barns can no longer hold all his grain. He possesses far more than he needs. But rather than sell at a discount or give to the poor, he decides, *“I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.”* [v18]. Note that the words “I” and “my” appear twelve times in the rich man’s soliloquy. He never remembers God, who blessed his fields, prospered his work and provided abundance beyond measure.

Having settled his future needs, the wealthy man muses on the years of ease, pleasure and self-indulgence that lay ahead. *“But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’”* [v20]. Jesus never condemns the man for his wealth or accuses him of dishonest gain. Self dependence is deadly error that is far too common among church members: *“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”* [Rom 1:20]



Pieter Bruegel, *The Triumph of Death* (detail)

Our Lord warns, *“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”* In and of themselves, mere belongings are not sinful. However, when they take root and grow in our heart, the things we love can take possession of us. God will judge all those who allow this to occur.

The Lord himself provided a solution to our problem with the sin of greed and self-centered gain. He taught his disciples, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* [Mat. 6:33]

Evening Lesson, Wednesday, October 2, 2019