

Luke 12:13-21 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."*

What does a good life consist of?

- 1. The fool thinks it consists in the abundance of possessions.**
- 2. The Christian knows it consists in being rich toward God.**

A new mother welcomes a baby boy. A father prepares to take his kids to school and each one seems to be so much older than the year before. A farmer assesses his crop after a troublesome spring and wonders both what could have been and how it could have been a whole lot worse. A woman sends a thankful glance over her husband's way as they celebrate their anniversary. A nervous young man happily looks into the eyes of his bride on their wedding day and imagines their new life together. An active woman is suddenly sidelined with a significant injury. A dying man contemplates his final days. Paying close enough attention we see that these kinds of big life events are happening all around us as we speak. Such challenges and blessings in our lives and in the lives of those around us might lead us to take a step back from the everyday and consider life from a different perspective. As our eyes are opened to such realities our eyes and minds might suddenly be opened to ponder anew some of those big life questions. What is this life all about? What does a good life consist of?

Well, our readings for today make it very clear, that life is not all about money or just about having stuff. It is not just about being successful and having plenty of toys and enjoying life to the full before you die. Unfortunately, this may be what life boils down to for some, even many, in this world. Money and success, prosperity and wealth, all too often drive and define people. This pursuit of more and more quickly dominates a person's life to the point where this becomes the chief purpose of life. The world around us calls this business as usual. To have a driving desire to attain more and more is seen by many as admirable, even wise, but God opens our eyes so that we may be made aware of the danger

such an attitude may present. God warns us to keep watch as greed has this awful tendency to consume many people to the point that they ignore their spiritual needs.

One of the reasons that greed is so very dangerously deceptive is because it disguises itself in all different forms and shapes. The nightly news and the daily paper are frequently littered with reports of people lying and cheating and stealing so that they could have a little bit or a whole lot more. That's greed at its most obvious and blatant. But greed has also mastered the art of being sneaky and subtle. Greed sneaks up on a mother as she looks into the eyes of her newborn son and wants to give him the world. *I need to give my boy the best to find so that we may find security and peace, and he will grow up to be somebody.* Greed sneaks in and we go much too far in this pursuit of wealth. Greed finds its way into a young man heart as he marries his high school sweetheart and he is driven to give her the best. No ordinary apartment, no ordinary house, no ordinary car will do, we need the best. He talks himself into thinking, that he needs to find more work and make more money and then we will be all set and our life will be great. Greed sneaks in and we go too far. Greed sneaks into the hearts of grown men and women when they fight with their siblings over who gets the land, who gets the house, and who gets the inheritance when mom or dad dies. Greed turns sideways and looks to crush us as it becomes envy and jealousy, deceit and regret. These deceptive trappings reach out to trip and ensnare each and every one of us.

God calls us to be vigilant and mindful of the blessings that he gives and the importance of our relationship to him because greed is relentless. It wants to take hold of our hearts in wants to alter our priorities and dominate our thinking. Greed seeks to set this pursuit of wealth and money, possessions and status, as the chief purpose in our life. It pushes its way to such a high status because greed claims that we will find the good life and happiness and fulfillment and security when we get enough stuff and when we accumulate enough wealth and purchase enough experiences so that we might somehow manufacture peace and happiness for ourselves. Greed makes such promises and yet it can never truly provide that peace which it promises to bring.

Our text for today contains one of Christ's strongest warnings against covetousness and greed. He does not want us to be fools who are constantly chasing after that which is fleeting. But rather he desires that we have something that has real and lasting value. He desires that our priorities would be in order and our chief concern is that we would be rich toward God. He wants us to find happiness and peace and security not in things of this world that are here today and gone tomorrow, but Christ Jesus wants us to find the good life in him. He wants us to find happiness and peace and security in the eternal blessings that he gives.

As Jesus was teaching his disciples a crowd of thousands pressed in around Jesus, even to the point of trampling upon each other as many were searching desperately for physical help and healing. But as they closed in on him they were privileged to hear him speak on some very important spiritual matters. He spoke to his disciples at the beginning of this chapter about watching out for hypocrisy and boldly confessing his name. He warned them that they would face enemies who would threaten and oppose them and their message. Yet Jesus also warned them that their real enemy is the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. He tells them to keep watch, but he assures them that God will be

there for them. He tells his disciples that they are precious to God, they have value. He is watching over them and protecting them from harm. ⁷ **Indeed**, Jesus said to them, **the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid**; God will be with them. He will strengthen them. He will forgive their sins, he will save them from eternal death, and they, in turn, would praise him and proclaim his name.

As Jesus is teaching these important truths to his disciples he is speaking loud enough that all can hear. And so what do you suppose happens next. Did someone plead, *"Lord forgive my sins and strengthen my faith!"* Did the crowd continue to press in to receive more spiritual instruction as they carefully readjusted their priorities to be more inclined toward spiritual and eternal matters of the soul? No, instead, a man from the crowd yelled.

"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

I think it is safe to say that Jesus was rather disappointed by this man's comment. Jesus has every reason to put this man squarely in his place, and in a way he does. He uses a sharp address of rebuke to get the man's immediate attention. ***"Man,"*** Jesus said to him, ***"who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"*** There were people appointed to take care of such matters. Jesus had come not to settle financial squabbles, he had not come to ensure people received material wealth, but he had come to make people rich toward God. He was teaching this man and all the others about important spiritual matters and this man who yelled out from the crowd, this man just wanted to make sure that he got his inheritance by any means.

Jesus, obviously, did not settle this man's dispute. But he did use this as a teaching opportunity. And so he warned the man and all the people there to ***"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*** He wanted this truth to resonate and stick with these people so he told an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. He told this parable of the rich fool.

This particular man was a farmer who *had a good year so 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.*** O to have that kind of problem, we might think. And the plan wasn't really that bad of a plan, either. If he had a good crop it would be wise to build a bigger barn. The problem, however, was this man's selfish motivation. The Lord Jesus continued his parable by speaking as the 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.'"*** He thought the good life consisted of having more and more wealth and that was his sole concern as he showed a lack of concern for his soul. He was looking for peace and security in material wealth when he should have found such treasures in his relationship with God. God made that crystal clear when he reminded the man of how quickly all our worldly possessions could be taken away, or how quickly this life on earth could simply just end. 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."***

Life is not just about getting a bunch of things or piling up wealth or experiences. It is not just about being highly successful or even relatively rich. It's about learning about God

and knowing what he has done for you. It's about having the peace and the joy that comes through faith in Jesus. It's about having and sharing the confidence that we are God's dearly loved children and we have purpose and value because we are loved by him. That's what the good life is all about. It is about being rich toward God and being generous with that spiritual wealth. Life is about having and sharing that message of peace and joy with your friends, and neighbors, your children and grandchildren in the message that we share, in the lives of gratitude and joy that we live.

And with that perspective, we may even enjoy and appreciate the things that we have, the life that God has given us, even more. God is good and kind, so gracious and merciful that he provides for our daily needs even though we have certainly neither earned or deserved them. I recall how a certain Christian man had an interesting way of regularly expressing his thanks to God; when somebody asked him how he was doing, his standard reply was, "Much better than I deserve." Money, wealth, prosperity, are all gifts from his hand that he chooses to give to us as he sees fit. God provides us with all that we need and then some. Even in times of want he is there for us. And yet he does not want such things to cast a shadow on what truly matters. He doesn't want us to try to find the purpose of life or happiness in the things that we have or the things we might one day accumulate. He has something better for us.

In the grand scheme of things your possessions even your property or your business, it doesn't define you. None of this defines you because all these things could all be taken away so quickly and who knows when your life will end, and you and I won't be able to take any of it with us. Therefore, as children of God we know that our treasure is stored up for us in heaven. The fact that Christ Jesus has purchased us with His own precious blood - that defines us. We are his prized possessions. Jesus Christ, the Lord of the heavens and the earth, gave up his heavenly throne for a time, became a poor humble human being so that we might be his own. He won for us forgiveness and new life and heaven and offers them to us through word and sacrament so that we poor sinners are now spiritually rich. What incredible blessings the Lord God has bestowed upon us!

As the proud new mother looks at her new son, she considers not only what this child will need for his body and life, but she considers the great honor it will be to share the good news of Jesus with this child. As that happy groom looks his bride in the eyes, he considers how richly he has been blessed spiritually and quietly considers the responsibility of being the head of the family and making time in God's word the main priority. That active woman facing surgery or illness might pause and give thanks to God for all that he has given her. And as that Christian man or woman takes his last dying breath, he or she can fall asleep in peace, knowing that eternal peace and stability are found in Christ and that heaven is the eternal inheritance given to God's children. From life to death may God keep from the trappings of greed and so that we may see how the Lord has blessed us with the good life through faith in Christ Jesus.

Knowing the Lord Jesus, being made rich before God through faith in Jesus Christ, and then receiving your reward in heaven that will never be taken away. That, my friends, is what the good life consists of. May this good news of Jesus bring you happiness and peace, stability and joy through all your days and years of blessings and challenges. Amen.