**Sermon on Luke 12:13-21: The Parable of the Rich Fool**

Back in the late 1800s, there was a European wrestler known as “Yusuf, the Terrible Turk.” He weighed 350 pounds—a massive and formidable man, with no excess fat, just sheer power. For four years, Yusuf was undefeated in Europe, holding the undisputed championship. Then in 1898, he travelled to America to challenge the reigning US champion, “Strangler” Lewis, who was only about 200 pounds.

Strangler Lewis had a simple but effective secret move: he would get behind his opponent, wrap his strong arm around their neck, and cut off their oxygen until they passed out, winning by pinning them. But Yusuf had almost no neck—his head merged directly into his massive shoulders—making it impossible for Strangler to get the hold. Yusuf soon flipped Lewis and pinned him, winning the championship.

After the victory, Yusuf demanded his $5,000 prize money in gold, wrapped the gold around his waist with the championship belt, and boarded the ship back to Europe. But halfway across the Atlantic, a storm sank the ship. Yusuf tried to board a lifeboat, fell into the water, and was never seen again.

What happened to Yusuf? His great wealth was too heavy—even for a mighty man like him. He sank like an anvil, and his riches destroyed him.

**The Rich Fool**

Jesus was interrupted by a man who asked him to settle a financial dispute over inheritance with his brother, but he refused to get involved in the family quarrel but used the moment to teach about the danger of wealth’s seduction.

The farmer in the parable is not wicked; he earned his wealth honestly and seems surprised by his good fortune. He makes reasonable plans to build bigger barns to store his abundant harvest and then enjoy a life of ease. So what’s wrong with that?

Notice how many times he says “my” — my crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, and finally, my soul. And how often he says, “I will”: I will pull down my barns, I will build bigger ones, I will eat, drink, and be merry. This man talks only to himself—he has shut out everyone else, even God. He is alone in his selfish plans, preoccupied with possessions, imagining that his wealth will guarantee his future.

There is no thought of sharing with the poor, inviting friends to the feast, or investing in anything beyond himself. Greed has eaten away his compassion, and the greatest good he can imagine is maximizing his own pleasure.

Jesus interrupts his plans with a stark warning: “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

The word “fool” is rare in Luke’s Gospel—only twice—yet it is used extensively in Proverbs to contrast the wise person who lives with God at the centre and the fool who lives as if God does not exist.

This farmer calculated his life without God. He placed his trust in wealth rather than the Divine. Richard Foster puts it well: when we lack a Divine Centre, “our need for security leads us to an insane attachment to things.”

Why?

The answer is found in how the man thinks — or rather, how he *does not* think.

1. **He talks only to himself.**
He plans alone, using the possessive pronoun “my” over and over: *my crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, my soul.* His whole world revolves around himself and his possessions.
2. **He excludes God and others.**
Notice that he does not consult God. He does not pray or seek guidance. And he does not think about other people—no thought of sharing, helping, or investing in the community. His plans are solely for himself.
3. **He trusts in his wealth for security and meaning.**
He believes his wealth can guarantee his future. “I will eat, drink, and be merry,” he says confidently. But Jesus reveals the illusion: life is uncertain, and death can come at any moment.
4. **He is not evil but self-centred and shortsighted.**
The rich man is not condemned for having wealth but for placing his trust in it and ignoring God. He is a fool because he lives *as if God does not exist,* as if his life and future depend entirely on what he can control and accumulate.

**Four Ways the Rich Fool’s Error Shows Up in Our Lives — And How to Resist It**

The rich fool’s story challenges us because we can recognize parts of ourselves in his errors. First, like the farmer who plans only for himself, we can fall into the trap of isolation—making decisions without seeking counsel or community. But life is meant to be lived with others, and opening ourselves to wise counsel and God’s guidance invites humility and perspective. By sharing our struggles and plans with trusted friends or mentors, we can avoid becoming prisoners of our own selfish thinking. This is how we make better decisions and are accountable. Some people have a Spiritual director for this. Maybe you need to be more open in a home group, for example?

Secondly, the rich fool excludes God from his calculations. In focusing solely on “my” goods and “my” plans, he forgets that everything ultimately belongs to God. We resist this temptation by cultivating a spiritual life that keeps God at the centre—through prayer, worship, and acts of generosity. When we give to others and serve beyond ourselves, our hearts expand beyond greed and isolation.

Third, the rich fool trusts in his wealth as security for the future, imagining that material possessions can guarantee happiness and safety. But money is an unreliable foundation for life’s uncertainties. Practicing gratitude, recognizing God’s provision, and investing in relationships rather than things help us build lasting security rooted in faith, not fortune.

Finally, the rich fool’s self-centeredness blinds him to the fragility of life and the needs of others. He believes his barns will protect him from any threat, ignoring that death can come unexpectedly. We counter this by embracing a stewardship mindset—viewing our resources as gifts to be used wisely for the benefit of others and for God’s kingdom, remembering that our true treasure lies beyond this life.

**A Real-Life Example: Alfred Nobel’s Transformation**

Alfred Nobel was a Swedish chemist, engineer, and inventor best known for inventing dynamite in 1867. He amassed a vast fortune from his inventions and the industries they fuelled. However, his wealth was tied closely to explosives used in warfare and destruction, leading some to call him the “merchant of death.”

In 1888, Alfred Nobel’s life took an unexpected turn when a premature obituary was published—an error caused by the death of his brother. The obituary harshly condemned Nobel for profiting from weapons of war and branded him a man who “became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before.”

Reading this, Nobel was deeply disturbed by the legacy he would leave behind. He realized that if he did nothing to change course, the world would remember him as a man who contributed to death and destruction.

In response, Nobel rewrote his will, directing his fortune to establish the Nobel Prizes—prestigious international awards recognizing significant achievements in physics, chemistry, medicine, literature, and peace. His transformation from “merchant of death” to patron of peace and progress shows how a man can confront his own legacy and choose to invest in life and hope rather than destruction.

Nobel’s story reminds us that it is never too late to reflect on our values, redirect our lives, and live generously toward causes that honour God’s gift of life and love.

**Life Is Fragile and Uncertain**

No matter how much we achieve or acquire, life remains fragile and uncertain. The rich fool thought his barns would protect him, but death came unexpectedly. We cannot buy more time or escape our mortality.

Our culture often tells us to pursue more, to shop more, to secure more. But Jesus says, “Beware! Life is not found in possessions.” Real life is found in God and in love toward others.

**A Challenge for Today**

This message is not a scolding or a call to asceticism but an invitation:

Live in community and not always be self reliant. So the your world doesn’t revolve around you.

Consult God and remember all things come from Him.

Don’t think that what you own makes you who you are. God’s love is sufficient for that.

Remember that life is fragile. Live it with respect and help others to do the same.

What will be on your obituary?