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The Parable of the Rich Fool
Luke 12: 13-34

The parable of the rich fool DIG: In response to the man's plea, Jesus tells a parable. What is the man's problem? His solution? Why is he a fool? Why was Messiah's response so harsh? Was the problem wealth? The Lord gave two examples from nature about trusting God: sparrows and the wild flowers. Can you think of any others? In His application, what does the Master teach about seeking the Kingdom?

REFLECT: Why should you trust YHVH instead of worrying? Explain how worry shows lack of faith? What are the rewards of seeking the kingdom of ADONAI, instead of personal gain? How do earthly riches differ from heavenly treasure? What is the secret of contentment? List some of the consequences of anxiety? What simple steps can believers take to avoid worry? What is the difference between planning ahead and worrying? How does this passage inspire you to trust the Lord with your needs? In what concrete ways can we demonstrate our trust in HaShem's provision?

The one main point to the parable of the rich fool is that life does not consist in the abundance of material possessions but in a relationship with ADONAI.

The background to this parable starts in **Luke 12:1**, **when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling one another. Jesus first began to speak to His apostles** (**to see link click Hc – Warnings and Encouragements To His Disciples**) but, at some point, **someone in the crowd said to the Prophet of Nazareth, "Rabbi, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."** Traditionally a rabbi was not a clergyman but a teacher of Jewish values and custom; and as such, the authoritative **judge or arbitrator** who decided points of the Torah and ethics central to people's lives. Only since the secularly inspired *Haskalah*, meaning *enlightenment*, of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have rabbis in the West been viewed alongside Catholic priests and Protestant ministers as peripheral figures in a supposedly secular "real world."

The Lord replied: **Man, who appointed Me a judge or an arbiter between you (Luke 12:13-14)?** Alluding to **Exodus 2:14**, where Moshe appointed himself ruler and **judge** over his fellow Israelites, **Yeshua** rejects the role of **arbitrator**.[1033] **Jesus** did not come to reconcile such family disputes. On the contrary, **His** coming would at times divide families (see **Hf – Not Peace, But Division**). What this person needed was not some legal ruling by a religious teacher but a basic grasp of how possessions relate to the purpose of life. Who one is . . . is far more important than what one possesses.

The Preceding Wisdom Statement. Evidently, **Messiah** regarded the questioner's attitude to be typical so **He** addressed **His** remarks **to the** whole **crowd: Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions (Luke 12:15).** Are you in prison? You are if you feel better when you have more and worse when you have less. You are if joy is one delivery away, one transfer away, one award away, or one makeover away. If your happiness comes from something you deposit, drive, drink, or digest, then face it – you're in prison . . . the prison of **want**.

That's the bad news. But, the good news is, you have a visitor. And your visitor has a message that can get you paroled. Make your way to the receiving room. Take your seat in the chair, and look across the table at the psalmist David. He motions for you to lean forward. "I have a secret to tell you," he whispers, "the secret is satisfaction." **The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want (Psalm 23:1 NKJV).** It's as if David is saying, "What I have in **ADONAI** is greater than what I don't have in life." Can we say the same?[1034]

The First Stanza: God Gives. When **Yeshua** addresses the crowd, **He** is teaching **His** talmidim and those who believe in **Him** and have spiritual ears to hear. **And He told them this parable: The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest (Luke 12:16). Jesus** was dealing with a theme already well known in the literature of **His** audience **(Ecclesiastes 2:1-11; Job 31:24-28)**.



The Second Stanza: The Problem. He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops" (Luke 12:17). One of the more striking features of the traditional Near Easterner thought is his gregarious nature. Life is lived in tightly knit communities. The leading men of the village sit at the gate and spend literally years talking to one another. The slightest transaction is worthy of hours of discussion. The elder in the community makes up his mind *in community.* He does his thinking in a crowd. The text does not read: **He** *said* **to himself**. No, **the rich man** dialogues with **himself**. **He** obviously has no one else with whom to talk. **He** trusts no one and has no friends or confidants with whom **he** can exchange ideas. When **he** needs someone to talk to, **he** can talk only to **himself**. Therefore, we begin to get **Jesus'** picture of the kind of prison that wealth can build. **He** has the money to buy a vacuum and live in it. Life in this vacuum creates its own realities, and out of this warped perspective we hear him announce his solution.

The Third Stanza: The Present Plan. The very climax in the third stanza is related to the beginning and the end of the parable. This is the turning point, for the rich man decides what he will do to solve his problem. **Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build up bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain" (Luke 12:18).** The language of **tear down** and **build up** is classical prophetic language that refers to the call of ministry of the prophet **(Jeremiah 1:10)**. It speaks of the courageous acts in the name of **YHVH** that call for suffering in their fulfillment. Here this noble language is sadly cheapened by this self-indulgent **rich man** who is determined that **he** alone will consume **God's** gifts. These gifts of **surplus** wealth have become "my **grain** and my goods." Covetousness (see my commentary on **Exodus Dt – You Shall Not Covet Anything That Belongs To Your Neighbor**) arises from a false philosophy of life that says the greatest good in life is to acquire material possessions. Such a philosophy characterized the Pharisees, who interpreted material prosperity as a sign of divine blessing. They expressed their philosophy in the saying, "Whom

God loves **He** makes rich."[1035] It was in the barns that the tithes and offerings were set aside. The priests and Levites came to the barns to collect them. But our **rich man** has other things on **his** mind, as we see from **his** concluding speech.

The Fourth Stanza: The Future Plan. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry" (Luke 12:19). This speech is not necessarily sad, it's just rather pitiful. This wealthy, self-confident **man** has arrived. **He** has made it. All that he has longed for has now been realized. He needs an audience for his arrival speech. But who is available? Family? Friends? Servants and their families? Village elders? Fellow landowners? Who will, "rejoice with me?" The father in the parable of the Prodigal son has a community ready at any moment to join him in a celebration of joy **(Luke 15:22-24)**. The shepherd and the woman call their friends and neighbors to rejoice over the found sheep and coin **(Luke 15:6** and **9)**. The gregarious Near Easterner always has a community around him. But this **man**? **He** can only talk to **himself**. **The parable assumes a time lapse between stanzas four and five.**

The Fifth Stanza: God Takes Away. The voice of **YHVH** thunders at **him** (presumably) after **he** has prepared **his** maximum security storage **barns**. Thus, after **his** arrival, **he** is confronted with the stark reality of the world **he** has created with **his** wealth. **But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you.** The sting of the words lies, however, not in the announcement that **he** must die, but in the following question, which clearly shows the real poverty of **his** life. **He** is lonely and friendless in the midst of **his** vast wealth. **Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself (Luke 12:20)?** The reader already knows this. Now we see that it takes the voice of **YHVH Himself** to penetrate **the rich man's** self-created isolation and confront **him** with a chilling vision of **himself**. There is no accusing question, such as, "What have you done for others?" **He** has no doubt developed impenetrable armor for just such an attack. Rather, **God** thunders, "Look what you have done to yourself!" You plan alone, build alone, indulge alone, and now you must die alone![1036]

The Following Wisdom Statement. This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God (Luke 12:21). The phrase **rich toward God** is a synonym for **treasures in heaven** (see my commentary on **Revelation Cc – For We Must All Appear Before the Bema Seat in Heaven**). David said: **The fool says in his heart, "There is not God" (Psalm 14:1)**, so, in effect, that's what this **rich man** was saying. **He** had left **God** out of the picture.

The Application: Christ gave six reasons why they were not to worry about material possessions. First, turning **to the Twelve, He** no longer spoke in parables and said: **So I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes (Luke 12:22-23).** Sometimes we make life much harder than we need to make it. We rush around, working overtime to ensure that we have all the things we need and want. In a consumer-oriented society, **Yeshua** words about trusting **ADONAI** can easily be missed.[1037] But **Jesus** said **He** would meet our needs. Of all **His** words in the Bible, **Christ** had more to say about money than any other topic. This section offers a good summary of **His** attitude. **He** does not condemn possessions, but **He** warns against putting faith in money to secure the future. Money fails to solve life's biggest problems.

Second, He emphasized that all of God's creatures are under His care: Consider the ravens. In contrast to humans **they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds (Luke 12:24)! He** cares for **them**. Unlike **the sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31)**, **ravens** were not sold because **they** are scavengers. There are other versions of this (add your favorite animal, fish or bird). Like, **consider the** bunnies**, they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom of barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than** bunnies **(Luke 12:24** paraphrased**)!**

Third, the Lord reminded them that anxious care cannot change the situation. Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? The assumed answer is, of course, no one. So it is ridiculous to worry. **Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest (Luke 12:25-26)?** Whereas the following reasons teach that the believer need not worry, the first three reasons teach that worrying is futile.

Fourth, Christ taught that people do not have the power to provide as wonderfully as God can. Again **Jesus** went to the natural realm to point out that **God** takes care of what belongs to **Him**. **Consider how the wild flowers grow.** Although the exact flower designated in the Greek is unclear, the meaning is not. **They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these (Luke 12:27: First Kings 10:4-7; Second Chronicles 9:3-6).**

Fifth, if ADONAI takes care of the grass in the field, which has such a

temporary existence, will He not take care of His own? If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire (better translated **oven**)**, how much more will he clothe you – you of little faith (Luke 12:28)!** Wood was relatively scarce in Isra'el, and **grass** was used for fuel to bake bread. In addition, **grass** frequently is used in the TaNaKh as a symbol for the transitory nature of life.

Sixth, He reminded them that they have a Father who knows what they need and will provide. And do not set your heart on, literally, *do not seek*, **what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them (Luke 12:29-30).** Literally, this means *the unbelieving Gentile nations,* who do not know **God (First Thessalonians 4:5)**.

As an alternative to worrying, **the Lord** exhorted them to faith. **But seek His Kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well (Luke 12:31).** Sometimes **ADONAI** is so touched by what **He** sees that **He** gives us what we need and not simply what we ask for. It's a good deal for us because who would have ever thought to ask **Messiah** for what **He** gives? Which of us would have dared to say, "**God**, would you please hang **Yourself** on a tool of torture as a substitution for every sin I have ever committed?" And then have the nerve to say, "And after **You've** forgiven me, could **You** prepare for me a place to live in **Your** house forever?" Then, if that wasn't enough, "And would **You** please live within me and protect me and guide me and bless me with more than I could ever deserve?" Seriously, would we ever have enough guts to ask for that? **Yeshua** already knows the cost of grace. **He** already knows the price of forgiveness. But **He** offers it anyway. Love burst **His** heart.[1038]

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom. This is accomplished through doing *tzedakah*, literally *doing righteousness*, but understood as *giving to charity.* That is, by not being selfish and sharing your wealth.[1039] **Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out. Purses** is a metaphor for the contents in them. In other words, one should not even attempt to use one's earthly money to lay up treasure in heaven. But by being generous with your money, you will store up **a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. Jesus** is not against having wealth but against making wealth the center of your life. **Christ** reminded them of the bondage of such slavery and asked them to put their faith in **God** so that they might become

enslaved to **Him**. **Yeshua** added: **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Lk 12:32-34).** One cannot serve **God** and money **(Lk 16:13)**, but one can serve **God** by the correct use of money.

One day a father of a very wealthy family took his son on a trip to the country with the purpose of showing his son how poor people live. They spent a couple of days and nights on the farm of what would be considered a very poor family. On their return from their trip, the father asked his son,

“How was the trip?”

“It was great, Dad.”

“Did you see how poor people live,” the father asked.

“Oh yes,” said the son.

“So, tell me, what did you learn from the trip?” asked the father.

The son answered, “I saw that we have one dog and they have four.”

“We have a pool that reaches to the middle of our garden and they have a creek that has no end.”

“We have imported lanterns in our garden and they have the whole horizon.”

“We have a small piece of land to live on and they have fields that go beyond our sight.”

“We have servants who serve us, but they serve others.”

“We buy our food, but they grow theirs.”

“We have walls around our property to protect us, they have friends to protect them.”

They boy’s father was speechless.

Then his son added, “Thanks, Dad, for showing me how poor we are.”

Too many times, we forget what we have and concentrate on what we don’t have.

What is one person's worthless object is another's prized possession. It is all based on one's perspective. It makes you wonder what would happen if we all gave thanks for all that we have instead of worrying about wanting more.[1040]