

June 16, 2019  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: Luke  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
© 2019 David J. Whitcomb

## HOW STUFF CLOUDS THE ETERNAL VIEW Luke 12:13-21

What did you buy your father for Father's Day? For several weeks I have been bombarded with multiple advertisements telling me that I need to buy my father everything from a new grill to a new car. In the first place, my father has no need of any earthly stuff. It would be quite a nuisance to him in his heavenly setting.

Furthermore, I wonder who started this whole idea that you are supposed to buy an extravagant gift for dear, old Dad on this one day of the year? It could have been someone who worked for the Sears and Roebuck Company or the Montgomery Ward Company or some other defunct purveyor of stuff that breaks or goes out of style.

Covetousness is the American way. For many years we have heard how immigrants do everything possible, legal and illegal, in order to get into this country so they too can get a slice of the American Dream. That dream is to own an abundance of things, to have an excess of money so that you can participate in all the experiences that make life fun, exciting, and fulfilling.

Let's be painfully honest. Even we Christians, who are supposed to be living in light of eternity, enjoy the stuff money can buy. I'm really not interested in giving up the material blessings God has allowed me to have. But the nagging question is this: Am I enjoying what God has given, or am I grasping for more and more that God would not necessarily desire for me to have? Am I using God's gifts for His glory to help others know Him, or am I consumed with getting more? In other words, am I content to have God's blessings or am I covetous?

The right way to assess the potential problem of covetousness is to determine if stuff, passing things and passing fancies, is

detracting from the certainty of eternity. If we are really living in light of eternity, we will be more interested in laying up treasure in heaven than laying up treasure on earth. Or as Jesus challenged us at the end of our text, "Are we laying up treasure for ourselves or are we practicing richness toward God?" The natural thing is to grab for all we can in life because we only go around once. The natural thing is to expend all my effort taking care of myself because no one else is going to take care of me. The right thing is to live in light of the reality that life is short and when it is over I will answer to my Creator for how I invested all that He gave me.

### A Request and Principle (vv.13-15).

A man abruptly, unexpectedly voiced a request which seems to be a common sort of request in any age. *Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me"* (v.13). This is another example of how Jesus often turned the question or comment of a bystander into a very important spiritual lesson. If this event is in chronological order flowing from the previous instruction, we should be nonplused at the guy's impudence. Jesus had just warned about the seriousness of failing to acknowledge a relationship with Him among peers. Jesus had drawn the focus of the listeners to eternal matters. And this fellow seems to have missed the whole significance of eternity because he was blinded by the passing present world. He was so human!

The man virtually demanded Jesus to issue a judgment concerning a conflict between his brother and him about an inheritance. We know from our own experiences that little in life, other than divorce, is a more pernicious cause of family conflict than disagreements about inheritance. Surely all of us are familiar with family wars that erupt over disagreement about who gets what when the parents die. It appears from the evidence of our text that such has been the case throughout human history. As long as people are infected with the sin principle, greed and covetousness will be abundant in matters of family inheritance.

According to Luke's account, this man presented no evidence and no will to justify his request. He just demanded that Jesus make an arbitrary judgment. There is nothing about the text to cause us to

assume that his brother, the adversary, was not present, standing alongside the guy when he demanded that Jesus judge between them.

Why did he demand that Jesus make the judgment? Why not take it to the judges in the town who normally took care of such matters? No doubt it was obvious to the man that Jesus was just, fair, and wise. No doubt most people believed Jesus spoke with unique authority. And maybe this man believed that Jesus was about to establish the new kingdom of Israel, and who better to make the judgment than the new king?

What the man probably did not expect was Jesus' blunt reply. *But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" (v.14).* The answer was a bit direct and surely unexpected. But Jesus wasn't on earth to engage in civil government. That was the kind of false accusations His enemies made about Him. In the end, they accused Jesus of trying to establish a kingdom to compete with Rome. But Jesus did not come to offer wealth, prosperity, and satisfaction of greed to people. Jesus came to offer the means to gain freedom from such enslaving sins.

Therefore, Jesus' response to the rude man's request was intentionally curt. The address, "Man" might be equivalent to the modern, "Dude." That would make Jesus' reply in the common vernacular of our day sound like, "Dude, what makes you think I'm interested in messing with your problem?" Jesus is indeed the ultimate Judge over all spiritual, eternal matters. But that final judgment is still pending. He was on earth to teach about His provision of real, genuine riches—eternal treasure.

To that end, Jesus bought up the opportunity to teach the important principle of guarding against covetousness. *And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness" (v.15).* Having deflected the covetous man's request, Jesus used the man's interruption as a springboard to return to instruction about eternal matters. Jesus said that the problem to avoid is covetousness, which was exactly the attitude that motivated the rude man's demand. Covetousness is the lust to have more than one's fair share, an unbounded grasping after more and more materialism. It is a life characterized by continual breaking of the tenth command in which God requires, *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female*

*servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:17).*

Covetousness is a way of life for people devoid of salvation and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Sadly, this grasping for more and more stuff that we don't need is a weight that impedes spiritual growth in far too many professing Christians.

Our Lord desires us to avoid the sin which makes sense to us when we learn that life is not about stuff. The lesson is to avoid covetousness, *"For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (v.15b).* The Lord's warning is not "Life **should not** consist in the abundance of possessions," but "Life **DOES not** consist of such abundance." You might have an abundance of possessions. In fact, because you are an American, you do have an abundance of possessions. But that is not life. It is a mirage, a dream, a fantasy from which you will one day awake.

Solomon identified the sin problem when he wrote, *He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity (Ecclesiastes 5:10).* Who wants to live a life where there is no satisfaction? Apparently almost everyone. Jesus said that such is not life at all.

The story goes that once there was a man who lived life in the lap of luxury. He worked hard, ran over everyone who got in his way, and gained the money to buy anything he wanted. The man was so proud of his possessions that he stated in his living will that instead of being buried in a casket when he died, he wanted to be buried in a brand new Ferrari. As his request stipulated, when he died they buried him sitting upright in a Ferrari F12 Berlinetta, that costs \$380,000. Supposedly, some of his friends stood nearby as the crane lowered the car into the underground vault. One friend was heard to say to the other, "Now that's living the high life." How absurd! The guy was dead. That was exactly Jesus' point! Covetousness is spiritual death, not the abundant life Jesus came to offer.

### **Illustration of the Problem (vv.16-21).**

Jesus told the story about a farmer who lived the American dream (vv.16-20). He was well-to-do because his efforts were profitable. In the parable Jesus said, *"The land of a rich man*

*produced plentifully” (v.16)* This is the goal of every farmer, every business man, every investor. The simple statement indicates that the farmer was wise and hard working. His land was not going to produce plentifully if he was a lazy fool. Solomon observed, *I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man (Proverbs 24:30-34).*

Therefore, wisdom teaches, *The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied (Proverbs 13:4).* And beyond that, land producing plentifully is an indication of God’s blessing. *Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you (Psalm 128:1-2).* Apart from God’s blessing of rain and sunshine, no farmer ever has or ever will experience a plentiful crop.

This very blessed farmer suddenly faced an enviable problem. *“And he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’” (v.17).* The Lord blessed the man so abundantly that he ran out of room to store the blessings. The American response to such blessing is to buy a bigger house when we run out of room to store God’s blessings. But almost immediately we fill the bigger house with more stuff we don’t need. And then we have to maintain all the stuff we acquire. Someone well said, *The more ACRES a man has, the more CARES he has.* See the transposing of two letters.

This is the lesson we generally learn only through experience. For example, a man just has to have a nice, big boat. He purchases the boat, but then needs to buy a trailer to transport it. And when he is not using it (which is most of the time), he needs to rent a place to store it. Plus he has to have insurance to cover any loss of his prized possession. Then he has to maintain it or it will stop running and rot away. And when he takes it out on the lake, he has to work to get it ready and then work to store it. Finally the man figures out the lesson all boat owners learn: The happiest two days in a boat-owners life is the day he buys the boat and the day he sells it.

The farmer was so blessed that he was forced to draw a logical conclusion. *“And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods’” (v.18).* When you are thinking about the new barns the guy built, do not picture quaint Amish barns dotting the lush landscape like you might see in Eastern Pennsylvania. The word “barns” speaks of storage places that might be anything from caves to rough “lean-tos.” Whatever the man built, it took effort and money.

However, when it was all said and done, the farmer made an erroneous prediction. *“And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry’” (v.19).* Notice the plethora of personal pronouns in this story. *“What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?” (v.17).* *“And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and (‘I will’ implied) build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods’” (v.18).* *“And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry’” (v.19).*

It is obvious that the man’s conclusions were all about self. This is a picture of ultimate self-centeredness, selfishness, and a “me, me, me, me, it’s all about me” attitude. It is astonishing to realize how many people around us actually think this way. All that really matters to them is that they are happy, satisfied, achieving their goals. How important are you in your humble opinion? Your words and actions answer that question loud and clear.

The farmer forgot to think about God and eternity. He forgot that he is a passing vapor. Like many of us, he forgot that our days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle (Job 7:6). We failed to consider that we come out like a flower and wither; we flee like a shadow (Job 14:2). He ignored James’ warning, *Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” – yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes (James 4:13-14).*

This man wasn’t living a dream at all! Nor are most of our peers. God said the dream was actually a nightmare. *“But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’” (v.20).* This man had no more sense or thought about eternity than one of **his** many donkeys

out in “his” field. The eternal God alone determines length of life. So Solomon’s conclusion: “*I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity*” (Ecclesiastes 2:18-19). What would you do, to whom would you talk, what would you say, if God plainly told you that tonight it was all over for you?

How does the important lesson, the principle Jesus taught, fit in our lives? Jesus made the application for us (v.21). But first, an illustration. “The Price is Right” is America’s longest running game show. It has, in many ways, impacted up to four generations now. The show began in 1956 hosted by Bill Cullen. I think it was about 1965 that Bob Barker took over hosting, and it has been hosted by Drew Carey since Barker retired in 2007. I still remember watching the show occasionally as a kid and hearing the voice of Johnny Olson say to particular contestants in the audience, “Come on down!” It is a show about covetousness—how to get something for nothing. If you have ever seen the show, you remember how at some point a contestant will be given the opportunity to choose door number 1 or door number 2 or door number 3. Behind each of the doors was either a great prize or a dud of some kind. Life is kind of like choosing the right door.

That was the picture Jesus gave in this application. There is a choice to be made. Jesus taught, “*So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God*” (v.21). Behind door number one is treasure for self. This is the typical choice, with very few exception in human history. We naturally believe and are consistently taught that we need to take care of self. We hoard, grasp, plan, and finagle to get more and more. This hoarding is not just things, or gadgets or stuff. It includes hoarding money just for the sake of having money. Sometimes it is treasuring up experience, education, knowledge, or skills. The ultimate goal is to be able to say, “I have more of \_\_\_\_\_ than the other guy.”

The one who lays up treasure on earth for self, damages his view of eternity and his relationship with God and others. “The possession of money has a most hardening effect upon the conscience. We never know what we may do when we become rich.

. . . Poverty has many disadvantages. But riches destroy far more souls than poverty” (J. C. Ryle, p.74).

The second choice is the less likely choice, but the wise and right choice. Behind door number two is richness toward God. What is richness toward God? It is to own our Savior’s rich provision of the eternal kingdom (2 Peter 1:11). It is to be rich in faith, heirs of God’s kingdom (James 2:5). It is to possess the Holy Spirit who God has poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:6). It is being able to be rich in good works, generous, ready to share (1 Timothy 6:18). It is to have full assurance of understanding and knowledge of Christ (Colossians 2:2). It is to experience the riches of God’s glory through Christ, supplied by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16). It is to possess the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:7). It is to know the riches of God’s mercy (Ephesians 2:4). It is to have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace (Ephesians 1:7).

The location of your riches reveals the condition of your heart. The natural, sinful person lays up treasures on earth because he or she has no other choice. The possessor of God’s riches amasses treasure in heaven, in the eternal state which is to come. “The antidote to foolish, sinful, materialistic greed is to use what God has given us for His glory and the benefit of others.” (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, “Luke,” (11-17), Chicago: Moody Press, 2013, 135.)