



# Better a Wise Servant Than a Rich Fool

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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## Introduction:

How important would a question have to be for you to interrupt me while I was presenting this sermon to ask it? Let me add to that. How important would a question have to be for you to interrupt Jesus if He were the one teaching? Let me add to that. How important would a question have to be for you to interrupt Jesus if He were teaching on the one difference between folks who go to heaven and folks who go to hell? I ask this question because that is exactly what Jesus was teaching about in **Luke 12:8-12**, when some unnamed man interrupted Jesus to demand He tell his brother to divide up their inheritance (**Luke 12:13**). I simply cannot fathom hearing Jesus talk about the difference between the lost and the saved and thinking my desire for an inheritance was so great that I should interrupt to direct Jesus' attention to this topic instead. However, Jesus used this interruption to provide profound teaching. He did not provide a legal ruling for the man or his brother, but He did provide great teaching that I think is especially appropriate to us at this time of year when we can so easily get caught up in the joy of possessions and lose sight of what is really important. What we want to notice is what Jesus said to the man and his brother, what Jesus then said to the crowds who were witnessing this, and what He then said to His disciples because of this discussion.

## Discussion:

### I. What Jesus said to the man and his brother (**Luke 12:14**).

- A. Interestingly, Jesus didn't say much to the man. He refused to grant his request. Instead, He asked, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" (ESV). The "you" is plural, so Jesus is speaking to both the man and his brother. This statement is interesting because Jesus is the judge of these two individuals. However, His judgment is not about petty squabbles. Jesus had been talking about the dividing line between those going to heaven and those going to hell in **Luke 12:8-12**, but this man wanted to turn Jesus' attention to some minor issue over property rights. Jesus refused to take this bait.
- B. No doubt, the text doesn't explain exactly why Jesus took this approach. However, there are two points I think we can make with certainty.
  1. Jesus was not interested in making this judgment because it wouldn't help with the real issue. Whether He judged in favor of the man or his brother, He wouldn't solve the real problem and probably only exacerbate it. The real problem was not who had the legal claim on this inheritance. The real problem was covetousness. If Jesus simply weighed forth on the legal matter, these brothers would not grow spiritually. Instead, Jesus addressed the real issue. If the brothers listened, they would be able to resolve this squabble themselves.
  2. Jesus does not speak to us so we can make someone else do something. This man was not listening to Jesus to learn how he should live. He was waiting for Jesus to say something that would get his brother to do what he wanted. No doubt, we need to teach others Jesus' truth. However, we need to listen first for what Jesus is teaching us. How should we live based on Jesus' words?

### II. What Jesus said to the crowds (**Luke 12:15-21**).

- A. While Jesus essentially ignored this man's request, He used it as an opportunity to teach the crowds. He turned to them and warned them against covetousness and then told a story to encourage them to live wisely. His overall message was that they didn't want to be rich fools.
- B. Four lessons we can get from Jesus' words to the crowds.
  1. *Beware covetousness (vs. 15)*: As we said a moment ago, the real problem with these brothers was not legal claims or inheritance rights. The real issue was covetousness. Covetousness is the greedy desire to have more. We need to beware it. In **Colossians 3:5**, Paul said covetousness is idolatry. Think about it. This man was so concerned about getting more from his brother, he interrupted Jesus' teaching on what would cause him to lose his soul. He was placing his desire to get more ahead of Jesus; no wonder it is idolatry.
  2. *One's life does not consist of possessions (vs. 15)*: Sadly, we have a tendency to judge people based on what they own. Look at the car they drive and the clothes they wear and we have figured out the person. Jesus says that isn't true. Think about it. Jesus was a man who did not even have a place to lay His head (**Luke 9:58**),

would we judge Him based on His possessions? The world says our possessions make us. Because of that, we can tend toward covetousness, making the pursuit of money and material goods our goal. However, there is no material possession that can make a life. There is no gift you will receive this week that will bring you happiness, contentment, serenity or peace. You may receive your dream gift this Saturday and it may give you some pleasure for a time. However, in the end, you will find that it is empty just like every other material possession you have.

3. *Possessions will not improve or extend your life (vss. 16-20)*: Jesus highlighted His point by telling the story of the rich fool. This fool was so rich he didn't even know what to do with all he had. Finally, he made his decision. He would keep it. It would provide for him for the rest of his life. He would build bigger barns and live off his own good fortune. But God let the man know that night how little his wealth would help him. His bigger barns would not preserve his life. His vast goods would not extend his days. Sadly, this rich fool was prepared to live for years to come. He was not, however, prepared to live for only a few more hours. The money and material goods he trusted to care for him could not help him.
4. *Be rich toward God (vs. 21)*: Jesus concluded His teaching to the crowd by saying this is the way they would all be if they laid up treasure for themselves and were not rich toward God. No doubt, this called to mind **Proverbs 3:9-10** in which the Jews were taught if they were rich toward God their barns would be full. This rich fool laid up treasures for himself and God emptied His barns giving the man's wealth to another, which in turn calls to mind **Ecclesiastes 2:18-19**. What vanity it was for this man to work so hard and produce so much. It would just be left to another and who knew if that person would be wise or foolish.

### III. What Jesus said to His disciples (**Luke 12:22-48**).

- A. Jesus did not stop with His public teaching. He used this circumstance to also teach His disciples. With the crowds, He merely warned against covetousness. With the disciples He provided practical tools to help them avoid covetousness and be rich toward God.
- B. Four lessons we get from Jesus' words to the disciples.
  1. *Don't be anxious, trust God (vss. 22-28)*: It is one thing to simply say don't covet. It is another to get at the heart of what produces coveting. Coveting stems from thinking we have to have stuff to survive and be happy. We become anxious and worried if we don't have enough stuff or if we don't have enough stuff to last. Jesus says instead of being anxious about whether we have enough stuff to last, we need to trust God. The God who gave us life can provide us food. The God who created our bodies can provide us clothing. The God who created the world with plants, animals and their circle of survival can take care of us. No doubt, He may not provide us with so much that we need to build bigger barns, but He can provide for us. The real issue is we need to learn to be content with His provision. **I Timothy 6:8** says we should be content with food and clothing. Everything else is gravy. As **Proverbs 3:5-6** says, we should trust in Him with all our hearts. We need to ask ourselves, do we really trust God that He can take care of us or do we think He needs all our plans and schemes for making money?
  2. *Seek God's kingdom (vss. 29-32)*: When we trust God to take care of us, we are set free to seek His kingdom, that is, His rule in our lives. Most definitely, this will include a work ethic of providing for our families (cf. **I Timothy 5:8**). However, we must not allow a desire for stuff to exalt our work ethic to be the only part of seeking the kingdom. If we seek God's kingdom, He will provide the rest; He will provide our food and clothing. Sadly, if we seek, as the Gentiles did, for food and clothing, He will not provide the kingdom. However, if we seek His kingdom, He wants to give it to us. We need to ask ourselves why we are doing what we are doing today. Is it to seek God's rule in our lives, or is it to provide for ourselves because we don't trust God to provide for us? No doubt this would call **Haggai 1:1-11** to the Jewish mind. At that time the Jews were so intent in seeking their own personal needs and welfare, yet because they neglected the kingdom of God, God made their efforts vain. If they had merely set aside the pursuit of their own needs and instead sought God's glory, He would have cared for them.
  3. *Sell your possessions and give to the needy (vss. 33-34)*: Jesus told the crowds to be rich toward God. He tells His disciples the practical way to do that. Certainly, as we said earlier, this called to mind **Proverbs 3:9-10**. No doubt, when there is a need the congregation is authorized to fill and is filling, this will include giving into the collection of the congregation (cf. **I Corinthians 16:1-4**). However, it also just includes our own personal generosity. **I Timothy 6:18-19** points out the rich in this world's goods should be rich in good deeds, ready to share, generous. **Hebrews 13:16** says God is pleased with such sacrifices. Certainly, Jesus is not declaring that every Christian must sell everything he owns and give it away. Otherwise we would all become the needy and we wouldn't be accepting the blessings God gives us to care for our needs. Having said that, however, I fear we press that point so much that we do not fulfill Jesus' point. I know I don't do it well enough. This point is at the heart of **II Corinthians 9:6-11**. When we give to those in need, God will provide for us. God

does not provide for us merely to hoard to ourselves. He blesses us to be a blessing to others. When we merely sock away our retirement fund, we must not expect the real blessings of God. God helps those who help others.

4. *Stay alert in the Lord's work (vss. 35-48)*: Finally, in a section that at first glance seems to be about something new, we find Jesus' exhortation to not only seek first the kingdom but to stay alert in that endeavor. It is not enough to have sought the kingdom at one time. We must stay awake and alert, awaiting the coming of our Master. As long as it is called today, we must seek the kingdom of God. In the midst of Jesus' parables about staying alert and being ready, notice the promise Jesus gives. "*Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions*" (**Luke 12:42-44**, ESV). Jesus has already told us our lives are not made up of our possessions. He then told us that instead of hoarding our possessions we should sell them to help the needy. Now He tells us when we are vigilant in this, He will give us true possessions. I don't fully know what is being promised here. However, I must admit that our Master's possessions in heaven are surely greater than any possession we might discover here on earth. Let us be alert in God's service and gain the true, eternal and great possessions God is offering us instead of settling for the temporal and decaying possession the world is offering us (cf. **Matthew 6:19-20**).

### **Conclusion:**

It is better to be a wise servant than a rich fool. Granted that doesn't mean we have to be poverty stricken to be God's servant. However, we should rather be poor, content with what God provides as we seek His kingdom than be rich, foolish, and headed for damnation. I know what concerns me about me. Unlike the great majority of the world, I own multiple sets of clothes, two cars, three computers, a home, cell phones, etc. I have never gone hungry a day in my life. I have never been exposed a day in my life. The truth of the matter is that I can't help but see that I am rich. The question is am I going to be a fool or am I going to serve God by sharing my blessings with others, trusting Him to care for me? What about you?