

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost; August 21, 2022

Luke 12:13-21

“Be Rich toward God; He’s Been Rich toward You”

Someone from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But Jesus said to him, “Man, who appointed me to be a judge or an arbiter over you?”

Then he said to them, “Watch out and be on your guard against all greed, because a man’s life is not measured by how many possessions he has.”

He told them a parable: “The land of certain rich man produced very well. He was thinking to himself, ‘What will I do, because I do not have anywhere to store my crops?’ He said, ‘This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and goods. And I will tell my soul, “Soul, you have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy. Eat, drink, and be merry.”’

“But God said to him, ‘You fool, this night your soul will be demanded from you. Now who will get what you have prepared?’

“That is how it will be for anyone who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

The brothers have a problem. They have received an inheritance, but they cannot agree on how to divide it. That is a problem. But Jesus sees a bigger problem lurking for these brothers, one more urgent than how to split an inheritance. He sees greed in their hearts. It’s this bigger, more dangerous problem of greed that Jesus addresses when he says, **“Watch out and be on your guard against all greed, because a man’s life is not measured by how many possessions he has.”** Jesus tells the truth: the value of a person’s life is not determined by what he owns.

But there is a big lie that says just the opposite. The biggest lie in the world says that the value of your life is determined by what you own. The more you have, the better your life. The more you can get, the better your life will be. We are surrounded by this big lie every day of our lives. Every day we hear the lie that if we just get one more thing, if we just upgrade one dusty tarnished thing for a clean shiny thing, our lives will be more valuable. The big lie is all around us, on billboards, television screens, and internet advertisements: get more stuff, and your life will be better.

I brought some examples of the big lie with me today, some ads that I printed off. All of these ads are for different stuff, but they all say the same thing: get this stuff, and your life will be better. Here’s an ad for Axe Body Spray. The gentleman on the beach is spraying Axe on himself. Behind him is a mob of women in bikinis running up to him. Just buy our glorified deodorant, and life will be better. The women will come running. I’ve used Axe body spray. It doesn’t work. Trust me. Here’s an ad for real estate in Tennessee. The tagline says, “Imagine it’s the best day of your life. Now stop imagining.” Just buy a home on this golf course on Rocky Top, and your life will be better. Here’s one for gym equipment. It says, “Make life worthwhile.” Apparently, all it takes is a gym bag to make life worthwhile. Sometimes you don’t need to look farther than the logo. Here’s one we’ve all seen: Miller High Life. The name says it all, doesn’t it? Miller will elevate your life, take you to a higher place. I have some limited experience consuming this

particular product, and I can tell you for a fact that one place it will not take your life is high. Finally, a blast from the past: "They'll know you've arrived when drive up in an Edsel." The Edsel part might be comical, but aren't car companies still trying to make us think that the way to impress people and prove your life is valuable is to drive a valuable car?

Please understand that this is not an effort to condemn advertising or capitalism. And it's not to condemn Christians who want nice things or have fancy stuff. If God has blessed you with the means to enjoy the finer things, consider yourself blessed and enjoy it. No need to feel guilty about having a big house or a luxury car. If you make your living selling or advertising, your vocation is God-pleasing. The point is that when greed enters our desires and our work, we go wrong and head down a spiritually destructive path. Jesus says the value of our lives does not hinge on what we have. Every day we hear a big lie that tells us the exact opposite.

And the big lie doesn't just come from things around us. This is why it would be silly to attack commercialism and capitalism. Mostly this lie comes from inside us. It comes out of our own hearts. All we have to do is look at someone who has more, someone who has better, and we start to think, "If I had more stuff, if I had better stuff, my life would be better. My life would be more valuable." The big lie comes from inside our own minds and hearts, too. No one has to be taught greed and materialism. It's our natural sinful attitude.

So Jesus reminds us of the truth: your worth does not depend on what's in your driveway, your bank account, or your safe deposit box.

And to drive his point home, Jesus tells the story of a man who bought into the big lie. He wanted more and more, bigger and bigger and bigger. And he got it. When he got his more and more, bigger and bigger, he felt secure. But he wasn't. In a heartbeat, his life was over, and all the wealth his greedy heart had stacked away did him no good at all.

This is the big problem with the big lie. There is no security in stuff. You can stack it high, store it up, and stash it away, but it goes no farther than the end of life. It has been said bluntly: "You can't take it with you." It has been said cutely: "I've never seen a luggage rack on a hearse." It has been said poetically by King Solomon, inspired by the Holy Spirit: "Meaningless! Meaningless! A chasing after the wind!" The stuff we accumulate does not determine the value of our life, because it cannot go beyond life's end. It offers no lasting security, no lasting value.

Speaking of commercials, I remember one televised by an investment company a few years back. In this commercial people walked around with numbers tucked under their arms or floating over their heads. Some of the numbers were bigger, like \$1.2 million. Some were smaller, like \$450,000. But the point was: everyone has a number, and in order to be secure for retirement you need to hit that number. Then you can rest easy in your golden years. That's probably true enough for having financial security in retirement.

But the real question is: what about eternal security? What about being secure not for twenty years or fifty years? What about being secure forever? This is where no amount of money and no amount of stuff

can make you secure. This is what the true value of a life hangs on – not on what you have to make you secure now, but what you have to make you secure forever.

Only God offers eternal security, and he offers it one place and one place only: his Son, Jesus Christ. God makes you this promise: your life is valuable. It is precious, not because of the stuff you have, but because you are his creation. You are his creation ruined by sin, but also saved by his Son. He promises you that you have real security, eternal security, not because you stack up so much stuff or hit some number, but because he washed you clean and made his child in the waters of baptism. Your life is valuable and it is secure forever because God has saved you in his Son and brought to you faith in him.

As far as everything else in life goes, God may give you a little or he may give you a lot. But whatever amount he gives you, you have no need to be greedy for more. You may be able to lay up a little or a lot for your golden years, but you are secure either way. You are secure in the promises of God for all eternity.

It is a load off to know that our lives are valuable because God has redeemed them with the blood of his Son. It is a relief to know that we are eternally secure in the promise of heaven. What a relief to be able to go through life without having to worry about more and more, bigger and bigger! What a blessing to be able to say, “I will try for more, but if I don’t get it, that’s okay, because my life finds its value in Christ. I will not listen to the big lie. I know God’s truth. I will save responsibly, but if I never feel totally financially secure, I don’t have to lose sleep. I’m safe in Jesus forever.”

What richness God has given us in his Son! What wealth in the forgiveness of sins and the promise of heaven! God has given your life its true richness and wealth. So now, let’s be rich toward him. The foolish man in Jesus’ parable stored away more and more and more and kept all his wealth for himself because he did not trust in God; his wealth was his only source of security. This is the natural thing for those who have no security beyond this life. It is only natural for them to be selfish and keep everything they can for themselves, because there is nothing else to rely on, nowhere else to lay their hopes. But for us who hold the real and lasting security of God’s promise, it is natural to be generous with the blessings God has given us. He has been rich toward us; let’s be rich toward him. Let’s use the lives that he has given value to glorify him. Let’s use the wealth that he has blessed us with in his service, because we are secure in his promises.

Once you have found your worth in the work of Christ and closed your ears to the big lie, you are willing to do with a little less if it means helping those God has put around you. You are willing to do with a little less if it means supporting the work of his missionaries. Once you have found lasting wealth and security in his promise of eternal life, you are willing to lay up less for yourself, and give more generously to others.

Be rich toward God, for he has been rich toward you. It’s the natural thing to do, once the wealth of Christ crushes that big lie and the greed that comes with it. It’s the right thing to do for those who rest secure in the true and lasting promises of heaven. Amen.