

**THE RADICAL RABBI:
“A RADICAL TRUST”
(Luke 12:13-34)
7.3.22**

Description: *Jesus warns about the dangers of greed and wealth, and encourages instead the priority of the eternal values of God’s kingdom.*

INTRODUCTION

Jesus continues to teach the crowds surrounding him and his disciples. Initially, the subject had been hypocrisy. But now Jesus moves away from that topic and on to another one — greed. While being an extremely relevant topic, it also was a very touchy one — both then and now. For so many people, literally living from one scrap of food to the next, the idea of having any kind of abundance was nothing more than a cruel, teasing fantasy. Life was extremely hard — always, period, end of story. But Jesus was about to share the idea of a radical kind of abundance, available to every single one of them. But to take advantage of this kind of abundance required a radical kind of trust that many — again, both then and now — had never considered before.

Jesus had shared some of these same words at the beginning of his ministry in the Sermon on the Mount (recorded in Matthew). But because of the radical value — and need — of these words, Jesus would certainly be more than happy to bring them to their ears and hearts again. So as he begins sharing them with us, let’s come together **to share a time of prayer.**

TEXT

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions” — Luke 12:13-15.

At this time, it was not unusual for a rabbi to be asked to mitigate a legal dispute. But as always, Jesus immediately sees what is behind this dispute — hearts of greed (the “you” in the text is plural). So it is actually the hearts of those involved that are the larger issue that Jesus addresses in this moment. For Christ, the heart issue was always the more important one because the heart, the spiritual center of the involved individuals, was the filter through which the legal dispute was viewed. That’s also why he literally puts up a “Danger” sign to declare a warning against, as he puts it, “all kinds of greed.” He desperately desires his followers to be aware of the quicksand-like risks that can accompany “an abundance of riches.”

So, as he often did to make his point, Jesus told that massive crowd still gathered around him a parable: *“The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain’” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:16-18.*

This parable is constructed in an interesting way because the wrong-heartedness of the individual at the center of the story is not immediately evident. It begins with a farmer who is apparently quite good at what he does — so much so that, as a result of the ground, the right amount of sun, warmth, wind, rain, and his own skills as a farmer, he has been rewarded for all his efforts with a bumper crop.

But there’s a problem — a nice problem but a problem nonetheless: He has more crop than he has storage facilities. So what to do? The answer, at least for him, is an obviously easy one: Tear down the barns you got and build bigger and better, and then you’ll have more than enough room for all your abundance. So far, so good. But what shows up next is a bigger problem: Not his idea, but his attitude.

“And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry!’” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:19.

His attitude is one of pride in his accomplishments that have, in his mind, set him up well for a good many years, leading him to the conclusion that he can take life easy now; he can eat, drink and be merry. In other words, he can enjoy life now; he’s earned it. But it’s all about him: Look what I’ve done, look at what I’ve accomplished. So therefore, look at what I’ve earned: years of taking it easy, enjoying good food and good drink. After all, I deserve it — don’t I?

You’ll notice what is grievously missing from these assessments of his life: In a word, God! Only the One who provided the ability of the seeds to do anything besides just lie in the ground (we have rocks for that). Only the One who provided the fertility of the ground, the great climate — just the right amount of sun, warmth, rain to bring moisture to the soil, and wind to dry it out — and, by the way, only the One who provided the farmer with everything he would need to be able to be a farmer, such as a teacher, likely his father, who could show him everything it would take to be a success, then a good mind to retain and understand how to apply all those lessons, the necessary skills given to him from birth to be able to be a farmer, a strong, healthy body to do everything needed to prepare the soil, and then to plant the seed, and then to know how to utilize animals to work the soil, and then the skills necessary to harvest this amazing crop he is celebrating. Not one bit of that did he get from the local hardware store; not one of those was found in an app someplace, nor did he run on over to the local automat and order those skills and abilities on the spot. Everything he was, every ability he had to think, to work, to accomplish — all of that was the blessing and plan and power of God. Also always, period, end of story! But there was no acknowledgement of God’s place in this narrative. This was his story, his legacy — not God’s. For all the things this guy did right, it didn’t matter, because he did his life part dead wrong! And none other than God himself would be there to tell him.

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:20.

The Greek makes God’s response to this guy’s attitude even more stunning. He literally said to him, “You mindless, stupid, ignorant, egotistical, unbelieving fool!” Wow! And then he pronounces sentence for such a frivolous attitude: “Tonight your soul — the real, eternal you — shall be demanded of you — by me! Then what shall become of your possessions and all the elaborate preparations you’ve made to celebrate — you?”

Then Jesus ended his story: ***“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:21.***

In other words, anybody who lives their life this way — busy accumulating and amassing the “things” of this world, that focus on this life, with no regard for accumulating the treasures of heaven, of living his life and overseeing his earthly assets according to God and his priorities, will hear the same declaration from God for real as this guy heard in Christ’s story: “You fool!” Not exactly ***“Well done, good and faithful servant!”*** — ***Jesus Christ, Matthew 25:21a.*** More like, “Only a fool sees this life as the only life that matters.”

Then there is a pause in the narrative, almost like Jesus is letting his parable and its final line sink into the hearts and minds of all those hearing it. And then he continues, painting a very vivid portrait of what this parable actually looks like in the world. And you can almost see him staring intently at his disciples as he resumes this incredibly important and radical teaching moment: ***Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore 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” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:22-23.***

When Jesus is saying, “Do not worry,” he is literally saying, “Give it no thought” — which is a profound response to issues of having food to eat or clothes to wear at a time and place where so many people were

struggling to simply get from one meal to the next, and where they wore their clothes almost to the point of their falling off their bodies. But Jesus sees the destructive power of worry and anxiety. The Greek word for “anxious” means “to be torn apart.” Anybody who has let stress and worry dominate their lives can testify to the negative power of being anxious, where life seems to be “coming apart at the seams.” But then Jesus tests his listeners with his response to those common needs: “Guys, life is so much more, it is exceedingly greater, exceedingly more excellent, than simply confining your thoughts to issues of food. And your bodies are meant to be seen as so much more than simply as something to be clothed.”

Christ then asks them to focus their attention on some common, everyday pictures: First, ***“Consider the ravens: 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!”*** — ***Jesus Christ, Luke 12:24.***

Both of the things that the man in Christ’s parable were worried about needing more of — storerooms or barns — the ravens do not possess. Yet they are fed. Now the fact that Jesus focused on ravens would have been particularly resonant to a Jewish audience. According to both Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, ravens were among the birds declared “not clean” by God; in other words, they were not even considered appropriate food for the Israelites. Yet they are considered important enough to God that he feeds them — everyday, without fail. And then Jesus asks the penetrating, thought-provoking question: If God does this for ravens, if he cares so much for ravens that he ensures they are fed, would he not so much more do that for each and every one of you that are gathered around me at this moment? Aren’t you all literally more excellent, of more value, than they?

Next, ***“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?”*** — ***Jesus Christ, Luke 12:25-26.***

This was very much a “God moment,” in the sense that God is the one who is the master of our time — we’re just going along for the ride. In a sense, this was Jesus reminding his audience of the infinitely vast difference between God and them. For all those who feel that they are in control of everything, even time, this was a throwback to the reality that David wrote about: ***[A]ll the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be*** — ***David, Psalm 139:16.*** God is completely sovereign, and rules over our length of days — with absolutely no input or impact from us — making us mindful of what James wrote in his letter: ***Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*** — ***James 4:14.*** So much for thinking any of us are in control — of anything! But it is also a reminder that, if God can be the master of something as unchangeable as time, can’t he also be the master of all our needs?

And finally, ***“Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you — you of little faith!”*** — ***Jesus Christ, Luke 12:27-28.***

The awesome beauty and majestic splendor of King Solomon drew attention from near and far in his world, yet it was a faint copy at best of the unequalled beauty with which God had endowed his creation. Jesus pointed all those listening to the wild flowers which anybody would have noticed in great supply in the surrounding fields. But while they likely never grabbed even the slightest attention from most people, for Jesus they were Exhibit A on how much care and concern God had put into his nature. Christ’s conclusion? If God would do all that for something so “here today and gone tomorrow,” how much more would he not care for something so much more valuable — like the audience listening to him at that moment?

And then Jesus returns to the first issue — food — and he does it with a far more personal picture of God — not just as a sovereign ruler but as our Father: ***And do not set your heart on 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. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:29-31.

Jesus is telling his audience, “Don’t be anxious; don’t let your mind fluctuate, rising up only to fall down from one thing to the next.” The idea of having, in the Greek, “a doubtful mind” literally means “to be held in suspense.” It is the picture of a sailing ship being tossed from one wave to another in a storm-tossed ocean. In fact, our modern English word “worry” comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word that means “to strangle.” Christ is saying, “The people, the nations of this world, heathen nations, godless nations, do that. They are the people David wrote about:

[I]n vain they rush about, heaping up wealth without knowing whose it will finally be — David, Psalm 39:6b. They strangle themselves in worry about every last thing. Don’t be like them. Why? Because if you know the Father, then you know that he knows everything you need; in fact, ***‘your Father knows what you need before you ask him’ — Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:8b.*** The pagans run after these things because they do not know the One who would gladly provide their needs as well.”

But what’s more important, what should have more priority, than any of these earthly things? Rather than focusing on any of them, instead be seeking the Father’s kingdom. The idea in the Greek is to be desiring the Father’s kingdom, making it a requirement for your life ahead of all other things, all other pursuits. And Jesus promises: If your priority is my Father’s kingdom, which is your most important need of all, then all these secondary, less important needs will be filled as well — in fact, filled more completely than you ever would have thought possible.

And then Jesus closes this lesson with these amazing words: ***Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:32-34.***

First is a command — do not be afraid. The greatest reason to say that is because, in the presence of your Father, there is absolutely nothing to be afraid of. If God your Father is the provider of your needs, what do you have to be afraid of? And even more than that: It is your Father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom your hearts should be seeking. It pleases him no end when his followers, his believers, his kids, seek him. Because he knows them and they know him, it is a joy to him to present them his kingdom.

And then, when Christ uses the reference “little flock,” he is referring to those in the crowd that day who actually were believers — some of his disciples surely, but also some in the crowd. But that is key to understanding the incredibly important phrase that comes out toward the end of the final part of this monologue: “your Father.” All of this is based on relationship — the promises of providing, the promises of the kingdom. In other words, the greatest thing we can ever seek is the kingdom of God. And the greatest joy we can ever experience is living our lives from that foundation.

Which leads to the ending: If all of these things are true, then there should be no fear in selling your possessions and giving to the poor. Again, Somebody so far beyond these momentary, temporary possessions is caring for you, loving you, knowing your needs way before you do. In the meantime, your possessions and other assets are opportunities to become tools for ministry for a kingdom that will never fade or pass away. Jesus is talking eternal values, which should underscore the lives and lifestyles of every believer. There is not one single possession that will last into eternity. Why should we treat them and hold them like they will?

APPLICATION

Jesus does a masterful job — naturally — of creating pictures of God’s care by directing us to images to which we can all relate — feeding the birds, and watching wild flowers grow. In all those instances, he

points out, God provides. Now if he can do that for parts of his creation of which the rest of us usually pay no mind, how can we not think that his wondrously caring heart and hands are not fully committed to caring for his children as well? How can we let ourselves get so stressed out over the things our Savior is saying his Father is already completely aware of? Actually, there could be a few contributing factors to that outcome:

- 1) First of all, this is at its most basic an issue of trust. Do we really believe that God will completely without fail meet all our needs? Do we believe that everything that Christ said, everything the Bible teaches, is actually true, and can be completely counted on? We live in a culture so overwhelmingly swayed by our senses — our God-created human abilities to take in the world around us. We work our jobs, balance our bank accounts, notice our cars beginning to fail, see food shelves holding less, see money stretching less — and we begin to stress about it. And all the while, there is God, loving his kids, ready to provide their needs. Do we believe he will do what he says he will do?
- 2) Second, this is an issue of definition — meaning that God said he would supply all our needs. He never said anything about our desires, our dreams, our want-to-haves; he only mentioned supplying our needs. Are we willing to let him define what our needs are? Nobody knows us better than him. Are we therefore willing to let him be the final authority on bringing supply to our lives — based on our needs as he defines them?
- 3) Third, this is an issue of heaven — as in not thinking about it. We spend so much time and effort in the affairs of this world — including things like being focused on providing for our families, choosing and building a fine career, building up our savings and investments and, especially in the summer months, planning out our vacation opportunities — so much so that we completely neglect any kind of active thinking about heaven. We need to make a choice: Which life should we be making plans for — the life we have here, or the life we have to look forward to in heaven? As Christians, that is certainly our final destination. But so much more than that, heaven is also our present-tense home; the apostle Paul said so: ***[O]ur citizenship is in heaven — Paul, Philippians 3:20a.*** Did you hear that? Not “our citizenship will be in heaven” like at some future point but now, right now, “our citizenship is in heaven. Realizing the reality of heaven, and living that reality, would make trusting God so much clearer to us, and therefore so much easier, for we are going to be physically living in His presence. Wow! That’s why Paul, in writing his first letter to his protégé Timothy, said this: ***Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life — Paul, I Timothy 6:17-19.***

Folks, not only is the best yet to come, not only is the best guaranteed to come, but it is an eternal best to come. Nothing in this world will ever beat that. Do we believe that?

CONCLUSION

And then, as we close, one final point, but one of the grandest points ever to be made. Notice again to one thing in particular that Jesus said: ***“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” — Jesus Christ, Luke 12:32.*** Did you catch those wonderful words? Your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. And therein lies one of the most wonderful keys for a reason to trust in God’s providential care. It pleases him to provide for us — to such an extent that he gives us his kingdom. Amazing!

A lot of the pictures of God, particularly from the world, is that of a judge who is just sitting back waiting for an opportunity to spring punishment on us, like he derives some sort of perverted pleasure from making us squirm. The Bible simply responds: “No way! Or that God is some frustrated judge who

wants to give us what we deserve but got outsmarted by some slick, clever attorney. That's nowhere near the God of the Scriptures.

Instead what the Scriptures tell us is that we are the kids of a Father who not only loves us, but has chosen to enjoy doing things for us. And it pleases him to do things for us. According to the psalmist, God's "starting point" is his reveling in all those who have become his: *[T]he Lord takes delight in his people* — *Psalm 149:4a*. And he also rejoices in those who surrender to him; as the prophet Micah made note of: *Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy* — *Micah 7:18*.

And then we get a picture of the joy with which God responds to us as his kids: *"The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing"* — *Zephaniah 3:17*. Can you imagine what the singing of God sounds like? There's a concert I'd love to hear!

And there's more: There is even a picture from Christ's own teachings about him serving us — in heaven: *"It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them"* — *Jesus Christ, Luke 12:37*. Can you imagine Jesus being so pleased with our service to him, and so in love with us, that he himself serves us? How can that even be — but the Bible says it is!

And then, at the very end of time, we have this to look forward to: *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children"* — *Revelation 21:3-7*. What an amazing place God is preparing with his Son for all those who love him, for all those he loves!

We are blessed with the opportunity to be the kids of an amazing King of kings and Lord of lords — who loves us beyond imagination, beyond any of our poor words to fully explain it, beyond any ability of our minds to even grasp the tiniest bit of it. And yet it is true: God loves us. But what about you? Do you love God? Do you know him? Has your life been surrendered to him? He has so much available with which to bless you. But first comes your heart. Who owns that? It is the answer to that question that determines everything else about the life that is available for us to know — every moment of every day. Let's pray!