

The Parables of Jesus

- The Rich Man Foolishly Building

Bigger Barns - Luke 12:16-21

This parable is found in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus and His disciples were in the regions of Galilee. Jesus was in full "teaching mode." Along with His disciples, Luke tells us that there was a multitude of people that had gathered around Jesus. So much so, that as they were pressing in to hear Him,

they began to push others down to get nearer to Him. Luke 12:1 tells us, *"...an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another."*

This was at the high point of Jesus' popularity. Everyone had heard of Him and wanted to get a glimpse of the man who could possibly be their Messiah. It was during this setting that Jesus gave what I refer to as, the parable of the "Rich Man Foolishly Building Bigger Barns." Actually, there were three other parables that Jesus gave in this same teaching setting. To truly get a fuller understanding of this parable and the three other parables, we must first place them within the context in which they given.

The latter part of Luke 12:1 lets us know the primary purpose or topic was to be in this time of teaching by Jesus. It states, *"He began to say unto his disciples first of all, **Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.**"* Therefore, what was to follow would be a lesson concerning what every believer and follower of Jesus needs to be aware of **not** becoming like, as well as what the proper attitude of heart should be for the true disciple of Jesus.

We know that the term "leaven" is always used in the scriptures revealing some kind of sin or characteristic that is contrary to and opposite of God's character and precepts. Here, Jesus makes it very clear that the Pharisees were leading a life of "hypocrisy." The word "hypocrisy" comes from the Greek word "*hypokrisis*," which means to pretend, to act as an actor on stage; pretending to be someone you are not. The obvious implication Jesus was very blunt is telling us was that the Pharisees were hypocrites. They were acting a part but were not really the people they were acting to be. They were pretenders.

In Luke 12:2, Jesus makes the statement that, *"For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known."* Jesus is plainly stating and telling, not just the religious leaders, but everyone, that the truth will soon be revealed for all to see concerning what is truly within a person's heart. The "hidden" intents of the heart that people think would never be known to others would indeed be made known and come to light. This included the hypocrisy and false, pious, religious fronts put forth by the religious leaders. This is also true concerning any of those who call themselves a "disciple" of Jesus but deep within they are not – ref. Judas.

Jesus continues in Luke 12:2-12 - *"And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? 7 But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows. Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven. And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say."*

In this time of teaching, Jesus was telling them not just to beware of the Pharisees themselves, but to also beware of the incorrect attitude of heart that they portrayed - saying one thing and doing another along with their self-righteousness. He was teaching them that what was important was not all of the outward appearances that would make it seem as if someone was righteous but it was what is found within the heart of the individual - the attitude of their heart - that was truly important.

He would also be beginning to "draw the line" concerning those that were following Him, including the disciples. Jesus said quite clearly that it was time for them to make some firm decisions concerning their belief in who He was and with whose power and authority He came in.

Jesus expressed what would be the possible consequences to anyone who would make that decision to choose to fully believe, follow and live by His ways and teaching. Some of those consequences would include not being accepted by the hypocritical leadership of that time. This would lead to them experiencing harsh persecution and suffering because of their belief in Him. However, He also comforted His followers by telling them that if they did choose to follow Him that they need not to be afraid or fearful, for their Heavenly Father would watch over them.

It was within this setting that a man cried out and asked Jesus to *"...speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me."* (Luke 12:13)

This man had just listened to Jesus explain what the correct attitude of heart should be concerning anyone who chooses to follow Him. Jesus just finished saying to the multitude that each one of them is so very valuable to their Heavenly Father and that He would care for them. Obviously, this man was not "getting it." For this man, it was all about using Jesus for the wrong purposes and the wrong motives. The man's trust and hope was in his inheritance, not in his God.

Jesus answered the man, *"Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* - Luke 12:14, 15. Jesus was making it clear that this man did not have the correct attitude of heart. He was missing the point of Jesus' words. He just completed a teaching concerning the hypocritical attitude of the Pharisees and to beware of that "leaven" and that sinful attitude of heart of self-righteousness and all that it entails which included greed and covetousness.

This man was seeing Jesus as a "religious leader" and therefore asking Him to arbitrate between him and his brother. This would be the roll that the Pharisees would usually take. However, in "providing" this service, they would charge a very high fee which they would keep for themselves. Usually their fee would be for a percentage of whatever the inheritance was. Obviously, it pointed to their greediness. The man was looking at Jesus as nothing more than one of these "religious leaders. Jesus made it very clear that He was not.

It would seem as if this man's outburst could have taken Jesus "off-track" from His teaching concerning to "beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees." After all, the inference was that Jesus was nothing more than another religious leader. Even though it may have seemed like it would have sidetracked Jesus the truth was that Jesus used it to bring forth a parable to keep everyone "on-track" concerning His topic to beware of the "leaven of the Pharisees" and their pretentious, greedy and covetous character and lifestyle.

Jesus goes on to express that this life is not about the abundance of wealth and physical things that we can gain and possess. To illuminate this teaching and concept in a greater way, He uses the parable of the "Rich Man Foolishly Building Bigger Barns."

The Parable of the "Rich Man Foolishly Building Bigger Barns" - Luke 12:16-21 - *"The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

Let's first review the "characters" in this parable

- The "rich man" - This man was very successful and he was very rich. His land was very prosperous in the crops it yielded. He seemed to do the wise thing in building bigger barns to store his fruits and goods. In the eyes and minds of Jesus' listeners, this man would be considered someone of great stature. He would be someone to be admired and even one that they may be "covetous" or "envious" of.

We must also remember the thinking and mindset that was prevalent at that time and to some extent is true even today. The Jewish thinking was that if a person was successful and prosperous it meant that their relationship with God was right so God would be blessing them. This isn't totally incorrect. However, the problem was that they also thought that if a person was not wealthy and prospering it meant that they were cursed by God and most likely were "in sin" and God was punishing them. This created a "class" system having an elitist mentality and a discriminatory way of looking at the poor.

- The other "character" in this parable is God who obviously, is God

So what was Jesus teaching in this parable? The first thing we see is that the man was all about himself for we hear him say, "... **my barns...my fruits...my goods... my soul...**" He thought it was all about him and that everything he had was **his**. The attitude of his heart was one which was not directed towards God. He did not acknowledge in the least way that it was God who caused the crops to grow or made the land plenteous. He did not even acknowledge God as the giver of his own life for he spoke to **his** soul and said "...**my soul...**"

He was under the misconception that his soul was in his hands. According to him, he was going to live a long, long life. He thought that he had amassed everything he would ever need. It was all about what he had and what he thought was **his** possessions - including his own soul. Unfortunately, he was incorrect about everything. The attitude of this man's heart was that of greed and covetousness.

As Jesus continues with the parable He tells us that God came that same night and *"required of him his soul."* What many people would have thought and called a man like this as being wise and prosperous, God called a "fool." The reason this man was a "fool" was not because he was rich. It was not because he built barns to store **his** goods. It was because his motives and attitude of heart were totally incorrect. The term "fool" used within the Jewish scriptures always refers to a person who is rebellious and stiff-necked towards God.

God then goes on to ask the man, *"... then whose shall those things be?"* This is a very real and telling question. It goes to the very core of what Jesus was teaching concerning what to beware of and what the attitude of heart should be for a disciple of His.

All these "things" and "possessions" will not belong to God, because the man never surrendered those things to God. God is not in the business of receiving anything that is offered to Him unless it comes from an individual who has the correct attitude of heart towards Him. They will not belong to the rich fool

because he can't take it with him. The answer is that it will be wasted and decay because it will stay and rot along with the barns that the man had built. We hear nothing of family or children. Obviously, this man was all alone and all about himself and his things. These "fruits" of the man's labors, unfortunately, will not be used for or by anyone for anything.

Jesus then proceeds to give us the "moral" of the parable. Luke 12:21 - "*So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*" The problem was this man's heart. His priorities were in the incorrect order. We must always place the things of God first. God must be the priority of our heart. Ultimately, we see that this man was not very "rich" after all.

Jesus was teaching that the characteristics of greed and covetousness reveal a corrupt heart. This spoke directly to the man who asked Jesus to rule in the inheritance battle between him and his brother. Jesus was telling this man that fighting and battling over an inheritance and anything received from that battle would ultimately amount to nothing in the spiritual scope of things concerning a right relationship with God. This was also speaking to the religious leaders concerning their own greed and covetousness and placing wealth and material things above the things of God. Material things and wealth **were not** barometers of a right relationship with God.

Jesus then seems to speak directly to His disciples. (Luke 12:22-34) We are not sure if the multitudes were still surrounding Him and listening to Him or not. If they were all still there, then most likely the man who asked Jesus to mediate on behalf of getting his inheritance would be hearing what Jesus was about to teach, as well.

Jesus turns and speaks to His disciples. He tells them directly what the correct attitude of heart should be for those that choose to follow after Him towards the "things of this world." He wanted to make sure that they, as His disciples, did not miss this principle for it is vital to the true child of God and a true disciple of Jesus. This was **His** attitude of heart towards His Father and therefore, it must be theirs.

At the conclusion of the parable He tells them that the man in the parable had an incorrect attitude of heart and therefore was "*not rich toward God.*" He goes on to explain in Luke 12:22-34, what it means to be one whose attitude of heart is correct and therefore would be considered, "rich toward God."

"... Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." - Luke 12:22-34 (KJV)

So what was Jesus teaching His disciples through this parable in the context of this setting that began with His warning to beware of the "leaven of the Pharisees" back in Luke 12:1? The parable of the rich man and his barn pointed to a person whose heart was covetous. Jesus was expressing that the "leaven" and hypocrisy of the Pharisees had to do with their incorrect attitude of heart towards God and His people.

Jesus was stating that the Pharisees in general, became greedy, covetous hypocrites because of the position and places of authority that they were given and held. The Pharisees were a sect of Judaism who originally came to being only about 150-200 years prior to Jesus' time. (The time of the Maccabees) The term "Pharisee" comes from the root Hebrew word "*parash*" which literally means, "separated, set apart and distinct from others." They originally, were devout Jewish men whose purpose was to return to the pure and true form of Judaism. They were originally looking forward to and yearned for the coming of Messiah.

However, over the years as the following generations of Pharisees came to be (during Jesus' time) they became corrupt, legalistic, hypocritical to their faith and ultimately became blind to the Messiah they were originally yearning for. As religious leaders and representatives of Yahweh, they were to be servants and ministers of the Lord to the people. In this, they were failing miserably. That is why Jesus was so harsh with them. They were literally, pretenders of the faith. They were using their faith for their own purposes.

Unfortunately, they abused and misused their God given position for their own greedy, self-centered and self-righteous ways. Jesus speaks at length concerning the Pharisees' greed and hypocrisy as we read in Matthew 23. Matthew 23:14 tells us, "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.*"

For us as believers today, we would do well, personally, to heed the lesson of this and the other parables to follow concerning to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." Our leaders also need to reflect and take a deep look, inwardly, and see if there is a need to free themselves and repent from hypocritical methods that are riddled with greed and covetousness. It should never be about "building bigger barns" a.k.a. – churches and ministries that are only for the purpose of building up someone's reputation, ego, ministry or "legacy." It must always be first of all, and primarily, for the purpose of being privileged to be used by God to bring forth the building of His Kingdom and His Kingdom only. Ultimately, it must be all about God and nothing of self. As John the Baptist said, "*I must decrease and He must increase.*" (John 3:30)