

The Foolish Rich Man / The Foolish Rich Church)

Luke 12:15-21,31,34 / Revelation 3:15-20

Key Themes: Pride, Self-Dependence

[Core Gospel Concepts: Sin, Repentance, Intimacy with the Father]

THE STORY:

One day Jesus was teaching crowds of people, and someone said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But Jesus said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Then he told them a parable, saying,

“The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 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 all my grain and my goods. And then I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

“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?’ This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God . . . Instead, you should first seek God’s kingdom, and these other things will be given to you as well . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Optional Memory Verse: Revelation 3:20 - *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”*

Introduction Question (discuss with a neighbor)

What are some of the gifts God has given you? (things, abilities, relationships, opportunities, etc.)

Teacher’s Transition Statement

Today’s story centers around Jesus’ parable of the rich fool. After learning this story we will also compare it to one congregation in the early church and see what we can learn.

Learn Story Together (Listening Task)

- As you’re committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - Why did Jesus tell this parable? What had someone said to him?
 - What did the rich man do as his business got bigger?

Basic Outline of Discussion (to help facilitator lead without reading everything):

- **Reason for the Parable:** Why Jesus told it?
- **Rich Man:**
 - Riches, response, real goal, result?
- **Rich Church / City:**
 - Riches, response, real goal, result?

- **Real Problem:** What we really need to understand about ourselves?
- **Real Solution:** What Jesus offers for us to buy?
- **Application:** What needs to change in my life after studying this story - after learning how our riches, blessings, or advantages can hurt our relationship with God? What actions, attitudes, or beliefs? How can we love others better?
- **Sharing:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (with some possible responses):

- **What prompted Jesus to tell this parable? How do you think the man who asked for Jesus' help with the inheritance was feeling? What did Jesus think was wrong with his request? What warning did he give?**
 - *take care, guard against life being about accumulating possessions*
 - *gave him example who HAD all those things the man wanted from his brother - and how bad it turned out.*
- **What were the RICHES of the man in Jesus' parable? How was he blessed?**
 - *Grain, storage, money, organized, financially secure future, reputation*
- **What was his RESPONSE to these riches? How did it affect his attitude? What did this show about what was most important to him? Who was he depending on?**
 - *proud, self-dependent, greedy, hoarding for himself, selfish, apathetic*
- **What was the REAL GOAL underlying that response?**
 - *himself, not others or God*
- **What was the RESULT, the actual fruit in his life of the attitude he had about his blessing?**
 - *death - physically and spiritually, a wasted life*

Note: The rich man in this parable is similar to both the city and the church in Laodicea.

Rich City (Note to teacher: just summarize this information for the group. Note that it does not come from Scripture but from a Bible dictionary.)

Many years later, after Jesus had gone up to heaven, God spoke to the church in Laodicea, as recorded in the book of Revelation. According to other historical documents, Laodicea was a city in the Roman province of Asia that started a few hundred years before Christ was born. By the time of the early church, it had become a wealthy center for business. It was in an area that was famous for producing beautiful, black wool and for having very good doctors who made special medicines.

But the city did have one obvious problem. They had no good water supply nearby. Therefore, they had to pipe water to their city from springs far away, so by the time the water arrived in Laodicea it was lukewarm and very hard to drink. This was different from its neighboring towns, one of which had hot water with healing powers, another of which had cold refreshing water.

But despite its poor water, the people of Laodicea thought they needed nothing from anyone else. They were proud of their own ability to take care of themselves. For example, when the city was destroyed by a terrible earthquake in AD 60, the people actually rejected the Romans' offer to help them rebuild. They could do it themselves! They thought they were rich and needed no help! The church at Laodicea had the same attitude. Listen to what God says through the angel to that church in Revelation 3.

Rich Church (Note: read aloud Revelation 3:15-20, repeat once before dialogue)

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

*You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." **But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.***

- **For the people of the city and church of Laodicea, what were their riches, their gifts, their advantages?**
 - *City: business, farms, money, gold, professional people, black wool, medical skills*
 - *Church: had all the same wealth physically plus felt rich spiritually*
- **For each of them, what was their response to their riches, gifts, advantages? What fruit did it produce in their attitudes?**
 - *proud, self-satisfied, made an idol of wealth, success, felt important and worthy*
- **What was the finally result of these attitudes?**
 - *Their fruit in their lives was bad, tasteless (like the lukewarm water in the city)*
 - *Forgot God as source of all blessing. Credited themselves instead.*
 - *Lukewarm spiritually, spiritual pretenders, deceived themselves.*
 - *Prideful, blind to see their own need, so not praying to God for what they most needed*
- **What true needs in their lives did they fail to see? God told them that they were what? What did they truly need?**
 - *wretched, pitiful, poor*
 - *blind*
 - *naked*
- **Considering the parable of the rich man as well as Jesus' words for the church at Laodicea, what do you think is one of the most foundational sins of people's hearts?**
 - *pride, depending on self, rejecting God*
- **What did he counsel them to "buy" from Him?**
 - *gold - true, refined by fire (remember, Laodicea was famous for its rich business)*
 - *so that would be rich, not wretched, pitiful, and poor*
 - *salve (remember, Laodicea was famous for its doctors and medicines)*
 - *so that they could see, not be blind, but able to truly see the truth about their own sin and need for forgiveness, and about the gift of life that Jesus offers*
 - *white clothes (remember, Laodicea was famous for black wool)*
 - *so that they could cover their nakedness and shame*
- **What was the gold refined by fire that they really needed?**
 - *growing relationship w/Christ – true riches*

- **What was the salve that they needed and Christ offered?**
 - *His Word and Spirit to enable them to see their own sin in light of God's holiness and to see the beauty of the Gospel of salvation that Jesus offers.*
- **What was the white clothes Jesus offered for purchase?**
 - *Jesus shed his blood to cover their sin and shame.*
- **How could they and you buy these important things?**
 - *Hear Him knocking at the door of your heart. Open the door so he can come in and eat with you and you with Him.*
 - *Realize that **He has already purchased all of this** for you.*
- **Jesus says, "So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." Is he mainly speaking to the lost who do not believe in Him? Who is he speaking to?**
 - *He's talking to believers, to the church, to us when we become prideful and self satisfied, unwilling to see our sin and follow Him closely through ongoing repentance and trust in the Gospel.*
- **Why are we so afraid to accept that we are "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked?" How does Jesus treat such people? Does he wait for them to come to Him? What does he really desire from those who realize they are "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked?"**
 - *He does not wait for us to clean ourselves up, to earn our own wealth, to clothe ourselves. He is knocking at the door!*
 - *He wants to help believers become hot for the Gospel, to grow in holiness, to grow in passion for knowing God more fully (to abide with Him, eat with Him be nourished by Him) and for making Him known to others.*
- **Consider again the rich man in Jesus' parable. How should he have thought about and used his blessings?**
 - *He should have recognized that every gift was from God Himself and that only God sustained him day by day. This should have felt him with thankfulness and praise.*
 - *He should have depended on God to know how best to use his blessings for God's kingdom - to love others and show them the beauty of God so that they also could feast with Him.*

General Application Questions:

- **The rich man was rich with good crops and all the possessions he could ever want. Most of us are not that rich money wise, but we all do have some ways in which we are rich. What are some ways that people, particularly believers, are rich?**
 - or think of it another way:
- **What are some ways that we would like to be rich? In other words, of what things or advantages or positions do we sometimes think, "If only I had _____, then my life would be OK!"**
 - **When we think this way how can this hurt our relationship with God? Or with other people?**
- **How should we respond to God's blessings in our lives, to the riches He provides for us?**

Personal Application Questions (choose one or two for small group discussion):

- **What is one particular blessing/possession/advantage** (maybe you have it, maybe you do not) **that you sometimes feel you cannot live without? Something that has become a source of hope to you? How has this damaged your relationship with God? What would it be like for you to repent of this attitude?**
- **In reality, in what way are you lukewarm? Or wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked? When you realize this truth, how can it lead to change in your life?**
- Jesus said, “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” **Are you experiencing God’s discipline in any way? What might God be asking you to repent of? Will you open the door to him and let him in to love you?**