

“Wise Investing”

August 3, 2025

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Luke 12: 13-21

This morning's Scripture lesson begins with someone from the crowd demanding that Jesus tell their brother to divide the family inheritance with them. The problem is nothing new. Families have been disputing over their relatives' furniture, houses, land, savings accounts, even silverware for as long as families have had possessions to pass down. And at least since the time of Moses, religious teachers and respected people in the community have served as judges and arbitrators in these cases. But Jesus refuses to serve as judge. Like Angie said, how could He judge one family member's greed as more righteous than another family member's greed. Greed is greed and it does not come from God.

So instead of submitting to the person's request, Jesus shares a parable. He says, "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool!' Now the first thing I need us to notice is there is no evidence of foul play here. It doesn't say he stole the land or underpaid his hired hands or even failed to leave the required amount of land unharvested so the poor could gather food for themselves. He just had a bumper crop, and it was more than his barns could hold. So, he did what we have all been taught to do – save for the future. In a land that is prone to drought and pestilence, that is not a bad idea. Besides, what is wrong with working hard then using what you have earned to relax, eat, drink and be merry? Some of the salary you pay me goes straight into a retirement fund, for I dream of having enough laid up to spend some of my later years relaxing, eating, drinking and being merry. I will probably be drinking Ensure, but I'll be drinking. So why does God say to him, "You fool!"

Calling someone a "fool" is a loaded word in the Bible because the Bible has extensive wisdom literature which differentiates the wise and the fool. Think of books like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. Now Biblically speaking, a fool is a person who fails to notice how the world works and adapt their behavior accordingly. Fools spit into the wind. Fools saw off the branch they are sitting on. They just don't pay attention to how things work and refuse to listen when others point these things out for them. Fools are often in error but never in doubt. Old Testament wisdom literature also highlights, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" That is Psalm 14:1. Now there were not many full-blown atheists back then who claimed there was not God. But rather folks who believed "There is no God Here." There is no God who is close to see or

cares about my life. So what I do, what I say, what I think, how I behave has nothing to do with God because God doesn't see or care about me anyway.

Now we are getting somewhere. The man was not a fool because he didn't notice how things worked. He not only noticed but did the work. He planted and tended and harvested a bumper crop. He showed great wisdom there. He moved from wise to fool when he proclaimed there is no God here that cares what I do or don't do.

That is the heart of this parable. Do you believe in God enough to let that belief change your behavior. Let me approach it this way. Do you believe in paychecks? If you don't, you stay in bed. If you do, you invest in it. You go to work. Do you believe in retirement? If you don't, you burn life at both ends. Spend it all on a fast car and text while you're driving and you won't need to worry about retirement. But if you believe in retirement, you invest in it. You pay into social security and a pension or a retirement fund. Do you believe in life after death? If no, then build a bigger barn, relax, eat, drink and be merry. If yes, then invest in it. That is what this parable is saying. It is not necessarily about harvest or money or barns or possessions. Those are illustrations of the point to help us get it, but the point is eternal life. If you believe in it, then don't just invest in the things of today like they are the definition of security. Invest in eternal life. Invest in the God who is here. Who is close enough to see and care about your life – about what you think, say, and do. Invest in the God who cares about who you are and what you do and do not do.

Verse 21 invites us to move beyond just earthly possessions and be "rich toward God." What does that look like? What does it look like to be "rich toward God" by investing in eternity? Our fool gives us a hint. When you look closely at the parable, you will see his conversation topic as well as his conversation partners are all him. Starting in verse 17, "And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" One of the reasons he is called a fool is his only source of wisdom is himself. His only conversation partner is himself. Two weeks ago we remembered a man reaching out to Jesus and asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. The answer was the great commandment. Say it with me, "You shall love the Lord your God with all you heart, with all your soul, with all you mind and all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself." Let's start with that for our conversation partner and strategy for investing in eternal life – for being "rich toward God". Flashback with me to our "Walk" campaign with the "Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life". Those practices started out with loving God – worship, prayer and study. Our fool did none of those things. Then we moved to service which is both loving God with your strength and loving your neighbor. Then giving generously of our finances to God and others. The fool

never thought of that. And finally sharing Jesus with others. Again, that is loving both God and neighbor with the same act.

If we truly believe life is eternal, we won't invest all our time and finances in possessions and entertainment that will simply perish. Instead, we will pour our energy and resources into behaviors and actions that will resonate throughout eternity. Augustine commented that the downfall of the rich fool was that "He did not realize that the bellies of the poor were much safer storerooms than his barns."

I really like the Gospel of Luke. Beyond having our favorite version of the Christmas story, it contains so many stories and parables that are not in the other Gospels. Like the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. But Luke can be really challenging to people like me, for Luke doesn't have a single good thing to say about rich folks. Yes, by world standards, this preacher and teacher are deep into the rich category. Here the rich man who is making sound financial decisions is called a fool. In chapter 1, Mary is visited by an angel and agrees to carry Jesus in her womb. She breaks out in song – we call it the magnificat – which proclaims God will bring "down the powerful from their thrones and lift up the lowly; He will fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty." In chapter 6, Jesus is sharing the beatitudes and not only proclaims, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" and "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled", but goes on to say, "Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation" and "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry." In chapter 16 it is the poor beggar Lazarus who is cradled in the bosom of Abraham when he dies while the rich man burns in agony. Chapter 18 has a rich ruler ask Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. After the man affirms he has kept the commandments from his youth, Jesus says, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." After the rich ruler left in despair, Jesus said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." There is no question Jesus and Luke see wealth as a great rival to God. When we have good things in this world, we really want to not only keep them but get more of them. But Jesus reminds us in less than subtle ways that: 1. He is not going to say one person's greed is more justified than others, and 2. It's all just temporary. And if we are wise, we will invest not just in the things of this world, but in eternity. We have shown we believe in paychecks. We have invested heavily in work. Can we show we believe in eternal life, and invest there also?

Mike Van Heyningen