

Are You Prudent or Possessed.

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

¹⁴ Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” ¹⁵ Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

¹⁶ And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

¹⁸ “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. ¹⁹ And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

²⁰ “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?’

²¹ “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

I remember a gentleman who owned this historic house. It must have been over 125 years old with ten foot ceilings, marvelous woodwork and it had this tower off the second story where the original glass was curved to fit into the curve of the turret. I told him how much I admired his house. He smiled and said to me, “We don’t own homes; our homes own us.” I got what he meant. Your name may appear on the deed. But in a sense, homes own us. When the house makes a demand of us—I need a new water heater, I need this room painted, I need a new roof—we have no choice but to pay for it. And when the house is done with you, it does the same thing with the owners after you.

You own a lot of things. These are gifts from God. Even money is a gift from God. God wants you to have them otherwise he would not have given them to you. But there is a danger that these things can take possession of us and if they do, they have grave spiritual consequences. Let’s listen to Jesus and ask ourselves: are we prudent or wise in how we use God’s gifts, or are we possessed by them?

I. Are you prudent or possessed by your possessions?

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus was preaching again to a crowd of thousands! Then someone in the crowd wanted Jesus to help him. His father had died. In those days, the eldest son was entitled to an extra share, so in this family, with two sons, the older son would get two thirds of the inheritance and the younger would get one third. Apparently settling the estate wasn’t going well. The younger brother asked Jesus to intervene.

¹⁴ Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Jesus is obviously upset. Here was Jesus preparing to talk about God and heaven. He was about to open heaven to sinners and tell them how they can have eternal life, and all this man could think about was money. So Jesus changed his sermon to warn about the dangers of greed. ¹⁵ Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

¹⁶ And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ ¹⁸ “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. ¹⁹ And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ ²⁰ “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?’ ²¹ “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

We have to admire this farmer. He earned every penny the honest way, with hard work and skill. He knew how to get the most out of his land. And his hard work paid off. He had a bumper crop that would provide him with an income for years to come. He could actually retire in comfort. He wisely decided to build more barns to hold his crop. What a nice problem, right?

Yet, Jesus called him a fool. Why? It is not wrong to work hard and to enjoy the fruit of your labor, even early retirement. It is not wrong to build more barns to store bumper crops, or to put away a little extra money over the years to retire comfortably. There is nothing wrong with that. In fact, the Bible encourages us to do such things. It calls us to manage our possessions well. This is not a condemnation of hard work or even becoming wealthy. There is nothing wrong with being rich.

Jesus calls him a fool because he was possessed by his possessions. This man’s life consisted only in what he could stuff into barns. In fact, you can infer that he wasn’t happy until he had more stuff than barns to store it. What happens when your measure your life by how many barns you need to store it? He thought he finally made it good, but God lamented that tonight he would die and someone else will enjoy and spend his wealth. It is like this younger brother who asked Jesus to intervene. It never occurred to him that they were arguing over a dead man’s stuff and that one day two other people would argue over his stuff. That is how temporary earthly possessions really are.

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“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?’ No, God didn’t get mad and decided to end his life early. Remember, our days are numbered and his

number was coming up that very night. And this is where he was a fool. He didn't spend his time wisely. The only treasure he stored up was wealth and he couldn't even enjoy that. ²¹ **"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."** He didn't store up a single thing when it came to God.

Are such fools around today? You bet. You will find them so wrapped up in their earthly lives that they don't spend any or little time with God. They measure success on whether they have enough or not, and they are not happy until they get a certain amount. They may be considered prudent or wise in how well they manage their stuff, and they very well are, but in reality it is their possessions that possess them. We lament the materialism of 21st Century America. But greed and materialism was just as big of a problem in Jesus' day as it is today.

Do you see such a fool in the mirror? I do when I look. I see it when my happiness ebbs or flows with how much I have or don't have. I worry even though God tells me not to worry. I get jealous of others. And we justify it in the name of being wise. "But I must think about saving for retirement. I have my own bills to pay. If that means ignoring God or my neighbor, that's life." It may be life on earth, but it is no life before God. Greed never delivers on what it promises. As soon as we have enough, we want more. Greed, like all the other sins, enslave us.

You heard this text before. You know how dangerous it is to be overtaken with greed or materialism. And yet, here we are, finding greed creeping in again. That is why it is good we spend time with Jesus and his Word. That is why we still need church and God's Word more than a day or two a year. Yes, we are reminded of the sin in our lives, but we are also reminded of the forgiveness God gives us. Instead of being possessed by our possessions, let's be possessed by God.

II. Possessed by God.

It is not a either/or thing here. It isn't like all believers must be below the poverty line. Abraham was an exceedingly wealthy man, yet he was a humble child of God and in heaven today. He worked hard to gain his wealth, but worked even harder when it came to God and his Word and his faith. He was a wealthy man by worldly standards and he was a wealthy man by heavenly standards.

This heavenly wealth isn't something we produce. It isn't something that we tuck away bit by bit every year until it is a fortune. The Bible calls it an inheritance. We are heirs of heaven because of Jesus Christ. As it says in 2 Corinthians, **You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.** To make us rich before God, he became poor. Think about it. Jesus who owns the entire universe and then all the stuff in heaven as well, left it all behind for you. Hebrews tells us how: **Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.** He became one of us in two ways. He took on flesh and blood like us. But then, on the cross, he became like us in another way. He became a poor, miserable sinner. He suffered the sinner's death of hell for us. Then it happened. He destroyed the devil's power. Did you know you were demon possessed? Yes, the devil owned you, but now you are freed because of Christ. And now we don't have to fear death. This consequence of death is removed too. Because of forgiveness we know we will not experience hell, but there is more. We have the physical resurrection from physical death. Your heavenly, spiritual blessings are so great, all of the barns in the world cannot contain them. Only heaven is big enough to store them.

God now possesses us. In Baptism he put his name on us and says, "You are mine. Keep your hands off, devil and the world." With that he gives us a whole new world view and lifestyle where we don't worry about things like the pagans do, nor do we run after them. Rather, we now can seek first his kingdom and righteousness, that is, make God and his promise of forgiveness the top priority in our lives. We spend even more time filling our hearts with God's Word as we spend in filling our barns with crops.

I really hope you are known as an honest, hard working person. I really hope you do well and are blessed with a good life. But I also hope people know you for more than being a good farmer, or teacher, or husband or wife or student. I hope people will notice that you are wise unto salvation, that you are known as a church going person who takes God's Word seriously, that you are always happy because of Christ, and that the gospel is your treasure. Your life doesn't consist of what can be stored in barns or bank accounts. Your life is in Christ and the fact that your name is written in the Book of Life. Don't be possessed by your possessions. Seek first his kingdom and righteousness. Be possessed by Christ as you let his Word dwell in you richly. Amen.