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"A SHREWD FOOL"
Luke 12:13-21

Our scripture lesson informs us that, while Jesus Christ was speaking of such important matters as the danger of hypocrisy, the comfort that comes from the realization of the providence of God, and the duty of confessing the truth before men, He was interrupted by one of the men in the crowd who said, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." Evidently, this brother had been wronged out of his share of the inheritance and so he wanted Christ to play the part of a small attorney and get his share conveyed to him. This our Lord deliberately declined to do. This socialistic brother, who wanted the inheritance divided, misunderstood the mission of Christ. With some degree of severity, Christ replied to his request in the following words, "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" Thus, Christ indicated that He had not come into the world to meddle directly with legal or political affairs. He came for the regeneration of individuals, and through that He desired to affect the public life.

So, rising from the individual case, Jesus addressed himself to the evil of which this request was a manifestation. He turned to the multitude and said to them, "Take heed, and beware of every form of covetousness." He meant that all should beware of setting up the possession of riches as the chief good to which everything else is to be made subservient. He taught that no one should let the acquirement of wealth become the absorbing ambition of life. That is the meaning of His caution, and He enforced it with this consideration, "For, a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth."

Now, it was to illustrate this truth that Jesus related a parable about a rich man whose whole concern was to multiply his possessions. This parable can never be forgotten. To hear it once is to remember it always. As we study it and observe the picture of the man we shall note:-----

I. His Characteristics

1. He was a real man
This farmer was no wax figure. He was no bloodless nonentity. He was altogether human stuff.
2. He was an industrious man
He was always busy and not in the least afraid of hard work.
3. He was a successful business man
This fact is an evidence of his shrewdness and industry.
4. He was an honest man
He had not become rich by means of speculation or oppression, or dishonesty. There is no hint in the story of any injustice or wrong-doing.
5. He was a frugal man
He not only made money but he knew how to save what he made.
6. He was a prudent man
He was thoughtful concerning the future. He prepared in time for emergencies. Was it not proof of the truest wisdom and prudence to make timely preparation for the coming harvest? Only a foolish man would have waited till the harvest time before making preparation for storage. The fact that he was concerned about his harvests indicates that he was a thoughtful man.
7. He was a practical man
No sooner did he realize the need than he set himself to pro-

vide for it. With him to think was to act. He was making provision for the future. He was preparing to retire from active life and give himself up to the enjoyment of his possessions.

8. He was an influential man

He was highly respected in his community. He had not taken his wealth from the pockets of others by robbery, legal or illegal. He was a benefit to the whole community. His broad acres required many hands for their cultivation, and his wealth was the storehouse from which many workers drew their wages, and many families their living. With increasing prosperity he gave employment to an ever-increasing number of persons, and so the community looked upon him as a great patron of industry. His neighbors looked upon him with admiration, and perhaps in some cases with envy.

II. His Circumstances

1. He was wealthy

However, he was not rebuked for that fact. The Bible is a tremendously reasonable book. It is the acme of good common sense. It is the very climax of sanity. It never joins in any wild tirade against riches. It never rails against rich men simply because they are rich. It no more does that than it lauds poor men because they are poor. It frankly recognizes the danger incident to the possession of riches. It makes plain the fact that the rich man is the greatly tempted man. It is very difficult to be wealthy, so I am told,--

(1) Without loving riches

(2) Without thinking one's self better and greater because of them.

(3) Without trusting in them instead of trusting in God.

2. He was prosperous

He prospered by means of a legitimate calling. He understood his business. His prosperity was largely the outcome of his own industry and good management and the blessing of God upon his efforts.

3. He had invested largely in lands.

That showed an element of wisdom, because land could not be consumed by fire or removed by foe.

III. His Character

If we were to describe his character, the chances are, we would call him wise, kind-hearted, thrifty, and even benevolent. We would praise him, honor him, and try to imitate him, and flatter ourselves by thinking that the measure of our imitation of him is also the measure of our wisdom and even of our Christianity. But, God described this character of our shrewd hero when He said that he was a fool. This man was a fool in the sight of God. God gave the correct estimate of him and an exact description of his character. Likewise, all who imitate this man, whether of yesterday or today, are fools according to the judgment of the same God. Wherein did the folly of this man consist? In:---

1. His forgetfulness of God

He was a practical atheist. He had absolutely no recognition of God. God was as completely ignored by him as if He did not exist. God had made him and owned him, but, there was no recognition of God in any of his plans or any acknowledgment whatever of His goodness to him. While thinking of his gifts

he forgot the giver. He reckoned without God, and the man who reckons without God is a fool. He completely ignored his responsibility to God in the matter of his possessions. He spoke as if he merited all of his prosperity, and so he gave God no praise. The idea that any portion of the increase of his fields belonged to God seemed never to have entered into his mind. He confused possession and ownership. They meant the same thing to him. Leaving God out of his thinking there was no one for him to thank for his success but himself. He had no sense of obligation. The man who has no sense of obligation, the man who tells you that he has a right to do as he pleases with his possessions is simply telling you in unmistakable language that he is a fool.

2. His forgetfulness of his fellow-men

He was embarrassed with his riches. He had no room in which to store his fruits. Apparently, he had no idea that there was any possible way of bestowing his goods other than by storing them in his barns. He took counsel with himself as to what he should do. In a flash the answer was found. He decided to tear down his barns, and build greater ones in which he could store his fruits and goods. He thought there was no place for produce except in barns. No other thought came to him. He ignored the claims of other men upon him for his help. He lived altogether for himself. He had no idea of giving, only of getting; no idea of using, only of storing. He never dreamed of stewardship or service.

3. His forgetfulness of his soul

He preferred his body to his soul. While thinking of his body, he forgot his soul. He only made provision for his physical needs. He acted as though material things were the proper food for the soul. But, the soul can be satisfied with nothing short of God. There is no greater fool than the man who makes provision for the meeting of physical needs; who clothes his own body, and cares for those who are round about him, but who makes no provision for his soul, and therefore, "is not rich toward God."

4. His forgetfulness of the actual value of things

Ignoring God he sought to find a substitute for Him in abundant crops. He showed himself to be a fool by the confidence that he placed in things. He over-estimated the value of material possessions. He expected to be happy because he possessed an abundance of things. He valued his days by the money that he made in them.

5. His forgetfulness of death

He lived as if he were never going to die. He presumptuously calculated on many years to come. He did not think of the daily possibility of death. He ignored the truth that his material possessions were not to be his forever. All of his wealth could not lengthen his life on earth a single hour. Wealth cannot buy off death and when we die we can take none of it with us; for, as the Spanish proverb puts it, "There are no pockets in a shroud." Death is absolutely certain to come, and may come at any moment, therefore, a man is a fool not to prepare for it.

6. His forgetfulness of eternity

He preferred time to eternity. There was every probability that he would live for many years, and he was wise to prepare for that. But while that was only a probability, there was the positive certainty that his soul would live through all eternity, and he was a thriftless fool to make no provision for that.

Wise to provide against the possible; fool to neglect the certain. Wise in what he had done; fool because of what he had not done. He was a fool for refusing to make provision for the eternity through which he must live. Because of these things, he received his just condemnation, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

Yet, all around us are those who are doing just what this fool did. If you can picture an arch without a key-stone, a building of striking proportions without a foundation, the sky without a single star to light it up, a life without hope for the present or the future, you will have in these things a suggestion of what it means for a man to be rich in fields, in abundant harvests, and in great barns, and yet poor toward God.

And, lest we should pull our skirts about us and thank God that we are not as this man, the Master forces the truth home upon our own hearts. Jesus said, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." That is, if you are living your life without God and living only for self you are just the same kind and just as great a fool as was this rich man of the story. The only way to go right where this man went wrong is to "yield yourselves unto God." That is your first duty. That is your highest wisdom. Recognize God as the Owner of all that you have. Give your all to Him and He will give all to you.