

ARE YOU A FOOL?

Luke 12:16-21

Christ was speaking to His disciples in the midst of an enormous crowd in the open air. At that particular time two great sins were prevalent among the Jewish people. They were hypocrisy in religion and covetousness in their dealings with each other. Religion had become a mask which poorly concealed from the eyes of men the dark and evil passions that reigned within. Covetousness was the predominate passion of the time. In appealing for the loyalty of His own to Him in the time of persecution, Christ uttered this remarkable parable. It needs no explanation because its teaching is unmistakable.

Do you recall the fool whom Christ described in this parable? He was a type of thousands of present-day people. He represents all who put self--selfish interests and selfish enjoyments--before the will of God and the service of humanity. There are multitudes all about us of whom this man is but a type.

This parable enables us to hear a man talking to himself. People who talk to themselves are apt to provide amusement for others, and sometimes they evoke their pity. If, however, the talking has to do with the affairs of the soul, it is a wholesome exercise. As we listen to this farmer, we learn what he thinks of himself and his program. He unveils his intentions and purposes. Unwittingly he indicates the size of the world in which he lives, his aims and aspirations, and reveals plainly his spiritual condition. It is very evident that he had made out an utterly wrong program of life and was bent upon fulfilling it.

We are somewhat surprised and shocked because God called this man a fool. He did so because no other term was so appropriate. Although our Master forbids us to use this harsh and jarring word, yet we are permitted to apply it where God has used it.

It is pitiable to be a fool. When other calamities befall one he is conscious of his misery, but when one is a fool he is not aware of it. It is hard for one to bear the thought that others consider him to be foolish, harder still if one realizes that he is foolish, but hardest of all to have God tell one that he is a fool.

This parable portrays a man who was respectable, upright, capable, honest, industrious, enterprising, economical, frugal and wealthy. Nothing unfair, dishonest, extortionate or oppressive was alleged against him. He had not made his money by speculation or fraud, but by the honest cultivation of his fertile fields. Through his ability and industry plus the blessings of God, his ground brought forth plentifully. His good crops were an evidence of painstaking industry, good management, and God's blessings. Although he was scrupulously honest and eminently successful, his wealth caused anxiety. I am told that wealth generally causes anxiety. Anyway, for him this world did its very best. When he checked the anticipated yield of his vast acreage in the light of his storage capacity, he saw that he did not have adequate room to store his crops. Realizing that expansion was an absolute necessity, he said, "I will pull down my barns, and build greater."

In no sense of the word is this parable of our blessed Saviour a condemnation of wealth or a denunciation of thrift. The prosperous farmer, about whom Christ spoke, was frugal. Our Lord never put any premium upon wastefulness. Both by precept and example He taught us that to waste anything of value is both foolish and wicked. That is still true, regardless of where and by whom it is done.

Shakespeare said, "The world's a stage." That is true, and on this stage dramas of fate are acted before the eyes of generations. Our text draws back the curtains on this stage and before our eyes a comedian, the rich farmer, acts his play which proves a tragedy. The man of our text was broken by the storms of his mistakes. His drama was acted well, and when the curtains were drawn, instead of hearing the applause of a hilariously pleased

audience, he heard the heavy thud of doom from God as He said, "Thou fool." In this play of which the rich man is the hero there are two acts.

I. His Fancies.

1. He fancied that life is for accumulation.
There was a materialistic spirit in his day. That same spirit is regnant today. There is not the faintest intimation that he used any dishonesty in accumulating his riches. He knew how to select soil and seed, and how to take advantage of shower and sunshine, and soon his barns were full to overflowing. There wasn't anything wrong in producing all that he could. His sin was in spending his time and centering his undivided attention on this, trusting in things, and not looking beyond them. He had become solely materialistic. To him life consisted in things, instead of high and holy purposes. He was more concerned about capital than character. Money-making was his religion. He valued his days by the money he could make in them. What a tragedy for any man to fancy that life is just to get!
2. He fancied that he was to keep what he had and enjoy it himself. His life was a selfish one. He said, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." He was a "getter" and "holder" of property. He had two aims--getting and keeping. Because he was selfish, he wanted to keep everything that came into his possession. He could have become a partner with God and thus have stored his fruits with Him. He could have turned his crops into money and his money into institutions.

Mr. and Mrs. John G. Hardin of Burkburnett, Texas, gave five million dollars in round numbers to Texas Baptist institutions while they were yet alive. One day Mr. Hardin was a guest of Dr. J. C. Hardy, then president of Mary Hardin-Baylor College. At the chapel hour, the president had Mr. Hardin stand at the front. By him was a young woman who knew the names of all the girls. The entire student body marched by and shook hands with the benefactor of that institution. When all had passed by, with tears in his eyes, the dear old man said, "I am made happy as I think of the fact that I have some little part in the life of every one of these young women." How different was his estate from that of the rich fool!

3. He fancied that he could make life a thing of ease.
Is that life? If so, who wants it? He had plenty of wealth, but he could not find any higher enjoyment than eating and drinking. Poor indeed is the soul that is reduced to mere animal satisfaction for its happiness. Men in all ages have felt an acute need of some great challenging and worthy task. This troubled, confused, needy and sinful age is not a time for ease.
4. He fancied that he had more time than he did.
He thought he had many years before him, but he did not have a single day. That very night his soul was to be called away, and everything would be left behind. Today many are going on thinking of many years, when tomorrow the bell may toll their funeral dirge.
5. He fancied that he was a great success.
But was he? No! He made a fortune, but he missed the aim and purpose of life. He called himself a success, but God called him a fool. He gave his time, thought and energies to this life only, and was a colossal failure.

II. His Follies.

Folly means the lack of wisdom. His folly is seen in these facts:

1. He failed to put first things first.
He put property above purpose, cash above character, wealth above wisdom, time above

eternity, and accumulations above acceptance of God. He thought that life was measured by property. Some try to measure people by the dollar mark, but it cannot be done. After the Civil War, Robert E. Lee was offered \$50,000 per year, which was an enormous salary in those days, to become the head of a questionable business concern. He was assured by the firm that they wanted his name and influence. He replied, "Gentlemen, my name and influence are all that I have left from my mother. They are not for sale." But he did accept the presidency of Washington College at a salary of \$1,500 a year. He did not measure life by the dollar mark. Neither should we.

2. He made the wrong disposition of his goods.

He inquired, "What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?" He acted as if he did not have any connection with his fellowmen. He never thought of anybody except himself. He ignored the needs and claims of others for help. What he had he intended to keep, solely for his own use. His motto might well have been, "Get all you can and keep all you get." It never occurred to him that God had blessed him with means in order that he might be a blessing to others. Seemingly he did not have any idea of usefulness. He lived for what he could get out of the world instead of what he could put into it. A self-centered life is a doomed life.

3. He made the wrong estimate of the soul.

His entire thought concerned his body rather than his soul. He had not learned that it is impossible to feed the soul with material things, or to satisfy the spiritual craving with material food. Material things can never satisfy a spiritual need. Christ alone is its satisfying portion. This farmer faced the same alternative that we face--goods or God. If we turn to goods we shall be disappointed, but if we turn to God we shall be abundantly satisfied. Augustine expressed it well when he said, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our souls are restless until they rest in Thee." Peace, contentment and happiness are not to be found in goods, but in God.

4. He left God out of his life.

He lived just as though there wasn't any God. He never even mentioned God. In three verses he referred to himself eleven times. He completely ignored God in his considerations, plans and life. He talked about his fruits, his barns, his goods, etc., as if God had not had any share whatever in what God's ground and God's sunshine and God's rain had helped to produce. There wasn't any allusion to God as the giver of the good things he enjoyed, any acknowledgment of dependence upon Him, or a single note of gratitude to Him. He acted as though he was the absolute proprietor of all he touched and handled. In his calculations, resolutions and anticipations there wasn't any place for God. But life is a dull, insipid, unattractive thing until God comes into it to quicken, to save, to direct, and to empower it. Let your purpose be what it may and live as you will, but you will find out that if you leave God out of your life that you have played the fool. He who lives without God will perish without hope.

5. He made the wrong calculation of time.

He calculated on many years to come. He lived as if he were never going to die. He never thought of the daily possibility of death. He reckoned on many years to come, but that night was to end his mortal life. He thought that he had much time, when as a matter of fact he only had a few hours.

Death is a fact that none but a fool will dare to disregard. He didn't have any time for God, but he took time for the grave. "This night" may be nearer to you than you think.

6. He did not make any provision for eternity.

In his program there was no place for thoughts of eternity. "Many years" limited the range of his outlook. He thought time was greater than eternity. He made

elaborate preparation for time but none for eternity. He lived as though there wasn't any heaven, or hell, or eternity. He was a fool because he neglected his eternal interests. And all are foolish who follow his example. When one is prepared for life he is prepared for death. If he is not prepared for death he is not prepared for eternity. It is a sad thing to live as a fool, but it is ineffably sadder to die as one. This man was wise to prepare for the possible, but he was a fool to neglect the certain. He was wise in part of what he had done, but he was a fool because of what he had not done. His death was sudden and his doom was sealed.

Lest you should say, "I am not like this man," Christ says, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." Don't play the fool with your life and your destiny. If you are wise enough to sell goods for a profit, don't be foolish enough to sell your soul for nothing. If you are wise enough to carry insurance on that which is perishable, don't be foolish enough to go without security for that which is eternal. If you are wise enough to insure your life, your home, your furniture and your car, etc., why not insure your soul? If you are wise enough to have your property titles recorded and kept, don't be foolish enough to live and to die without a title to a home in heaven. If you are wise enough to decide on and purchase a resting place for your body in a cemetery, don't be foolish enough to neglect to secure a resting place for your soul.

One day, years ago, a very wealthy man came to the rectory in a little town in the South of England and asked to see the minister. He announced that he had come to make arrangements about his burial-place. Accordingly the two walked into the churchyard to pick out a lot. After considering several possible locations the gentleman made his decision. Their matter of business settled, the two men paused for a moment listening to the singing of the birds. Then, turning to his wealthy companion, the devout old minister said: "Well, now; you have chosen a resting place for your body. Have you yet found a resting place for your soul?" There was no answer for a moment and then, looking the clergyman full in the face, the gentleman exclaimed: "You are the first man who ever asked me that question!" Have you found a resting-place for your soul? All who have can testify in the lines of Dr. Bonar:

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 'Come unto Me, and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
 Thy head upon my breast.'
I came to Jesus as I was--
 Weary, worn, and sad;
I found in Him a resting-place,
 And He has made me glad."