



The Rich Fool

I. C. HERENDEEN (1883-1982)

THE RICH FOOL

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THE RICH FOOL

“And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”—Luke 12:16-21

1. The Parable

During the days of the personal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth, He many times spoke to the multitudes in parables. Alexander Cruden explains a parable as a “similitude taken from natural things to instruct us in the knowledge of things spiritual.” Another has explained a parable as “a heavenly story with an earthly meaning.” We read in Matthew 13:3 that “he spake many things unto them in parables” and then went on to give the “great multitudes” (v. 2) the parable of the “sower [who] went forth to sow” (v. 3). A parable was His way of conveying what was often unwelcome truth.

The meaning which Christ intended to convey in this way was clear, obvious, and important.

This parable of the rich fool was occasioned by the request our Lord had received to settle a dispute between two brothers, one of which had been the recipient of an estate, and in which the other brother wanted a share. Christ was, of course, well aware of the earthly-mindedness of the applicant, and to impress upon the minds of these brothers the fact that He had come for a far greater purpose than to settle disputes about earthly matters, He rebuked him by saying “Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?” (Luk 12:14). From this incident, He availed Himself of the opportunity to solemnly warn His disciples and the “innumerable multitude of people” (v. 1) around Him against the great sin, the prevalent sin, of a covetous disposition. And to make clear the folly and guilt of covetousness, He introduced the parable of the rich but miserable worldling in the 16th verse.

For all that we know this parable may have been established from real life. We are not sure of this, of course, since we are not told. But whether it was an actual case or not is unimportant. What is important is the *moral* of the story. Nothing is told us either of this rich man’s parentage or his education; we are simply told that he had an ample estate with bright prospects for the future. His “ground,” Matthew Henry tells us, signifies “the country” in the original, so that he must have had an extensive estate. We are told this “ground” was so rich and fertile that it supplied the necessities

and luxuries of life in great abundance. God had so blessed his “ground” that so far from his being in want he possessed great abundance, yea, he was *embarrassed* by the bounties of God’s providence. He had so much he was perplexed what to do with it all. Some consider the success of a person’s accumulating wealth as a sign of God’s blessing on that individual. But God “sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mat 5:45). He distributes His favors as He pleases. In many instances, the Lord’s people are blessed with abundance and become rich in houses and lands, whereas at other times their comfort is blasted, and they live in poverty and want. On the other hand, the ungodly often suffer severe privations, and experience “cleanness of teeth...and want of bread” (Amo 4:6), while other of the ungodly have “more than heart could wish” (Psa 73:7). But as a usual thing, the greatest amount of prosperity is given to the wicked. The man in this parable had so much he was troubled with anxious thoughts as to what he was going to do with it all.

“And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?” (Luk 12:17). This is the language of great concern; he was in difficulty, perplexity, and distress. We do not hear him saying, “What shall I do to show my gratitude to the Giver of these mercies for this abundant supply?” He had no thought of doing good to those who, in God’s mysterious ways, are denied such prosperity. He had no thought of the widow and the orphan, nor, of how he might aid in the preaching of the gospel of

God's grace both then and after he had been placed in the grave. We do not hear him saying, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all His benefits?" (Psa 116:12). No, his only thought was how he was going to be able to take care of his fruits (Psa 10:4). "The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God" (Psa. 104:21); but this man does not recognize the hand that feeds him. It is the same with multitudes today—no expressions of gratitude and praise from their lips. They have no regard for the glory of God nor for the salvation of others. His whole heart was engrossed with the thought of what he would do with "my fruits."

2. The Fool Thinks Abundance and Happiness Are the Same Thing

Let us learn from this that abundance and happiness are not synonymous terms. Accumulations, instead of producing happiness and contentment, produce encumbrance: possessions only increase anxiety. The more one accumulates the more he *wants*, and the more he has, the more *miserable* he is. There are multitudes who never knew real care until they became rich. Ecclesiastes 1:18 tells us, "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow," and so does he that increaseth riches. Those who are "clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day" (Luk 16:19) may be envied by the poor, but the envy originates from their ignorance. They know not the anxious days and sleepless nights of the very rich. "The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or

much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep” (Ecc 5:12). Such are harassed with anxious thoughts as to what they will do with what they already possess—how they can invest it safely so as to return the greatest and largest returns. They are harassed with fears lest “thieves break through and steal” (Mat 6:19). “Riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven” (Pro 23:5).

From the words “he thought within himself,” it would seem that he did not put his feeling into words. He seems to have kept them to himself. But God, Who knows all things, knew his thought—and He is the Discerner and Judge of the thoughts and intents of our hearts. Before Him all things are “naked and opened” (Heb 4:13). This man might forget God, but God did not forget him. Job 34:22 tells us, “There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” “Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering” (Job 26:6). There is no “creature that is not manifest in his sight” for “the eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Heb 4:13; Pro 15:3).

In verse 18, this rich man forms his resolution on which he acted. “And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater.” Note the pleasing emphasis he puts on the terms “my barns,” “my fruits,” and “my goods.” This is not the language of gratitude or of dependance on God’s mercy Who makes the sun to shine and the rain to descend in fertilizing showers to cause the earth to

bud and blossom and bring forth fruit. He forgot, if he ever knew, that what he possessed was only lent to him, and that he was responsible for the use he made of it. He was not only a steward of the Lord's goods, but a tenant of the Lord's lands. How many today do the same thing, and then are bold to ask "Who is Lord over us?" (Psa 12:4). Are we also guilty in this matter?

"The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep" (Ecc 5:12).

3. The Rich Fool Disregards the Uncertainty of Life

Note too, his utter disregard of the uncertainty of life which is implied in his language when he says, "This will I do: I will pull down my barns" (Luk 12:18). It would seem from these words that he thought himself exempted from the stroke of death. He speaks as though he was immortal. He seems not to realize that his breath is in his nostrils, that he is but a heartbeat from death. What certainty did he have that he would live to see his barns pulled down and replaced with others of a larger capacity? "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Pro 27:1).

It is clearly evident that this man calculated upon having an abundant harvest each succeeding year. Though his ground brought forth plentifully one season, it was no guarantee or pledge that his crops would be as abundant the next. How often

years of famine follow those of plenty, as with Joseph in Egypt. If his fruits were too plentiful for his barns now, might not his barns be too large for his fruits next year? And, too, building more capacious granaries, he would but involve himself in new and greater cares instead of escaping them. The greater the extent of his possessions, the greater his anxiety. Now note this fact: the whole of these fruits were to be hoarded up; none were to be bestowed upon the stranger, the fatherless, or the widow. He seems not to make any provision for the maintenance of his own household. Oh, with what reluctance the worldling gives—he grudges the food and raiment even of those of his own household. He is blind and deaf to the cries of the poor and needy—he hoards up all his fruits and goods for himself.

In verse 19, we read how pleased he was with his hopes for the future after he had carried out his designs. He says, “I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” This clearly indicates that he fully expected to live for a long time to enjoy his possessions. He talks with confidence of “many years” uninterrupted by care, or troubled by disease, accident, or other disappointment. He did not take into his considerations that his property might be destroyed by wind, fire, or lightening from heaven, or that he might be stricken by some disease rendering him helpless and unable to enjoy the luxuries which he possessed. For all he knew, he might soon be laid in the grave. A few days often bring about great

changes in our future prospects and in that of our families. We so easily forget that we are mortal and our best estate vanity.

“If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much...This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above” (Job 31:24-25, 28).

4. The Mercenary Spirit of the Rich Fool

The use to which he intends to devote his hoarded stores indicates a mercenary spirit. He makes preparation to spend the evening of his life in sensual indulgence and in the satisfying of every fleshly desire. His gross ignorance, or thoughtlessness, is evident from the fact he makes his address to his “soul,” not to his body. How could his soul be interested in a barn full of grain, or a bag full of gold, for that matter. The honors, riches, or pleasures of this world cannot satisfy it. One might as well endeavor to charm the ear with colors, or the eye with sounds. The soul may be poor amid bags of gold, or perish in the midst of plenty, without a knowledge of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Of this, this unhappy man was regardless. Heaven and hell he seems not to have taken into consideration; also he failed to consider whether there was a God or not before Whose awful judgment seat he would be called to stand. He never so much as thought of those things, as great multitudes today do not. Likely, he

supposed that if he was moral, industrious, and a good citizen in his community, he need have no fear about the future—that God is too loving to damn any of His creatures. In this way, he lulled his conscience to sleep and went on eager to add house to house and field to field. He “made gold [his] hope, [and] said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence” (Job 31:24). But alas, his fondest hopes were suddenly dashed to the ground. There fell a voice from heaven upon his ear like a thousand thunders, and dreadful is its import. “But *God* said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luk 12:20). What a fearful summons was this! With what regret would he bid adieu to earth! A true Christian says with Job, “I would not live alway” (Job 7:16); for this is not our rest, for it is polluted. But a miser clings to the things of earth with fond affection, for they are everything to him. My friend, have you sought the salvation of your immortal soul with that earnestness which its worth demands? What will it profit you if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul, or what will you give in exchange for your soul? (see Mat 16:26). It may be you have trifled away your day of grace and lived and labored only for the meat which perisheth with the using. What then will you say when your soul is required of you? Your summons to meet the Great Judge of all the earth may be just as sudden and unexpected. You have made your plans for many years to come, but have you stopped to think that you may not be permitted to see another year, or

even another day? Of what profit now was this rich man's extensive possessions and hoarded wealth? He was required to leave all that he had set his affections upon. "Then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luk 12:20).

Yes, whose? We do not know what became of this man's property, but one thing is certain, it was his no longer. He took none of it with him to the grave, and in the day of wrath it will rise up in judgment against him and make his condemnation terrible. His "gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against" him (Jam 5:3). In verse 21, our Lord makes the application. This man does not stand alone, for our Lord says, "So is he that layeth up treasure *for himself*, and is not rich toward God." Are *you* rich toward God? Are you a partaker of His grace? Are you rich in faith and good works? Remember this, that He Who addressed this man will soon address *you*, and what will your answer be? Will you hear such words without consternation? Soon the cold hand of death will be laid upon you, and perhaps sooner than you expect. Remember, soon your night shall come. Are *you* prepared? Are *you*? Your soul may be required of you this night. Make haste and "flee from the wrath to come" (Mat 3:7).

"Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days" (Jam 5:3).✠

Note: We are indebted for a goodly part of the above to a sermon preached some 100 years ago.