January 4/5, 2020

Don’t Be a Fool

Luke 12: 1-3, 13-21

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I don’t think there’s anyone in the room that, if you were to die today, would like to stand before God and have God say to you, "You’re a fool." Now some of you are thinking, "Well, God would never say that." Really? Well, let's talk about that. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Luke, Chapter 12. Since we've been studying the Gospel of John, I decided to stay in the Gospels for this week and next week. Luke chapter 12 is in a section of the Gospel of Luke people sometimes refer to as the “Woe” section because Jesus repeats this phrase to the Pharisees, the self-righteous religious leaders. “Woe to the Pharisees,” and then he talks to them. “Woe to the Pharisees…” and one of the main themes is their hypocrisy, their attempt to pretend to be super spiritual, but their hearts are not really for God. So this conversation in chapter 12 is kind of in the midst of this “Woe” section. Verse 1:

> **Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first of *all*, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops.** (*NASB, Luke 12:1-3)

So Jesus is talking to His disciples and He's giving them a warning, **“Beware**.” That's a strong warning. **Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.** Now this idea of leaven is a common concept in the Scriptures. It’s the idea of yeast and it's the idea that a little bit of yeast leaven in the dough quickly permeates the dough. It doesn't stay in a little area of the dough; it takes over. And so it's used to illustrate a lot of things. In this case he tells us the leaven of the Pharisees is their hypocrisy. When you are a hypocrite, your hypocrisy eventually takes over.

So think of it like this. When people lie, typically it's not a single lie. Next thing you know, we have to lie again to cover that first one and then we have to lie again…and then we have to lie again. Pretty soon it becomes a lifestyle of lies to keep covering our tracks.

That's very similar with **hypocrisy**. The word hypocrisy literally means *to wear a mask.* It's a term that was taken out of the Greek theatre. It was the idea that an actor or actress is pretending to be somebody else; they wear a mask. So, this is the idea that I pretend to be somebody I'm not. So then I have to pretend to be that person in church. And then I have to pretend to be someone at work. Then I pretend to be someone with my friends, and pretty soon it just becomes a way of life. I'm wearing masks in different environments because I'm afraid to just truly be me. So once we start to live that way, then it becomes the leaven that takes over the whole lump of dough. It becomes a way of life. That's what Jesus is referring to.

Now if that was a problem 2000 years ago, certainly today, with social media, it is a problem times 10. People have become very good at pretending to be someone they're not on social media. As a matter of fact, I'm convinced that’s part of the appeal of social media—that I can be someone on social media that I'm actually not in reality. So I can present myself as *Super Christian* on social media, and that's the appeal of it. But that's not who I actually am, and that's not how I live.

So think of it like this. People get on social media, and they have a lot to say. Often they like to say it very loudly. So they have areas of passion: whether it's the environment, whether it's immigration, whether it's refugees, whether it's racial, or gender inequality—all these causes that are so common in our culture. So people get on social media and they rant. But what research shows is very few of those people give any time or any money to be part of the solution to that problem. As a matter of fact, research shows that many of those that talk the loudest do the least. That's exactly what Jesus was talking about. If you're not willing to give significant sacrificial amounts of time and money to be part of the solution, you apparently don't really care that much. You're just angry, and social media allows you a platform to vent your anger. That's just hypocrisy. It's pretending to be somebody you actually aren't in reality.

It's become common in our culture that businesses have figured out it's good marketing to offer: If you buy a pair of shoes or socks or whatever the product is, then they'll make a contribution to people in need. Now that's fine. I'm not judging the motives of those companies. I don't know. I do know it's really good marketing. That's why so many people do it. But from the standpoint of the consumer, it's really important to understand just because you purchased a pair of socks, you're not changing the world. What happens in our culture is people want a good feeling like, "I'm doing something to help," but just listen to the language. That's not compassion for people in need. That's selfish. I'm wanting a good feeling, so I want to believe I've done something to help.

These problems are significant, and they are complicated, and the only way we're really going to make a difference is if we're willing to roll up our sleeves, get in the mess, and sacrifice considerable amounts of time and money to at least create pockets of flourishing to genuinely help. That's authenticity. That's going from kind of this loud hypocrisy to actually doing something to help.

Now I would say one of the things that I love about Lincoln Berean is we have so many people that get this. So many people sacrifice time and money to get involved in things that genuinely make a difference in our community, whether it's out in the community or on the campus. When people ask me what makes Lincoln Berean special, my first answer is always the same. "It's the people." God has always given us amazing people that sacrifice time and money to involve themselves in the things that will matter forever. So that's what God calls us to. But honestly, some of you have to be honest and say that's not you. You may have a lot to say, but the truth is you're unwilling to sacrifice time or money to get involved to make a difference. And I would just encourage you this morning to possibly rethink that and think about investing yourself in the things that matter forever. At the core of this conversation, one of the big issues that affects how we live, is what Jesus then picks up in verse 13:

> **Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher,** (Rabbi), **tell my brother to divide the *family* inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?"** (Vs. 13-14)

Someone in the crowd is disgruntled over the way the family inheritance has been divided. He wants Jesus to sort it out. Now it wasn't unusual in this culture for a rabbi to get involved in civil matters and sort them out. So that's probably what's behind the request. But Jesus understands this is not a math problem. This is a heart problem, and He's not about to get involved in this family mess. But He uses it as an opportunity to warn His disciples of the issues that are at the core of this conversation. Verse 15:

> **Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."**

So, a very strong warning. As a matter of fact, it's a double warning: **beware; be on guard against.** What's the problem? **Greed**. Greed is a compound Greek word that literally means *to have more*. It isn't limited to money. Oftentimes it's translated *to covet* or *covetousness*. The core idea is, "I need more." "How much do you need?" "More!" If Patty was to ask me, "How many fishing poles do you need?" The answer would be, "Just one more, honey." How can you have enough? *(laughter)* That's a separate discussion. (*laughter)*

But this is the issue of greed. It's important to understand this has nothing to do with how much you have. It doesn't matter if you have a lot or if you have a little; it's irrelevant to the conversation. Nowhere in the Bible does the Bible have a problem with people that have wealth. That isn't the issue. The issue is: "What do you do with what you have?" So, whether you have a lot or whether you have a little, the issue is: "Where do you find life?" So that's what Jesus says. Even with the abundance of possessions, you still won't find life there.

When I start to think, "What's going to give me significance…what's going to give me security… what's going to make me happy," is *more,* that becomes what defines my life. It's what I think about. It's what I dream about. It's what I strategize about. It's what defines the trajectory of my life. When we start to think the accumulation of wealth is the basis of my significance, we're starting to think, "I'm not a loser; look at my house." "I'm not a loser; look at my car." How much do you need to be significant? Answer? "More!" How much do you need to be secure? Answer? "More!" So it's easy to justify the accumulation of more and more and more. How much do you need? "More!"

I mean, "What if this happens?" "What if that happens?" "What if we get in a war with Iran?" "What about North Korea?" "What if the whole economy crashes?" Okay, let's talk about that. In that moment, are you going to trust your bank account or are you going to trust God? Which do you want? When the doctor says, "It's cancer," do you want to trust your bank account or do you want to trust God? How much does it take to be significant? "More!" How much does it take to feel secure? "More!" How much is it going to take to be happy? "More!" That's why Jesus said, if you don't get this one right, you're likely to miss on everything else because this is what's going to define your life. The contrast of this would be contentment. Paul writes from a prison cell, "*I've learned to be content with whatever the circumstances are."* He even says, *"I've learned to live with a lot; I've learned to live with a little."*

I remember years ago having a conversation with Patty and the girls, and I don't know how we got into this conversation, but at one point I remember saying, "You know, if everything fell apart, and we had to go back and live the way we lived in our early days as a family, what would be the problem with that…what would be the problem with that?" We were fine. We were happy. We were joyful. Life was good. Now, I like having a bigger house. I like having stuff. I like being able to afford to do this and that. That's fine. But I don't *need* any of that. If we had to go back and live a very simple life, what is the problem with that? We get ourselves worked into a lather, thinking we need all this stuff. What we need is God. What we need is to learn contentment. What do I need to be significant? "God!" What do I need to feel security? "God!" What do I need to be happy? "God!" I don't need more of anything—just God! So that's the idea.

Pastor Tim Keller talks about the problem with greed is that it's hard for people to see it in themselves. It's kind of like legalism. It's hard to see in yourself. You think of the other commandments. They're pretty easy to identify. If I've committed adultery, I know that. I know this isn't my wife; I'm not

confused about that. But greed is not like that, because it's so much a part of our culture, it just seems normal—and it's hard to see in ourselves. So if Jesus said, **"Beware; be on guard against,"** —a double warning—wouldn't it be fair to think this is potentially a problem for me, and I need to guard myself against it? Jesus then launches into this parable:

> **And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?'** (Vs. 16-17)

So far, so good. There's no problem with him being rich. There's no problem with having land that's productive. There was a man or woman who was rich and had a very productive business. But the question is, "What do I do with the profits?" Good question. Verse 18:

> **Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear 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 many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry."'** (Vs. 18-19)

So what does he need? More! So, he has barns already full. How much does he need? More! So he's going to build bigger barns so he can store more with the intent of, *"I will have so much, I will say to my soul, 'Eat, drink and be merry.'"* In many ways, it's the American dream. Work hard; accumulate wealth; work toward a La Z Boy and a bag of money, and I will say to my soul, "Soul, retire at 55, eat, drink, and be merry." What's interesting about this story is 11 times you find the words: *me*, *my*, *my* soul, *my* grain, *my* barn, *my* stuff… Verse 20:

> **But God said to him, 'You fool!'** (I guess he does say that.) **This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?'**

So what's driving this man is his greed. How much does he need? More! When is enough, enough? Well he needs more! What if *this* happens? What if *that* happens? I need more, so I'll build bigger barns. Apparently it never dawns on him that there are people around him in need, that there are people that he could help, that there's poor, that there's homeless, that there's all these people in a first century Roman culture that could have benefited from the blessings God had given him, but he doesn't even think about that. It's just the accumulation of *more*. How much do you need? I need more. How much is enough? I don't know, but I need more.

So the plan was to have so much, he could *eat, drink, and be merry*. There's just one thing he didn't factor. His soul is not his. It belongs to God. And on that day God said, "You're done…you're done! So now you give an account. What did you do with what you were given?" Can you imagine standing before God and the first thing God says is, "You are a fool." On this earth, with this world's value system, you were somebody, but the first thing God says is, "You're a fool," because you lived for things that don't matter, and now you have nothing. You wasted your entire life. Verse 21:

> **So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."** (Vs. 21)

This is why Jesus said: you get this one wrong, you're going to get pretty much everything wrong. As long as our lives are driven by a greedy heart, then everything's about more. How much is enough? I don't know…more! That becomes the trajectory of our lives. Rather than treasuring treasures in heaven, rather than living for the things that will matter forever, it's about the accumulation of more. How much do you need? I need more…I need more. That's what defines my story every day.

The alternative, according to Jesus, is to be rich toward God. Do you need money for retirement? Of course you do! Is it good to have a savings account? Of course it is! But at some point there has to be a reasonable understanding of that, and a desire to be generous and faithful with whatever God has given us, whether it's our talents, whether it's our time, whether it's our money. You don't get any credit for what you *intended* to do someday. I know it's easy for people to think, "You know, if I had more, I would be generous." To which I would say, "No you wouldn't…no, you wouldn't." If you're not generous with what you have today, you would not be generous with more. You would just think you need more. People are generous because they're generous, not because they have so much. There are no points for what I might do someday.

If God says to you today, "Time's up," and you have to give an account for your life, it doesn't matter what you intended to do someday. It doesn't matter what you put in your will. That's kind of a way of saying, "When I don't need it anymore, when I don't need my safety net anymore, then God can have it." You don't get credit for that. It's, "What did I do with what I have today? What does it look like to be a faithful steward? What does it look like to be generous today?"

One of the things I love about this passage and others like it is, I think we all understand that not everyone in the room will be rich. It's just not going to happen. But every single person in the room has equal opportunity to be rich toward God. At the end of the story, what matters isn't whether or not you had a lot or little in this life. The only thing that's going to matter is, "What did you do with what you've been given?" and everyone in the room has an equal opportunity to be rich toward God, which, at the end of the story, is all that will matter.

So, it's very common for senior pastors, in roles like mine, to have access to the giving records. I would say most of my senior pastor friends do. They believe it's important to see what people give. I would say I'm more the exception. In our organization here, I have access to those records. I choose not to access it—never have, never will. So, if I happen to be looking at you and I'm making a point, don't get all defensive. *(laughter)* I don't know. I really don't.

But here's what all my pastor friends tell me; they all say the same thing. "Bryan, you'd be really surprised at those people that come and try to present themselves as these really committed Christians who give little to nothing." I don't know…I don't know. I'm just assuming they tell the truth. It's easy to put on a mask and pretend to be *Super Christian*, but that doesn't make it so. And what Jesus said is: If today I ask for your soul, all the masks come off and all the lies are exposed, and the truth is, "No," you can fool us all day long. But at the end of the day, you don't stand before us. You stand before God, and the books will be opened, and the truth will be exposed. My prayer is that we would all seek, with all our hearts, to live a life rich toward God.

> *Our Father, we're thankful for Your generosity to us. That is the basis of our salvation. God, You've blessed us in so many ways. Lord, may we be faithful. May we be generous with what we've been given to accomplish Your purpose in the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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