

The Rich Fool Luke 12 v13-21 (NIV)

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” ¹⁴Jesus 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; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” ¹⁶And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷He 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 my surplus grain. ¹⁹And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain 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 whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

The Tower of Babel Genesis 11v1-9

At first, the people of the whole world had only one language and used the same words. ²As they wandered about in the East, they came to a plain in Babylonia and settled there. ³They said to one another, “Come on! Let’s make bricks and bake them hard.” So they had bricks to build with and tar to hold them together. ⁴They said, “Now let’s build a city with a tower that reaches the sky, so that we can make a name for ourselves and not be scattered all over the earth.” ⁵Then the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which they had built,⁶ and he said, “Now then, these are all one people and they speak one language; this is just the beginning of what they are going to do. Soon they will be able to do anything they want! ⁷Let us go down and mix up their language so that they will not understand each other.” ⁸So the LORD scattered them all over the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹The city was called Babylon,^[a] because there the LORD mixed up the language of all the people, and from there he scattered them all over the earth

Ecclesiastes 2v1-11.

2 I decided to enjoy myself and find out what happiness is. But I found that this is useless, too. ²I discovered that laughter is foolish, that pleasure does you no good. ³Driven on by my desire for wisdom, I decided to cheer myself up with wine and have a good time. I thought that this might be the best way people can spend their short lives on earth. ⁴I accomplished great things. I built myself houses and planted vineyards. ⁵I planted gardens and orchards, with all kinds of fruit trees in them; ⁶I dug ponds to irrigate them. ⁷I bought many slaves, and there were slaves born in my household. I owned more livestock than anyone else who had ever lived in Jerusalem. ⁸I also piled up silver and gold from the royal treasuries of the lands I ruled. Men and women sang to entertain me, and I had all the women a man could want. ⁹Yes, I was great, greater than anyone else who had ever lived in Jerusalem, and my wisdom never failed me. ¹⁰Anything I wanted, I got. I did not deny myself any pleasure. I was proud of everything I had worked for, and all this was my reward. ¹¹Then I thought about all that I had done and how hard I had worked doing it, and I realized that it didn’t mean a thing. It was like chasing the wind—of no use at all.

The Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12v13-21)

What are you building?

Is Bigger Better? Short people will often say “the best things come in small packages”. Some may say – its not the size that counts! But what do we really think? When we are early into our working life, who doesn't want a bigger salary, a bigger house? Perhaps some want more popularity, or a bigger Church?

Ask yourself What are **you** building? What do you spend time looking at? Reading? What do you spend your time and money on, because that's what your building? Some people build an encyclopaedic knowledge of TV soap operas, and the insides of curry houses. Because that is where they spend their time and money. If we are going to go for bigger, then we need to be going bigger for God.

Babel

In ancient days, after the flood, God had encouraged Noah and his sons to have many descendants to disperse and populate all of the earth. However they had other ideas. A large number of them, came together in one place and built a big city, the biggest in the known world. King Nimrod ordered a massive tower to be built, to show off his power and grandeur, a tower that would rival God for greatness. They named the place Babel which meant Heaven's Gate as the tower reached so high. Such a tower was called a Ziggurat which is a great brick structure with external staircase extended heavenwards. Later known as Babylon, the remains of this city are 54 miles south of Baghdad. It was an incredible city with city walls 14 miles long. This challenge was deeply offensive to God, and he did something which had a cataclysmic effect on the people. We don't know what it was, but they abandoned the city and dispersed in all directions. This act of God did something to the speech capability of the people there, gifting each dispersing group with a new language, but removing their ability to speak in their old language, preventing them from further similar acts of rebellion, and moving them back into Gods original command of populating the Earth. From them on humanity has been scattered and divided. From Babel we get the word babble; fast and incomprehensible talk. This ancient story might appear to some as rather mythical, and yet somehow one of those ancient languages from the book of Genesis seems to have survived. Among the people scattered from Babel was a group of people who climbed over the mountains to the East, and settled when they reached the sea, and became the nation of China. The ancient language they brought with them was put down in picture form. The astonishing thing about the Chinese language is that you can reconstruct the story of Genesis 1v11 from the creation to Babel using these pictures. So The word for devil is made of symbols for man, garden and a secret, and the word for a boat is a container of 8 people, as was Noahs ark. So the Chinese language is an independent confirmation outside the bible of the events in Genesis.

So descendants of Babel, who liked to build big ended up in China. They build an even bigger wall, the great wall of China- 5500 miles long, and the country has the biggest population, 1.4 billion, with over 35 million people still living in caves (i.e. more people than live in New York City, Mexico City, London, Paris, Rome, Madrid & Berlin combined !) one in every 3 socks in the world is made in a single city in China. China is big.

First Century Big

Even in the first century the Chinese Empire had brought together 50 million conquered people and ruled the known world. 4500 miles was another great power. They were unaware of each other. Over half the whole planets population were governed by one of these two empires. This second world was the similarly sized Roman Empire, and it had a Middle Eastern outpost annexed to its Syrian province. In Galilee lived a young Rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth. The human desire to have more and build bigger was no different there as it was in China. Jesus knew about big. He drew big crowds. Not wanting to draw Roman attention, he often taught in remote places. Today he had found a natural acoustic setting, which could have been a cove or a hollow in a hill. Here he could address the huge crowd that had shown up. There were thousands of them crammed together, so many that that they were stepping on each other [Luke 12v1].

A request for more!

Read v13. - *Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide with me the property that our Father left us.”*

Imagine this huge tightly packed crowd, and one man working hard to push his way through them to get near the front where he can be heard. When he had got within earshot, he interrupt the Rabbi with a request, or was it a

demand. Teacher – tell my brother..” It is unlikely that he had journeyed with his brother as there seems to be bad blood between them, but he must have known that his brother was somewhere in the crowd too. It was a good assumption because everyone seems to have come out to see Jesus.

Rabbis like Jesus knew all the details of Old Testament Law, and it was common for people to bring their disputes to a Rabbi for a ruling. One of the contemporaries of Jesus, a famous Rabbi, Johanan Ben Zakki, actually moved south from Galilee to Jerusalem, because there weren't enough legal disputes for him to sort out up North.

The Father of this complainer has died and this younger son wants a share in the inheritance, but his brother has not given it to him. We hear this and our sense of fairness jumps in, and we think – that's not right if his brother is cheating him out of what he deserves. Surely this man has a case to be answered? It was common for people to take their legal disputes to Rabbis. However the Law in Deuteronomy states that the older son had special birth-rights and should get a double share of the inheritance. The Jews followed this law. It was fixed, the older brother got a double share and the Father would keep to that if he had left a will. If there was no will, then the property went to the older brother, and it was up to him to do the division. We can therefore presume then this is a younger brother somewhat aggrieved by getting less or none of what he wanted from his father's estate. This is clearly an important issue for the brother. He wants more than he has got. So he comes to the Rabbi, telling him to intervene. 'It's not fair what's happened. I feel aggrieved. Do something about it for me. Making a ruling so my brother will divide the land with me.

Life seems unfair to the man, he wants more than what life has dealt him, and he wants his brother to have less. To come to a Rabbi, there is clearly a problem in the relationship between the two brothers, and the complainer wants a final separation in the relationship, by having his desired portion then splitting away for good. He has let the matter of inheritance, something he has not earned, come between him and his brother. Sadly we see this played out so often in our own culture today, as families fight over and contest a will. Anything from a 'will' is an unearned bonus, a surplus to what we have already

But is the younger brother justified in coming to Jesus to solve his dispute. Clearly Jesus does not think so.

What would have made Jesus respond favourably was if the man had come up to him and said “My brother and I are arguing over some land, and I am worried in case it causes a permanent division amongst us. Would you hear my issues and help bring us back together. But no, the division is already complete in his mind, and now he wants to leave his brother with what he feels he deserves of the inheritance.

The rebuff

Read v14 - *Jesus replied, “Man, who gave me the right to judge or divide the property between you two?”*

Man.. This is a rough way to address some-one in Middle Eastern culture. Some translations soften this to 'friend', but by using the word 'Man' Jesus is showing immediate tones of disapproval. Jesus comes to reconcile, to bring us together, not to encourage our separation, not to divide. Some Christians are rejected by their families when they find faith, but that is not what is wanted from the heart of Jesus, he wants to bring us together under his protection.

So his response is abrupt. 'Who gave me the right to judge'? First he will not do something that will cause further division. Secondly he did not come to be a judge over legal matters. That is not the authority he has been given and he has not come to usurp some-one else's authority. His kingdom is a spiritual one, so he does not interfere with civil powers. He never challenged the right of the Romans to rule. He is concerned for the poor and needy, those that do not have sufficient, those that are oppressed and struggling. He is not concerned with disputes over life's excesses; his business is not to arbitrate over property rights. Let other Rabbis do that. Had the man come to him wanting some help in a Kingdom matter, then he would have received the help he needed.

The concern of Jesus is to heal relationships, then out of that healing they will be able to sort out the problems that had come between them.

Jesus looks at this man, and the cry for justice that he hears, is seen as the symptom of a sickness. Jesus goes to the root of what's causing the complaint, rather than addressing the complaint itself. What is the root? The man is greedy.

Warning against greed

^{v15} *And he went on to say to them all, "Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because your true life is not made up of the things you own, no matter how rich you may be.*

Jesus knows that the complaining brother will not have all his problems solved by getting more inheritance, because his real problem is one of the heart. So Jesus becomes a judge, but not between them as the man had wanted, but over him.

Jesus warns us of two things, the insatiable desires, and our surplus possessions.

There is a warning here that when our hearts thirst after anything, with an insatiable desire, we end up wanting more and more of it and it becomes destructive. Wanting more and more material possessions in one such form of greed, but Jesus warns us against being greedy for anything. For example greedy for food could make us obese and led to heart disease. We believe that our greed will bring us a better quality of life.

But the desire for 'more' is often linked to an inner and irrational fear that one day we will not have enough. We won't cope in the future if we don't build up some security around us. But no matter how much is stored away, this fear still remains. Getting more, does not get rid of the fear, so we still want more, and even with large sums of money and possession, people still want more, it is never seen as enough whilst the fear is still there. There is never quite enough because the insecurity never dies.

There is a certain amount that we do need in order to live, but we can wrongly believe that an abundance of life comes from an abundance of possessions. We can come into abundance by hard work, a good weather crop season, a shift in the stock market, or from a gift, inheritance or prize.

We can naturally think that Bigger is better. Jesus is saying that a true and rich life is not made up from the things that you own. Life itself, not possessions is what matters. Even extreme wealth will not guarantee you a good, happy and abundant life. God often provides plentifully for wicked men, but it often ensnares them, so it is a reminder that we should not judge how much God loves us, by the provision of wealth.

Most peasants though poor still owned some property, so the words of Jesus would have struck hard at the heart of all the listeners, all who probably wanted more, something bigger.

The Fisherman

A businessman was on vacation in the Caribbean and is walking down the beach early one afternoon when he notices a fisherman lying under the shade, happily humming a tune. He calls out to the man, who sits up. Wagwan, what's happening, want fish for buy? No, I just want to know what you are doing? Relaxing and enjoying the good life, came the reply. But why aren't you out with your fishing boat. I have already caught all I need for the day. So why don't you go out in the afternoons too and catch more fish? But why? So you can sell it and earn more money? But why? So you can save it up and buy a second boat or even a small fleet? But Why? So you can catch even more fish and earn even more money? But why? So that you can eventually retire and put your feet up for good and enjoy the good life? But that's exactly what I was doing until you came along, replied the fisherman, and closed his eyes, and led back down.

The Rich Man gets a bonus.

So Jesus responds with a parable as a rebuke and a warning to the complaining brother, and for all those that are greedy. It is a parable about surpluses.

¹⁶ *Then Jesus told them this parable: "There was once a rich man who had land which bore good crops.*

There are two speeches in this parable, one from a Rich Man and one from God. We start with a man that is already rich, he already has more than enough to meet his needs, then he receives a bonus, a surplus, something that he hasn't earned – this one year his land produces a bumper crop. He has not earned this additional surplus, and does not need it. The question is – what to do with it?

Scratching his own brain!

¹⁷ *He began to **think** to himself, 'I don't have a place to keep all **my** crops. What can I do?*

The Rich man spends time in thought. They are selfish thoughts, but God knows and observes what we are thinking. It is as clear to him as if it were a movie. We can not live as if our thoughts are hidden from him, and we need to confess our thought life as much as our words and deeds.

What to do with this surplus? Instead of thanking God for it, He calls them 'my crops' not acknowledging that all we have is a loan from God, and that it is God who has blessed him with a wonderful harvest. All he can think about is how to preserve them for himself. One option would have been to store the crops in the mouths of the hungry. According to Paul a man we should work for two reasons –first so that we will not be a burden on others [2 Thess 2v2-7] and so that we might be able to give to those in need [Eph 4v28].

He sighs – Oh what can I do? It almost feels like all this wealth is becoming a burden to him. Perhaps you have a rich friend who says to you – 'You'll never guess how much tax I had to pay this year'. You feel like saying- Oh Poor you!

The traditional Middle Eastern man is extremely sociable and chatty with his neighbours. Life is lived in very tight-knit communities. Your business is every-ones business. [You see still see this in some small communities and villages today.] Decisions are made in a group after hours of conversation. The leading men in a village will sit at the gate and spend years talking to each other. This man only talks to himself. He can't have any one else to talk with, there are no friends or any colleagues that he trusts enough to exchange ideas.

Throughout the world, amongst the great palaces, mansions and estates, the more wealth people acquire, the more it separates them from their neighbours. His wealth has made him a loner. Isaiah sums it up nicely [Is 5v8]. Woe to those individuals who join house to house, and field to field, until there is no more room, and they are left to dwell alone in the midst of the land.

So Jesus is painting a picture of the type of prison that our insatiable greed for more possessions can build us.

A bigger barn is needed

¹⁸ This is what I will do,' he told himself; 'I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, where I will store the grain and all my other goods.

He comes up with the solution. Bigger barns are needed. I will tear down and build up - The language used is the noble language of a prophecy as in Jeremiah (1v10), when the Lord says " I give you the authority over nations and kingdoms to uproot and pull down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant". Also barns were the place where the tenth of the crop was stored for the Levites, those who did priestly duties on behalf of the other tribes.

But there is nothing noble about this Rich man's intentions though, he sees it all as his own. My barns, my grain, my goods.

A pitiful speech

^{v19} Then I will say to myself, Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!

I say to myself, self you have done well! The man will build the bigger barns and then finally arrive at his destination he has always wanted. The abundant life, no more work required, take it easy from now on. But who will there be to join him in the celebration of this momentous occasion. Other parables have some good parties going on to celebrate. The Father of the prodigal when he comes up celebrates with his household. The lady on finding the lost coin calls in her friends and neighbours.

The Middle Eastern man at the village gate is never without community to celebrate with. This man has only himself to share the good news with, he no longer has anyone else. His greed has seen to that. Yet he can not even see the prison that he has made for himself, the actual poverty of life that he has constructed by his greed. He is deceived and cannot see past his keen appetite for material wealth. He does not understand his soul. It is not one that thirsts after wealth, your soul thirsts after God, that is how it is satisfied. As the Psalmist put it [Ps 24], As the deer pants for water, my souls thirsts after you God. St Augustine said that my soul is restless until it rests in you God. This Rich man though had the view that his soul is restless until it had an abundance of food and drink. "Eat, drink and enjoy yourself". It was a pitiful state to get into.

God speaks

^{v20} But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?'

There are four greek words for fool, and the strongest one is used here. God points out his utter stupidity. You see, not only did he not realise that the crops, and the barns and other goods were all just on loan to him, the same

applies to his soul. On loan. Tonight, he has got to hand it back. Losing life, of course he loses everything else too. But there is a real sting in the tail with what God says. Who will get your stuff now? It will be some-one he doesn't like or trust. For the first time, he can see what real poverty he was in. He ended up with no close family or friends or any other meaningful relationships. This is what his greed for material wealth had done, it had not given him abundant life, but had actually robbed him of it.

v21 *"This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."*

The abundant life is to be found in treasuring up for God, and not for self. Going about spiritual work, helping building the Kingdom, of God not through chasing after material possessions. The former leads to a fullness in life, not in the latter. A clear and loud message for the complainer who wanted Jesus to get him more of his Fathers inheritance.

An ancient tale

In 1973 US backed Israel is fights back an attack by Russian backed Egypt & Syria over territory. One man is caught by the blast and lies dying in a desert scape. When the noise of battle passes over he heard in the wind from the distant past, the whisper of an ancient tale..

A certain man had two sons. One was rich and the other was poor.

The rich son had no children. The poor son was blessed with many sons and daughters.

In time the Father fell ill, sure of death he called his sons to his side, and gave each of them half of his land, then died.

That night, the rich man could not sleep. He said to himself..

"What my Father did was not just. I am rich my brother is poor. I must move the markers that my Father set to give him the greater share. He must not see do this as he will be to proud to accept,so I will rise at Dawn and move the marker."

Meanwhile the poor brother also could not sleep. He said to himself..

"What my Father did was not just. I am blessed with the joy of so many children, and he has none to comfort him in his old age. He should have the main share of our Fathers land and perhaps in some way this compensate him a little in his indescribable poverty. I must move the markers that my Father set to give him the greater share. He must not see do this as he will be to proud to accept, so I will rise at Dawn and move the marker."

The next morning the two brothers met at the ancient landmark. They fell with tears into each others arms, and on that spot was built the city of Jerusalem.

Adapted from the poem Resurrection (Ode on a burning tank:)

Our own fears

Babies start out in life with only two fears. The fear of falling and the fear of loud noises. But somehow we develop this fear of the unknown. This fear stops us stepping out into the promises God has for us, and fences us in.

I know. My Uncle sadly died of illness visiting friends in a very remote part of Zambia. There is unfinished business that I need to sort out but I am frightened of going on my own there to do that. It could be a great experience for me, but so far I have not gone. Fear of the unknown. Fear of getting ill myself. Fear of getting mugged. I have busied my mind with many other things rather than start making plans. Fear is holding me back. But if it's the right thing to do, if it is within Gods will then I should go. I should put my faith in Jesus to look after me, and go.

Our fear can become stronger than our faith, and we forget how faithful God has been to us in the past. All the good stuff he has done for us. All the answered prayers. Our fears erode our memories of faith, and we are restricted in what we can build for God. We forget his goodness to us, and the fear stops us stepping out in faith.

We fear the unknown, we fear that if we take risks that God won't show up for us. We will look weak hopeless and silly, and that worries us so we hold back to our comfort zones, which is the limits that fear has put on us. Fear build fences, build confines. It always does.. If you fear heights you are limited to lower ground. If you fear open spaces you stay indoors. If you fear water you stay dry. If you fear the unknown then you stay in familiar territory, even if that territory is full of destructive patterns, and unhappiness. We stick to what we know even if we don't like it too much.

Our insatiable desires are birthed in Fear. Our obsession with security, pleasure, and power prevents us from living rich and meaningful lives. Our endless struggle to acquire money, good feelings, and prestige can yield a rich

harvest of worry, frustration, resentment and loneliness. Our desires lead us to making our a prison out of our possessions.

What are your insatiable desires, and what is the fear behind it. The Holy Spirit would have us pray for him to come and cast out those fears with the perfect love of Jesus. Ask him today to help you, release you from any fear, so you could tear down the walls of your prison and experience more what abundant life in Jesus is like.

Babel & China –building up

Noahs descendants were instructed to go out into all the world and populate the earth. I think it was the fear of the unknown, that made them congregate together in a large number and build Babel. We are also told to go into all the world, not to populate it, but to evangelise it, to share the good news with as many others as we can, and not let fear hold us back. The spirit of Babylon lived on in China, and these great builders challenged God again and outlawed all Religion from their country. Even the Hindus have been told that they can not re-incarnate without Government permission. God was censored, but you couldn't say so because even the word censorship is censored in China! And yet there were those who risked everything in overcoming fear to take the Gospel into China. But now the Holy Spirit is at work in China, and though problematic, now it has the biggest and fastest growth of Christian numbers in the world, and where once all bibles needed to be smuggled in they now have the biggest bible printers in the world. More Christians go to Church in China now than the whole of Europe combined. Despite tight controls and more subtle persecution, they are now building for God.

Jesus – building up through us

Jesus came to unite and not to divide. Jesus Christ's mind was truly focused on finding the Father, compassion for others, a heart of forgiveness, and the work of the kingdom. He wants us to build something big with him, but not build out of material things but built out of love.

You are already doing it, he just wants more of it. As you go about your spiritual work, you are building his kingdom, you are storing up your treasures in heaven. When you pray for church unity on the island. When you go and spend time with a sick person. When you pray. When you visit the lonely. When you share with a neighbour. When you worship together. When you give of your money to the Church or others in need. You are starting to build something big, experience something of faith, something of God. Storing up your treasures in heaven.

But there's more, there's bigger. The love of God is infinite, its measureless. God has so much more of it. Ask him to flood you with his love, to drive out all fears. We can overcome all things through the love of God that is always with us.

Romans 8v38-39 – ³⁷We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, ^[k]neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Vine

Johns gospel tells us that we are grafted into the Vine, which means we are part of Gods family, and can bear good fruit for him. Jesus said "You did not choose me, I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures. (John 15v16). We can't bear much fruit, if we are in a prison or constraints which have been erected because of our insatiable desires.

Today, allow God to fill you with his love. Ask him to overcome your fears of the unknown, and replace it with faith in his provision. Realise that all we have is on loan from God himself, even our souls, everything we have and everyday we are given comes from him. So invest your time and your money into building up your spiritual life, and your unity with family, friends and neighbours, sharing his love wherever you go, building up and Gods community. Bearing much fruit. In other words:- Building big, but building for God. Amen.