



“And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,” Luke 12:15.

### **Jesus Speaks on Possessions**

**Lesson Aim:** To encourage consistent Christian stewardship.

**L86. Date:** November 1970. **Text:** Luke 12:13-23.

**Topic:** Covetousness; Stewardship.

### INTRODUCTION

What a wonderful Teacher is Jesus! Even the most sublime truth is made clear when He presents it. Today's study is an example. He did not merely set forth a law regarding stewardship of possessions. Rather, He set out a principle, illustrated it with a parable, and then applied it to us. Look how clear the truth becomes as you pursue this study.

Jesus spoke a great deal about the subject of material possessions. One who counted the references reports that one verse in every six verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke deals with the stewardship of material wealth. Today's lesson text is only one of many, therefore.

Jesus' teachings on stewardship emphasize these facts. (1) God is owner of all things. (2) He entrusts portions of material substance to the administration and care of individual men. (3) Man is but a steward of that which he calls his own. (4) Each man must account to God for what he has done with what he possessed. (5) Covetous hoarding of material wealth, with the ignoring of God's will, is a most serious sin. (6) Liberal gifts as expressions of love and praise to God are appropriate and commended. (7) Man's greatest stewardship is of the gospel. Material wealth is to be used to get the gospel to all the world. Today's lesson aims “to encourage consistent Christian stewardship.” As you continue the study of this topic, keep your heart open to what God would say to you about the quality of your own

stewardship. And whatever He speaks to your heart, do it with a willing spirit.

## EXPOSITION

### I. A PRINCIPLE, 12:13-15.

There is a tragic note related to the incident recorded in Luke 12:1-59. A great multitude had gathered to hear Jesus teach. He spoke to them of judgment, the loving care of the heavenly Father, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, the sufficiency of the Holy Spirit's ministry in believers, and other great truths.

But in that crowd there was a man who received no benefit from the teachings of the Lord. He had his mind on other matters which seemed of greater importance to him. Pushing his way through the multitude he finally stood before Jesus. He got the Master's attention. He was permitted to speak. And what did he say? **“Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me!”**

Oh, foolish man! He had the chance of a lifetime to commune with Jesus, but he was so worried over things of monetary value that he missed his opportunity. How tragic. But how many others have missed the Lord because of their obsession with material things?

Jesus replied to that man, “No one has appointed me a judge or a property divider among men.” (His ministry was of much greater significance.) This does not mean, of course, that Jesus is unconcerned about justice and equity. It means there are some things of much greater importance than desire to obtain wealth.

Then to all the multitude, Jesus said. **“ . . . Take heed, and, beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,”** Luke 12:15. (Observe how the Apostle Paul relates covetousness to fornication, uncleanness and idolatry, declaring that it should not be so much as named among believers, Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5.)

How true Jesus' statement is. “The rich man can go where he pleases, but perhaps pleases himself nowhere. He can buy a library or visit the world, but perhaps has neither patience to read nor intelligence to see . . . He may have gained the world and lost himself; and with all his wealth around him . . . he may live as blank a life as any tattered ditcher.”-----Robert Louis Stevenson.

Jesus suggests the possibility of a larger life than one which wealth

procures. He spoke of men having life, and having that “more abundantly,” John 10:10. Real life, life full of meaning, comes through knowing Jesus, not by possessing much riches. This is contrary to the thinking of most people, of course, but it is true. Here is the principle which Jesus stated, “A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” Now He illustrates the principle.

## II. AN ILLUSTRATION, 12:16-20.

Jesus told the story of a farmer who through large harvests and wise management had grown quite wealthy. One year he had unusually productive fields. His prosperity had increased to the point that he resolved to retire and live off his resources for the rest of his life. Of course, with material needs guaranteed, he looked forward to living many years in peace and plenty. But in the midst of his plans, God interrupts and calls him, “Thou fool!”

1. The rich man had many merits to commend him. He showed wisdom in preparing, planting, cultivating, harvesting and preserving his crops. Doubtlessly he was a wise man to know the seasons sufficiently to raise bountiful crops. He also was an astute businessman. He cared for the produce of his fields so that it was preserved and his wealth increased.

And yet, God called this man a fool. Why? Not because he was rich. Many great men of God have been wealthy. Look at Job, David, and Solomon. Neither did God call him a fool because he planned to preserve his harvest yield. No, this is a part of good stewardship to care for the wealth we have. Jesus' word always is, “. . . **Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost,**” John 6:12. Nor did God call the farmer a fool because he operated an unlawful business. There is no word of accusation from Jesus against the farmer on this point.

It is very probable that all the people of the community who knew that man would speak of him with respect. He was a careful businessman engaged in a lawful business. And yet, God called him a fool. Why?

2. The rich man made some serious errors. He was a fool because he left God out of his plans for the present and future. He acted as if material wealth was the supreme good—the answer to every need. He seemed to think that if man had enough wealth to care for the body he need have no concern for the spirit.

You see, this man made the same mistake that multitudes are making today. He forgot that man is both a physical and a spiritual being and that you cannot feed your soul on material wealth. Thinking of only one world at

a time, he placed his confidence for the future in his possessions, not in God. Thus he was well prepared for his body to live but he was ill prepared in spirit for death to come. He was a fool because he thought only of the body, which is temporarily on earth, and ignored his spirit which is immortal in time and eternity.

3. The rich man faced a perplexing dilemma. **“... This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”** 12:20. The question from God shows two grievous errors the rich man committed. (1) He did not prepare his soul for the hour when he would be called to account to God. (2) He did not make provision for his wealth in case of his sudden departure. What a fool some wise men become! **“For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?”** Luke 9:25.

4. Look how God deals with a wise man who acts the fool in spiritual things. (1) He ignored his plans. While man speaks of building barns, taking his ease, eating, drinking, and making merry, God speaks of judgment. God is not bound to follow the plans of any man.

(2) He upset his timetable. The wealthy farmer was speaking of “years” at the same time God was saying, “This night. . .” No man has a guarantee on tomorrow, James 4:13-15.

(3) He called him to a sudden and unexpected accounting. What careful stewards men should be, therefore, of both material possessions and spiritual opportunities. Any hour may be the hour to account for our stewardship.

### III. AN APPLICATION, 12:21-23.

1. Take heed that you do not seek material wealth at the cost of spiritual prosperity. Remember the man who interrupted the teaching of Jesus to call for a settlement of a dispute over an inheritance? He was guilty of seeking material wealth to the detriment of spiritual riches. What an opportunity he had to hear Jesus. What a tragedy that he wasted it in a lust for possessions.

But Jesus warns that not that man alone, but all men are in danger of making the same mistake. Any person who “lays up treasure for himself, but is not rich toward God” is making the same error as the man whom God called a fool. Beware!

2. Take heed that you live free from anxiety, verse 22. Jesus warns against needless concern about the supply of physical needs. God is a Father over His creation. He feeds the fowls of the air; He clothes the lilies of the field; He provides for His children. See Matthew 6:25-33. Worry indicates a lack of faith in His provision.

A right attitude toward possessions is to refuse to grow self-sufficient when you have them in abundance, and to refuse to be beset with anxiety when you have them in scant measure.

3. Take heed that you keep the correct view in estimating the value of material wealth and spiritual wealth, verse 23. Jesus said, **“The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.”** If a person had sufficient food and clothing, therefore, he still would not have the best in life. Remember the principle by which this discussion began? **“A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,”** verse 15.

Man lives by bread (food), that's true. It is essential to his well-being. But Jesus taught that, **“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,”** Matthew 4:4. He who has physical supply for the body and no spiritual sustenance for the spirit is only half living.

4. Take heed that material wealth does not become an object of security to you. Jesus warned, **“... Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven ... It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God,”** Matthew 19:23-24.

This does not mean that a rich person cannot be saved. Quite the contrary. Many spiritual giants in the Old Testament were very wealthy: Abraham, Job, David, Solomon, and many others. Even today there are many men of great wealth who are sincerely committed to Jesus.

But there is a danger that wealth will become the symbol of security. Even many poor people look upon wealth in this way. But it is not assured security. So many businessmen have lost all their possessions. Inflation can eat up the value of money and depression can cut off the flow of money. No, it is far too indefinite to offer true security.

Real security is to be found only in God. He who belongs to God has both material and spiritual needs assured. Any person who is content to trust in the security of material wealth, while ignoring spiritual things, is the kind of person Jesus called a “fool”!

## CONCLUSION

Jesus warns, **“... Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth,”** Luke 12:15.

