

“Have You Ever Interrupted a Sermon?”

Luke 12: 13-21

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Have you ever called anyone a fool? Doing so can be risky and dangerous. Even Jesus cautioned against it in the Sermon on the Mount. Yet, in the parable recorded in Luke 12:13-21, Jesus referred to the rich farmer as a fool. Why did he do so and what did it mean? Let's look at this passage and see.

Jesus was speaking to a large crowd about spiritual matters when someone from the crowd interrupted him. “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

Now, such a request was not uncommon, even though the timing was awkward. In that day, people often turned to rabbis to help settle family disputes. Actually, I think the request should be seen as a compliment to Jesus. Apparently, this brother detected in Jesus a fairness of spirit that would qualify him to settle a dispute over an inheritance.

Being the good teacher that he was, Jesus seized the opportunity to teach his listeners not about inheritance laws, but life. Immediately, he turned thoughts back to the spiritual realm with a proverbial truth about the value of one's life and this parable about a rich farmer who had a bumper crop. It was in this parable that he referred to the main character as a fool.

What is a fool? A fool is one without understanding. A fool does not have the ability to see how things fit together. Spiritually speaking, a fool is a person who fails to see what is important, genuine and permanent. A fool cannot distinguish between trash, trinkets and treasures and pursues the wrong things in life.

In particular, this man was a fool for two reasons. He never saw **beyond himself** and he never saw **beyond this world**. How dangerous!

This man was incredibly selfish. Count the number of personal pronouns in this parable. There are ten. This farmer continually used the words I, me, and mine, words that Barclay refers to as “aggressive pronouns.”

According to Fred Craddock, this man “lived for himself, talked to himself, planned for himself, congratulated himself and trusted in himself.” No mention was made in this story of sharing his wealth, only hoarding it. Neither did he say anything about God's goodness, his gratitude for God's blessings or his accountability for the use of his vast resources. In other words, he never saw beyond himself. There was total disregard for the needs of others and the generosity of God.

Why did this attitude make him a fool? It led him to believe that the purpose for living was to accumulate and hoard a lot of possessions and indulge in unlimited pleasures. If he were successful doing both, he would be happy and fulfilled. Little did he realize that the purpose for living was to honor God by being a good steward and that happiness was the result of giving, not getting.

This foolish and misguided thinking is still a problem in our narcissistic society. Perhaps this is one reason we live in a world with so many unhappy and frustrated people. Listen to the words of Timothy Dwight in a sermon, “The Sovereignty of God.”

“Men and women are merely taller children. Recognition, wealth and splendor are the toys for which grown children pine, but which, however accumulated, leave them still disappointed and unhappy. God never designated that intelligent beings should be

satisfied with these enjoyments. By His wisdom and goodness, they were formed to derive their happiness and virtue from Him alone.”

Do you recall the words of Mrs. Wiggs of the *Cabbage Patch* when she said, “I just don’t feel like anything is really mine until I have shared it with someone else.” The Good Samaritan must have felt the same way.

A few years ago, Thomas Cannon was a postal clerk in Virginia earning \$22,000 a year. Over a ten-year period, he gave away over \$58,000. When asked why he did it, he replied, “I deliberately hold my standard of living down. Instead of saving money to buy a new car, I save money to help people. I feel people should give of themselves unselfishly. Giving gives me great satisfaction, especially in this day and age when people have become so callous. I want to emphasize the importance of human life. It should be valued more highly than anything else. I’m just demonstrating how people should care about others.”

Who is the fool here? The rich farmer in the parable or Mr. Cannon? For sure, one is and you must decide.

He was also a fool because he never saw beyond this world. Evidently, the thought of dying soon never occurred to him. His wealth made him think that he had full command of his life. Did he believe that financial success could prevent death or at least delay it for years? I suppose so and as a result, all his decisions ignored eternal consequences.

How did his nearsightedness make him a fool? He was wrong, dead wrong, to live as if he would never die. That very night he would die and be separated from all his possessions. That very night he was going to have to explain why he had been so selfish.

The Danish philosopher Kierkegaard was right when he wrote, “Success is to be rightly related to eternity.” Every decision has eternal consequences and we need to look beyond this world as we make them.

John Baillie’s words have meant much to me. “My life today will be lived in time, but eternal issues will be concerned in it. The needs of my body will be important, but it is for the needs of my soul that I must care most. My business will be with things material, but behind them, let me be aware of things spiritual. Let me keep steadily in mind that the things that matter are not money or possessions, not houses or lands, not bodily comfort or pleasure, but truth, honor, meekness, helpfulness and a pure love of Thee.”

Do you recall Jesus’ penetrating questions recorded in Mark 8:36-37? What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” Only a fool would ignore those questions!