

Parables of Jesus

Message 1

Making the Most of Your Time at Lehigh

Luke 12:13-21

Introduction

Well, how are you enjoying the new semester at Lehigh? Are you buried under your work, depressed that you will need to spend all day Saturday in the library? Or is there anyone here with plans for something fun this weekend? You know, the trouble with school is that no sooner do you get one assignment done than the prof gives you another. And as soon as you finish one semester and rest up a bit, you're back at it again. Jeff here gave a great solo performance with the choir last year, but last year's solo will not get him off the hook this year. Seamas was outstanding last year in the play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, but he will have to work just as hard this year if he is going to be in another play. It seems like life is always chasing you.

Say, wouldn't it be great if you could give a little extra push for a few semesters and then take it easy the rest of your time at Lehigh? Let's see – some of you came in with some advanced placement. What if you could get one course ahead every semester from the beginning of high school. You would enter Lehigh with eight courses, about a year and a half of credit. Then if you could keep up that pace, you would be finished by the end of your sophomore year. Just think! You could spend your junior and senior years really enjoying Lehigh! Hanging out with your friends, movies, games, frisbee, volleyball – you could go to all the sports and cultural events on campus. Of course, you could audit some courses you might find interesting if you wanted to, but without the stress of taking them for credit. Staying up late, sleeping in late, no more boring classes or dreadful papers or killer exams. That would really be making the most of your time at Lehigh, wouldn't it?

The man in our parable was in a similar situation. He owned a farm which was very productive. I suppose he worked hard to see that it bore abundant crops, and he harvested more than he needed. Well, what would you do if you were a farmer and you harvested a lot more crops than you needed to feed your animals and pay your bills? We are talking about the ancient world here, so it's not like you could ship them to China to feed the masses. You would have to do *something* with them, and it definitely would be a waste simply to throw away all that food. The only solution would be to build more barns to store the stuff, right? That's what I would do. That would be the right and prudent thing to do. But God looked at the man and declared that, far from being prudent, he was a fool! How could someone who worked hard to get ahead be a fool? What is God thinking here? Well, when you look at the text, you see that God does not condemn the man for working hard. Neither is he condemned for becoming rich. The issue is not how much wealth he has, but what he does with it.

Ungratefulness

The first thing we are told is how this man got his wealth – his ground yielded plentifully. Was this because he made the ground rich? Did he cause the sun to shine and the rain to fall so the crops would grow? Did he keep the locusts and other pests away? Did he provide good weather so the harvest could be brought in without damage? No, he did none of those things! But without the sun, rain, rich soil, and good weather there would have been no crops. Even though he may have labored diligently, ultimately it is God who grants prosperity. But although God had richly blessed this man, he shows no hint of gratitude for these blessings. His whole focus is on himself – what he got, how to keep it, and how to enjoy it. He should have known better. He should have seen disaster coming. Moses warned him in Deuteronomy. In chapter 8, verses 11 to 19 we read,

Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest – when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with manna,... – then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth,... Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish.

This man forgot that God had given him all his wealth, so he will perish. He should have known.

How about you? When you ace your exam, or finish your paper in the nick of time, or get the right result in lab, or perform well on the stage or on the field – do you thank and praise God for giving you success? Where do you think you got the intelligence to learn the material? Who gave you the health to attend class and study hard, Who gave you the strength and talent to perform or compete? Are you like the rich fool, too busy basking in the glow of your achievements to remember the God who enabled you to achieve them? Do you regularly thank and praise God when He gives you success?

Greed

The second thing we notice about this man is his plan for the surplus crops. He shouldn't throw them away, so clearly more barns must be built to contain them. But as we read on, we see the corrosive self-centered focus of this man. He has no intention of using some of his wealth to help others, but his whole desire is to live for pleasure. Look at his plans. He is not content merely to add storage capacity – he is going to tear down his old, middle class barns and build *mansion* barns. Then he will be able to store *all* of his goods. Not a grain will have to be given away. Then when he discusses his plans, he doesn't share them with his wife or friends – only with himself. Maybe he has no friends! Then he plans to abandon any productive work from then on. It's party time! Life is going to be one big party for many years!

But the man is a fool, for soon he is going to have no life to party with. God is going to call him into His presence to give an account of his life, and the outcome does not look like a party. But even those who do live to enjoy their wealth do not really enjoy it. All who seek satisfaction apart from God are fools. St. Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till we find our rest in you." Wealth and prosperity do not satisfy. We think they will. We are certain that life would be fine if we could get a faster computer, or a neat little sports car, or a vacation in the Carribean. Perhaps we don't want Bill Gates' billions – just \$50,000 and we will be satisfied. But it's a lie. John Rockefeller, when asked how much money is enough said, "Just a little bit more." He was never satisfied.

It's true of your career at Lehigh, too. You also are a fool to seek pleasure. If you could get ahead in your studies so that you could take it easy in your last two years, you would be just as much a fool as the man in this parable. It's not wrong to gain wealth or to advance in your studies. What is wrong is to devote your life to seeking pleasure. You think that academic success, or extracurricular accomplishment, or popularity, or having a boyfriend or girlfriend will make you fulfilled, but it's a lie. God is the only thing that gives us true satisfaction. St. Augustine was a brilliant academic success. He was popular. As a young man he got a good job teaching rhetoric. He had a devoted mistress. (Much more convenient than a wife!)

He had everything a Lehigh student could want. But his life was empty. At length he came to see that all along he had been a fool. He had searched for happiness in studies, in teaching, in money, in drinking, in traditional religion, in eastern religions, friendship, in sex – but nothing filled the emptiness in his life. At last he turned to God, and found the rest he sought.

Rich Toward God

This parable concludes by telling us how to live wisely. The rich man's error was not in laying up treasure – it was laying up treasure *for himself*. If we are to be wise, whether rich or not, we will seek to lay up treasure for God. Laying up treasure for God means we will use our resources for Him. Whether money or possessions, time or talents, we will put them to use in serving God. That might mean, for some of us, accumulating wealth, but then using that wealth to help the needy and to advance God's Kingdom. John Wesley wisely said, "Make as much as you can, give as much as you can." For others, we may use our intelligence or popularity to serve God. Rather than seeking to get ahead in classes so you can party during your last semesters here, a better goal would be to help others who may be struggling in some classes where you excel. For many of us – all of us, I hope – our friends one of our most valuable possessions. Do you hoard friends the way the rich man hoarded his money? Do you cultivate friendships simply for the pleasure you can get out of them? Or do you use this treasure to serve God? Are you on the lookout for lonely people – people who have few friends, so that you can invite them into your life and friendships? Whatever you value, if you are using it for your own pleasure, laying up treasure for yourself, you are like the rich fool. Instead, you need to use it to serve God, laying up treasure for Him.

Conclusion

Now the point of this parable is not how to live a better life. You might be thinking that, based on what we just said about using your resources for God rather than yourself. No, the point here is that you will *lose* your life if you pursue your own pleasure. This man died the same night he made plans to party the rest of his life. You, too, will die if you pursue personal pleasure.

In the Bible, a fool is not someone who is unintelligent or uneducated. A fool is someone who does not fear God. Conversely, a wise man is not known for his learning, but for his fear of God. In Proverbs 9:10 we read, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*". You can see in this parable that God means business. He is not someone to mess around with. Only a fool would ignore God.

Have you been a fool? All of us were at one time. We all can look back to times in our lives when we ignored God. We lived for pleasure – and found it empty. The real issue tonight is whether you will live as a fool now, here at Lehigh. You may have thought that to make the most of your time at Lehigh means getting high grades and making good friends. This scripture teaches us that if you are doing those things for yourself, you will die. It may not be physical death right away. Perhaps it will be spiritual death for now. But is that what you want to achieve during your four years here? Do you want to look back on your years at Lehigh and say, "I got good grades, made a lot of friends, had fun, got a fine job, and died spiritually"? I hope not. That is hardly making the most of your time here.

But there is good news for us! Later in Luke's gospel Jesus said, "*The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*" (Luke 19:10) You are not alone in this. Jesus has come to you. He *wants* you to live – really live – not the fake life of someone who is physically alive but spiritually dead, but the real life that comes by following Him. God loves you and sent Jesus to find you, call you, and save you from death. You are not supposed to make yourself wise – Jesus will give you wisdom. But you have to ask for it. The only people who make the transition from fool to wise, from death to life, are those who ask Jesus for wisdom and life.

If you came to Lehigh to get yourself ahead in life, you are headed for disaster, like our rich fool. Maybe you are a Christian who has lost his way and picked up selfish goals since you arrived here. Maybe you are not a Christian. This parable is for all of us. Don't follow the path of the rich fool. Make the most of your time at Lehigh by asking Jesus for the life and wisdom that only He can give.

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