

PARABLE 1

THE RICH FARMER

LUKE 12:13 TO 21

This week we are taking a break from our series on The Creed and focussing on a parable Jesus taught. This passage was the basis for the talk at the 11.00 service.

We used to say parables were 'an earthly story with a heavenly meaning'. Some have tried to over-interpret parables and give meanings to different facets of Jesus' narrative. Jesus normally wanted to make one important point and we should try to stick with that idea. We should leave the parable having understood an important point Jesus wanted to make.

Jesus has been teaching a gathered crowd of thousands (12:1) and he outlines some of the values that should characterise those who follow and serve God. He talks about hypocrisy and justice – he also deals with what will happen to his followers when they are brought to justice

Jesus often told parables to answer a question posed by one of his disciples or one of the crowd. In this case someone in the crowd wanted some help with a family dispute.

'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me' (Luke 12:13)

Perhaps the justice point earlier in the passage prompted the person in the crowd.

Why did Jesus not answer this person directly?
Surely, he is the source of all wisdom so he could give the man a perfect answer?

The usual place to go to settle such disputes was a rabbi – there were rabbis in the temple who dealt with such issues. But look carefully at the person's request. He asks Jesus to 'tell his brother' – he's not looking for arbitration but rather back up so he can get hold of his money. He wants Jesus to take his side.

Are there ever dangers for us in this way?
Are we sometimes so convinced we are right we ask God to back us up rather than asking God to lead us to the truth?

The fact that the person is seeking his own gain explains why Jesus then speaks about greed. He refutes the idea that he is the one who should solve this dispute but takes the opportunity to warn the crowd about greed.

Jesus' ability to use a situation to make a point is clear throughout the gospels.
Do we sometimes miss such opportunities?
Share some examples of where that may have happened with people you know.

There are many examples in the Bible where greed is condemned. Here's a few to read together.

Romans 1:29 2 Corinthians 9:5 Colossians 3:5
Ephesians 4:19, 5:3 2 Peter 2:3 & 14

What do these verses tell you about greed?
Practically, what does it mean to 'be on your guard' against greed?
Is it easy to think life **DOES** consist in the abundance of your possessions (v15)

The main issue in the parable is not wealth. Rather, it is one's **attitude** to wealth. The man in the story has a good year. His fruitful harvest is too much for his existing storage. There is no hint that he has done anything other than work hard and look after his crop. Even building extra barns could be seen as a good solution.

His problem comes with how he views what has become his. Five times in verses 17 to 19 he speaks of what 'I' will do as if he owns it all. He speaks of 'my' fruit, 'my' barn, 'my' goods, and 'my' soul. He will not share his abundance but he keeps it for his own private use.

How easy is it to regard all our possessions to be the result of our hard work?
Does this make us forget that anything we have is a gift from God?

What this leads to is withdrawal and self-indulgence. Take life easy and enjoy the fruits of your labour – 'eat, drink and be merry'.

Is there ever a time where it is right to just look after yourself?
Should we ever say 'I've done my bit, I deserve a rest'?

The man shows no concern or responsibility for anyone else. The essence of greed is keeping what resources God gives you entirely to yourself. Jesus' judgement on the man appears to be very harsh.

'This night your life will be demanded from you' (v20)

Jesus asks the question – 'who will get what you have prepared for yourself'. Clearly not the man so Jesus is questioning the idea of hoarding. The question was asked about a rich man when he died - How much did he leave? The answer came back 'EVERYTHING' or as we often say 'you can't take it with you when you go'. Jesus labels the man a fool.

Jesus' clear message is that becoming self-centred is self-destructive.

Talk practically about what this means

How can you so organise your life so that what God has blessed you with becomes a blessing to others?

This may involve hospitality, giving, use of time, family and home finance – it's important to earth this message of Jesus is our 21st century living.

And there's one more key point in the last verse. Being self-indulgent rules out being 'rich towards God' (v21). That phrase means that we should respond to life and blessing in a way that pleases God.

Talk practically about how we can be 'rich towards God'?
Maybe through service, compassion, giving etc.

KEY MESSAGE

**SELF- INDULGENCE IS SELF-DESTRUCTIVE
LET WHATEVER RESOURCES YOU HAVE
BE USED FOR THE BLESSING OF OTHERS**