

## **It Just Didn't Seem Wrong**

Luke 12:13-21

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 31, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth.

We know that now because our Lord has ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. He exercises the Father's authority on the Father's behalf. Revelation, chapter 6, in symbolic form presents our Lord presiding over all of human history. He is Lord.

The Lord acquired this authority after He rose from the dead. He was obedient until death. He learned obedience from what He suffered. He was perfected through suffering. Those are fancy biblical ways of saying that the Lord has earned His glory. The Lord being who the Lord is could have received all authority in heaven and earth without what He suffered, but because He suffered He demonstrates that He has also earned all authority in heaven and on earth. The Father has given it to Him.

That means that Jesus is the judge of the living and of the dead. He is the final court on everyone. Even the Supreme Court justices will have to stand before His judgment seat and give an account of how they have fulfilled their vocations in this life. And if our Lord will judge even the Supreme Court justices then the Lord will judge all cases and settle all disputes. When He returns again in glory, He will settle everything and do so with complete justice and mercy. Has the right to determine disputes and mediate them if He wishes.

Jesus is also the incarnate God. The angels told the shepherds on the night that Jesus was born that the Lord had been born in Bethlehem. When Jesus commands the winds and the waves to be calm and they immediately obey Him, the disciples in the boat ask each other, "Who is this who even commands wind and wave and they obey Him?" Excellent question. Too bad none of them had the courage to venture an answer.

Because Jesus is the incarnate God by virtue of who He is, He has the right to decide cases prior to His death and resurrection. He may not have earned His right in the plan of salvation as of yet, but He certainly has the right. He is the incarnate God. We see in the Gospels our Lord rendering His judgments all of the time. He condemns the Pharisees and the teachers of the law for their hypocrisy. He forgives those who are sorry for their sins.

Since Jesus is basically holding court from the time He is baptized, it is not surprising at all that someone would come up to Him and say, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

The man wants Jesus to mediate a dispute between himself and his brother.

Apparently the man's father had just died. According to the Law given by Moses the older brother received the double portion because he was the firstborn. Firstborn sons had extended responsibilities in the family and therefore God had commanded that they receive double what the other sons received. Apparently this man is a younger son whose older brother as acquired control of their father's estate and even though the young brother is not entitled to everything to which the older brother is entitled, he is still entitled to something. He would like to receive it. Jesus is the incarnate God and judge over everything. So it makes sense to this man to request a judgment from Jesus so that he may receive what he has a right to receive.

Everything sounds just and right. Nothing sounds out of order. But Jesus rebukes him for his greed. Jesus reminds Him that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Our Lord's parable is no different.

There does not seem to be anything wrong at all. A man's ground yields well in a certain year. It yields so well that he does not have the space to store all of it. He makes a good business decision. He tears down his granaries and builds bigger ones. Who wouldn't?

After all would it have made sense to have let the yield go to waste? It should be used. Isn't the yield a blessing from God that will provide for the man? Then it makes sense for him to prepare adequate facilities to keep and preserve that with which the Lord has blessed him.

And the Lord condemns him too. He says that once the guy comes up with the plan to increase his storage capacity God comes to him that night and calls him a fool. God points out to the man that his possessions are requiring his soul from him. And once his possessions have his life his possessions will then belong to someone else.

Both the man who spoke with Jesus and the man in our Lord's parable are within their rights to ask what they ask and to do what they do. There does not seem to be anything wrong with what they were doing. If one of you had asked Jesus to settle a dispute between you and your brother, I certainly would not have objected. Who to settle disputes better than the Lord? If one of you had a good yield and you decided to store it yourself to wait for a good market price and in so doing you built larger and more grain bins, I would not come out to your house and have a pastoral visit with you about your sins. Actually I would rejoice too because I know Immanuel well enough to know that some of that is going to make it into the offering plate. And don't I have a right from 1Corinthians 9 to see some of it in the offering plate? But then the Lord condemns me as well.

Nothing seems wrong with any of this and yet the Lord condemns it all as greed.

And so it is with greed. When greed motivates your actions the actions to which it motivates you are not wrong. They are not illegal. They do not harm to your neighbor. In fact many actions that are motivated by greed are actions that we have a right to take. Even under God's Law we have a right to such actions, but because they are motivated by greed, all of those actions are condemned and we come under God's judgment.

Our Lord had just been instructing the crowds about the unforgivable sin. Before that He had been instructing the crowd on whom they should fear. Before that He was cautioning them against the doctrines of the Pharisees. None of this has anything to do with legal disputes, inheritance rights, or even with money at all. In fact in Luke's Gospel this is the only time that our Lord talks about greediness at all. And the reason that the subject came up was because this guy was out there in the crowd and all he could think about was how his brother was not giving him what was due to him. He could not contain himself. He was not listening to what Jesus was saying. If he were, he would have been thinking about blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and how unforgivable it is instead of worrying about the fact that his brother had not divided the inheritance with him. Unable to contain himself and probably because Jesus was not talking about what he wanted Jesus to be talking about, He blurts it out, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." And the giveaway that he is greedy is the fact that he blurted it out when our Lord was trying to teach him something else and something much more important.

The man in the Lord's parable receives a much more blunt treatment. The Lord can do that with parables. God tells the man in the parable that his possessions will request his life from him. I realize that the translation says that your life will be requested from you, but in the original it says, "They will request your soul from you this very night." The only thing the "they" can be is the man's possessions. He will die that very night and the cause will be his possessions. The Lord does not say how it will happen to the man. He does not tell us what his possessions will do to him to kill him. The reason is that greed will kill each of us in our own way. When greed motivates our actions our possessions will own us.

They will dictate to us what we can do and who we can see. They will forbid us from doing certain things and seeing certain people. After all in order to hang on to everything that we have there are some things that we absolutely must do in order to hang on to them and there are some things that we must avoid in order to hang on to them. That means that as long as we are greedy our possessions are in charge of our life. They will demand our life. A god always does.

Now, our Lord tells us that this is how it is with anyone who treasures up for himself and is not rich toward God.

Rich toward God.

Rich toward God?

This is the only time our Lord uses this phrase. What does it mean?

Does it mean put more money in the offering plate? No! The Lord does not mention offering plates. Is that because offering plates have not been invented yet? No! The Lord could have told the guy to put his money in the offering box at the temple. Does it mean to give to the poor? No! The Lord could have told the guy to give to the poor. He certainly had no trouble telling a rich guy to sell all he had and give it to the poor. Well, then what does it mean? Does it mean putting our money and possessions in a rocket and shooting them up to heaven? Does it mean getting rid of everything that I have so that I don't have any possessions? At least that way I will not be treasuring up stuff for myself.

Being rich toward God means what being rich toward God has always meant. It means believing in Him. After the Lord gets done telling the parable of the rich fool he exhorts the people not to worry or be anxious. He instructs us not to be anxious about our bodies, what will eat or what you will wear. He instructs us that life is more than food and the body is more than simply clothing. He asks us to consider the ravens who neither sow nor reap nor store away in barns and yet your Father in heaven feeds them. He points out that none of us have added a cubit to our stature or an hour to life by worrying. He tells us to consider the lilies of the field. He tells us that they do not labor or spin and yet not even Solomon in all of his glory was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, oh you of little faith. Your Father knows that you need all of these things. So do not be anxious about them.

You see the rich fool of our Lord's parable wanted a life of ease. He wanted a life where he could relax, eat, drink, and be merry. It sounds like the retirement goal of every American. This is the life that Money magazine puts forward as the end goal of anyone's financial goals. And wouldn't that be great? Think about it: to have a life where we did not have to worry about our incomes, where everything that we wanted would be affordable and not put our financial future in jeopardy. Wouldn't that be great? And like the rich fool many of us set about trying to achieve that financial goal and we find that in working toward that goal it is unachievable. We wear ourselves out with anxiety because we need this or that to go right in order to obtain the financial position where we may relax, eat, drink, and be merry, and enjoy some time with our friends and family. We pursue goals that ultimately are all about ourselves and not about our neighbors or God. We pursue a goal that cannot be achieved in a world that is beset by death.

You see prior to the resurrection and the new creation, there is no life where you may relax, eat, drink, and be merry. The reason is that the world is beset by death. There is always something that your money will have to go toward in order to prevent decay and death that while it is going toward that it is not going toward relaxing and being merry. Even when you retire and even if you reach your financial goals when you retire, your visits to the doctor will increase and then there will be the nursing home and I am not certain that anyone considers that relaxing. There are few people who do and even they die.

So how does one go through life without being anxious? How does one go through life not worry about money? Is there some switch that we can throw in our hearts that will turn off the worry so that we may be rich toward God? No. No switches.

There is only God's promise.

Avoiding greed is similar to avoiding revenge and retribution that our Lord taught us about last Sunday. Just as revenge is necessary if this life is the only life that I have, so also greed is necessary if this is the only life that I have.

If the life in this world that is beset by death is the only life that I have, then I have to increase my net worth. I must do so. There is no middle ground when it comes to money. Either I am gaining more of it or I am losing it. There is no standing still and steady. The markets either go up or down. They don't just stay the same. Salaries and wages either go up or down, they don't just stay the same. Buying power goes up or down. It doesn't just stay the same. So if I only have this life to look forward to, I had better get ahead and I had better get ahead as soon as possible or I am not going to enjoy this at all! If I have only this life to look forward to, then I had better do something about relaxing, eating, drinking, and being merry, or I am not going to relax, eat, drink, or be merry at all.

But this life is not the only life that you have. This life that is beset by decay and death is not the only life that you have. You have another life. You have another life that is coming. This life is not the be all and end all of who you are. There is another one that is coming and it is better than this life. This is why your life is not the abundance of your possessions.

By the death and resurrection of our Lord He has guaranteed to you a life that is coming. In it there is no death. Once He raises you from the dead you will be like Him and one of the ways that you will be like Him is that you will be unable to die again. Death no longer has dominion over you. You will have all of the time in the world to do whatever you want. There will always be time to get around to doing whatever it is that you want to get around to do. There will be an eternity to relax, eat, drink, and be merry, but when you do, you will understand in the brilliant clearness of God's revealing light that such relaxation, eating, drinking, and merriness, are gifts of nail scarred hands. But that is only to your advantage because that adds gratitude to your eating, drinking, and being merry. You aren't just eating, drinking, and being merry in a selfish and self centered desire for pleasure. When Jesus raises you from the dead you eat and drink and are merry because death no longer has dominion over you. There is no reason to toil. He provides everything. There is only enjoyment and relaxation forever.

That life is guaranteed to you.

So whether you make your financial goals in this life or not is irrelevant. You are going to die in this life anyway. By the way, that is why I discontinued my subscription to Money magazine. It made me obsess about death. Maybe you can read it and not obsess about death, but I certainly could not. Whether or not you increase your net worth in this life or not is irrelevant unless you have vocational commitments that require it. And let me be clear on that because some of you do not understand what I am saying when I say that. The rich fool in our Lord's parable apparently does not have family to support. If you have family to support God calls you in your vocation to provide for them. If that requires an increase in net worth, then you had better do it in order to fulfill what God has called you to do. But barring vocational requirements whether or not you make more money or less is irrelevant. Your father knows that you need the things of life and not only will He give them to you in this life, He will also give them to you in the life that is coming. He will never leave you, nor forsake you.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.