

Luke 12:13-21 home group study questions

By Phil Bailey

Theme: possessions cannot not secure quality or quantity of life, but richness towards God secures them eternally.

Aim: Beware the lies that more possessions will secure long life and happiness, and that wealth is a blessing for our selfish enjoyment. Be rich towards God and find true security and happiness.

Sermon summary

Everywhere in the West, we encounter the assumption that more or bigger and better possessions and experiences will secure long life and/or happiness. It also seeps into the church, because we absorb the attitudes of our culture unwittingly. Often the desire for possessions is veiled behind demands for fairness, as with the nameless man's demand that Jesus judges between him and his brother in an inheritance dispute. But Jesus sees through to the heart and warns against greed for material possessions. In the parable, he demonstrates in the parable that they can secure neither long life nor happiness. That's because the hour of death is in God's hands alone. He could demand our lives unexpectedly through all kinds of means that possessions cannot guard against (e.g. disease, road traffic accidents, terrorist attacks). And when he demands our lives, we will be accountable to him for how we've used the possessions he's given. For rich people like the landowner in the parable, who store up (or intend to store up) everything for their own selfish indulgence, God's verdict will be: 'fool.' So possessions cannot secure long life and happiness in the present or in eternity (cf. Luke 16:19-31). Nor is material blessing in the present a reliable indicator of God's lasting favour. As per Luke 6:35, God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked, but that doesn't mean he's pleased with them! His lasting favour comes only with repentance and faith in Jesus, which includes the desire to be rich towards him (v.21).

In order to see whether (or to what extent) greed lingers in our own hearts, we need to look at the general direction of travel in our life, which is a more reliable indicator than one off failings. Is the trend towards continually increasing our possessions and our standard of living? Or is there evidence of a settled contentment and even a willingness to part with possessions for the sake of others? If the former, we need to repent, as greed is a serious sin, as per 1 Cor 6:9-11. But the good news of the gospel is that if we are repentant and daily seek to wrestle with greed, as with other sins, we are no longer defined by it – we were washed, justified and sanctified as Paul says.

Jesus also gives us something better to live for than greed, which is idolatry (Col 3:5). Like all idolatry, it is ultimately a form of slavery. It degrades us, because it turns the order of creation on its head, makes us worship created things, and yet leaves us empty, because creatures have no power to give life and satisfy. Only the creator, who we were made to worship and enjoy forever, can do this. Jesus releases us from the slavery of greed and empowers us to orient our lives outwards. He enables us to be rich towards God (v.21). This means growing an abundant supply of the things God values, especially love for him and neighbour (cf. Luke 10:27-28). As we fix our eyes on Christ and see his beauty and goodness, we cannot help but grow in love for the things he loves (God and neighbour). When related to our possessions, such love looks like a thankful heart and an open hand. We are grateful to God for giving us what we don't deserve. And we are willing to be generous because he never blesses us with wealth for our enjoyment alone, but to bring hope and blessing to others in a broken world. Living fulfilled lives of thankfulness and generosity is far more dignified, noble and satisfying than slavery to greed!

Questions:

- 1) Where do you recognise greed for material possessions/experiences creeping into your own heart?
- 2) What makes them so attractive?
- 3) Why can't they guarantee long life or happiness? How does Jesus expose the lie?
- 4) And why is material blessing not a reliable indicator of God's lasting favour?
- 5) What might it look like for you to repent of greed for possessions and orient your life outwards in love for God and neighbour (i.e. being rich towards God)?
 - Why must we keep fixing our eyes on Jesus first and foremost, if we want to grow in love for God and neighbour?
 - How could we encourage and help each other in this?
- 6) Where do you feel like you most need help to see through the lies of greed's idolatry?
- 7) How is Jesus' way of richness towards God more noble and attractive?
 - How might it support our witness to the world, if we can grow in richness towards God instead of storing up for self?