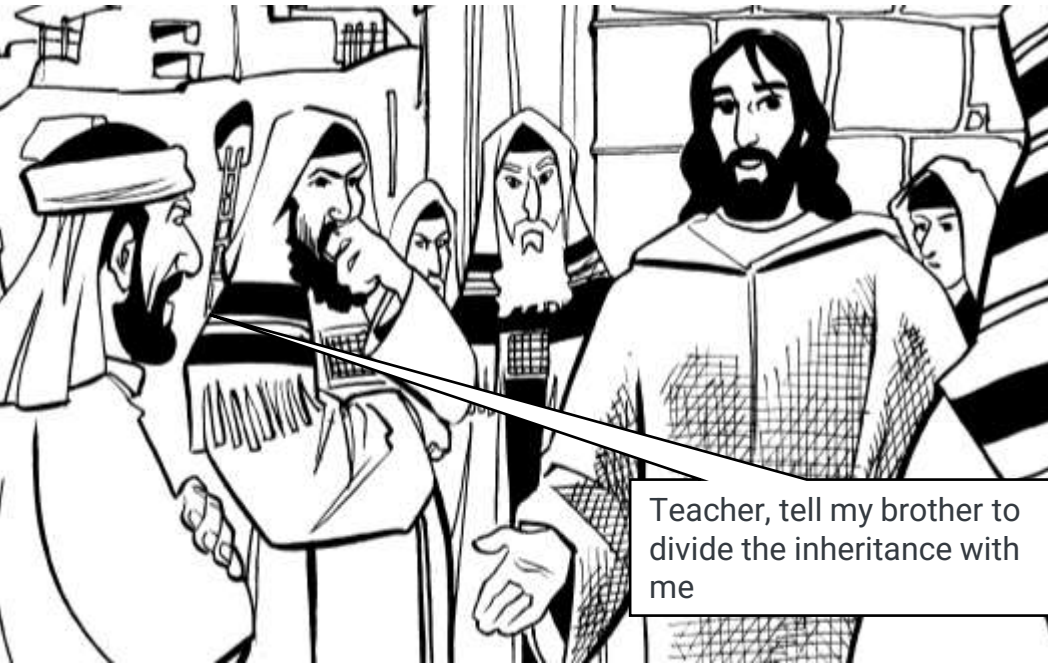


# The Rich Fool

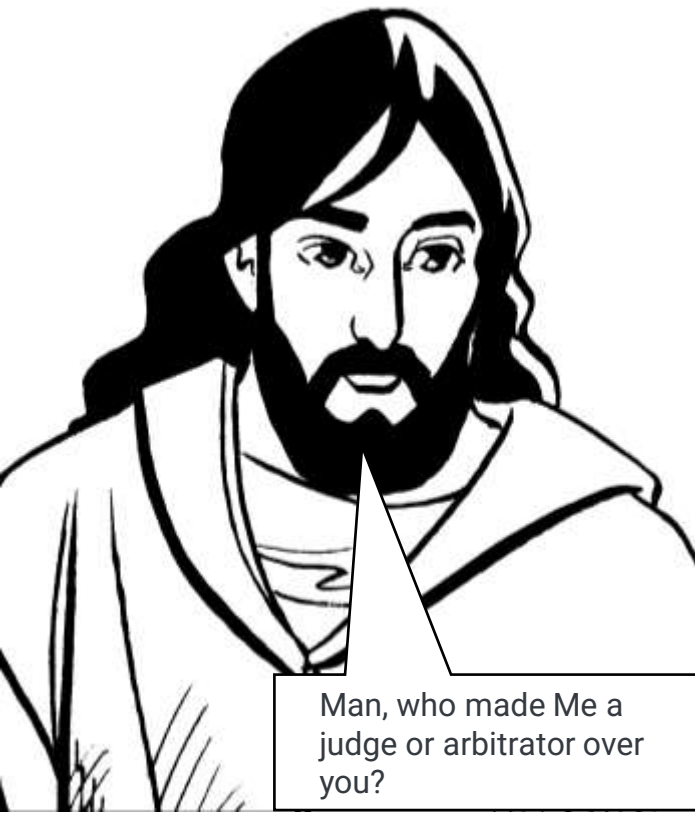


Luke chapter 12 begins with Jesus teaching His disciples within earshot of a crowd of many thousands. At one point someone nearby addresses Him.

*Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." (Luke 12:13)*

It would not have been out of the ordinary for someone to ask a teacher (the term used in Luke's Gospel, synonymous with rabbi) to arbitrate a legal dispute such as this one. Rabbis were experts in the laws of Moses and spent much of their time giving legal rulings on such matters. In this situation perhaps the father died without a will, either written or oral, resulting in a dispute between two brothers. The man calling out to Jesus would most likely be the younger brother, as the father's inheritance, which would likely include land, could not be divided if the older brother did not agree. The older brother possibly preferred that the land, or the estate, be kept undivided and that both brothers live on it together, which was common. However, the presumed younger brother apparently is not content with this arrangement and therefore is virtually demanding that Jesus tell his older brother to divide the inheritance.





*But Jesus said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or arbitrator over you?” (Luke 12:14)*

The younger brother is not asking for arbitration, or for Jesus to mediate between him and his brother. He’s not trying to bring reconciliation or restoration between himself and his brother. He’s asking Jesus to side with him and to tell his brother to divide the inheritance. In a sense he’s trying to use what he perceives as Jesus’ position of influence as a rabbi or teacher to pressure his

brother. Jesus would most likely prefer that the two brothers restore their relationship rather than dividing the inheritance, that they remember the wisdom expressed in Psalm 133:1:

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity!*

Jesus follows up with:

*Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. (Luke 12:15)*

Jesus then proceeds to tell the parable of the rich fool. In order to fully understand this parable, it helps to bear in mind that Scripture teaches that God created everything and that it ultimately belongs to Him, and that we are stewards of what God has given to us. As it says in Psalm 24:1:

*The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.*

*The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, "What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?" And he said, "I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods." (Luke 12:16-18)*



What we find out about the man is that he was already rich, and that his land had just produced a bumper crop. It was probably one of those years which had just the right amount of sunshine and rain. There's no indication that he worked harder on this crop than he had on any other, but this year there was a huge surplus, so much so that he didn't have room in his present barns.



This self-indulgent rich man, who already has plenty, plans to store the crops in new, larger barns; with the idea that once he does, he will be financially set for many years. He says to himself,



*"Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." (Luke 12:19)*

Jesus calls this man a fool.

*But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (Luke 12:20)*

The rich man is not taking into account that God is the one who gave him the increase, the abundance. He's also not considering that God is the one who has given him life.

The Greek words used to express this night your soul is required of you contain language that is related to repaying a loan. And like a loan which has come due, the man's life ends, showing how meaningless and foolish his plans were. His possessions offered him no real security.



As the old saying goes, you can't take it with you. All physical wealth is left behind upon death, and it no longer has any value to the one who owned it. Jesus succinctly makes this point in the parable and then ends with:

*So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:21)*

Is he called a fool because he's rich? No. The message of the parable isn't about the condemning of riches; it's about the improper use of the riches and about those who take no thought for God. The rich fool saw the blessing of the abundant crop as a means to provide for his own enjoyment and his own security. He thought only of himself, his future, and his pleasure. There was no consideration that perhaps God had

given him this increase for a reason beyond his own desires, such as helping the poor and needy.

The conclusion of the parable speaks about being rich toward God. What does that mean? In the verses which follow this parable, Jesus speaks about trusting God for our lives and our provision;

saying that if God will feed the ravens, who have no storehouses or barns, and if He clothes the lilies of the field, that He will take care of us. He says we are to put our trust in God, to seek His kingdom, and He will take care of us.

We all need resources to live. It's wise to set aside money for the future if we can. There is nothing wrong with having possessions or plenty of finances. The man's riches were not the problem; the problem was that his heart was with his treasure, his riches, and not with God.

What about us? Do we recognize that all that we own actually belongs to God? And if so, do we thank and praise Him for what He's provided for us? When He blesses us, do we in turn bless others in need?

May we each learn to involve God in every aspect of our lives, including how we use our finances and the material goods He has blessed us with. May we look to Him for His direction on how to use the blessings He's given us, and may we reflect His nature and character in the use of our material goods and in our lives and service. May we all be rich toward God.

