

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Missing the Point

Luke 12:13-21

Sunday, July 31, 2022

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I would like to begin this morning by asking you to imagine something. Imagine a funeral. Everyone has gathered in this sanctuary for the funeral service. There are flowers. The organ is playing. A reception has been prepared in the Gathering Room. The minister walks in with the family and everyone stands. The music stops and the minister gets up to speak.

Now, imagine this is your funeral. That's right, your funeral. Everyone has gathered to remember you. What will the minister say about you? What will family and friends who have been chosen to speak say about you? How will you be remembered?

Now imagine it is the reception. Sandwiches, cookies and punch are displayed. Everyone is walking around eating potato salad and they are talking about you. What are they saying about you? What do you want them to say about you? What kind of legacy have you left behind? And here is a key question: Does your life reflect how you would like to be remembered?

This exercise snaps things into perspective real quick, doesn't it? One of the benefits of being a minister is that I deal with death all the time. Now, you may say, "Charley that does not sound like a benefit." Well, it is because I am reminded on a regular basis how precious life is and how important it is to make my life count. I am reminded on a regular basis what is most important in life and what is not – what I should spend my energy on what I shouldn't. Doing a lot of funerals has a way of teaching you that.

Many years ago, I did a funeral for a man I didn't know. The funeral home called me and asked if I would do it because the family did not have a minister. I met with family and friends of the deceased. I asked them to tell me what they treasured most about their loved one. My question was followed by an awkward silence. I asked the question again. More silence. Finally, one of the family members said, "Well, preacher, he liked two things: motorcycles and beer." I replied, "Okay, good. What else?" "That's about it, preacher," he replied. "We appreciate you doing the service. We know you will do a good job." And they left.

The parable of Jesus we are exploring today is about a man who totally missed the point of his life. He thought he knew the meaning of his life and what was most important, but when he got to the end of his life he realized he totally missed the point. Here is the thing - I don't want any of us to miss the point of why God has put us here and why we have the things we have. So, let's take a look at this parable because it may become a game changer for you. If you pay attention it could change the direction and purpose of your life.

To set it up for you Jesus tells this parable in the context of speaking to a large crowd. He is giving a sermon really. All of a sudden, in the middle of his sermon, he is interrupted by a man in the crowd who blurts out of a random command.

Now, I have never been interrupted in the middle of a sermon. I can only imagine how unnerving that might be! The man blurted out, "Jesus, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me!" Jesus was teaching about the Holy Spirit, waxing poetic about the power of it, when a man just blurted out, "Hey Jesus, that's all wonderful but could you do something for me? Could you tell my brother to give me my money?" What does that tell you? This guy was consumed with the idea of getting money that he had inherited. He couldn't stop thinking about it.

Some things never change. Families have been fighting over the family money for ages. A few times in my ministry I have been caught in the middle of such disputes!

Jesus was wise. He kept out of that fight. He wasn't going to be caught in the middle of it. He basically said, "I'm not a judge or lawyer. Go find one and work out the problem yourself."

I believe Jesus knew this man had a problem with greed because he turned back to the crowd and said one of the wisest statements you will ever find in the Bible. **"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."** -Luke 12:15

When Jesus begins a sentence with “Watch out!” we better pay attention. Something really important is coming. There are a few phrases of scripture that all of us should commit to memory like the golden rule and the greatest commandment. And there is a phrase in this verse that should join that list too. Let’s say it together: **“Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”**

We need to remember this because we live in a culture that tries to tell us the exact opposite – that what we own, what we have, makes us who we are. Every day we are bombarded with advertisements that tell us that if we don’t have their product we will not be happy in life. We all struggle with this. I remember getting a brand new set of Taylor Made golf clubs a few years ago. They were beautiful! I still have them. But every time I see an ad for new golf clubs I am tempted to throw mine away and get new ones. Now, there is nothing wrong with my clubs. They hit the ball great (when I swing correctly!). But the culture pulls me into thinking that unless I have more I will not be satisfied. And it is a myth and we all struggle with it. Falling into the materialism trap is like drinking seawater. The more we drink the more we want and it never ends. That’s why Jesus said that our lives do not consist in the abundance of possessions.

After Jesus makes this great statement, he tells a parable about a man who had a huge crop – a banner harvest. He was all excited. Who wouldn’t be? But notice that Jesus is careful to tell us what produced the great crop. Jesus said, “The land of a rich man produced abundantly.” He didn’t say, “The man produced abundantly.” Yet this man was quick to say “my crop, my crop.”

So here was the man’s first mistake. He totally disregarded the source of his blessings and his resources. He thought he was the only one responsible for his success. That is another myth.

There is no such thing as a self-made person. We like to perpetuate that myth in our American culture. “I did it all myself. I didn’t get any help from anyone.” When people say that, I want to respond, “Oh really? Who gave you life? Who brought you into this world? Who paid taxes so you could go to school? Who farmed the food that you ate throughout your life? Who gave you medicine when you were sick? Who gave you the skills and ability that you have?”

I like the old saying, “If you are walking along a fence and notice a turtle sitting on top of a fence post you know it didn’t get there by itself!” Behind all

successful people are more people and a great big God!

I am reminded of this when I watch the Oscars. When the winners are called up, do you ever hear them say, “I want to thank myself”? No! They have a laundry list of people they thank – agents, directors, producers, writers, make-up artists, editors, family and friends. And if they are smart they thank God!

The man in the parable lost sight of the source of his blessings and that he had help along the way. He forgot it was God who put him on top of the fence post. It was God who created the land, the sun, the rain and the seeds that provided the harvest.

When we lose sight of the source of our blessings, self-centeredness can infect our lives and lead to spiritual emptiness and pain.

I want you to notice something. I am going to read verses 17-19, the words the man said to himself about his harvest. As I read I want you to count how many times you see the word “I” and “my”:

He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ ‘Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. 19 And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’” -Luke 12:17-19

I counted 6 “I’s” and 4 “my’s.” In three verses the man refers to himself 10 times! Does that tell you something about the man?

I want to tell you something and I want you to listen very carefully because it is the truest thing you will ever hear me say. The most miserable people in the world are selfish people. The happiest people in the world are generous people. The most miserable people always ask, “What’s in it for me?” The happiest people are those who always ask, “What can I do for others?” Just take a look around in life and you will see that this is true.

And why is this true! Because generous people have figured out the secret to life – we were created by a generous God for the purpose of generosity. It is part of our DNA. When we are generous we are living out our destiny. Jesus said it well, “Those who want to

save their life will lose it, but those who lose their lives for my sake will find it.” Jesus meant that those who give themselves away in his name have the most fun in life!

Of course, the man in the parable had not figured this out. He thought he would just store everything he had and enjoy it himself. He made the mistake of thinking that he had as much time as he had stuff. Watch what Jesus says next:

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.” -Luke 12:20-21

Jesus said that God called him a fool! A fool! That is pretty strong. Why? Well, he wasn’t a fool because he was successful or rich. He wasn’t a fool because he saved. He wasn’t a fool because he was a good business man. He was a fool because he had not figured out WHY he was rich and WHY he was blessed! It was the end of his life and he had all this stuff and whose was it going to be? He couldn’t take the stuff with him. You never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul!

The man had not figured out that he was blessed so he could be a blessing to others! As he stored all his crops it never occurred to him to ask, “Who could benefit from all that I have. Who could be blessed by my blessings?” As a result, his life and his blessing were a total waste, a total loss.

Have you ever stopped to ask yourself, “How does God want me to use the blessings He has given me? How can I share the blessings I have received so that others can be blessed?” God wants us to enjoy life, but God also desires for us to share what we have with others. God is counting on us to share His blessings. But so often we get caught up in the rat race in the world and we become like the man in the parable. All of us have a natural tendency to think the world revolves around us. So we think, “I have so much and I don’t notice people that are hungry. I have so much but I don’t think about the Kingdom of God and the needs of the church. I have so much, so I am going to think about the next thing I can buy.”

What a gift it is when we see people who get what Jesus was trying to teach. Not too long ago I had a family in the church approach me and tell me that because they had a great year of business they were going to increase their tithe! Every pastor loves to hear that!

When you receive more in life what is the first question you ask? “How can I make a difference with it” or “How

can I use it all for myself?” One day God will ask all of us, “I gave you these gifts. What did you with them? I gave you all these blessings. What did you with them? Did you do something with it or did you keep it all to yourself?”

Throughout my ministry I have made visits to nursing homes. You know what I have noticed? Those precious folks who are in those facilities have simplified their lives. All they have left is what is most important to them. And most often it is pictures of loved ones. Some have a Bible beside their bed. There may be a few other items, but you could probably fit what they have left in a box. What will be in your box at the end of your life? Pictures of loved ones? Notes and letters from special people? A Bible? Jesus said, “One’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

Adam Hamilton tells the story of running into a high school graduate from his church at a Kinko’s store. The young man said, “Hey Pastor! Remember me? You confirmed me several years ago!” Hamilton replied, “Oh yeah! How are you? What are your plans?” He said, “Well, I just got accepted to an Ivy League school and I am really excited.” Hamilton replied, “Well, what are you going to do after that?” He said, “Well, I will probably go to graduate school and then get a good paying job.” Hamilton replied, “What are you going to do after that?” He responded, “I think I will get married and have kids and live in a big house.” Hamilton asked, “What are you going to do after that?” He said, “Maybe I will retire early and travel around the world with my family.” Hamilton asked again, “What are you going to do after that?” He replied, “Um, I don’t know.” Then Hamilton said, “Listen, you are very bright and have a lot of potential but I think you are dreaming way too small.” “One’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

Daily Devotional Guide

Luke 12:13-21

Prayer: Lord, draws us back to you and what really matters. May your poignant parable be a cautionary tale for all of us who can be tempted to equate possessions with happiness or self-worth. Remind us to “number our days” so that we will be moved to live our lives investing in what is eternal. Keep ever before us your greatest commandment, and may it serve as true north for us as we live each day.

Monday – Read Luke 12:13-15. Verse 15 is a key verse of scripture. When Jesus begins a statement with “Watch out” it is important that we pay attention! “A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” This would be a good phrase to commit to memory because the culture tries to convince us that who we are is made up of what we have. Here is a good question to ask: At the end of your life who or what will be the most important to you?

Tuesday – Read Luke 12:16-17. Notice the mistake the man in the parable made. It was the ground that produced the good crop yet the man made it clear that it was his crop. We often make the mistake of forgetting the source of our blessings. None of us can be successful without the resources of God. The truth is everything we have is a gift from God. When we lose sight of the fact that all we own is really a gift from God, self-centeredness can infect our lives and cause a host of troubles. Take time today to thank God for all that you have.

Wednesday – Read Luke 12:17-19. Take a minute and count how many times the man in the parable says, “I” or “I’ll” and “My.” You will find he refers to himself 10 times in three verses (depending upon translation). Does this tell you anything? A life living only for yourself is no life at all. Jesus reminded us that true life can only be found by giving ourselves away. Generosity is the key to joy and happiness. Selfishness leads to emptiness and spiritual pain. Find an older person in the church you respect and ask them what life has taught them about being generous.

Thursday – Read Luke 12:20-21. Why was God so angry? Why did God call the man a fool? He was a fool because he failed to see one of the most important lessons about our money and possessions – we are blessed to be a blessing. Have you ever stopped to wonder why you have been given so much? Sure, God wants you to enjoy life, but God also wants you to share what you have so others can receive a blessing. When we fail to see this we have missed the point of life and God’s purposes for us.

Friday – Read Luke 12:21. Imagine your own funeral. What would you like for the minister and family to say about you? How would you like to be remembered as people are eating sandwiches at the reception? Would you like for them to remember you as someone who was rich toward God? Does your life reflect how you would like to be remembered?