

"INTENSIONAL" LIVING, PART I

Sermon, August 4, 2019

Texts: Luke 12:13-21; Hebrews 11:8-10

I must confess the sermon title was a bit of a stretch, but I noticed a common theme in the lectionary texts for this week and next week and opted for a two part sermon (*maybe three; we'll see*). The second Scripture reading this morning is a bit of a preview of next week's text; there we read, "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; **he lived in tents** ... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." He lived in tents. Pardon the pun, but Abraham had an "in tents" faith in a God Who had promised him great things, and he lived his life accordingly; Abraham lived INTENTS-ionally. He knew he was a sojourner, a short-timer in this world; his real home was in that eternal city whose architect and builder was God, and he lived his life accordingly ... living with his tent pegs loose in this Earth which was not his ultimate home, living in such a way as to be ready and available to go where God called him to go and to do what God bid him to do.

This is who we are as Christians in this world. We are strangers, sojourners, short-timers who are called to live obediently knowing this world is not our home, living as to *intents*-ionally invest our lives in eternal things, knowing our true citizenship is in heaven and that ultimately we will abide in the presence of God forever. Does this mean that we can't enjoy our lives here in the meantime? Quite the contrary! When we know this world is not all there is ... and, as Jesus underscores in this little parable this morning, this world is NOT all there is ... when we know that what we do now matters in some way FOREVER, when we know we have an eternal audience watching us, cheering for us (*and greiving for us when we stumble*), when we know that one day all things will be made well and clear and whole, then and only then are we set free to live as we were created to live! We've talked about this before, that being heavenly minded has inspired Christians throughout history to do tremendous earthly good. Living INTENTIONALLY with the knowledge of heaven made Christians throughout history become healers and helpers and heroes ... because being heavenly minded gives us hope, it gives us purpose, it gives us strength and it gives us reason to go on to do tremendous earthly good in this world while we're here.

You know, the word *fool* appears only twice in the four Gospels. The first time, Jesus warns us not to call anyone a fool; Matthew 5:22. The second time the word "fool" appears is here; Jesus uses it in this parable of a man who apparently gave no thought to heaven. What a foolish way to live. God said (*perhaps channeling his inner Mr. T*), "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded of you." The word translated here as "demand" is the word then used in the Greek world for the return of a loan. There will be a day when God calls in His "loan" for each of us ... after all, all we have, including our very lives, are "on loan" from Him ... and we would do well to be ready for that.

Some have interpreted this parable as Jesus saying it was stupid and foolish, if not sinful, for this man to amass riches. Well, no. Working, and the accumulation of those things which come as a result of our work, is not foolish or somehow evil in and of itself. We can, and indeed we should, work hard if able, and find great satisfaction and pleasure in the rewards of work and the extra blessings good fortune often brings our way. There is nothing inherently wrong with having money. There is nothing inherently wrong with making money (*unless you are a counterfeiter*) (*and, of course, if you are gaining it by illicit means*). Money in itself is not evil. By itself, money is an amoral force, like the force of electricity, which can light a church or light a brothel. Money can fund a mercenary or it can fund a missionary. Like electricity, "money" is a force that can do much good AND it can do much harm. It's not a perfect analogy, but attaining wealth is like upgrading from a bicycle to a car. You can give more people a ride with an automobile, you can get places faster, you can be of great service to others with a car, but you can also become more dangerous and more of a menace to others and yourself behind the wheel of a car. You can help or hurt, you can serve others or you can run over them, you can be a blessing or you can be a menace if you don't handle such a powerful force as an automobile with responsibility and care. The same with money. There is nothing inherently wrong with having and earning money; in fact, it is a mark of maturity, responsibility, and integrity to produce and earn and save, if you are physically able. One of the most foolish things we can do with money is to pietistically deny its importance. A person with no money in our society is in trouble, and usually becomes a burden to others.

So, the man in Jesus' parable was rich; nothing wrong with that. In fact, many of us would do well to give better attention to our finances. However, the Bible warns against becoming a *lover* of money. We aren't to love money; we are to love God and then use whatever money and blessings and talents He brings our way in this life accordingly, use them as God would have you use them, use them to be a blessing to others, thus, as Jesus says later in this chapter, storing up treasures in heaven. *(On a related note, I've heard it expressed that money is a fickle lover who has no commitment to you or to your well-being; and like many so-called "lovers" who refuse to make commitments, it will often leave you cold and alone. We aren't to love money; we are to love God, Who is committed to us and will never leave nor forsake us.)*

Our selection begins "... someone in the crowd said to him ..." Now, verse 1 of chapter 12 tells us this was a big crowd: ... a crowd of *many thousands* had gathered, so many that they were trampling on one another. Jesus spoke primarily to His disciples, but loudly enough that many in this crowd could listen in; He did this frequently throughout the Gospels, and oftentimes several in those overhearing crowds overheard enough to make them want to be disciples as well. Well, one man in that immense crowd stood up and called out, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." You've heard it said, "Where there's a will, there's a way." Well, where there's a will, there's also a family quarrel. The brother here wants his share, what he believes he is entitled to, and he wants Jesus to intervene. So, he calls out and asks ... no, actually he hollers out to Jesus and *demand*s, in so many words, "You tell my brother to give me my rights!"

Just as an aside, if you want to irritate Jesus, come to Him and demand your rights ... you come to Him and demand what's coming to you, and He might just respond accordingly! He might just give you what you deserve ... and trust me on this, you may not want that. I certainly don't want Jesus to give *me* what I deserve; I want Him to be my Savior Whose grace *rescues* me from what I deserve ... but that's almost another sermon! Anyway, this man is not asking for advice or guidance from Jesus; rather, he is actually ordering Jesus around. He has already decided what he wants and he tries to enlist Jesus to fight his battle. "You tell him, Jesus! You tell my brother what He should do. I've already decided what I want, this is what I think should happen, and if you, Jesus, will only do what I want, then everything will be OK." It just doesn't work that way! No, *He's* the Master, *we're* the servants. Jesus is more prone to respond favorably to us when we approach Him as Lord and Master and seek to live His way, rather than when we treat Him as our servant and demand He help us get *our* way. Appropriately, Jesus replied rather gruffly, "Man!", which may be the cultural equivalent of "Listen, buddy." "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" An arbiter was a *divider* of sorts, helping arbitrate or divide who got this and who got that, and so on. As another quick aside, what would be the opposite of a divider? A "uniter," a *reconciler*. Jesus always wants to foster reconciliation; He doesn't always respond kindly to those who try to enlist Him on the side of division rather than reconciliation. Two "things" last forever ... God and people. Jesus wants us to be reconciled to, and in good relations with, both.

Now again, Jesus did not condemn the man in the parable for being rich. The rich man was foolish not for having wealth, but because of what he planned to do ... or NOT do ... with that wealth, keeping it all for himself. "What shall I do for I have nowhere to store my crops?" Well, the truth of the matter is he *has* barns. And barns are good! There is nothing wrong with barns! Ask the Amish, who are among the most selflessly generous and genuinely faithful people in our nation ... they are renowned for barns; "barn raising" is a uniquely Amish community celebration! No, I think this man's sin was not that he had become wealthy, but that he wanted to selfishly hoard it all for himself. He had been blessed greatly, but he apparently did not want to share that blessing with others. In short, he was becoming something of a clogged bottleneck in the flow of God's blessings through him to others. I think the parable would have a different ending if the man had recognized he had more than enough for himself and went on to plan to share his surplus by finding ways to maximize his blessings for the benefit and betterment of others ... in honor of the God who blessed him.

Notice, too, that Jesus never directly answers the man's original request. Rather, Jesus drives home the point that all that we have, even our very souls, are on loan from God ... so let's live our lives accordingly. Do not let money or the acquisition of money and goods let us lose sight of our true home, our ultimate destination, don't let money let us lose sight of who we are called to be and what we are called to do. We are to be lovers not of money, but lovers of God ... and then use whatever money and blessings He brings our way accordingly ... thus storing up riches in the "barns" of heaven. Let us live *intentionally*, knowing this world is not our final home, by investing our time, our energy, our wealth in eternal things, and become *(as Jesus says in verse 23)* rich toward God.