The Parable of the Rich Fool
(Luke 12:13-21)

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” 14 Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” 15 Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” 16 And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17 He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ 18 Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ 20 “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?’ 21 “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:13-21, NIV).

The Picture
Jesus had just left dining with a group of Pharisees in the home of a Pharisee. While there He pronounced five “woes” on them for their hypocritical behavior. After leaving there many thousands had gathered to listen to Him. Despite the enormous crowd waiting to hear Him speak, He began by addressing things only to His close group of disciples. His brief discourse expressed how valuable people are and how worthless possessions truly are, how they should fear God and not man, how they should protect and proclaim with confidence the Name of Christ, and that disowning the Holy Spirit leads to death.

Then, someone in the crowd called out to Jesus, saying, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Although Jesus responds to this seeming interruption, He does so in a way that bypasses what the man was actually seeking in order to get at the heart of the issue. Jesus uses this particular question to address the heart attitude, not only of the man asking the question, but of the entire crowd. Desiring wealth is something everyone among the multitudes present would identify with. It is with this that He launches into His parable of the Rich Fool.

Who’s Who & What’s What
➢ The Rich Fool: He does not represent those who are wealthy. He represents those who are wealthy who believe they are so because of their own abilities and who do not give God glory for blessing them in this way. He also represents anyone whose life is marked by covetousness. This could very easily be a poor person. The issue is not money in the bank, but the desire of the heart.

The agricultural metaphor is not symbolic. Jesus could have used a number of different illustrations, but He chose one the people would easily understand and readily identify with. This is one of Jesus’ most direct parables. Those present did not have to try to figure out what was being communicated; it was quite clear.
Questions to be answered

- Why was the man who shouted out demanding Jesus be an arbiter between him and his brother? The people had courts to go to get such matters settled. Why go to Jesus. Certainly much discussion was being had among the people as to whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. This man came believing Jesus would be able to authoritatively make a judgment in this matter. Let’s pause and think about all this for a moment. You are going to see the One who may be the Savior of your people and you demand that He be an arbiter between you and your brother over earthly wealth. At least the Rich Young Ruler in Mark 10 had enough sense to ask, “Lord, what must I do to inherit eternal life.” His “foolish” question was indicative of the people in general; they had become a self-absorbed people whose chief concern was for their own temporal well being. Jesus is indeed arbiter and judge, but His judgments are over much more significant matters than earthly disputes determining temporary, earthly wealth. His judgments are of eternal consequence. His judgments determine the eternal destiny of your soul!

- What is the significance of Jesus using the term, “fool”, in verse 20? The word “fool” is used rarely in the New Testament. It is reserved for those who rejection is so great there is little hope for them. Psalm 141:1 states, “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”” Using the term in the New Testament is another way of saying a person is denying the existence of God and His sovereign rule over man. This man was a fool because he did not recognize that his wealth was from God. Not only that, but he felt under no obligation to use his wealth to bless others. He ignored the plight of the poor only to make his kingdom bigger. When stating, “This very night your life will be demanded of you,” it is being made clear that God is sovereign over His creature and not the other way around. The man invested his whole life into that which was temporary.

What is the point(s) of this parable?

1. All wealth, whether great or small, is a gift from God and is to be used to bring glory to Him and not to meet selfish desires.

2. Eternal riches are to be sought after and not temporal, earthly wealth. Luke 9:25 states, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”

3. Earthly possessions are not an indicator of spiritual health.

4. Your heart will always be where you are storing treasure. If in Heaven, then doing things that please God. If on earth, then doing things that please self.

Application

- Jesus warns His listeners to, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.” Each person should ask himself/herself, “What do I run after that will not last? What good thing am I neglecting because of my selfish pursuits?”
The purpose of life is not to eat, drink, and be merry! The purpose of life is summarized in the following two passages:

- Matthew 22:36-40 — “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”
  37 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
- 1 Corinthians 10:31 — So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

REMEMBER: God has promised to take care of all our earthly needs, not all of our wants, but all our needs. In our culture we often confuse the two. Matthew 6:25-34 tells us, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

How to Be Rich in God’s Sight (practical tips)

1. Serve with joy! No matter what task you involve yourself in it can be a great blessing if done with joy.

2. Do everything with the knowledge that you are working for the Lord and not for man! Colossians 3:23-24 states, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

3. Invest in the lives of others! Look for ways to be a blessing in the church, to your family, to your neighbors, and to those who are less fortunate than yourself.

4. See every trial as an opportunity from God to grow you and help you store up treasure in Heaven.
5. Fear God and not man! The introduction to this parable is a clear command, which all believers must heed with sober minds. "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him” (Luke 12:4-5). In others words, we must always consider the fact that answering to God is of a far greater significance than having to answer to man. Again, the issue is temporal versus eternal.