

August 3rd, 2025

Luke 12:13-21 “Get Over Yourself”

I’m going to start out with a preacher secret, but it’s not the usual kind I share where I tell you about some of the sneaky little things we preachers do to hide our motives. This is different. This is about our training. Now, in most mainline denominations including our own, a preacher needs to have a minimum of a master’s degree in theology, divinity, or biblical studies to be recognized as an ordained minister with standing in their denomination. And in many cases, it matters *where* you receive that master’s degree. Most denominations want you to have a Master of Divinity degree from a school that’s accredited by the ATS or Association of Theological Schools. Here’s where I need to stop before we start making assumptions about the ATS. Some people might think, “Well this is just an example of how progressive academic elites find ways to discriminate against evangelicals. They only accredit schools that swing left on the theological pendulum.” Not true.

Check this out - Oral Roberts University Graduate School of Theology and Harvard Divinity School are *both* on the list of accredited schools. Those seminaries are about as different as night and day theologically speaking, but they both conform to the requirements of the ATS. So you can be Pentecostal or Episcopalian and still be ATS accredited. The function of the ATS accrediting board is to weed out people who have “degrees” from fly-by-night online seminaries and keep them out of churches who have standards when it comes to calling ministers. Every ATS accredited seminary must offer certain classes in biblical literacy, theology, supervised ministerial experience, spiritual formation, ethics and boundaries that are taught with academic consistency. Here’s my two cents on the matter. I think that the ATS should require seminaries to offer classes in basic facilities management including plumbing and electricity. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve run across situations where preachers get in a bind when it comes to plumbing and the only tool they have at their disposal is a Greek lexicon. But I’m not holding my breath. I don’t think the ATS is suddenly going to add that to their

qualifications. What is more realistic is that they should require classes in what *not* to get involved with when you're in ministry. This class should be called, "Stay the Heck Out of People's Business 201."

If ever there is a skill that all ministers should be familiar with, it's how to recognize the difference between when to step into a potentially volatile situation and when you should drop everything and run the other way. I've sat on too many regional ethics committees where a pastor's standing is at stake for not minding their own business and getting into a hot mess that sometimes requires legal representation. Stay the heck out of people's business. You do not know what you're getting into. That's why preachers from a myriad of Christian denominations *love* this passage that Marie read this morning.

It starts out with someone in a large crowd of people who gathered around Jesus saying, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." We ministers tense up and say, "Don't do it! Don't do it Jesus!" *even* when we know the outcome of the story. We know that the only appropriate response to this request is, "Heck no, that's not any of my business, go find a professional arbiter!" Talk about triangulation! Talk about a serious breach of ethical boundaries! But here's the thing, it wasn't unusual for people of that time and culture to seek out religious leaders to settle disputes! When I was visiting the American Center for Oriental Research in Aman, Jordan back in the 90's, they were working on this huge project to translate scrolls that they found in the ruins of Petra during a time when a Christian community was established there. The scrolls they were studying were all about religious leaders settling property disputes among the members. So this situation here in Luke 12 really isn't that unusual. But here's Jesus setting a great example of what to do when this happens –

"Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" Amen! You tell him! Jesus must have went to an ATS accredited seminary because clearly they required clergy ethics and boundaries. This story from Luke should become a litmus test for receiving ATS qualifications. "You are

not an arbiter. Stay out of people's business!" What Jesus did, though, was what he did best – He told a parable. Over the centuries, this parable has come to be known as "The Parable of the Rich Fool." Jesus starts out by revealing the point of the story first. Before he even told it he said, "Be on your guard against greed. Life isn't about possessions." No, Jesus! That's not the way you do it. You tell the parable first, then you hit them with the takeaway!

The first thing I want you to notice about this parable is that Jesus did not denigrate the rich man's wealth. It's not a crime to be rich. There's no evidence here that the rich man did anything immoral or illegal to build his wealth. He's not portrayed as an extortionist or an oppressor of the poor. He's just a rich guy who talks to himself out loud, which I don't hold against him because I do too. So this man's land produced an abundant crop. And he said to himself, "Self? What should I do, because I have no place to store my crops." Apparently, the little voice that lives in his head said, "Tear down your old barns so you can build larger ones!" *This*, according to Jesus, was where he went wrong. The rich man's problem is not his crops, it's his attitude. He is covetous and lives only for earthly things. That's what fills his soul. In his abundance, he thinks he has a storage space problem. But Jesus points out that he has a soul problem. In the rich man's eyes, the "action required" is not the sharing of his abundance but the building of new barns to store it all.

In the conversation he's having in his head with his "soul," he never thanks God for the gift of a great harvest. He doesn't consider what God would have him do with this blessing. When you think about it, his complaint about the lack of space sounds really hollow. The truth of the matter is that he's probably quite proud of his accomplishment because this gift will increase his wealth. Think about the number of times he uses "I" and "me" and "my" in this conversation with his soul. That kind of language tells me that this was all about him. It's all about his self-interest.

While we may not talk out loud to our souls, the silent language of our acts may be the same as the rich man's. We come to rely on our many possessions and overlook the fact that our lives are ultimately dependent on God. The rich man seems oblivious to the notion that he's not the only actor in the game of life. The rich man's actions are based on self-love and run counter to the actions of God. And don't get me wrong. Love of self isn't a sin. In fact, there are a lot of folks who deal with depression and low self-esteem that need to love themselves more. But the rich guy loves himself a little too much. He acts out of the belief that he has "ample goods laid up for many years." But God's actions are based on his sovereign will that "this night the man's soul will be required of him." The years of ease this rich man eagerly anticipates are cut short by the one who has authority over his life. Our actions and ways of being in the world are just a small part of life's calculations.

Okay, this lesson is fine and dandy for rich folks. But what about us? What about those of us who are just trying to get by from day to day. What's the lesson we're supposed to bring home?" Listen, you don't have to be rich to have the same kind of "soul problem" as this guy in the story. We too can be guilty of thinking that we're the only actor in the game of life. We too can have what my spiritual director calls a "lousy abundance consciousness." We too might think that we have a storage space problem, but what we have is a lack of faith in God's abundance. And to solve this, we need to get over ourselves. "Okay, but again, Jesus is talking about rich guy problems. I'm not rich! I can't think of any examples about how this applies to me!" I have two words for you -- Toilet paper. I have two more -- Hand sanitizer. I'm not done -- how about these two words -- Bleach wipes. "Yeah, but that was different. That was a matter of survival during a time of crisis!" Was it?

In the Exodus story from the Old Testament, Moses helped the Hebrew people escape slavery in Egypt. For 40 years, they wandered in the wilderness re-establishing their relationship with God and learning how to rely on God heart and soul. One of the first tests they faced had to do with a substance called "manna." No one knows what it was apart from

it's nutritional value. Every morning, they would wake up and there was manna on the ground. The people gathered it and ate it. God said, "Only take what you can use in a day. Don't store it up except on the sabbath – you can store it the day before so you don't have to work on your day of rest. But the rest of the week? You've got to have faith that it will be there every morning." And because people are people and we all struggle with lousy abundance consciousness, they started gathering it up to store for another day. The consequence was that it rotted.

Again, the point of Jesus' parable is not about a "rich guy" issue. It's a people issue. It's an abundance issue. It's a soul issue. When we stand before God, will our record show acts of abundance and mercy or acts of self-interest? The rich man acted out of love for himself, but God acts out of love for the entire created order. We all hit those moments when we wonder: *Will it be enough?* That was the question behind the barns. That was the question behind the hoarded manna. That's the question behind the panic-bought toilet paper and the way we cling to control, cling to our stuff, cling to our certainty. But Jesus says: "*Life does not happen in the abundance of possessions.*" Not because possessions are bad. But because trust is better.

The parable kind of ends in tragedy—not because God is cruel, but because the rich man never learned how to live with open hands. He never realized that his soul was built to receive more than grain and goods—it was built for relationship, for trust, for mercy. So here's the invitation: Whatever your barns look like, whatever you're tempted to stockpile—whether it's stuff, or time, or control—open your hands. And trust that just like manna in the morning... God will show up. Maybe not early. Maybe not in the way we expect. But always.