

Three Things That Matter in Life

Luke 12:13-21 (New American Standard Bible)

¹³ Now someone in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” ¹⁴ But He said to him, “You there—who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over the two of you?” ¹⁵ But He said to them, **“Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one is affluent does his life consist of his possessions.”** ¹⁶ And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. ¹⁷ And he began thinking to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ And he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and I will store all my grain and my goods there.’ ¹⁹ And I will say to myself, ‘You have many goods stored up for many years to come; relax, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!’” ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is demanded of you; and as for all that you have prepared, who will own it now?’ ²¹ **Such is the one who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich in relation to God.”**

Introduction

(Begin the sermon asking the congregation to write down their own answers on *Three Things That Matter Most in Life*).

For the same question, some people answered as follows: *health, education, and gratitude. Faith, family, dreams. Family, school, and friends. Health, respect, and money. Wisdom, favor, and giving.* What is your answer? Mine is ‘Jesus, family, church family.’ Here’s one of God’s answers to the same question: **Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God** (Micah 6:8).

Last year, I read a very interesting article in National Geographic Magazine. **What does a walk across the world teach about navigating our troubled century?** (A Journey’s lessons by Paul Salopek, National Geographic Magazine, November 2021). In this article Mr. Salopek shared his insights on the same question.

For your information, Mr. Salopek planned to walk through the world, starting from the horn of Africa, through Middle East, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, India, China, Siberia, North America, and end his journey at the tip of South America. All 24,000 miles. Nine years ago, he started walking from Ethiopia. As of November 2021, he completed 11,000 miles somewhere in China. He walked through deserts and mountains. He encountered many

different cultures and customs, even hostility and kindness. He met thousands of people on the way, both friends and foes. He met the outcasts, the invisibles, refugees, the displaced, the jobless, homeless, and stateless, forced migrants, and even smugglers. All in all, he learned the following three lessons.

First, *tread lightly upon the earth*. You don't need any further explanations. Anyone can tell you that you cannot nor want to carry many things when you walk. Perhaps, all you want is good shoes and healthy body. Some food, shelter, and clothes. Maybe, have some good company. Not much more than that. I wonder there's some lesson for our life journey. We don't need a lot. Tread lightly.

Second, *share what you can*. Mr. Salopek firsthand experienced people's generosity of sharing what they have with him. Not among the rich folks, but rather among those who are poor. One time, he was traveling through Azerbaijan. In one town, he experienced an unbelievable kindness as he knocked at a dilapidated apartment occupied by Armenian refugees from Syria. Through the closed door, he heard the women hollering, "Wait." They frantically, he continues, "*prepared a meal of cucumber, salt, cheese, and stale flatbread. They kept restocking my plate, a sheet of newspaper. They refused to even sit down. Two suitcases held all their worldly goods*" (*ibid.*, p. 133). It blows your mind, doesn't it? Share what you can.

Third, *but most of all, remember*. Good things. Bad things. Good folks. Poor folks. Learn a lesson. Remember their generosity and kindness. Repeat. Be humble. Be content. Be thankful for what you have. Do unto others as you would have them do to you.

Content

Life is a journey. We start from our earthly home and journey toward to our heavenly home. We ourselves walk daily, both spiritually and physically. By the way, God's Word compares our life journey to walking. *Though all the peoples walk, each in the name of his god, as for us, we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever* (Micah 4:5).

In our heaven-bound journey, Jesus commands us to remember three things when it comes down to material possessions: *Guard against greed, Store up your treasures in heaven, not on earth. Be rich toward God.*

Be on Guard against greed.

One time I heard about a family of five siblings. After their last surviving parent passed away, they started fighting over the inheritance. It got ugly. They ended up taking it to the court. Nothing is new, is it? Even in the time of Jesus two brothers fought for their own inheritance. To the point where the younger brother brought the case to Jesus' attention and begged for His intervention. It is quite surprising how Jesus responded to his request. *"You there—who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over the two of you?"* (v. 14). Although it seems to me a fair request for equal distribution between the two brothers, Jesus refused to be an arbitrator. Instead, He turned to the crowd saying, **"Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one is affluent does his life consist of his possessions** (v. 15).

Be on your guard against every form of **greed**. This is a great advice for us living in America. Almost every ad we watch or hear entices us to be greedier than before. *You want this, You deserve this, Get it now, You are the first in line*, and so forth. Just think of the Black Friday Shopping Crowd. Some folks physically fight over certain things, don't they? I am glad that Jesus warns us to be on guard against every form of greed. Peter the apostle also warns about the hearts that are trained in greed (2 Peter 2:14). Untrain your heart from greed.

Jesus also explains us why we should be on guard against greed. **Because even when we are affluent, our life doesn't consist of possessions.** He is telling us the truth. If possessions really matter in our happiness, all the billionaires would be very happy, and all the poor folks would be miserable at all times. On the contrary, the opposite is often true. E.g., Not long ago, I heard about a 1.2-billion-dollar lottery was sold somewhere in LA, California. I am concerned about the winner's future life. Did you hear about some lottery winners who became very unhappy even miserable after they had won? Sink Jesus' truth into your heart. *'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes out of the mouth of God'* (Matthew 4:4). **Our life doesn't consist of our possessions even when we are rich** (v. 15).

Two Greek words for 'life': 'bios' and 'zoe.' The life Jesus talks about in today's text is 'Zoe,' not 'bios.' 'Bios' means a biological existence that consists of eating, drinking, sleeping, and having fun. That's what all the animals do—day in day out. 'Zoe,' on the other hand, is much more than that. It transcends a mere biological existence. It doesn't consist of a great deal of money. It involves the relationship with the Creator. It brings forth *meaning and purpose along with faith, worship, love, kindness, hope, good works, satisfaction, even sacrifice*. Money helps, but don't think or act like money is everything lest you be disillusioned. Learn to be content with what you have. God's Word confirms: *If we have*

food and covering, with these we shall be content (1 Timothy 6:8). Blessed are those who are content.

Store up your treasures in heaven, not on earth.

Jesus says: ¹⁹ “**Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth**, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But **store up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also** (Matthew 6:19-21).

Jesus often talks about treasures: treasures on earth and treasures in heaven. Of course, He is not most interested in making us filthy rich in heaven with green dollars. He knows what matters eternally. He knows what’s best for us. He also knows when we keep storing up earthly treasures only for ourselves, it hurts us: we will worry about how to keep them, or don’t know how to use them (like the rich fool in today’s story). Furthermore, earthly treasures tend to corrupt our character, love, and generosity. They will make us worship the money than God. They will give us a false security in money, rather than in God. Did I mention that it can also ruin our relationships? Let’s not forget wherever we store up our treasures, there will be our heart. Store up your treasures in heaven. Keep your heart up there.

Finally, Be rich toward God.

One who is rich toward himself is not rich toward God and vice versa. You cannot be both. Being rich with ourselves in earthly possessions actually makes us poor toward God. Being rich with earthly possessions without sharing endangers our chance to get into Heaven. Remember Jesus’ teaching? *And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God* (Matthew 19:24).” Remember the risk of the material wealth that blocks our entry to Heaven. Be rich toward God. To be so, we don’t need million dollars. All we need is to set our mind on heavenly riches such as love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness, and share them with others.

Conclusion

Remember how the story of the rich fool ends? Death came upon the rich man without warning. At the height of his success. He couldn’t enjoy the accumulated wealth as he had planned. Listen to what God said to the rich man: *‘You fool! This very night your soul is demanded of you; and as for all that you have prepared, who will own it now?’* Jesus

says, ²¹ ***Such is the one who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich in relation to God.***

Unless we are on guard against greed, unless we are rich toward God, we will meet the same fate. Don't be a fool. Be rich toward God. Amen.