

“When I try to remember I forget.” (15)

One day four employees from different departments rushed to use the photocopier at the same time. The person from accounts payable said, "We have to get our bills paid, so I should go first." Accounts receivables said, "If we don't get our receivables collected, you won't have the money to pay the bills." The product manager said, "Unless I sell something, there won't be any receivables to collect to pay the bills, so I should go first." The last person mentioned she was from payroll-and everyone swiftly cleared for her a path to the copier.

And I guess the point of the story is when it comes to priorities, some things are more important than money. Please turn your Bibles to **Luke 12**. We are going to look at “**The parable of the rich fool**,” today and Jesus is going to teach us about just how forgetful we can be sometimes, especially if our priorities are all wrong.

In **Luke 11** Jesus is preaching one of the fieriest sermons He ever preached. In **Luke 11:14** Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. And some of those in the crowd accused Him of using the devil’s power to do it. And in **Luke 11:29** He preached to the multitudes and called them a wicked generation because they were always looking for miraculous signs. And again in **Luke 11:37** Jesus was invited to a Pharisees house for dinner but He didn’t wash His hands and those who were present weren’t a happy bunch and so Jesus called them, “**foolish people**”. And in **verse 45** “**One of the experts in the law said to Him when you say these things, you insult us also.**”

And so Jesus tells them that this generation was going to be held accountable for the death of the prophets since the beginning of time and the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law were fuming. And in **Luke 12:1** Jesus speaks to His disciples and tells them to look out for those guys, those so called leaders. And there are thousands of people listening in on the conversation that Jesus is having and it’s in **Luke 12:13** we pick up the story.

**Luke 12:13-15** “**Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" 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."**”

Have you ever been having a conversation with someone when someone else jumps in and totally changes the subject? That’s what this guy does. Jesus had been speaking about vital truths, of divine providence. He had been speaking about vital truths of confession. He had been speaking about the Holy Spirit and while Jesus was talking with His disciples this man spoke up and said, “**Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.**”

This was totally out of order; this was not the place and time. **Now what does this tell us about the man?** Well this tells us that he wasn’t interested in spiritual things, his whole heart and life were absorbed with his present life. And so Jesus said to this individual, “**Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?**” Jesus bluntly refused to answer this man’s blunt question. Jesus didn’t want anything to do with a quarrel over family property.

You see the Jewish Law was specific enough about this kind of thing. **Deuteronomy 21:15-21** “**If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him.**”

The Law said that the firstborn son was to receive a double portion (**two-thirds**) of the inheritance and the remainder was to be divided among the other sons, this Law left no room for debate. Now this man who spoke to Jesus obviously must have been the younger brother. And so he comes along and speaks to Jesus to try and get Him to go on his side in order to get an equal share of the inheritance. In other words he knew the Law but he wanted more than his rightful share.

And I think that if I were ever asked to choose a song, which summed up the society we live in today, I would choose the **Rolling Stones** song, “**I can’t get no satisfaction.**” Because loved ones what follows is one of the most severe warnings in the Bible against covetousness. Jesus says in **Luke 12:15**, “**Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.**” And this warning covers any and all forms of covetousness.

A businessman who needed **millions of pounds** to clinch an important deal went to church to pray for the money. By chance he knelt next to a man who was praying for **£100** to pay an urgent debt.

The businessman took out his wallet and pressed £100 into the other man's hand. Overjoyed, the man got up and joyfully left the church. The businessman then closed his eyes and prayed, "And now, Lord, now that I have your undivided attention...."

I guess the point is that Christians too can fall for the temptation of covetousness. But what is covetousness? It's not simply a desire for property. For example a person can have an excessive and unrestrained desire for food; someone might say that they are hungry for food. Just as some people are hungry for food some other people may be hungry for gain. In others words some people have a selfish ambition to want more and more.

I used to watch "Ready steady cook" a few years ago and on one show the guests were past lottery winners. One of them won 1 million pounds and the other won 6 million pounds. And when Ensley Harriet was talking to them, the one who had 6 million pounds said that, "she still does the lottery".

And that's because there are people who will never be satisfied with what they have. And anyone who desires anything in that way is a perfect example of what covetousness is, it's an excessive desire for gain. And so after warning against covetousness, Jesus states the reason for the warning.

He says in Luke 12:15, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." The NEB version says, "Even when a man has more than enough, his wealth does not give him life." What's Jesus saying? He's saying that life is more than things. He's saying that the success of a person's work cannot be measured in terms of what he has been able to accumulate.

And if your still confused to what Jesus means, it's now that He shares "The parable of the rich fool" to illustrate the meaning. Luke 13:16-21 "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 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 all my grain and my goods. 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."' "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 anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

Everyday of our lives we see evidence of covetousness all around us. And while adultery, drunkenness and dishonesty are still frowned upon; covetousness rides right through society and is pretty much ignored. Even among self-professed Christians it is so widespread that it is scarcely recognised for what it is.

And what is it? It's a deadly sin. A worldly atmosphere so threatens the church that it's very life is threatened. Individual members are in such hot pursuit of their own interests that they have found very little time and energy left for the Lord. We really need to listen to what Jesus is teaching us here today.

Here was a man whom in the world's eyes was a great success, yet God called him a fool. But why? What was wrong in his life? How did he miss the way? How did he act like a fool? Well this man was a fool because of the important things he forgot. And that's what I want to spend the remainder of our time together looking at.

He forgot 5 things and the 1<sup>st</sup> thing he forgot was other people. He thought of no one except himself. This is the first thing that leaps out at you when you read the parable. 6 times he uses the word "I" in the parable. 5 times he uses the word "My" in the parable. This man was all about self, everything he did, he did for himself.

And other people never even entered his mind, not once did he remember those people who worked for him. Luke 13:17 says, "He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'" Think about it, maybe the farmer across the field was saying to himself, "What can I do, for I don't have any bread to feed my children." And if he didn't have enough barns, there were other places he could have put it.

You might ask where, where could he have put it? James 1:27 "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." That's where he could have put his crops.

He could have put it at the feet of the homeless, he could have put it in the houses of the widows, or he could have put it in the mouths of the orphans and infants. But Oh no this rich fool didn't think about those barns, all he could think about was his own little world where there was no room for no-one except himself.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing that he forgot was that **man is more than what he owns**. You see he looked on life in terms of the physical things only. And it's here that he makes a tragic mistake, like much of the world makes today. He didn't distinguish between what a man has and what a man is. It's not always easy to make a definite distinction because many of you who have been brought up in the church still count a person fortunate if he enjoys a long run of prosperity. The Bible says in **Mark 10:23** "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

**1 Timothy 6:9+10** "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

In other words a person's life is not the same as his business. **1 Timothy 6:17-19** "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life." You see it's more important to be rich in good deeds than it is to just to be rich in goods.

And that brings me to the 3<sup>rd</sup> thing he forgot, **he forgot the source of real happiness**. He had a false conception of life and so because of that, he had a false conception of happiness. He thought he could be happy by indulging himself. There's was another man just like this one described in **Ecclesiastes 2:3-10**, "I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly--my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives. I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well--the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labour."

**And what conclusion did he come to?** **Ecclesiastes 2:11**, "Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." You see loved ones happiness is not found in things. Money can buy a lot of things but it can't buy a sense of usefulness. It can't buy a clear conscience; it can't buy a mind content with God and man. **Or as the Beatles once sang, "Money can't buy me love."** These are the real riches and without them no one can be really happy.

The 4<sup>th</sup> thing he forgot was his biggest blunder, **he forgot God**. He didn't take God into account at all. There was nothing wrong with him wanting to tear down his barns and build bigger ones because as we know a good farmer must have foresight. But his fatal mistake was that in all of his well-laid plans, he didn't spare one thought for God.

And church this is a common down fall for many Christians. **James 4:13-15** "Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." Whatever our long range plans may be, we need to remember that our biggest factor of all is God. And church if we ever leave God out of our plans then you can be sure that our plans will end in ruin.

And that brings me to the **final thing** he forgot, **he forgot about death**. He thought he was going to live a long life. **Luke 12:19** says, "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.'" And yet God says to him in **Luke 12:20**, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you."

He only had one more day left to live and in so many ways we deceive ourselves constantly by thinking that we too have got plenty of time to live. We put off until tomorrow and the truth of the matter is that we don't even know if there will be a tomorrow. You see Satan doesn't say to us, "**You will not die**" but he does say to us is, "**You will not die soon.**"

But Psalm 90:9+10 says, “All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.”

In the height of this man’s prosperity and self-satisfaction, God appeared to the rich man and required his life. **How much did he leave?** He left it all. No wonder he’s a fool. He spent his whole life striving for the things he had to leave behind. He neglected the true values of life that he could have taken with him.

Matthew 6:19-21 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Many people may have a good title while they are here on earth, whether it be **the Queen**, or the **Prime Minister**, whether it is **Lord** such and such or the **Mayor of London**. But when they get to heaven, they have no permanent lease or title.

You know the story about the **rich man and Lazarus**. The story about a rich guy who lived in a great big mansion and outside near the gate was a beggar named **Lazarus**. And for years he begged at his gates but the rich man did nothing about it. Now he wasn’t unkind to the guy, he never had him thrown in prison or moved away. But one night his soul slipped out from him and all his wealth, all his ease and all his self-indulgences were gone.

**Why was the rich man condemned?** Matthew 25:41-46 when Jesus is talking about the great division on judgement day. "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

The rich man lost his chance, Lazarus was right there in front of him and yet he did nothing about it. The rich fool in the parable forgot about many things and Satan whispered in his ear, “**These are not important.**” And he’s still doing it today, whispering in people’s ears, “**Just look after yourself because nobody else cares about you.**”

Well let me tell you loved ones God cares and He cared enough to come down from heaven in the form of Jesus and give His life and die a horrific death on a wooden cross, so that you and I don’t have to be condemned. **Romans 8:1** “**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**”

Turn your Bible to **Matthew 5** where Jesus preaches the **Sermon on the Mount**. He says beginning in **verse 3-12**, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Now notice that Jesus finished by saying, “**Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.**”

Now let me share with you some of the devil’s beatitudes.

1. Blessed are those who are too tired, too busy, too distracted to spend an hour once a week with their fellow Christians -- they are my best workers.
2. Blessed are the touchy that stop going to church -- they are my missionaries.
3. Blessed are the troublemakers -- they shall be called my children.
4. Blessed are the complainers -- I'm all ears to them.
5. Blessed are those who are bored with the minister's mannerisms and mistakes -- for they get nothing out of his sermons.
6. Blessed are those who gossip -- for they shall cause strife and divisions that please me.

7. Blessed are those who are easily offended -- for they will soon get angry and quit.
8. Blessed are those who do not give their offering to carry on God's work -- for they are my helpers.
9. Blessed is he who professes to love God but hates his brother and sister -- for he shall be with me forever.
10. Blessed are you, who, when you hear this think it is about other people and not yourself -- I've got you too!

Do you see the difference? If we listen to Satan, we will end up being with him in eternal damnation. But if we listen to Jesus and do what He asks of us, we will have eternal life, the crown of glory, treasures stored where nobody or nothing can touch them.

Or as He says to His disciples in Luke 12:33+34, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

So let me ask you, where's your heart at? Is it set on being rich in good deeds for others for the Lord? Or is it set on getting rich for good things for yourself? What are we going to do with our crop when it gets full? Are we going to build another barn? Or are we going to look at the barns screaming out around us?

I used to have a little magnet stuck to our fridge door and it's a picture of Winnie the Pooh. And next to Him there is a pile of books and a little slogan that says, "When I try to remember I forget." In other words when we remember our purpose as a church, we will never forget our purpose as individual Christians. Because the minute we forget about God, that's when we forget our purpose. That's when we forget about other people, that's when we forget that a person is more than what they own. That's when we forget the source of real happiness, that's when we forget God and that's when we forget about death.

If you're a Christian this morning who has or beginning to forget your purpose, then read your Bible, talk to God in prayer or just speak to someone about it and allow them to pray for you and with you. If you're not a Christian this morning, and you're tired of chasing after material things, or maybe you think life is meaningless.

Or maybe your just looking for a purpose or some meaning to life, then please just ask any member of the church here and we would be happy to share with you the reason why we believe there is a reason for life and how God has got a purpose for every individual in this life.