

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Luke, the twelfth chapter beginning at the thirteenth verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

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." And he told them this parable: "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."

Heavenly Father, sanctify us by the truth. Your word is truth. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

How rich are you? How much have you set aside for retirement? Are you earning a good return on all your investments?

How rich are you? Did you awake to a peaceful country to live in? Were you able to sleep without a care or concern? Have you gone about your "normal" routine so far today?

How rich are you? Did you read your Bible before coming to church this morning? Did you make time for your own private devotion? Did you look ahead to the texts for this week and study them the past seven days?

It takes a lot of forms but asking yourself, how rich are you, can also provide a plethora of answers. In many respects we are a rich people, a rich nation. We all have food to eat, a car to drive, a home to sleep and play in... we have so much. But are we rich? Many of us would say, "No, I'm not rich." And sadly, we are correct in that assessment. Just like Jesus points out in our text, we need not be rich in the eyes of the world; rather, we need to be **Rich Toward God**.

So I will ask again: How rich are you? How many of us are willing to stake our eternal salvation on that answer, are you? When I read a text like this, my mind begins to play tricks on me and I suppose I am not alone.

In the text before us today, a man has just received great financial and physical news. His crop had come in and it was indeed a bumper crop. It was so large, in fact, that he was contemplating building new barns just to hold it all. Now before we start a potential argument, no, his sin was not being rich. His sin was not having a lot of worldly possessions. Consider

Abraham, David, Solomon, Job, Lydia... many very faithful and "Christian" people who were also very wealthy. Yet, the man did sin. So what was his sin? Well, listen again to the man's thoughts: ***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."*** So what was his sin? Think of how many times the man used "I" or "my" in the above phrase. No less than ten times does the man refer to what he wants and what he will do. James (4:13-16) has a very stern warning about this kind of thinking, "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... In stead you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'"

In the man's thoughts he only focuses on what he will do and what his plans are; have you

ever caught yourself doing this? I do believe this is the ultimate show of breaking the first commandment: having no other gods. It allows us to know and feel that we are in control of our lives. It allows us to believe in the errant way of thinking that we are in control. The man just wanted to build barns... but he didn't care what God wanted. You may have barns overflowing, literally and figuratively, and how often do you ask God what He wants you to do with them? It's hard to do sometimes because there is the distinct possibility we will not like the answer. I will go to a Packer game this year... but I will not bend on how much I give to the church. I will buy a new house this year... but I will not help a neighbor who is in need. I will do this or that... but I will not seek from God if it is His will that this or that be done. As Johann Gerhard states, "For just as God the Lord has above all others shown these blessings to you, He also wants to remind you that you also are above all others to thank Him for them and be obedient to Him... Why does God give great riches and temporal goods? Not that you should horde them up for yourself, hurriedly hiding them away with an earthly hedgehog

line of defense. Instead, you are to use them to do good for others. You are to become rich in good works, give generously and be helpful. This you may then also be rich towards God."

However, what about breaking the ninth commandment? Whoa, wait, isn't one commandment per sermon enough? Think again to what prompted this parable of Christ: a man came to Him complaining about splitting an inheritance. "Teacher, tell my brother to split the inheritance with me." And Jesus' reply? "Man, who made me a judge or arbiter?" And then we get the parable of a man who had received a landfall and only wanted to keep it and not share it. As Stoekhardt writes, "Total bankruptcy is the end of the covetous man. He is brought into judgment with his name lost, for before God he is a fool; with his soul lost, for that is what is required of him for eternal punishment; with the world lost, for that he must leave behind; with heaven lost, for he has neglected to deposit a capital in heaven." And it's kind of funny to me that the new translations have gone away from the older ones. In the new translations of the Bible this

verse is taken as greed; that Jesus is warning about all kinds of greed, but really Jesus is warning about all kinds of covetousness. Bewary of coveting. And what is coveting? It is wanting something so bad, being greedy for it, plotting out how to get it, constantly thinking about it and obtaining it... **BUT IT IS NOT YOURS!** Wanting, striving, conniving, seeking... after something that does not belong to you. This too is a valuable lesson in this text. I want a new house... but what if God doesn't want that for you. I want to go to a Packer game... but what if God doesn't want that for you. I want... but it is not always what God wants. And as Jesus so rightly points out, and we so often forget, "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." A man's life does not consist in his wanting more and more on this side of heaven... but on wanting more and more on God's side of heaven.

As Jesus was being tempted for forty days in the desert, the Devil offered Him something that many people would jump at. Satan offered Him all the kingdoms of the world, if Jesus

would just bow down to him. That is a pretty tempting offer for us. All the kingdoms of the world if we would just bow down to Satan. And yet Christ would not fall victim to Satan. Jesus Christ neither broke the first nor the ninth commandment. Instead, Jesus Christ looked forward to the end of His life on this earth. He knew what He would have to endure. He knew the ridicule, the pain, the scorn, the ire... and He endured it all. He lived a life of perfect obedience and reliance on God. He trusted that the heavenly Father would take care of Him. And then He died. He died a sinner's death, by hanging on a cross. As He hung on that cross, He stayed there for all the times that you or I do not uphold the first commandment perfectly, He stayed there for all the times that you or I do not uphold the ninth commandment perfectly. He stayed on that cross until all sin was atoned for. And then He died. Three days later He rose again from the grave and proclaimed His victory to the world. His victory over sin, death, and hell. Jesus Christ had won the victory that was beneficial for us all. That is what Jesus Christ did.

As Lenski notes, “The negation, ‘and is not rich in God,’ is not intended as the complete negation of gathering earthly treasures so that we are to gather no wealth except the spiritual. The negative qualifies the preceding positive; our gathering of earthly treasures is never to bar us from gathering the true riches.” Our great wealth is not found in the things of this world, our true riches are found ONLY in Jesus Christ our Lord. The great treasures of this world for a Christian are not the money and wealth and possessions, that so many strive for; rather, they are the simple things: some words on a page of paper, water, bread, and wine combined with God’s Words. These are the greatest treasures that we could ever have. Without these, we have no treasures, but because of these “means of grace” we have the greatest treasure, faith in all that Jesus Christ has done for us.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, how rich are you? Are you rich in the eyes of the world? Are you rich compared to your neighbor? Your friends? When it comes to earthly wealth it does not matter our level of “richness.” Because honestly it doesn’t matter. You could

be Bill Gates or you could be a lowly pauper and ultimately it doesn’t matter. The thing that does matter is your “richness toward God.” So, how rich are you? Are you coming to hear God’s Word and being showered with His love? Are you baptized into His holy name and thus strengthening your faith in all that His Son has done for you? Are you receiving the very body and blood of Christ and thus receiving also the forgiveness of all your sins?

This world can be very deceiving. This world can spin us around, but we do not need to focus on the world.. we need to focus on Christ. Whether you are rich in the eyes of the world or not... Be rich toward God.

And we pray: Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.