

July 31, 2022

Ecclesiastes 1:2; Colossians 3:1-4; St. Luke 12:13-21:

“A Whole Lot of Nothing!”

- I. Get.
- II. Gives a Picture.
- III. Points to What God Gives.

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Ecclesiastes 1:2; Colossians 3:1-4; St. Luke 12:13-21

Dear friends in Christ,

If you have a schedule for reading and studying Scripture then you are probably familiar with these words Paul wrote while in prison:

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. For my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” (Phi. 1:21-23)

There are questions for us here, dear friends. Would we think those words apply only to an Apostle? How do we understand “fruitful labor”? What are we emphasizing with our children in light of what they will face from this world? While we labor for the necessities of life, is the desire to depart and be with Christ greater than desire for this world? Does that question apply mostly to the elderly and those facing terminal issues, or apply to all?

Martin Luther said: “Riches are the least worthy gifts which God can give man, yet men toil for them day and night, and take no rest. Therefore, God frequently gives riches to foolish people to whom He gives nothing else.” Would we agree with that? Think about it. As has been said, “You’ll never see a U-Haul behind a hearse.” Let’s take a few minutes to look at . . .

A WHOLE LOT OF NOTHING!

I. Get.

Prior to our Gospel text we’re informed, “...when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, (Jesus) began to say...”. (Lk. 12:1) Many thousands gathered! He had been teaching powerful issues for our walk through this world in preparation for the world to come. It is in this setting that we’re told: “Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’ But he said to him, ‘Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?’”

The fact is, there were the scribes, lawyers, who were used to settle such disputes. Martin Franzmann observed, “Jesus, who came to free men from the clutches of covetousness, will not let Himself be used in the service of men’s covetings.” As a result, He warns, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of...possessions.” (v.15) Those are hard words for most: *life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions*. Those are hard words since the goal of life for many is to **get**.

II. Gives a Picture.

And he told them this parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” (vv.16-19)

It’s hard to miss: “my crops...my barns...my grain...my goods...my soul,” and, of course, the “I will’s”. It’s a good picture of what much of this culture has become. It’s about “me,” “my,” “I”. *Hedonism* is defined as “...the doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the sole chief goal of life (Webster). The man in the parable was a hedonist. I don’t need to comment on contemporary culture, do I?

There’s an old, but timely, story about an old rich man who had a terrible disposition. One day he visited a rabbi. The rabbi took the rich man by the hand and led him to a window. “Look out there,”

the rabbi said. And so, the rich man looked out into the street. The rabbi asked, "What do you see?" The rich man answered, "I see men, women, and children." Again, the rabbi took the man by the hand and this time led him to a mirror. He asked the rich man, "Now what do you see?" The man replied, "Now I see myself." Then the rabbi said, "Behold, in the window there is glass, and in the mirror there is glass. But the glass of the mirror is covered with a little silver, and no sooner is the silver added than you cease to see others, but see only yourself."

We would do ourselves a favor to listen to these words from the Old Testament lesson for this morning: "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! **All** is vanity...what has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the Sun." (Eccl. 1:2; 2:22) Well, once again, let's get to the point. What does a man have of this world with absolute certainty? The grave! A whole lot of nothing. Jesus **gives** a clear picture of this in the closing words of the Gospel text:

But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." (vv.20,21)

III. Points to What God Gives.

No doubt we know that the issue of life is not what we can get out of this world before we die. The issue is about what God gave us - "that He gave his only Son..." - the Son whose sinless life cancelled our debt of sin. The Son who took the hell we deserve upon Himself. The Son who carried out the death penalty for our sin crimes against God.

And listen to these words of Jesus: "To you (to us) has been given the secret of the kingdom of God..." (Mk. 4:11a) We possess the secret, the key, the understanding that through faith in Christ we are citizens of His everlasting Kingdom!

The fact that we live in a state of hope in the midst of a world filled with chaos testifies to the incomprehensible giving of God to His people. Who among us hasn't thought or said something along the line of, "I don't see how people without Jesus get through life's storms?" The past few years have impressed that upon us, haven't they? And what's to come? As Scriptures teach, "...hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been given to us." (Rm. 5:5)

And we can't let this promise drown in a sea of concerns and worries: "...do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'...your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added (given) to you." (Mt. 6:31-33)

Listen, *The Parable of the Rich Fool* is a clear warning to never allow the wants and things of this world pull us away from what we have in Christ. The admonitions of our Epistle lesson for this morning are so very familiar to us, but they must be a part of our walk through this world:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above (not the incessant cravings of this world), where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died (died to this world), and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:14)

Put that text with the words the Lord gave John: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." (I Jn. 3:2)

Recall Paul's thorn in the flesh as spelled out in 2 Corinthians 12. He wrote, "...to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited." (v.7) The great revelations were the result of God allowing him to have a glimpse of heaven. Writing in the third person, he stated, "...I know that this man was caught up into paradise - whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows - and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. (vss.3,4) We can only imagine the joy and wonder Paul experienced. How could he relate to this world. He was given a thorn, an affliction, that brought him down to the reality that he had a job to do for the Lord.

Thorns. Afflictions. Pandemics. Those moments when everything gets turns upside down. They impress upon us what sin has done to us and this world. They impress upon each one of us that we have work to do for the Lord, namely to reflect the love of Christ, forgiveness and eternal life to others. And so, we come back to Paul's words:

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

Think about it. Seek and sacrifice for things of this world, ***A Whole Lot of Nothing***, or . . . ?

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott