

## **“Soul’s Not Just a Place in Korea”**

Sunday, August 1, 2010

*Luke 12: 13-21*

First Christian Church, Falls Church VA

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*“And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ Soul?? Where is it? What is it? Certainly it is not just a city in Korea!*

Have you ever talked to yourself that way? Talked yourself into something by only consulting yourself about it? “Soul... Self...you’ve worked really hard all your life! You have stored up for yourself some great retirement treasures! Relax. Eat, drink and be merry! Or even, “soul, you’ve had a really rough day today, you deserve a treat!” “ Soul...I know I shouldn’t pour that salt on my food, but what harm is it for me right now?” Or “Soul...I know I should go out and get some exercise, but I just don’t want to! That’s no fun!”

For our soul to really live and thrive, we must allow it to converse with more than itself! Indeed, I can convince myself of almost anything I really want to! The Bible can even give me my reasoning on about any issue. Some days, Jesus is at a party turning water into wine. Other days he is castigating us for enjoying ourselves too much! How do we figure out what is right for us? I suppose that is what Jesus means when he says that every day, much is demanded. Let’s unpack how he gets us there.

Notes:

1. The crowd: Must return to the beginning of this chapter: “Meanwhile, a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling one another. Jesus spoke to the disciples first.,”

The crowds were collecting around Jesus and they were beginning to be so big so as to be a spectacle. Jesus reserves some comments for his disciples, who he had been tutoring in far greater depth. Then he turns to speak to the crowds who seem hungry, anxious, for his wisdom. They have practical questions, decisions they need to make. In this story, someone really wanted to know what Jesus would recommend regarding, in this case, what he felt was the injustice of all the inheritance going to the oldest son. He figured that Jesus would agree with him, being an advocate for justice. But Jesus tells him a parable and requires that he figure out where the greatest justice will lie.

2. This entire chapter is filled with instructions meant to be taken as a whole – each like a separate pearl that is strung together to make a necklace. The whole chapter is about being prepared to meet God – the coming judgment.
3. Our passage tries to teach us about the place of material possessions in life. This part that we read, the parable of the rich fool, says something to those who have an abundant supply of material possessions. The following parable says something to those who do not.
4. So, what does Jesus say to those who have an abundance of possessions?

Jesus teaching focuses on the thought process of a rich man – or rich fool as he has come to be known. Two things stand out about this man:

- a. *He never saw beyond himself.* Notice something about this parable. It is filled with the words “I, me, mine.” The rich man in this story is aggressively self-centered. It’s like saying, “Joe lives in a little world bounded on the north, south, east and west by Joe.” Until the voice of God interrupts the rich man’s musings, there is nothing in the story but the man and his possessions.

John Wesley’s (founder of the United Methodist tradition) rule of life was to *save* all he could and *give* all he could. Let me explain. When he was studying at Oxford, he had an income of 30 pounds. He lived on 28 and gave away 2. When his income increased to 60, 90, and 120 per year, he still lived on 28 and gave the balance away.

I discovered a great Roman proverb which said that money was like sea water; the more a person drinks, the thirstier they become. That is the definition of greed. Jesus says, “watch and guard yourself against a spirit which is always wanting more – for even if a person has abundance, life does not come from their possessions.

- b. *He never saw beyond this world.* It seems his daydream is to spend his future indulging in his own needs and desires – in maximizing his own pleasure. We might be saying, “how selfish!” But I know that the thought of leisure, recreation, freedom from the demands of work – the rich man’s vision of the future sounds uncomfortably like one that many of us have for our retirement years. What gives our life meaning now? And what will give it meaning then? And if we are spending our time lamenting how hard we are working now and dreaming about what it could be like to have leisure and recreation there is something amiss about our loyalties and perspective – and this can be a clue to us: Our loyalties indicate where we are searching and what we are searching for. Our loyalties indicate what kind of life possesses us. It is a good thing to ponder... where do our loyalties lie?
3. *What difference should our faith in God make in the practical matters of life?*

One theologian termed the rich fools approach to life as “practical atheism.” The rich man may protest that he has always believed in God, but when it comes to managing his life, dealing with possessions and planning for the future, he lives as though there were no God. This parable, I think, probes our basic commitments. What difference should our faith make in the practical matters of life?

I remember how all of us were so concerned about Bill LaLiberte’s work ethic into his 90’s. No matter how many times we told him that he must slow down, instead of coming to open Safe Haven at 8, could he wait until 9? Instead of insisting on lifting the heavy pots, could he let someone younger do that? We were so worried that Safe Haven might someday kill him. His response to me was “the minute I stop arriving to open the doors to Safe Haven is the day I die.” I realized then that Bill’s purpose was fueled by his ability to serve, to “do something for God” as Rev. Austin said yesterday in his Memorial service. And yes, when his health weakened so that he could not come to Sunday School or church, could not come to Safe Haven, could not come to Bible Study... yes, he did begin to die. We were worried about his physical health. He

tried to tell us that serving God was what his living was about. If he could not to that, he was not living.

May we all evaluate our own loyalties this very day – as the parable suggests...”don’t you know that this very day your life is being demanded of you?”