

Text: Luke 12:31-21 (Beck)      11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost.      **August 25, 2019.**

Through Christ's poverty you have become rich. Amen.

Rich. What do you think of when you hear that word? Money? Stuff? Do you picture Scrooge McDuck sitting on a pile of gold, wearing fancy clothes? Do you see someone "making it rain" slapping \$100 bills off a huge wad of cash? Rich. Do you think of something good? Something bad? What do you think of? I would think the popular answer would be, "good! I'd sure like to be rich!" Rich is good. If it's me. But what if rich is someone else? Well, then it's bad. Politicians rail on the 1% who are the richest, even though most politicians are part of the 1%. We can easily look with suspicion on those who are rich. Maybe they got it unfairly. Maybe it was just an inheritance.

I know we are officially done with the swimming upstream series, but when it comes to this one word, rich, what God says and what most people say most of the time are opposites. Did you know that most often, almost always, when the Bible uses the word 'rich' to talk about money, it's bad? Really. Not that it's bad to be rich necessarily, but it's hard for rich people to enter the kingdom of God. We meet a certain rich man who cared nothing about God and only about himself. But when rich is used in other senses, it's good. You can rich in faith. Rich in good works. Rich toward God. Those are the true riches. Rich toward God, that's the lasting riches. Be rich toward God and you have the real riches. Be rich toward God and you have all you need. Be rich toward God. Those riches will last. Be rich toward God. The scene is set as Jesus is teaching. A man in the crowd takes advantage of a moment of silence to make a demand. Teacher, tell my brother to give me my share of the property our father left us. Maybe he was the younger brother and got shut out of the inheritance. Maybe he had a legitimate claim. All those questions we could ask aren't addressed by Jesus and so they don't really matter. What Jesus wants to address is the attitude of loving stuff more than God, the attitude of seeking only earthly riches without being rich toward God.

Jesus refuses. Come on, dude. I'm not the judge of something so trivial. I'm not the divider of inheritance. It's fascinating. The man asked Jesus to divide. Jesus used a word, "divider," that's only used once in the entire New Testament. Jesus didn't care about this inheritance. He did care about the attitude of greed. Contrary to the movie of many years ago, greed is not good. At least not in the eyes of Jesus.

Here, instead, is what Jesus has to say, "Even if you have more than enough, your property doesn't give you life." Even if you have more than enough, your property doesn't give you life. Wow! Let's think about this. Let's talk about this. Wow! Is this countercultural. Even if you have more than enough. Isn't this exactly us? How many would like to lose a few pounds, because we have more than enough to eat! How many of us have this big problem: the closest isn't big enough. There aren't enough hangers. I groan when someone offers me a tshirt. I already have too many. What other time in history? What other country do we have too much to eat and too much to wear? And do we put our trust in our stuff rather than in God? And back to school just means we need more new stuff, because the old stuff is one whole year old! And we feel bad if it's not the newest. And we invented this phrase, "Whoever dies with the most toys, wins." Wins what? Hang on to that thought. We'll talk more about it later. Your property doesn't give you life. Your stuff is not the measure of your manhood, your existence. Life is not your stuff. Life is being rich toward God.

Let Jesus tell us a little story. A rich man had good crops on his land. Again, it's not a sin that he's rich in money. But it doesn't turn out well for him. He's not rich toward God. Again, rich in money usually ends badly in the Bible. And notice he's just a certain rich guy. No name. No significance. No family. No friends. He's rich. But he's really a nobody. A nobody focused only on himself. He doesn't mention God. He doesn't refer to anyone else. He only thinks about himself, and his stuff. He only talks about himself, and his goods. Actually, my count from the original language is 18. Eighteen times in just three verses he refers to me, I, myself, my. Even when he uses the word, "you," you is I. Even you is talking about himself. Listen as I read these verses again. "What am I going to do?" he said to himself. I have no place to store my crops. Finally he said, "This is what I'll do; I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grain and goods in them. Then I'll say to myself, "you have a lot of good things stored up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself." Man, what a self-centered guy!

And just like us! I'm going to be careful, because I know that not everyone here exhibits this attitude to this degree. And I know that some of the things I'm going to say and stats I'm going to quote are not every person gathered here. But man, don't we see this attitude happening? And it's not entirely just out there. It's also in here, in my own heart, counting earthly riches as the true riches and not being rich toward God.

This man got his stuff honestly and fairly. He worked. That's good. But work was more important than God. I have to work. I have to work. I have to work. How often isn't that the number one priority? Even more than God. If I had a dollar for every time I heard someone say, "I can't make it to church, I have to work." I could work for free. And why do we even have that expression, "If I had a dollar for every time," as though having a dollar is the best thing you could get from that?

Having no place to store my crops, my grain, my goods. Notice it's not just the necessities like food, but the stuff, the goods. Did you know that storage units are a \$38 billion dollar industry, each year, just in the United States. 38 billion dollars! Just to store our extra stuff! And have you ever heard someone say, "God has been so good to us. We are putting some stuff in storage. We are so thankful to God that he has kept his promise and blessed us with so much!" Let me know. I haven't heard someone talk like that. And tearing down barns and building bigger ones. Here's something for you. In the 1950s, the average size house in the United States was 983 sq. ft. 983. Today, the number is almost 2700. 2700! Houses almost three times as large, and the average family size is smaller. What? Our barns are bigger. Our stuff is more.

And what about take life easy, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself? Let me be clear. It's not a sin to retire. Or even to save up and look forward to retirement. But is retirement the goal of life. Is having enough stuff to take it easy the number one priority? Do you think this rich nobody is living the dream? Do you think the guy with the opening question could have it made, if he could just get his share of the inheritance? I know I've made fun of my parents in sermons before. That's just joking around with little stuff. I had the chance to spend a little time with them in Sun City, Arizona once. This is an entire city where everyone is retired. And my mom said, "You know, maybe some of these groups for entertainment are nice, but we want to be part of groups that serve, help out at church, help our community, help other people."

Retirement isn't just about enjoying yourself. It's about enjoying others. Serving others. Retirement isn't just about being rich enough not to work. But about being rich toward God.

Jesus quickly and clearly shows the futility and the foolishness of this rich guy's thinking. You fool.

Tonight you die. You want a judgment? Here's a judgment! You want someone to divide? What about

the one who divides the soul from the body, the one who divides you and your stuff! Note the contrast. The rich guy thought he had stuff for many years. But this night. This very night! God demanded his soul from him. Then who will get it? He thought he could enjoy it. But someone else did! You want the true and lasting judgment? That's the judgment of the soul. You want the true and lasting riches? It's not storing up goods for yourself.

I know this message from Jesus sounds harsh. And doesn't end on a great note. And maybe it hits too close to home. But it certainly makes us think, makes us careful. And makes us look, not finally at the rich guy, but the guy telling the story, who gives us true riches. The guy telling the story told us the story because he loved us. Jesus loved you so much he lived a perfect life, a life completely free from the love of money, so his perfect life is all God sees when he looks at you. Can you think about that? God only sees perfection in all his baptized children. God doesn't see your sins of greed, your sinful desires for bigger barns and houses and stuff. God only sees a cross, where those sins were nailed, once and for all, forgiven, once and for all. God only sees the cross where the greatest debt, your sin, was paid, in full, a debt greater than any mortgage, a debt more lasting than any student loan, the debt of your sin, paid in full. The guy telling the story loved you so much he rose to get your mansion in the sky ready, a mansion bigger than 2700 square feet, a mansion greater than the 15 bathroom and swimming pool celebrity home, a mansion with your name on it and Jesus as your permanent host. Having Jesus, that's true riches. Forgiveness, perfection, that's true and lasting life.

Being rich toward God, those are the real riches, the lasting riches. If you have a 2700 square foot home, thank God. He gave you that home for your enjoyment. But always remember to thank the giver, not worship the gift. If you are retired, God be praised. There are definitely days I'm jealous of you. But remember this is a time not just to enjoy yourself, but a time to thank God, to help others. Yes, you can enjoy and celebrate earthly riches. But remember Jesus is your greatest treasure. Your lasting riches are found in heaven. Remember to be rich toward God. You will find the greatest riches in his Word. Hear it in worship. That's more important than work. Stick around for Bible study. That's way more valuable than money. Spend time with God at home in devotions, prayer, that's more lasting than some overtime. Yes, riches on this earth can be good, but being rich toward God, that's eternal. Amen.

The peace of Christ will keep you rich toward God. Amen.