

## WHY DID GOD CALL THE RICH FARMER A “FOOL?”

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On one occasion Jesus was addressing a “crowd” of people, at which time a person in the “crowd” interrupted the Savior, saying “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me,” Luke 12:13. There he was in the presence of the Son of God, the “Messiah” of Old Testament prophecy, the one Who came to “seek and to save that which was lost,” Luke 19:10, and apparently all he could think about was his brother’s unfairness in failing to “divide the inheritance” with him! For shame! However, he has many modern counterparts!

Interestingly, this is one of two incidents recorded in Luke’s gospel in which a person came to Jesus complaining about someone else, and each time Jesus addressed the complainer. The other incident is recorded in Luke 10:38-42, wherein we learn of Martha complaining about her sister Mary for not helping in the kitchen duties, and of Jesus then rebuking Martha and commending Mary. And now in this incident we read of the “one from the crowd” complaining to Jesus about his “brother,” and asking Jesus to “tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

Jesus, however, let it be known that He had not come to be “a judge or an arbitrator over” such matters. So He turned His attention to the man himself, telling him to “take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses,” Luke 12:15. Jesus, Who “knew what was in man,” John 2:25, recognized that this complainer was a covetous person, so He urged him to “take heed and beware of covetousness,.” and He then presented what has been called “The Parable of the Rich Fool,” It goes like this:

“The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.’ And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years: take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God,” Luke 12:15-21.

You will please note that “God” called this man a “fool,” v. 20. “Fool” is from the Greek *aphron*, which denotes a “want of mental sanity and sobriety, a reckless and inconsiderate habit of mind,” or “the lack of commonsense perception of the reality of things natural and spiritual. or the imprudent order of one’s life in regard to salvation,” *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, by Vine.

In all likelihood this “certain rich man” was held in high esteem by his fellow man and was widely respected for having become so successful as a farmer, which is certainly a greatly needed and honorable profession. Yet God called him a “fool!” Why?

Negatively, it was not because he was a farmer, for it was God Who, after the fall, said to Adam, “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you will return,” Gen. 3:19. In this case, being able to “eat bread” as it were by “the sweat of your face” involved planting, cultivating, and harvesting crops. Yes, farming is an honorable profession, and to be a successful farmer one has to plan wisely and work diligently.

Negatively, it was not because he was “rich.” Abraham, who was called “the friend of God,” Jas. 2:23; cf. 2 Chron. 20:7, was also described as “very rich,” Gen. 13:2. Job, a very righteous man, Ezek 14:14, in terms

of material wealth, “was the greatest of all the people of the east,” Job 1:3. There is nothing inherently wrong with being rich. Money can be a useful tool for doing “good,” I Tim. 6:17-18, or it can be a cruel taskmaster, and bring more sorrow than joy. It is one thing to possess money and another to be possessed by money!

### **So Why Was the “Rich” Farmer a “Fool?”**

**He forgot others.** Look at the personal pronouns, “I” and “My,” and the number of times he referred to “I” and “My.” He had an overabundance of produce — more than his original barns could hold. Instead of building “greater” barns, he could have shared his produce with those less fortunate. Cf. Gal. 6:10; Matt. 25:35-39.

**He forgot real joy.** He thought he could be happy by eating, drinking, and being merry. His motto was “eat, drink, and be merry,” v. 19. Solomon described his search for happiness; in fact, he had “greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before” him, and then “looked on all the works” his hands had done and concluded that “indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind,” Eccl. 2:3-11. Money can buy a lot; it can buy cars, houses, boats, jewelry, etc., but it can’t buy love, a clean conscience, or true happiness. In fact, Solomon also said “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves abundance with increase. This also is vanity,” Eccl. 5:10.

**He forgot his soul.** The rich farmer thought of life in terms of material wealth, of things, of pleasure, taking his ease, eating, drinking, and being merry. However, Jesus asked this thought-provoking question: “what profit is it to a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” Matt. 16:26. The rich farmer was more concerned about the size of his barns than he was the condition of his soul!

**He forgot God!** He left God out of his plans. Jesus admonished His disciples to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” and then promised, saying, “all these things (referring to the necessities of life, bw) shall be added to you,” Matt. 6:33. Jesus also said “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind,” and He then said, “this is the first and great commandment,” Matt. 22:37-38. But the rich farmer didn’t take time for God — God Who possesses “the earth...and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein,” Psalm 24:1, God, in Whom “we live and move and have our being,” Acts 17:28. He was more concerned about mere things!

**He forgot death!** He made plans for “many years,” Luke 12:19, yet he would die that “night,” and all his “things” would go to someone else. He was bragging about his wealth, little realizing that he would be completely bankrupt that very night. Amazingly, all of us recognize that life is likened to “a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away,” Jas. 4:14, that death is universal, Heb. 9:27; yet most people make no provision for what lies beyond the grave!

**His priorities were reversed!** He thought about mere things, not the well-being of his soul. He thought about time, not eternity. He thought about himself, not God! He allowed his blessings to become a curse! He laid up “treasures for himself;” he was “not rich toward God,” Luke 12:21. Yes, “fool” was the proper word to describe him!

**Conclusion:** The “rich” farmer of Luke 12:15-21 has many modern counterparts today. When we are too consumed by the here and the now, when we allow things to dominate our lives, when we ignore God and the needs of others — all in our quest to “live the good life,” we make the same mistakes made by the rich farmer of Luke 12. However, in delightful contrast to the rich “fool” of Luke 12: 15-21, we read of

the “wise man” of Matt. 7:24; the man who hears the “sayings” of Jesus, and does them, and who thus “builds his house on the rock.” We conclude with a thought-provoking question: Are you a “wise” person, or are you a “fool?”