

When Our Plans aren't God's Plans

By Al Felder

"¹⁶And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: ¹⁷And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? ¹⁸And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. ²⁰But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? ²¹So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:16-21)

Let's consider this man for just a moment. This man worked hard. He was a farmer, and he worked his land until it produced plentifully. He had an abundance. In fact, he had so much that he was able to retire from his work. This man was able to relax and enjoy life. Really, when you look at this man many might say that he was living the "American Dream". Now what's wrong with that? After all, this man doesn't appear to be a blatant sinner. The text doesn't describe him as a drunkard, murderer, adulterer, thief, or any such thing. He was simply a man who worked hard, and accumulated a great wealth.

As I said before, many people would look at this man and say that he was living the "American Dream". I believe that it's easy for us to find ourselves in this man's place, and that's why it's so important for us to consider what Jesus had to say regarding this man. Jesus made it very plain that there was a problem. It was a problem that cost this man his soul because his plans weren't God's plans.

In order for us to get the full understanding of the point that Jesus is making in this parable, I believe that we have to look at the larger context of this passage. As we do, we find that this parable was in response to a question that a man asked Jesus. *"And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me."* (Luke 12:13) This man had a family dispute that he wanted Jesus to help settle. The dispute was over an inheritance.

It is sad, but true that many families struggle with such issues. It is not uncommon to see families that are torn apart over inheritances. Different members of the family believe that they deserve certain things, and disagreements arise. These disagreements often become very bitter, and many families separate over such matters. This is the place that this man was at. He believed that he was owed something, and he wanted Jesus to help him get it.

Notice, if you will, what Jesus said to this man. *"And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?"* (Luke 12:14) The Bible doesn't tell us about this man's response to Jesus, but I guarantee you that he was not expecting the answer that Jesus gave him. I believe that there is something that we can and should learn from Jesus' response.

It was not Jesus' mission or purpose to settle such disputes between men. He had a task to accomplish that was much more important than what this man was worried about. That task was completing God's plan of redemption for mankind, not settling disputes over an inheritance.

As we grow in the faith, we too must develop our skills of discernment so that we can determine which issue is greater. There are many things in life that will seek to distract us, and cause us to get sidetracked. We, like Jesus, have to determine whether or not something is a distraction and can potentially keep us from achieving our task.

As we read further, we find another statement that Jesus made to the man before he told the parable. *"And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* (Luke 12:15) This man had a problem, and Jesus pointed it out to him. This man believed that money was all he needed to make him happy. The way he saw it, getting what he considered to be his fair share of the inheritance was going to solve all his problems.

As far as the man was concerned the only issue was his dispute with his brother, but Jesus pointed out a deeper issue. This too is something that comes with spiritual growth. Many times the thing that we think is the issue really isn't the issue. In many instances there are deeper problems. We get caught up dealing with the symptoms and not the disease itself. Jesus showed this man his real problem. It wasn't his dispute with his brother, it was his view of money.

It's in this context that Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool. The man in this parable is probably someone to whom we can easily relate. As I said before, he was a man who worked hard. As a result of his hard work he became prosperous, and decided to relax and enjoy life. Do you know anyone like that? I'm sure you do. In fact, you may be able to easily place yourself in this man's position.

The fact that this man is relatable should cause us to take the words of Jesus more seriously. As we can see from the text, there was a serious issue here that caused this man to lose his soul. To those around him, he probably just seemed like a hardworking man who became wealthy enough to sit back and enjoy life. What's wrong with that?

Well, there's actually a lot wrong with such a life. You see, this man viewed a life of earthly abundance as his greatest achievement. He desired a life of leisure, and he believed that his riches were going to give it to him. He placed too much value on temporal things, and put too much effort into getting them. As a result, he became distracted from those things that are eternal.

There are other individuals we can read about in the Bible who were in the same situation as this man. In Luke chapter 18 we read of Jesus' conversation with a rich young ruler. This man asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus reminded the man of God's

commands, and the man said that he had kept them all. Then, Jesus told the man to go, sell all that he had, give it to the poor, and follow him. The Bible tells us of the man's reaction to the words of Jesus. *"And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich."* (Luke 18:23) This man too had placed all of his affection on his worldly possessions.

Another man came to Jesus with a desire to follow him, but he wanted to wait until after he had buried his father. The Greek language leaves open the possibility that the man's father was still alive. In other words, the man was telling Jesus that he would follow him after his father was dead.

Notice the response that Jesus gave the man. *"But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury the dead."* (Matthew 8:22) This may seem like a harsh response to some, but it was a situation where the man had to realize which task was greater. It was more important for him to follow Jesus. As Jesus pointed out, the spiritually dead would be able to take care of the physically dead.

The fact of the matter is that no relationship can come before our relationship with God. *"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* (Matthew 10:37) As far as human relationships go, there is no one closer to me than my wife. Next, would be my children. That's the way it should be, but neither my wife nor my children can come before God in importance.

As we consider all three of these individuals, we realize that they all had the same problem. Their problem was that they had plans, and those plans didn't involve God. They were focused completely on the here and now. *"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."* (Colossians 3:2) Their affection was on earthly things, therefore, their plans were not God's plan.

How important are godly things to you? Are you willing to give all that you have when it comes to serving God? It will take nothing less than all of your time, talent, and possession to serve God. Are you prepared to give it?

Too often we fail to set our affections on things above. Instead we become consumed with the things of this world. We become guilty of the sin of being too busy. We're too busy with work, we're too busy with recreation, we're too busy with this, and we're too busy with that. We become short sighted focusing only on the here and now while the cares and pleasures of this world choke the word out of our life.

In both of these areas that we have talked about we do have responsibilities. We do have to make a living for ourselves, and those under our care. That requires money! We are also involved in relationships that are regulated by the word of God. We have certain responsibilities in these relationships, so how do we balance everything in order to avoid being like these three individuals?

Jesus gives the key at the end of the parable. The mistake that the man made was that he failed to become rich toward God. He lived his life as if he was made for earthly things and not for God. His life consisted of the abundance of his possessions. They were his greatest treasure.

Becoming rich toward God means that we put things in their proper perspective. *“But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.”* (Luke 12:31) Instead of thinking that we are made for earthly things, we realize that we are made for God. He is our greatest treasure, and our desire should be to know Him.

What occupies the thoughts of our mind?

“⁵For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. ⁶For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. ⁸So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Romans 8:5-8)

Do we find our greatest enjoyment and fulfillment in the things of this world? Are we motivated by earthly things? If so, then we are carnally minded, and we are guilty of the same thing as the man in the parable.

In order to become rich towards God we must desire the things that pertain to God. Like the saints of old, our fulfillment cannot come from the things of this world. *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”* (Hebrews 11:13) We must find our joy and fulfillment in spiritual things. We should realize that the things of this life hold no real value when compared to things that are eternal, therefore, they can and should be given up when necessary.

Is God your greatest treasure? Do you desire knowledge of Him above all else? Do you find more joy in things that pertain to God than you do things that pertain to the world? What consumes your thoughts and dominates your time? Is it things that pertain to God, or the things of this world?