

It's a dream common to humanity; a dream promoted and celebrated by our culture; the dream is to make it all the way to the top and to have everything the world can offer. That dream drives an awful lot of human behavior. Incredibly, the book of Ecclesiastes was written by someone who reached the pinnacle and accomplished the dream, and in doing so, King Solomon, blessed with deep wisdom, lets his readers know that a life lived in pursuit of that dream is pointless. Using a memorable phrase, he says its like 'chasing after the wind.' You'll never get your arms around it.

In this part of Ecclesiastes, Solomon is coming to the conclusion that 'you can't take it with you.' As the King, he was sitting on a mountain of worldly treasure, but he knew it was slipping through his fingers. No amount of gold could change the fact that one day he would die, and his son Rehoboam, would inherit everything, including the throne, and who knows what he would do with it? (Spoilers, Solomon was right to be concerned. Under Rehoboam, Israel and Judah split, weakening both sides).

What was Solomon doing with all his treasure? Apart from occasionally gawking at his goods, he was merely storing them away just like the rich fool Jesus talks about in today's gospel lesson. Solomon reached a point where, like the man in Jesus' story, he asked himself, "The things you have prepared, whose will they be?" And of course, the only answer is, "someone else's." If you agree with Solomon, that a life devoted to the accumulation of stuff is ultimately pointless, what, then, is an alternative? What does life with a point look like?

Let's turn to the story Jesus told for more insight. You would think that the rich man in Jesus' story would have had a moment of contentment as he looked over his crops and noted how well everything had turned out. Farming can be tricky business especially if the weather isn't just right. He had every reason to be contented – his crop was the best that he had ever had.

But this farmer is not contented. He is the beneficiary of a spectacular harvest. In fact, his bumper crop is a problem and he is stressed. We find him having a bit of a discussion with himself.

"What can I do?" he asks himself, "I have had such good seasons in the past, my barns are full and I have nowhere to store this year's crop. I know what I will do? I will pull down my barns. I will build bigger ones.'

He doesn't just build extra barns to add to his existing ones; he tears down his old barns and builds new barns. This underlines extensive wealth to be able to go into such a rebuilding program. He hasn't just done well; he has done very well indeed. Miraculously well.

Whatever positive impressions we may have of this farmer soon vanish when we discover that he has no intention of sharing this miraculous gift. He has stored his harvest all for himself. His own words condemn him, "Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat drink, and enjoy yourself!"

So far in the parable the only one who has spoken has been the rich farmer. Suddenly another voice intrudes into the story - the voice of God. The voice doesn't accuse the rich man of

injustice, or selfishness or even of greed. God says to him, "You fool! This very night you will have to give up your life; then who will get all these things you have kept for yourself?"

The rich man thought he had done everything right and could now sit back and enjoy his wealth but he had forgotten the most important thing of all – he had forgotten God. Jesus takes an extra step here He doesn't always do, which is to interpret the meaning of the story for us. He concluded it saying, "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not be rich toward God" (Luke 12:21).

And it's therefore vital to know what Jesus means by being rich toward God. In one sense, this is a first commandment issue. No other Gods includes the god of self-centeredness—the false god of a life focused on the accumulation of things for the self without concern for anyone else. These false gods must be dethroned. But again, what is something better?

Being rich toward God is not only obeying his commands, but being attracted to His goodness. We might think that our greatest needs are material, but to be truly wealthy is to know Jesus and the depth of his love for us; the forgiveness and freedom he bought for us with his blood. To be rich toward God begins with the realization that Jesus suffered and went to the cross for me. That's how much He values me. That's how much He values you. To forgive you, save you from despair and death, Jesus counted you worth dying for. Do you see? This isn't a rule to follow; this is a love to receive. To hold this love in your heart is to have something more satisfying than anything in the world can give. No medal, no trophy, no bigger barn or bank account can do what the sacrificial love of Jesus can.

And so a life that is rich toward God is a life that trusts him, loves him, relies on him, believes him, turns to him, talks to him, listens to him, worships him, regards him as Savior and Brother and King and even more. Knowing Jesus gives peace in the middle of storms; confidence when everything is in turmoil. Knowing Jesus means that the power of sin and death no longer terrify us. You can trust that Jesus payment on the cross and resurrection from the tomb counts for you.

And, it is Jesus who even forgives us when we get all of our priorities mixed up.

Today Jesus is challenging you through this passage of Scripture to see what kind of riches you really have. Are you rich toward God? Is Jesus the priceless treasure of your life? And, as a result, does the way you use your resources demonstrate the rich relationship you have with God?

Here's something to ponder. Jesus did not have the same attitude as the Rich Fool. He did not keep to himself with no regard for anyone else. All the riches of God are generated by what Jesus, the Son of God, did on the cross. In the death of Jesus there is forgiveness for our mismanagement of God's gifts. In His risen life we find the greatest wealth. It is true: you can't take it with you. But Jesus can take you with Him into a life that never ends. It's the glory we've always wanted, given as a gift of unfailing love.