

Hoarders Anonymous: How Much Is Enough?

Luke 12:13-21

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Abraham Lincoln once said the real test of character is not adversity; the real test of character is prosperity. Now it is interesting that Jesus nowhere in the gospels offers a simple three-step plan for the question of how much is enough? It is rather a perspective, a way of seeing life. And he tells stories to get us to see it. The story of the rich fool is prompted by something familiar to all of us: a family squabble over inheritance money (v. v. 13). Nothing new under the sun! I heard of the reading of a will in an attorney's office. The will began, "Being of sound mind, I spent it all!" Another one goes like this: "To my nephew Andrew, who loves real estate, I leave my Monopoly game."

Jesus sounds out two warnings before he tells a story (v. 15). First warning: Greed comes at us from several directions so be on your guard. Second warning: what we ARE is more important than what we HAVE. Life is more than stuff. Jesus then tells a story about a farmer whose land produced abundantly. Note how Jesus artfully points out that it wasn't the man who produced it. It was the soil, the sun and rain and photosynthesis that did it. A lot of silent partners were on this farm!

But the farmer doesn't seem to recognize this. Notice how many times he uses the word "I." And the word "my." MY crops, barns, grain, goods." Then he even calls it "my soul" (v. 19). Oooh. Be careful, Mr. Farmer! Have you ever thought about how we use the word "my"? That's my seat in the movie theater. But someone else comes along and uses it in the next movie. That's my seat shopping cart in the grocery store. But someone else comes along. We just use this stuff for a while! Then it passes to others.

Now the farmer has a problem. It is a crisis of prosperity and blessings. "What should I do?" (v. 17). Now let me point out that this is what we call today a "First World" problem. First world problems are like I'm not getting a good rate on my investments. I don't know what color to paint our guest room. How will we ever have enough time to watch all my favorite TV shows? That is distinct from "Third World" or "Developing World" problems, like clean water, food for today, do I pay the light bill or buy my blood pressure medicine? So anytime we are having trouble distinguishing between wants and needs, wondering how much is enough, we just need some perspective. Think about people in other parts of the world, or other parts of our city or county.

I'd like to point out that in Jesus' time and in ours, this farmer would be considered successful, but God calls him a fool (v. 20). In our time, he would be called smart. God calls him a fool. He's a fool because he was thinking only of himself. This reminds me of Proverbs 21:7 The Message: "The rich get buried alive by their loot because they refuse to use it to help others." His sin isn't just greed;

it's presumption. The fool talks about laying up goods for "many years" (v. 19) but God says his soul would be required of him "this very night" (v. 20). It's the sin of missing life's point.

Someone has pointed out that there are four proofs of the rich man's poverty. 1) Lack of thanksgiving. 2) Lack of helpfulness (he was more interested in stowing than bestowing). 3) Lack of a worthy future. The best he could come up with for a future but storing more stuff. Is that the best your life holds for tomorrow? 4) Lack of perspective. He takes nothing with him and leave everything behind [adapted from John Reid, quoted in *The Teaching of the Parables*, Peter Rhea Jones, p. 136].

The famous playwright Arthur Miller was born to wealthy parents (a summer beach house, a family chauffeur, etc.) but his father's business collapsed. Miller was 13 at the time, but watched his father go from powerful to helpless. Miller said, "It made you want to search for ultimate values, for things that would not fall apart under pressure." That's what Jesus was saying!

Isn't it true? We crave layers of security and protection against aging, against not being liked or popular or successful, against uncertainty, against the future, against tragedy. But in the end, you and I cannot secure our future. Only God can. You and I cannot insulate ourselves against the ravages of time. Only God can. That's where faith comes in. No matter who holds title to your car or who holds the deed to your land or possessions, God holds title deed to you! And to me!

A college commencement speaker had finished his address and afterward visited with one brilliant graduate named Robert. He asked Robert his plans. "I plan to go to law school." "What then," asked the speaker. "I plan to make lots of money, retire and travel." "What then?" Robert was a bit annoyed by then. "I don't know. That's as far as I've gotten." The wise speaker told him, "Your plans are way too small. They only cover 60 or 70 years. You need to include God. And you need to include eternity."

I want to go back to the Monopoly game I mentioned earlier. I have a good pastor friend, Drew Hill, who once preached a sermon on this game! He said we all play games with God. And most of us want to buy up Board Walk. But, in the end, it's just a game. It doesn't last forever and it is not of ultimate value. And when the game is over, the pieces go back in the box. And in the end, we all go back in the box. It might be pine or brushed steel. A nice casket. But it's a box. And to quote Jesus, "then whose will these things be?"