

The Shiny Bicycle

Luke 12:13-21

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/the-shiny-bicycle/>

When I was a little boy, I shared a couple of worn-out tricycles with my siblings. When I learned to ride a bike, I wanted one of my own so badly. I remember thinking, "If I could only have a new bike, I'll never want anything else in my life." And on Christmas morning, there it was. Red and beautiful. But I soon learned that my friends had better bicycles--ones with streamers, horns, hand brakes. So mine wasn't so great. And about that time, I learned that there were ways of getting around that didn't involve pumping your legs. You turn the key and shift gears-- a car! I stared wanting a car. "If I could just have a car, I'll never want anything else in the world." And I got a car. But then I realized it didn't have air conditioning or a fancy sound system.

You know where this is going, right? The shiny bike is never enough! There is always more. Our story begins with someone asking Jesus to settle a family quarrel over inheritance. Sound familiar? People often appealed to rabbis to settle disputes. But Jesus isn't going to get in the middle of this one! He goes deeper, looking at motives and the heart. He is very blunt (v. 15): "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed." Now if that was true in Jesus' day, how much more in ours. The constant barrage of ads. Economist John Kenneth Galbraith once pointed out that the danger of our current market economy is not so much that it responds to existing needs as that it creates the wants which those goods are expected to satisfy [*Christian Century*, July 6, 2016, p. 10]. Key questions arise around our scripture this morning. How do we distinguish between needs and wants? How much is enough? You know the old story. The reporter asked the millionaire, "How much money would you have to make to feel secure?" The reply? "Just one dollar more than I have right now!" Shiny bicycles are never enough!

And to drive home his point about the danger of shiny new bicycles, Jesus tells a story (vv. 16ff). A rich farmer keeps having bumper crops and he keeps building more barns. He grows intoxicated with success. And with himself. I want you to listen to the first person, personal pronouns in these verses. Verse 17: I, I, my. Verse 18: I, I, my, I, my, my. Verse 19: I, my. And here's his big mistake: my crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, and then, worst of all, MY SOUL! Really? It's his?

Notice his question in v. 17, "What should I do?" Wringing his hands as if he has a real crisis. Imagine the people listening to Jesus' story. The homeless person or the hungry person thinks, "That's what you call a crisis?" That's what we call a First World problem. What do I do with all my crops? Why are the taxes on my three vehicles so high? Where can I find a good tax shelter? Third World (or Developing World) problems are different. How will I feed my baby? Where will I sleep tonight? Where can we find clean water? And if you look carefully and honestly into this story, you can see how wealth and comfort can skew our vision--of ourselves (I deserve this

prosperity); of God (God exists to make me happy); of others (it's their fault); of the world (it's not my concern).

What would be a one-word obituary for the rich farmer? Intelligent. Prosperous. Successful. Did you hear Jesus' one-word obituary for this man? "Fool!" Isn't it ironic? The very things we grasp, expecting them to bring us security, are the things which create anxiety.

So you might ask, What are the guidelines for knowing how much is enough? There are none, except be on your guard (v. 15). And learn to see beyond yourself. And to see beyond this life [William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study Series, The Gospel of Luke*, pp. 164-165].. Do you see the juxtaposed phrases? Verse 19: "these many years" and v. 20: "this very night..." Get this. The rich man has not only forgotten the reality of dying. He's also forgotten the reality of facing God when he dies. And we all will give an account before God!

Note the concluding verse, 21. Rich in things while neglecting God's riches. I am so, so very burdened that our church find a way to reach secular people like this farmer, to tell them there is something more and better--and it really lasts and satisfies! It's Jesus! The key may be for all of us may be to remember what Stephen Covey taught in "Seven Habits of Highly Successful People." You start with the end in mind. And then you work your way back. Because once Jesus enters your life, you never look at possessions the same.