Have you ever been in a classroom or maybe a conference where the speaker has been talking on a subject for a while and then someone raises their hand and makes a comment or asks a question that has absolutely nothing to do with what was being said? It’s one of those eye-rolling moments when you want to say, “Where have you been for the past hour? Have you not heard anything that’s been said?” That’s pretty much what the “Someone in the crowd” does when he says, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.”

***“Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”*** *(Luke 12:13 ESV)*

The crowd referenced here is the crowd that has “gathered by the thousands” found at the beginning of this chapter. The crowd was so big we are told people are trampling each other. This is a chaotic scene from which someone is trying to speak to Jesus. Crowds can be distracting, especially chaotic crowds. Perhaps we may feel like we are this “someone in the crowd” who has a request for Jesus. Maybe you are feeling trampled by the “crowds” or circumstances that are crushing in on you from every side. Our lives so often place us in circumstances that make our days and nights chaotic and even threatening. And being surrounded by thousands with their trials in life, we may also feel insignificant, forgotten, and overlooked. In these chaotic crowds in which we live, we too may call out to Jesus with our request. We may think Jesus doesn’t see us and he is unaware of our situation. Have you been there? Maybe you are in that situation today.

If so, this story invites you to hear Jesus speaking to you personally. He sees you and he is more aware of your situation than even you are. Let’s face it, when we are being trampled and crushed by circumstances, surrounded by chaos, and jostled about, we are probably not seeing our situation as clearly as we think. Fear has a way of distorting our thoughts, over-accentuating some things we should ignore while ignoring other things that are important. But Jesus is not distracted or thrown off by crowds. He remains focused on his purpose and plan for you, and he doesn’t change what he is saying. He’s steady, consistent, and he sees clearly through the crowds. As we go through this story, I encourage you to picture the chaotic crowd surrounding Jesus. At the same time, picture Jesus looking at you in the crowd. Notice he is not worried. He is not afraid of the crowd, and there is no panic or concern in his voice. This is how he addresses us even today in our chaotic and crowded lives. He knows something we don’t. He is not worried. He is full of peace and not triggered or thrown off by our concerns. He’s not just another random frantic and frenzied citizen in the crowd. He is the one we can listen to. He sees much further than we do, and his words to you today invite you to share his peace and assurance in your time of chaos.

If you go back to the beginning of this chapter, you will see that Jesus has been speaking to the crowd about some pretty heavy issues. He is talking about how to respond in the face of death. He has dropped weighty words about not fearing those who want to kill you, but rather fear God who cares for you. He talks about the consequences of denying the Lord and of blasphemy. He talks about what to do when you are asked to defend yourself against rulers and authorities – pretty heavy and hard-hitting topics. And through it all, he has one consistent and resounding point. Do not fear and do not worry. God has not forgotten you, and he cares for you. Then out of nowhere, you get this one person in the crowd who says, “Hey Jesus, can you get my brother to give me what’s mine?” You can imagine the eye rolls from those who had actually been listening to Jesus. Where did that come from?

Now, a good public speaker at this point would probably just ignore the comment and stay on topic. But Jesus does far more. He engages the person and still continues his teaching. Let’s look at how he does this.

***But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”****(*Luke 12:14 ESV)

First, he addresses him as “friend.” Have you ever had someone address you as friend, and you know that means that they are about to tell you something that may sound unfriendly? That’s about the size of it. Jesus is not being inauthentic here; he is simply trying to soften the blow. He wants the man to know that what he is about to say to him is coming from a place of friendship. Meaning, you can trust that what is being said is for your good. Jesus is not positioning himself against the man, even though this individual has attempted to hijack the moment for his own personal gain. This is important for us to remember when we hear Jesus speaking to us. He comes to us as our friend and the best friend we could possibly imagine. He never intends us harm. So, even when he tells us something we don’t want to hear, we know it’s coming from a heart of love. He can be trusted.

Second, Jesus asks an interesting question: *Who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?* How often does Jesus ask the question that starts with the word “Who” when we come to him. We see all through the Gospel stories Jesus asking this question directly of those who come to him. “Who do you say that I am?” (Mat. 16:15) When we come to Jesus with our questions and our requests, it is important to know who he is. Otherwise, we may not be in a position to receive anything from him.

Let's assume I happened upon Francesco Aquilini, the Chairman of Canucks Sports & Entertainment, and asked him to help me find my seat in the Rogers Arena, and he offers me to sit with him. I may miss out on enjoying the game in a luxury suite if I had mistaken him for an usher. Knowing who Mr. Aquilini is would be really important in that situation. That crude analogy may only work for Vancouver Canucks fans, but I hope you get the point. Knowing who Jesus is will have a big effect on what we are able to receive from him. He may be offering us far more than what we are asking.

This particular man is asking Jesus to settle what appears to be a dispute between him and his brother over dividing their inheritance. It was not inappropriate for someone to ask a rabbi to arbitrate over such dealings. But to ask Jesus in the middle of his message is not only to miss what Jesus had been talking about the whole time, but it is to miss knowing who this particular rabbi is. He has confused the Son of God with another run-of-the-mill itinerant teacher.

Jesus is not offended. He wants to help this man – and us today – to receive from him what he has for us. We don’t know the situation between the brothers, but clearly, this man wants what he believes belongs to him and he wants it now. He is focused on himself, and he sees an opportunity to enlist Jesus to his cause. And that is a mistake of a very high order. May we take seriously the correction Jesus intends in his question. Jesus was not sent by the Father as just another person we can use to get what we want. He is not some cosmic vending machine. Jesus will not be manipulated and used as a means to our own ends. He is Lord, King and the Author of life. He is not the means **to** the life we have been trying to build for ourselves. He is our Life!

Now Jesus has this to say to the man and to all of us in the crowd:

**Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”** *(Luke 12:15 NIV)*

Jesus is getting to the root of the issue here. This is not what the man wanted to hear, but it is what Jesus had been trying to say all along. Life is not about possessions. If we think it is, we will continue to live in fear. He does not go off topic. Rather he uses the man’s off-topic request as segue to further his teaching. Jesus warns about “all kinds of greed.” Greed is not just wanting more money; it’s just wanting *more*. Can you see how fear will feed greed? When possessions and anything of this world are seen to be the essence of life, then we will fear losing those things. In fear, we will try to accumulate more and more in hopes of securing our own life. There will never be enough even when we have plenty. But the opposite is true when we know who Jesus is. Even when we don’t have enough, we will have more than plenty. Our cups will overflow. And there is no fear in Jesus. No one can take him away. He is the gift from the Father that will never be taken back. We can rest in him and stop striving to secure our own lives. Our lives are secure in Jesus. And in case the man still doesn’t get it, Jesus chooses to add a parable to his teaching.

***And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully*** *(Luke 12:16 ESV)*

Notice how Jesus begins the parable. It is the *land* that is doing the producing, not the rich man. That seems to be a subtle hint with where Jesus is going. The rich man is rich by the grace of God, not by the works of his own hands.

***and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’****(Luke 12:17 ESV)*

The sentence, “And he thought to himself” is literally, “debated within himself.” The rich man is in self-dialog. He is not seeking anything from anyone outside of himself, which means he is in no position to receive from another. And what is he concerned about? Storing his crops. Fear is developing into greed. The land has provided for him abundantly, but he is fearful that he will run out of food. So, instead of trusting the land to produce next year, he will take matters into his own hands.

***And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods****. (Luke 12:18 ESV)*

Notice the orientation of the rich man. It’s all about him. There are at least 15 uses of personal pronouns in four verses. He’s thinking about himself, he’s talking to himself, and whatever he does, he will do it himself. This is a self-reliant person who doesn’t seem to have any room for others in his life. And how sad that instead of enjoying what he has, he launches into a demanding work project to secure his future. His plan involves tearing down the things he built in the past and replacing it with something larger. Are you scratching your head at why the rich man would want to tear down his existing barns instead of just adding more to them? That seems a bit odd, does it not? Perhaps it indicates an underlying problem of greed.

The rich man seems incapable of being satisfied with what he has. Not only does he want bigger barns, but he also won’t be satisfied until what he has is destroyed. Fear and greed certainly hinder being rational in our plans and decisions. And one more observation may be worth mentioning. Notice what never entered the rich man’s plans. He never entertains another option for the overflow of grain and goods, namely that of sharing it with others. No thought of giving it to the hungry, poor and homeless. No thought of using it to be a blessing to others. He only wants it for his own enjoyment. But, ironically, instead of resting and enjoying what he has, the rich man is working himself to death out of fear of not having more in the future.

***And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”*** *(Luke 12:19 ESV)*

This is the rich man’s hope. He wants to reach a point that he is completely self-sufficient. In a sense, you could say he wants to one day be able to say to himself, “Well done old boy, now enter into your own joy.” And that joy is articulated as “relax, eat, drink, be merry,” which is the proverbial expression of living life for oneself in the present with no expectation of any future life or judgment. The rich man is not held up as a godly man, but rather as a man deep in hedonism, unaccountable to anyone.

***But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’  So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”*** *(Luke 12:20-21 ESV)*

This conclusion sets the parable as one of a kind. It is the only parable in the Gospels where God appears as one of the characters and speaks. And this distinction marks the only place in the parable where another voice appears, disrupting the rich man’s inner self-focused monologue. Maybe Jesus knew we needed a jarring parable that breaks through our illusory belief that our life is only what we make it. It shows that the rich man has been foolish in thinking and living as if he is the only one in the room. He has forgotten to listen to God, much like the man wanting Jesus to settle a dispute wasn’t listening, either. What about us? Are we listening now?

The sin Jesus is locating is not that the man had lots of money or how he gained his riches. Following a common theme Luke brings out in his Gospel account, the sin is simply that the rich man is hoarding his riches instead of living generously with them. Underneath this sin is a fear manifested by greed. The rich man is unable to trust his future to anyone but himself. In this way, he is unable to be rich toward God. Another way to say it is he refuses to live by grace and opts instead to live in an attempt at self-sufficiency. In this way, he is unable to receive what God richly provides, and therefore is not “rich toward God.”

With this parable, Jesus has put his finger on what is really needed for the person in the crowd who wants Jesus to intervene in his inheritance dispute. This person, like you and me, needed to see Jesus as our rich provision. He is God’s grace to us, and we live by his word, not by our own words of self-counsel. This unidentified man in the crowd was not receiving what Jesus was giving him in that moment. Jesus’ parable was a way to redirect the man’s focus from himself and onto Jesus.

I pray this parable helps us today as well, to redirect our attention to one who is our life. In Christ, we have nothing to fear. We can receive what he has for us, and in doing so, escape the trap of greed and be generous with all the Lord gives us. Only those who truly receive from the Lord, by trusting him fully to be their life, are free to truly give generously There is no fear that their generosity will deplete the eternal storehouses of God’s care and provision.

***Bottom line:*** If we feel crushed by the circumstances of life may we remember who sees us and be rich in our relationship to God.

**\*\*\* Closing Prayer \*\*\***

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