

“FOOL” (part 1)

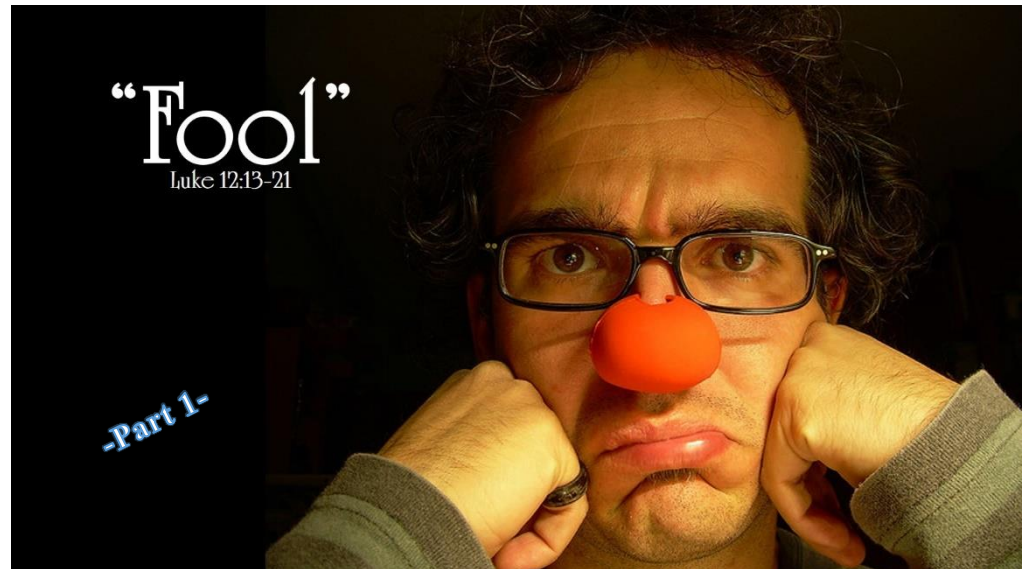
– Luke 12:13-21

by Pastor Tim Dodson

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at JF Believers Church

in Menomonie, Wisconsin



Luke 12:12-21 *Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."*

But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" 15 And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." 16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" 20 "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

In the previous verses, Jesus had just been speaking concerning some of the heaviest matters imaginable. He spoke of our need to fear the God who can cast us into hell, more than we fear men who can only harm our bodies. He spoke of pride, legalism, demonic control, passion of the heart and the sin of hypocrisy. He warned against the unpardonable sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. One would think that everyone in the audience would be “eating out of his hands” as the Messiah Himself preached on these intense issues, and yet...

Suddenly ‘out of the blue’ a man in the crowd spoke up and revealed that he hadn’t been listening to Jesus’ at all! Often I believe that if I based the conversation that occurs around here after services, that I too would have to wonder if all of us had been in the same service! This man pulls an ‘end run’ and skirts around the material that had been presented and just goes in after what is all about **him**. He said, “*Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.*” If I had been Jesus, I probably would have thought, “*Where was this guy during my sermon?*”

Certainly folks go to church and come before God for a lot of different issues...and often those issues are very narrow in their view. I believe I have just about heard it all over the years, and it’s become hard to surprise me anymore when it comes to such matters. We come because we are lonely, bored, empty, broke, feeling guilty, wanting some attention, wanting some financial help, seeking some position, looking for an ear who will listen, and most of all, looking for someone who will lend credence and confirmation to lifestyle and decisions I have already embraced.

Jesus however was looking for those who would “*pick up their cross, die to themselves, and follow Him*”...and follow Him *wherever He might lead them*, without debate! He was looking for **servants**. In general, there are many who seek Christ and community to **gain** something...**get** something to **add** to their current life and lifestyle, and then there are the few who come to **give up** something and **give to** everyone else.

These two clearly very different priorities have existed and divided the religious world ever since, and determines the church in which we attend. This man wasn't there to have Jesus change his heart. He wanted someone to support him in his position and get his problem fixed without confronting any issues in his life. The bottom line? It was about HIM, not about JESUS.

I think the saddest part of this passage and subject is just how many people will write themselves out of the storyline because they just believe it doesn't speak *to* them or *of* them. They would be the first to claim that no such material or financial priority exists in their life. So they say "amen" to the message...which again, is apparently aimed at some other nebulous soul in the vast religious scheme, and they move on, thankful that they are 'innocent' of such a "dis'ing" of the Son of God.

And yet we know that scripture...even Christ Himself, repeatedly called for an all-out wholesale surrender to the priority of Christ and kingdom.

Matthew 6:33 "But seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Matthew 6:19-21 "***Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth***, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Matthew 6:24 "***No one can serve two masters***, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. ***You cannot serve God and money.***"

Galatians 2:20 "I have been ***crucified*** with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me..."

John 3:30 "He must increase, but ***I must decrease.***"

Colossians 3:1-4 "If then you have been raised with Christ, ***seek the things that are above***, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ***Set your minds on*** things that are above, ***not on things*** that are on earth. For ***you have died***, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Romans 8:5 "For ***those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh***, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit."

Matthew 22:37 "And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with ***all*** your heart and with ***all*** your soul and with ***all*** your mind."

These passages essentially just scratch the surface of this issue! And yet truthfully few of us would ever see our reflection in their rendering because we want to think that we are 'a-ok' with God on this matter! Surely this passage in Luke isn't talking to and about *me*! Like most of us, this man truthfully had his focus on getting what he wanted in ***this*** world. Jesus shows him that his true need was to be ready for the ***next*** world!

The truth is, the vast majority of the greater church today seeks only to ***add*** Christ to their worldly life! He is something to 'hedge their bet'...to make the life they have a little better, more secure, and safer. In most of our lives, Jesus is more of a 'lucky rabbit's foot' than Lord and Master! We no longer surrender our lives to His control. We "want our cake and eat it too!"

I have witnessed folks who struggle with this issue for literally years. They keep saying they *want* to "step up to the plate"...they are *trying* to commit to God and His kingdom...*which includes this community*, and they intend to be 'all in' one day! The days however turn into months which turn into years and still they struggle and still they reason and still they excuse themselves.

They just need to finish school. They just need to get this job or gain that promotion. They just need to have kids, grow the kids up, get the kids through school, graduate the kids, get them through college, pay for their college, deal with their grandkids, and on and on and on. Family and recreation easily trumps church attendance and career easily supersedes commitment and participation in the body life. As soon as I do see a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel, I do not move to involve myself as God is calling me too, but rather I instead join a club, take a recreational or hobby class, or increase my vacation time.

The bible clearly tells us that our ‘heart will be where our treasure is.’ (Matthew 6:21) We keep saying that our treasure is in Christ, but then why is our heart not in Him? NO, the truth is we are more concerned about our finances, our fun, our families, our career positions ...and a plethora of other issues. If we are honest, some of us will admit to that sin. We are more concerned with bigger barns to hold more stuff. And Jesus...in this parable...quoting God Himself, calls such a person a “fool.”

The rub in all of it is that we innately know this truth but we want to believe that God is ok with where we are ...that He understands the issues we face and the reasons why we have to do other than what He has instructed herein! We want to believe that Jesus will still put His arm around us and pull us close and tell us all is ok and He loves us madly. But check out how God *really* deals with this heart and this action and this way of life: *He calls the guy a “fool.” Ouch.*

The fact is, *we all have a choice about how to invest our lives.* It comes down to basics and it comes down to black and white and we don’t like black and white. We prefer to live our faith out in nuances and greys, and clutch terms like ‘grace’ and ‘eternal security’ and ignore words like “fool” and names like “generation of vipers” and “wicked and lazy servant.” (Matthew 25:26) But plugging our ears doesn’t make the music go away, it just keeps us from hearing it. We must decide: Greed or God?

It’s here when we cry ‘foul.’ Life isn’t so ‘neatly divided’ we claim! We believe we can love God and still pursue a financial security and a full earthly life! But Jesus drew the line plainly when He said, “You cannot serve God and mammon...” (Luke 16:13). He did not say, “*should* not,” but “*cannot.*” It is an impossibility to serve both masters at the same time. You must choose one or the other. And the term ‘mammon’ means more than just money or wealth, but it means ‘treasure.’ And for many of us, our treasure lies in vocational position and power, in family, in real estate, in hobbies and R & R time, in possessions, in a plethora of other issues which all have one common denominator: they aren’t Christ and Kingdom. They are “the world.”

In Mark 4:19, Jesus said that the thorns that gradually grow up and choke out the word are “the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things.” Seldom is there a deliberate and overt decision where we decide, “I’m going to become a materialistic hedonist and blow off God in the process.” Truthfully, it creeps up on us subtly and through a hundred small decisions that in and unto themselves seem inconsequential. But it eventually garners a slow stranglehold on our lives, like thorns growing up around a healthy plant. So how can we determine if we’re falling into the sin of greed and worldliness?

If you believe yourselves to truly be in love with Christ firstly, then ask yourself:

(1) Do my thoughts more often run after material things? After worldly things, more than after God Himself?

Consider the magnitude of this category! If I am often thinking about my job...moving up in position, my car, my house, my love of hunting, fishing, or some other hobby, my wife, my kids, vacation time, friends, shopping and money, *more than I think about and pursue my relationship with God and serving as his bondsman*, I am tainted by greed and the world.

(2) Do I ever compromise godly character in the pursuit of material gain?

If I sometimes cheat or lie or steal to get ahead financially, to avoid loss, or to dance out of kingdom responsibilities, I am being worldly. If I am willing to shred relationships or to take advantage of another person for financial, material, or personal gain, I am being worldly. If I care more about the things of this world than about being a witness for Jesus Christ, I am being worldly.

(3) Do I enjoy material things more than I enjoy knowing God?

If my happiness soars when I get a new car, but I am bored by the things of God, I am worldly. If I rejoice when I go shopping or take a trip, but I yawn when I hear about a soul being saved, I am worldly. If I find it easy to pass on body-life fellowship for the sake of secular experience, I am being worldly. (I know...you are "witnessing"...but *are you really?*)

(4) How do I respond when I lose material things?

When I can't have something because I can't afford it, do I fall apart emotionally? If I get robbed or lose some or all of my things in a fire, does it devastate me? I'm not saying that we must be stoic about such losses. We will always feel some sadness when we lose things even if only for emotional ties. But if it wipes us out, then we're probably too attached to this world and its goods.

(5) What would I do if I suddenly came into a fortune?

What if a distant relative died and left you a large inheritance? Would your first thought be, "Now I can get that house, start that family, or buy that new car or boat"? "Now I can take that long vacation." Or, would you think, "Now I can support dozens of missionaries"? "Thousands of people can hear about Christ because He has given me funds to invest in the spread of His kingdom!" Many of us fight our flesh every time we move to give our tithe and offerings! And yet we still claim that Jesus is the most important thing in our lives!

How we struggle with this issue! We bristle at the whole premise, for it seems so...well, *un-American!* But to allow ourselves latitude in this essentially rejects Christ's Lordship over our lives and everything in it. It's a popular idea today! We see Jesus as *Savior* but reject Him as *Lord*. We believe we can accept Him as *Redeemer* but refuse Him as *King*. We want to go to heaven we just don't want to work or discipline or be faithful! And that would all be fine except for the small issue of the ***whole Bible*** which clearly says otherwise! So to attempt this maneuver is to reject the very words of God and to live by a creed that is wholly made-up in our heads and hearts. Are you ready to stake your eternity on such a belief?

The man in the parable saw himself as the boss...as the "owner" of his life and stuff. Repeatedly he used the pronoun "I," without any regard for God. He claimed it all! ***My*** crops, ***my*** barns, ***my*** grain, ***my*** goods, and, most frighteningly of all, ***my*** soul. In the famous poem "Invictus" by William Henley the proud and defiant words ring out "*I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.*"

Scripture however tells us a different story. It says in opposition, "*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him.*" (Ps. 24:1 NLT). It's *all* God's. Everything! Your next breathe is His and given by grace for you to experience. And His desire and purpose for giving it to you is to show you love and that you might use it to love and glorify Him in return. We are just "stewards" of all the stuff we have. What shall His return on investment be?

I wonder how many of us are living our next day saying "This is what *I* will do."

But a true child of God says "Lord, what would ***You*** have me to do today?"