

July 28- Aug. 1, 2025 Edition

Following

The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 186

The Parable Of The Rich Fool

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we're going to spend some time looking at the parable of the rich fool. It's a story Jesus told in response to a request from someone that approached Him while He was teaching. This is the story:

Then someone called from the crowd, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me." Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own." Then he told them a story: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"' "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?' "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God." Luke 12:13-21 (NLT)

This is God's thinking on our money- unfortunately. Jesus talked an awful lot about money. In fact- depending on how you define it- almost one half of Jesus' parables revolved around how we humans handle and look at our money. Why is that? Because in this reality we place such a huge emphasis on wealth. For many of us it's the only truth we rely on. It's where we get our sense of self worth and security. And because of that we are constantly making foolish decisions about where we put our time, our energy and our resources. Generosity isn't just one of the Christian "habits" we're supposed to be practicing- it's kind of a bellwether of how well we're doing with the rest of the habits we are invited to develop. One of the ways to determine how much of the love of God exists within us is to look at how we handle our finances. It's not the only way but it's a pretty big one. One of the ways to determine how much hope exists within us is to look at how we handle our finances. And one of the ways to determine how much faith we have is- you guessed it- to look at how we handle our finances.

Generosity is not just another Christian habit encouraged by Jesus. You can't love God without being extravagantly generous. You can't love your neighbor as you love yourself without being extravagantly generous. And you will never be a part of changing the world without being extravagantly generous. It's not that God has some predetermined number or even percentage of how much you "have" to give in order for Him to accept you. The New Testament doesn't give us a number or percentage. It just tells us over and over to be generous with what we've been given. That makes our money a barometer of what's happening in our hearts. Radical generosity is really the only way to gauge whether or not we've truly given our hearts and souls to Jesus. Like it or not Jesus teaches that one of the ways to show your devotion to God is by handling your money differently than the rest of the world handles theirs.

As we go through this difficult teaching of Jesus' I hope you'll set aside any preconceived notions you have about what a pastor who works at a church will probably have to say about giving back to God with radical generosity and entertain the wild idea that perhaps what you've been taught about giving to the church may not line up with what Jesus actually taught. He does care about how you handle your money but not because He needs your

money- He cares not because of what will happen to His church if you don't give but because of what will happen in your heart if you don't. And please don't take this as Pastor Ed trying to drum up more cash for the church he works at. In fact I'll finish today's reflection with this disclaimer- if you don't trust us at Riverside because you think all we care about is your money then please, don't give a cent to us. But find some organization that is blessing people in the Name of Jesus that you believe in their mission and support them with extravagant generosity. Because if you aren't finding some way to give generously back to God part of what He's so generously blessed you with it will shrivel your heart and your relationships and will lead you down a very dark path.

Tuesday Reflection: This parable is about Jesus looking a world that worships the accumulation of stuff and wealth square in the face and saying, "you're smarter than this, aren't you?" And the setup couldn't have been more perfect. Jesus has been teaching about the Kingdom of God and eternity and love and relationships and this guy basically interrupts Him with a question. And it's not a question about the Kingdom or eternal life or love- it's a request for Jesus to tell his brother to cough up his share of the dough that dad left us. I guess nothing says "family bonding" like fighting over money at a funeral, huh? This would have been like someone giving a Ted talk on poverty and suddenly someone in the crowd shouts out, "hey can you help me with my taxes"? Jesus responds not with advice on probate litigation but with advice about getting too caught up with wealth. Because Jesus is not about providing answers to our pat questions- it's about changing the way we view reality:

Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own." Luke 12:14-15 (NLT)

A lot of people have taken Jesus' words on greed to mean that Jesus is anti-rich people. But it's not true. Jesus wasn't anti-wealth or anti-success. But He was VERY concerned with what the wealthy and successful do with their wealth and success and how they treat those with less than they have. And ultimately it all comes down to how we view reality. When we read that Jesus said, "life isn't measured by how much you own" what He literally said was, "you do not exist within your possessions". Ok then, what do we exist in then? Well to answer that question Jesus tells a story that starts out like this:

Then he told them a story: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops."
Luke 12:16 (NLT)

Now if you read yesterday's reflection then you already know the rest of the story. The guy has a surplus so he decides to build bigger barns to house all of his wealth. Was the problem building bigger barns. Is Jesus saying that big barns are bad? That barns need to be a reasonable size? No. He's not making a statement about barns- He's making a statement about human hearts. The rich man had a surplus and wants to use it solely to make his own life better. So what's wrong with that we might ask. And what's wrong with that is that when we approach life and our stuff with that kind of attitude it reveals a certain condition of heart that will rob us of the Life He came to provide us with. It makes us the center of our own universe and everyone else is just furniture in the story of our lives. We were not created to

live in isolation nor were we created to live believing we are better than everyone else. But this rich fool only has eyes for himself. He thinks this is all about him. Jesus says He's so wrong that this way of looking at life makes one a fool.

Look at how Jesus sets this story up- "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops." Jesus says it was the farm that produced fine crops- not the man. So often we fall for the lie that we earned everything we have and didn't need help from anyone but it's just not true. It reminds me of the story of a group of scientists who were atheists started believing that they could do anything God could (I know calling them atheists and then talking about them dealing with God is strange but it's a joke, ok?) and so they decided to send a representative to tell God that His services were no longer required. So the spokesperson for the atheists goes to God and says, "we have figured out how to create life- just like You. So we don't need You or Your morality any longer. Please leave the world alone." God proposes a contest to determine who is best at creating life- Him or the scientists. The atheist scientist agrees and reaches down and starts scooping up some dirt to get started and God asks him, "what are you doing"? The guy tells God that He's getting some dirt so that he and his other scientist friends can create something alive from it and God says, "no- you have to make your own dirt!"

We humans have gotten pretty good at taking the raw materials God has given us and manipulating them to create beautiful and useful things. But we have never figured out how to create the raw materials from nothing. That, as it turns out, is the big miracle. It reminds me of a short history of the universe that I once read: Hydrogen is a light, odorless gas that given enough time becomes people. Let's face it- we all believe in miracles. Either God created all of this or it sprang from nothing which is a pretty big miracle in its own right.

What does this have to do with the story of the rich fool? The rich fool thinks his success is all his own doing but without God's dirt and God's rain and God's sunlight that rich fool has nothing. Nada, zilch. But the rich guy doesn't see it that way. But if you know the end of the story then you know he's about to get an education. The guy was going to die that night. And what was going to happen to his wealth? Well it wasn't going with him. You've probably heard the phrase, I've never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer. Why not? Because as it turns out the only thing we take with us from this life to the next is the treasures we've already stored up in heaven by being extravagantly generous with the wealth God blesses us with- whether that's a lot or a little. So maybe today you and I could spend some time reflecting on what we are doing with our material wealth that God has so generously entrusted into your care. Did you have a hand in working hard to accumulate that wealth? Sure you did. And God loves hard work and success. They were His ideas. But this story teaches us to stay humble and to stay generous and grateful.

Wednesday Reflection: Let's continue with this theme that life isn't about stuff. The rich fool thought that was all it was about but he learned differently on the night he died and realized he couldn't take his stuff with him. So if life isn't about accumulating more wealth and stuff then what is it about? Turns out that's a really easy question to answer. Jesus was asked once what the greatest command in the entire Old Testament was. I don't if you've ever read the entire Old Testament but it's thick. It's full of commands. Hundreds of them

and by the time Jesus came to this earth the Jewish religious leaders had added literally thousands of more commands so if I didn't have Jesus' answer to this test question it would probably take me years of combing through all of those commands to come with the most important one. But not Jesus. He answered immediately and confidently:

Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." Matthew 22:37-40 (NLT)

Jesus clues us in on what this life is supposed to be about and it's not wealth or accumulating stuff. It's love. Love is the answer. It's all about love. Love for God, love for others and love for ourselves (but not a narcissistic love which is the kind of love the rich fool had for himself- rather Jesus is talking about taking really good care of ourselves so that we have the time, energy and wherewithal to love God and love our neighbors. Love is what this life is all about- whether we realize it or not. And if we don't realize it now Jesus tells us we will on the day we die. In God's economy love is the most valuable commodity in the universe:

So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

1 Corinthians 13:13 (NLT)

Jesus is urging us to store up treasures in heaven by loving Him, others and ourselves. That's the only riches any of us will be able to take with us into the next life. And I'm not here to tell you what that's supposed to look like. I'm not here to tell you what to do with your wealth and stuff. I'm only here to point you to Jesus and highlight what He had to say about all of this so that you and I will both (hopefully) take a good, hard look at how we're handling our money and then ask Jesus what He'd recommend as a sound investment strategy not just for this life but (more importantly) for the next one. And again let me stress that Jesus isn't anti-success or anti-wealth. He tells us to save for the future, to work hard and provide for our families and plan for retirement. But He also tells us to be very careful not to hoard our stuff and our wealth because that will wither our hearts and souls and make us paupers in the next life. If you were at church a couple of weekends ago when I was finishing up talking about the Good Shepherd I talked about the church at Laodicea (pronounced lay-odd-ih-see-uh) and the letter Jesus sent that church to discuss where they were going wrong. The church at Laodicea was rich. They were sort of living the American dream. They were affluent and comfortable. Look at what Jesus says to them:

You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. So I advise you to buy gold from me- gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Revelation 3:17-18 (NLT)

What is this gold-that-has-been-purified-with-fire? It's a figurative way of talking about what's truly valuable. I believe the goal Jesus is referring to is the treasures we're storing up in heaven. The love and generosity we express to others and to God with our money and with our lives builds up treasures that will never perish, cannot be stolen and that won't stay behind when you are promoted to the next level of your existence. Obviously money isn't the only way to love others. And if you only love others with your money but not with your life

then you're creating a toxic situation so don't think that this is only about how we deal with our money. It's not. But this week we're focusing in on the parable of the rich fool and at the heart of that story is a man who shows how withered his heart and soul have become by how he deals with his finances. So maybe today you and I could spend some time reflecting on how we're doing at buying the gold-that-has-been-purified-with-fire that Jesus is talking about in His letter to the Laodiceans. How are you doing at loving God, loving others and taking really good care of yourself?

Thursday Reflection: So what happens if I decide to build my life around the accumulation of stuff and wealth rather than focusing on my relationships? Well, in that case your wealth will enslave you. Basically your possessions will end up possessing you rather than the other way around. That's what happened to the rich fool (and that's what made him a fool- not that he was rich or successful but that he decided his life did indeed is measured by how much we own. Look at the inner board meeting the guy has with himself here:

He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"

Luke 12:17-19 (NLT)

See what I mean by inner board meeting? It's all self dialogue. He doesn't ask for God's wisdom to figure out what to do with this surplus he's experienced. He talks to himself, plans with himself, makes decisions- all for himself. This guy would have crushed it in the corporate world. He had a vision, scalable infrastructure, solid ROI. He had everything- except a clue. And again there's nothing wrong with success or wealth or saving for the future. But this life HAS to be about more than just you. If it's not you've missed the point of life. Now this guy was a great planner. He was all about those 10 or 20 years plans. But he made one huge miscalculation- he thought he had more time.

But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?' Luke 12:20 (NLT)

And we do this all the time thinking we've got all the time in the world. I'll start helping others and serving when things calm down. When I have more money then I'll start being generous. Once the kids are gone then I'll invest in my marriage. But the thing is you don't get to schedule your final breath. Jesus isn't trying to scare us- He's trying to wake us up and remind us what this life is REALLY all about. It's not just about me and this life is uncertain- we don't know how long we've got left. None of us does.

Interesting tidbit- this is the only time in all of scripture where God calls someone a fool directly. It's also interesting that if we read the parable of the rich fool without knowing how it ends then at the beginning most of us would be thinking, what a legend. I want to be like this guy. This is a guy who is building bigger barns to store up his great harvest, and he's going to be financially independent. He's going to retire early. That's what I want to do. And then Jesus turns around and calls the guy a fool. And suddenly I find myself in a paradox

where the striving for more is what's real and the investing in relationship with God, others and myself is the illusion. But we've got that backwards.

I mean it's kind of the American dream right? And there's nothing wrong with money in and of itself. Jesus speaks out against rich people who are blinded by their own greed but Jesus doesn't criticize all rich people. If people were rich and then in turn showed generosity toward the poor and those with less than they had then God blessed them. This guy's problem wasn't how much money he had- it was that he had missed the point of reality. He was investing in things that will not hold their value. He wasn't a fool because he was rich. He was a fool because he thought life was all about stuff.

Make your life all about accumulating stuff and wealth and you're just shooting yourself in the foot. The problem wasn't that he was wealthy. It wasn't that he worked hard. It wasn't that he wanted to enjoy life. It was that he had believed a false narrative about what this life is really all about. I used to see these bumper stickers all the time that said, he who dies with the most toys wins. That's the spirit of our culture and it's the spirit of the rich fool. He thought life consisted in accumulating stuff rather than participating in God's kingdom and investing in relationships. But Jesus' response was a lot like the second bumper sticker that came out not long after the he-who-dies-with-the-most-toys-wins bumper sticker- it said, "He who dies with the most toys still dies". You can't take it with you. But you can send treasures ahead of yourself that will be awaiting your arrival when you get to heaven.

God invites us into a different timeline of sorts. A different story that is what reality is really all wrapped up in. Meanwhile we've believed the illusion that life is all about how much we can accumulate. And how easy we can make our own lives without ever once thinking about those who have less than we have. So maybe today you and I could spend some time reflecting on the relationship we've got with the accumulation of stuff and wealth. Do you have the kind of relationship with your money and your stuff that Jesus recommends or are you falling into the rich fool category and believing the lie that our lives are indeed measured by the abundance of our possessions?

Friday Reflection: Ok so if we relate to our wealth the way the rich fool did then we will ultimately be enslaved. Then how can we free ourselves? Through generosity. Generosity is what sets us free from the slavery of serving our stuff rather than making our stuff serve us. That's why Jesus ends his story of the rich fool like this:

*Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.
Luke 12:21 (NLT)*

I like the way the New Living Translation handles that verse. Most Bibles say something along the lines of, this is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God. The reason I like the NLT translation better is because it assumes more than just money. I mean, money is still part of having a rich relationship with God but it's not the only thing involved. There are lots of people who are stingy not with their money but with their time, their attention and their energy. There are also those who give selflessly of their time, attention and energy but hold onto their wealth like Scrooge McDuck. But to have a rich relationship with God will require being generous with our money as well as our time, attention and energy. It all comes down to who is possessing whom? Are you in possession of

your wealth and stuff or do your wealth and stuff possess you? God has a word for when our stuff stops serving us and instead we end up serving our stuff- idolatry:

Don't be greedy, which is the same as worshipping idols. Colossians 3:5 (CEV)

Did you know that God calls greedy people idolators? Many of us will scoff at the idea. Come on, in this day and age? Idolatry? Really? I'm much too sophisticated for that. I would never fall for worshipping false gods/idols. But we do. We do it all the time. Because idolatry isn't just about ancient savages dancing around a fire bowing down to carved statues and sacrificing at their altars. The gods haven't gone away. They've just gotten sneaky and they will get you to sacrifice the best of your time, energy, resources and even relationships on the altar of greed. It happens everyday. The libraries of the world are filled with stories of people who our culture considers wildly successful who sacrificed everything to work their way to the top only to find that the top is empty without the things that were sacrificed to get there. People have ended up with everything they ever dreamed of except the relationships, health and well being that define true riches. And their biographies paint a very bleak picture as they warn us not to make the same mistakes they did.

It's not a sin to be successful but what tripped up the rich fool is that when he had a huge surplus he didn't pray and ask God, what are we going to do with this surplus you've blessed me with? Instead he held a board meeting with himself and asked, what shall I do with my stuff that I earned and sweated for. I mean after all this is my life, right? But here's the problem- when we forget the source of our blessings we misuse the resources we've been given and we miss the point of this life. And God says that will make us fools. He doesn't use that word lightly.

Every blessing we receive that we don't praise God for has the potential to turn into a curse in our lives. The money God has entrusted into your care isn't only for your comfort and enjoyment- part of it is meant to be used to further God's Kingdom on this earth. And when we do that we are truly building up treasures for ourselves in heaven. And since we are such legalistic creatures (or maybe you haven't been asking yourself how much would be enough to satisfy God and move you from the fool category to the wise category- maybe that was only me but just in case you share my shortcomings let me finish my thought ;o) our first thought is, how much do I need to give to invest in the things that truly matter? Turns out it isn't about an amount- it's about a condition of heart and soul.

One day Jesus and His disciples were in the Temple and were watching as people came and dropped money into the offering boxes there. Pharisees and other religious leaders were dropping fat stacks of cash (not the Bible's imagery- I'm paraphrasing a bit now) into the offering boxes. The disciples were impressed but Jesus just yawned. Then a poor widow came by and quietly dropped two coins into the boxes- like donating two cents. That got Jesus' attention. That was impressive to Jesus:

Jesus called his disciples over and said, "The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly." Mark 12:43-44 (MES)

Turns out it isn't about an amount. It's about a condition of the heart and soul. Why are you giving? What does what you are giving mean to you? Want to break free from the idolatry of greed and success? Then send all your money to me at- KIDDING!!!! ONLY KIDDING!!! Geez can't you guys take a joke? But seriously, to break from the slavery of greed in our lives we must take a hard look at our relationship to our stuff. Where are you putting your confidence? Where are you putting your faith? God wants you to be a good manager of the money He's blessed you with. He wants you to work hard and save for the future. But He also wants you to learn to share. To be generous in your relationship with Him and with others. What kind of numbers are we talking about? I'm not sure. I'm still trying to figure that out myself. And it's a constant battle for our souls. If you're asking me how I try to keep all of this in perspective I guess it comes down to how much do I feel the generosity that Judy and I practice towards God and others with less than we have. We may have more money than anyone else around but I will tell you this- nobody is wealthier than we are. We're not wealthier than anyone else but nobody is wealthier than we are. Not because of dollars and cents and investments (we still worry about that stuff more than we should) but because of the treasures we are building up in heaven through our generosity to God and to others.

So maybe today you and I could both spend some time reflecting on the generosity we express with our stuff and with our wealth. Remember- the rich fool wasn't a fool because he was rich. He was a fool because he thought his riches could save him. Don't make that mistake.