Chapter 13

Generosity

The Parable of the Rich Fool
{Luke 12:13-21}
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One Main Thing

A spirit of generosity demonstrates that we are followers of Jesus and helps create opportunities for us to introduce others to our Savior.

Introduction

Hoarding gets a lot of attention these days. This behavior can manifest itself in people whether they are rich or poor, though the number of possessions many American households maintain may give the impression that hoarding is widespread in this prosperous society. We should remember that it is always sinful to value objects more than people.

Some Christians may exhibit a hoarding mentality in respect to their congregation. Sometimes, Christians can be church hoarders. Perhaps they will say, "This is my church, and you can come to

my church as long as you don't get in my parking spot, and get in my way, and sit in my seat. This is mine and you can look but don't touch!"

Such behavior shows that we have forgotten our purpose as members of the body of Christ. Our mission is to introduce people to Jesus Christ (share) and help them follow Him (care). Being generous is a means to that end.

One way we can help the body of Christ grow is by exhibiting generosity. In doing so, we imitate our God, who loved the world so much that He gave His son (John 3:16). The Parable of the Rich Fool shows us the opposite of generosity.

Setting

Jesus was instructing the disciples on the need for faithfulness during times of persecution when a man abruptly interrupted Him with a demand for assistance: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13). The request this man makes, in actuality, is a directive. "Jesus, go do this!" Jesus responds, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" The reason why Jesus reacts so harshly is because this man was asking Jesus to quit teaching, to quit doing what He was sent here to do, and to settle a family

dispute. During this time, it was shameful to take a brother to court because it was seen as "airing out the family's laundry."[1]

In verse 15, Jesus switches from addressing the man to addressing the crowd, instructing them to watch out for all types of covetousness. He says these things based on the man's actions. The motivation for this man's request was based in two things: greed and long-term security. Jesus is warning the people, "watch out, or you may find yourself more concerned about how unfair your life is than about your salvation."

Interpretation

Jesus then illustrates His point with a parable about a rich fool (v. 16–21). During a particularly prosperous time, this man decided to build larger storehouses without preparing himself for his ultimate fate. Upon first glance, some readers may think that the landowner had great business sense. The man had a bumper crop which he decided to save so that he could retire and sell some of his

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[1] Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World* (Louisville: WJK, 2001), 36–38, 43.

harvest as needed. However, this is not Jesus' point at all. If we examine His audience, we know that during Jesus' ministry almost all of the believers were poor farmers and day laborers. They were not landowners!

The point Jesus is making is that the actions of this man were completely self-centered. As Fred Craddock describes this man, "He lives completely for himself, he talks to himself, he plans for himself, he congratulates himself."[2] The farmer sought to secure his future without any reference to God, which is why God labels him a "fool," signifying a person who rebels against God, or one whose practices deny God. He forgot that his life was on loan from God.

We may hope otherwise, but it is always God who has the last word. Jesus asks the landowner "the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (v. 20). This rhetorical question should make us assess the value of accumulating possessions. This fool was what we might call a hoarder: his possessions defined his existence, taking on greater importance in his life than other people or even God.

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[2] Fred B. Craddock, *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 163.

Application

We should be sharers rather than hoarders. When it comes to the church, we want to grow to be the kind of people with a sharing mentality. We want to be generous with what we have so that others may be able to experience God's grace and love just like we do. We want to be like the church in Acts 2, where a spirit of generosity compelled believers to sacrifice their own possessions so that others could experience prosperity. They had this unselfish generosity that flowed from their realization that you can never out-give God. To become like the model church in Acts 2, we must, first of all, share within the church. From an early age we struggle with sharing. We all have a toddler mentality. We believe that everything we see is ours, and we see no reason to share our stuff! Yet the early church community realized that their things, their time, their food, and their money was not just theirs, but everyone else's too. They were sharers.

They were also in awe at what they saw and heard from Jesus and the disciples. The disciples were teaching and living out their belief of sharing everything they had and it shocked people. People couldn't believe they were giving away their things. Are we ever in awe at what we see and hear in the Bible? I pray we can always say yes. We need to

share these moments of awe with each other. They had a generous heart towards other people and wanted to share this awe with others.
Sharing within our church is about sharing what we have with our church family. This is how we rejuvenate ourselves and others.

But, to follow the example of Jesus, we must share not only within the church but also through the church. In the book of Acts some people were wealthy, some poor, but they all had one thing in common: they were all rich in God. Therefore, they were able to live generously with whatever God had given them. They realized that God was everything they needed and so they gave happily. Some of the greatest acts of generosity that happen within the church take place without anyone knowing, such as anonymous contributions. We may never see the outcome of our generosity here on this earth, but we shall in the age to come. When we relinquish our bodies to return to the dust we enter into our forever home where we will be rewarded for those anonymous contributions.

Sharing through our church, and within the church requires that we share what we have with our community. We must be sharers.

Conclusion

We become real Christians when we believe that what we have is worth sharing; when we believe there is value in it; and when we believe in the power of what we have—the power of the Gospel.

Let us not forget that our mission is to introduce people to Jesus Christ (share), and help them follow Him (care). Being generous is a means to that end.

Discussion

1. Why do some people become hoarders?

2. How do you think a hoarding mentality affects people in the church?

3. What role does sharing play in the Christian life?

4. In what ways was the man in this parable foolish?