

Number Our Days

Our text tonight comes from Luke 12:15-21. In this well-known parable there is a lesson lurking that I think tends to get overlooked in our time.

Interestingly, in this case Jesus actually gave the moral of the story before He gave the story itself. When a person came to him with a complaint about his brother's inheritance, the Lord told him this:

Luke 12:15: “And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”

It's rather interesting, if you stop and think about the situation. This man was in the presence of Jesus Himself – the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. By this point in His ministry Jesus had done a whole series of astonishing miracles. He was a fountain of incredible wisdom. This brother was one of the only people who ever lived who had the opportunity to go to the Lord in person and make a request. Do you know what request he made? *He asked Jesus for money*. He didn't go to Jesus for righteousness, or wisdom, or salvation. No, all he wanted was money. Can you imagine?

I would say it's rather easy to imagine, because we see this all the time in our own day. Televangelists are famous for preaching that if you just send in your seed money, God will bless you with cars and houses and everything else your heart could ever desire. Other preachers proclaim the prosperity gospel, which teaches that if you have faith God will give you all the money you could ever want. Some people seem to have the idea that if we just approach Jesus from the right angle He will give us whatever it is we want – as if the whole point of His existence was to be our personal valet.

But things did not go as this greedy brother desired. Jesus instead rebuked him and told him that his heart was in the wrong place. To illustrate this, Jesus told the story of a man who *was* given great riches:

Luke 12:16: “And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:
17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?”

This guy had it *made*. Note that he was already described as a rich man *before* he had this bountiful crop. Not only was he rich, but in this particular year he had such a great harvest that he actually ran out of places to store all of his crop! This man literally had more wealth than he could store. He had an overflowing abundance – so much that he stopped to ask himself what he ought to do with it.

We, too, have been given an overflowing abundance. In fact, I daresay that the life of the average person in this room is probably better than the life of the average billionaire from a hundred years ago. On September 29, 1916 John D. Rockefeller became the world's first billionaire – and that was in *1916* dollars. Today his fortune would be worth around \$23 billion. His vast wealth could give him a huge house in New York City, but it couldn't give him air conditioning. Or television. Or the internet. Or a cell phone. Or modern medicine. Or modern dentistry. There wasn't even radio back in those days – and the movies were silent, black-and-white affairs. There were no antibiotics or dentures, and if you needed a hip replacement you were in big trouble. The finest watch your money could buy in

those days wasn't as accurate as a cheap watch you can buy at your local Walmart, and no amount of money could buy you a refrigerator. Oh – and your life expectancy in those days was a thrilling 54 years.

We live in one of the most prosperous countries the world has ever seen, and have better lives than nearly everyone who has ever lived in all of human history. Worldwide, in 2017, about 2 billion people live on less than \$2 a day – which comes out to about \$730 per year. I realize that we all have problems and challenges, but when you compare our lives to the lives of those in other times and places, we really have it made. I bet John D. Rockefeller would envy the lifestyle of the average middle-class American, and would have been willing to give up a fortune to get a few of the things we take for granted.

But we have been given so much more than just material things. The Lord Jesus Christ shed His own blood on the cross to die for our sins, and to pay the penalty that we deserved. We should have been the ones who were punished, for we were guilty, but instead God offered up His own Son so that we could be set free. Forgiveness is a priceless thing – it means we will not suffer the eternal wrath of God in Hell. Instead God has given us life – *everlasting* life. He has promised that one day He will return. When that day comes, those who are alive will be transformed and meet Him in the air – and those who are dead will be raised back to life again. He has promised to put an end to Death itself and create a world where there is no more crying or suffering or sickness or pain. These are things we never could have provided for ourselves, or deserved, and yet Jesus gives them to us freely – at great cost to Himself.

God has given us astonishing blessings. Even the poor of this world, and those the world holds in light esteem, can be rich in the sight of God. But what do we do with them? What do we do with all of this bounty that we have received?

The rich man of this story had many options. He could easily have used his tremendous wealth to feed the poor. In the first century poverty was everywhere, and this man was in a great position to help those who were on the verge of death. He could have made a huge difference in the lives of all sorts of people. He could have used his position to help those who were in dire need of help. He had something those around him desperately needed, and he was in the perfect place to provide it.

But that's not the choice that he made. Instead he decided to take a different course of action:

Luke 12:18: “And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.”

He decided to spend every last penny he had completely on himself. Since it all belonged to him, he was going to take the rest of his life off and live as lavishly and richly as possible. What did he care if people around him were starving? He had it made, and he was going to enjoy it. All of this wealth was his, so he was going to spend it on whatever made him happy. In his opinion the whole point of life was to gratify your own desires and get whatever it was you wanted. Since he now had the ability to do that, he was going to live as selfishly as possible.

Unfortunately for him, he left God out of the equation. His life took an unexpected turn:

Luke 12:20: “But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

This rich man choose poorly. He never stopped to consider his relationship with God. He never stopped to think about what would happen after he died. He never even stopped to think about how much time he had left. He just assumed that there was no God, that he had all the time in the world, and that all that mattered was his own personal happiness. When he unexpectedly died that night, he lost everything.

Jesus was warning that brother not to make the same mistake as this rich man. Do not spend your life seeking the temporal things of this world, for this world and all that it contains is going to be destroyed. Even if you amassed every bit of wealth that this world had to offer, you can't take it with you. When you die the Lord will not be impressed by the size of your bank account. Instead, when you stand before God and are judged, He will want to know how you have spent your time. What have you done with the life the Lord has given to you? Have you spent it wisely, or did you spend your days pursuing your own desires?

We must remember that the Lord has purchased us with His own blood. He died in order to save us – and He does require something of us in return:

Romans 12:1: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

One of the things we tend to forget is that part of being saved involves giving your life to the Lord. We often say things like “Give your heart to Jesus”, but have you ever stopped to think about what that actually means? When we became a Christian, we agreed to start living for the Lord. We agreed to sacrifice our own will and seek the Lord's will instead – to sacrifice our own desires and seek the Lord's desires. We agreed to seek after the Lord's kingdom. In other words, we changed sides. We are no longer asking God to join *our* side and help us accomplish whatever it is we want so that we can be happy; instead we have joined *God's* side and pray that He will work through us to accomplish whatever He wants.

Our works do not save us; our salvation was accomplished on the cross. But the way that we live our lives does show what side we're on. If we truly have given the Lord our heart then we will want what *He* wants, and will take joy in the things that bring Him delight.

The book of Psalms says this:

Psalm 90:12: “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

The rich man thought he had all kinds of time – but he was wrong. He thought he had everything he needed to live for years without thinking about God and could just live for himself. He never imagined that God would come for Him so soon or so suddenly. He thought he was going to have more time than he actually did. His mistaken assumptions led him to make poor choices that, in the end, cost him everything.

None of us knows how much time we have left. None of us knows what tomorrow might bring. That is why the book of Psalms urges us to number our days. We need to learn to live each day with care, for we have not been promised another one.

Now, some people say you should live each day as if it was your last. Please, *don't* do that. If you think about it, if you truly believed that today was your last day on Earth then there are all sorts of things you wouldn't do. Why go to work, or pay your bills, or go to the dentist if today is your last day? Who cares about school or college? If today was *really* your last day then all sorts of things don't matter

anymore. That is why people who try to set dates for the Rapture tend to get in so much trouble – they quit their jobs, sell their house, and spend all they have and then find themselves in a big mess when they turn out to be wrong. You can't live that way.

But what you *can* do is learn to live wisely. The rich man thought his wealth meant he could spend years goofing off and living selfishly. That was a grave error. What he should have done was use his time to seek the Lord, to do what was right, and to help those around him. He should have proclaimed the gospel, helped the needy, and done what he could to further the kingdom of God. He should have lived his life in such a way that no matter when the Lord returned for him, God would find his life in order.

We don't know when the Lord will come for us. What we *do* know, though, is that when He comes it would really be best if He was happy with the state of our lives. If He came for us today, would He find us working for Him? Would God find us seeking holiness, resisting sin, spreading the gospel, and putting His desires ahead of our own? How do you think He would judge you if your time ran out?

That is what it means to number our days. God has given each of us a certain number of days, and each day that goes by subtracts from that number. We need to use them wisely, and not waste them as the rich man did. If you go down a few more verses in Luke 12 you will see that Jesus Himself tells us that we needed to be watching so that we were not caught off-guard:

Luke 12:35: “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning;
36 And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.
37 Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.
38 And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.”

When Jesus returns for us – and that day *will* come – He wants to find us ready and watching. He wants to find us working for Him, with our lives in order. Imagine that you are at work, and your boss suddenly walks into the room. Do you want your boss to catch you hard at work, or goofing off? Have you ever thought about what Jesus would say about the state of your life if He were to come today? What if He comes next week, or next month? Are you watching? Are you ready?

Jesus gives a very dire warning to those who take advantage of His absence:

Luke 12:45: “But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken;
46 The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.
47 And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.”

The rich man was not looking for the Lord. In fact, God wasn't even on his mind. All he was

thinking about was all the riches he had, and all the partying he could do. He wasn't prepared for the Lord to return.

Jesus is warning us to not be like that rich man. We know the Lord's will, and Jesus Himself has warned us to be watching. We know that we should number our days. We know that we should be living soberly and wisely, as people who are living on borrowed time. The rich man thought he had a whole lifetime ahead of him to be as irresponsible and selfish as he could imagine, and he was completely wrong. The end was vastly nearer than he ever imagined. He wasn't watching, so he was caught off-guard and in a poor state.

The point of this is simple: we should be living wise and sober lives, always watching for the Lord and always ready for Him to come for us. When that day comes He should catch us being about our Father's business, doing the Lord's will – not living for ourselves and thinking we've got all the time in the world to make it right later. If you are truly living for the Lord then you will never have to worry about Him suddenly coming for you and catching you doing something you don't want to be caught doing.

Let us close with a word from the apostle John:

1 John 2:28: “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.”

There are some Christians who *will* be ashamed when the Lord suddenly returns for them. Jesus will catch them at an hour when they are not aware. But it doesn't have to be that way. If we abide in Him – if we live for Him – then we can look forward to His coming with confidence.

Just take a moment to examine your life. If there is anything in your life that needs to be addressed, now would be the time to address it. Don't be like the rich man, and wait until it is too late. You simply don't know how much time you have left. Act now, while you still can. Today is the day of salvation.