

## 2013: TIME TO CHOOSE

### January 13: Choice Principles (Luke 12:13-21)

Intro to series: I want to make a confession to you: I love ethics. Brady, my two-year-old grandson, likes to say, “I love cake.” Or “I love candy.” If I ask him about a food that he knows and enjoys, he says he loves it. I hope one day he will say, “I love ethics.”

Ethics is the study of what is good. It is the study of the moral code and its effect upon conduct. In other words, ethics is JUST studying morals. It also looks at behavior and the changes that come about because one embraces a certain moral code.

Our faith in Jesus as Lord is much bigger than ethics. We are not just doing morality at church. We are actually doing truth and a world view that encompasses this life and the next. That comes out in the story Jesus tells about the Rich Fool. Let’s read it.

Intro: What I want us to do this morning is to think about the truths or principles behind this story that Jesus tells. You have to be anchored in eternal truth, the fundamental and first axioms which are not derived from other axioms but are themselves the foundation of all true knowledge and wisdom.

***Be on your guard against all kinds of greed***, says Jesus. We would be wonderfully blessed if we focused our attention upon the sins that Jesus warned us about rather than the sins that other people do that we abhor. Jesus here identifies one of the BIG THREE: the three most destructive, costly, and poisonous sins in our nation and in your life—GREED. Greed is multifaceted. That is why Jesus says “all kinds of greed.” It can manifest itself in all sorts of inordinate, out-of-balance desires that send your character and your moral life into ruin.

Looking at this story, and keeping the other teachings of Jesus in mind, it seems to me that four great principles emerge:

I. **Morality**: God is good (Matthew 19:17: There is none good but one, and that is God. Psalm 34:8: “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusts in him”).

A. We affirm the love of God. He is faithful. His lovingkindness is better than life. His plans for us are good, to bring us hope and a future. He works all things together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose. There is no universal truth or morality without this anchor. This is the first of the First Principles.

B. Rich fool has benefited from the goodness of God. Indeed, all of his prosperity has been accomplished through God’s good gifts of talents, capacities, and resources.

C. But the rich fool lacks godly focus or reference—he makes decisions and lives his life without reference to God.

D. Rich fool lacks gratitude—sense of his own dependency. He would want to claim that he is a self-made man, that all he has he accomplished through his own intelligence and hard work. But that would not be true. He used tools that were given to him at birth. He leveraged the goodness of God in the rich resources of the earth.

This rich fool could not make a grain of wheat let alone make it grow. He is a steward of that which he did not create and does not understand. The entire process of germination and maturation of the grain is likely a complete mystery to him.

\*\*\*He commits the same error that you would make should you claim to be solely responsible for your mobile phone. It is all yours, you say. But you do not understand even the tiniest and oldest technologies that make it work. If you were stranded in the forest you could not build one. And it would be useless to you without the vast support system of towers, etc. that make it work. \*\*\*We all learned during Hurricane Katrina that having a mobile telephone in your hand does not a conversation make.

The Rich Fool is in the same boat. He can hold an ear of corn and claim that he has grown it. But that would not be true. Only God’s goodness, genetic engineering and master-minding of the weather and resources can produce a corn crop on this planet.

E. Rich fool lacks humility—sense of his proper place in the world. He is plagued by GREED that blinds him to responsibility beyond himself. And he is plagued by PRIDE that fools him into thinking he is the center of the universe.

F. God is good. This is the first choice principle. The second principle involves our current circumstance living on this planet:

II. **Reality:** Creation itself is God's good gift (Psalm 139:14: "fearfully and wonderfully made"; Psalm 34:12: "Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days..;" 1 Tim. 4:4: "Every creature of God is good...).

A. Humans are of infinite worth. Humans are made in the image of God. It is good to be human.

1. God is our Father. We are his children. This is our place in the world and in Christian moral thought. Other humans are of infinite worth.

2. God became man in Jesus of Nazareth because living in the world is a good thing. The incarnation of God in Christ Jesus would never have happened if it was fundamentally bad to be a human on the planet.

3. Jesus taught us that God cares for the sparrows and the cattle and the flowers. He said of the vast population of tiny birds everywhere that not one of them falls to the ground without the Father in Heaven noticing. This is the goodness of creation.

4. Then Jesus said, "Be of good cheer. You are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:31). Humans are of more value than other life forms on the planet. I am saying this in a relative way. Sparrows are of such value that they have the attention of God. But there is a hierarchy of value in the teaching of Jesus, and humans are of greatest importance to God.

B. Rich fool appreciates life.

\*\*\*I heard an aged atheist say that he loved this world. He talked about the maple trees near his house and how he loved to see them and to experience the world around him. He also spoke of his love for people and how he missed those who died before him.

The Rich Fool likes his grain, his barns, and his opulent life. He enjoys the stuff he has accumulated. In itself, this is not bad. Rather, it is what God intended. All of these things are given for our enjoyment.

C. But the Rich Fool's appreciation lacks the context of gratitude. It is fully self-centered.

D. "Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights," Pastor James declares to his people (James 1:17). This is a fundamental choice principle that we must embrace: we are experiencing life as the good gift of God, and we are all working with the his good gifts every day in everything we do.

III. **Accountability:** We are accountable for our actions

A. Here are a few texts that make this abundantly clear:

1. Matthew 12:36: "Every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment"—Jesus.

2. Romans 14:12: "Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God"

3. I Peter 4:5: "But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."

B. The things we do and the choices we make really matter. They matter right now in our lives and in the lives of others. They matter in eternity. We are responsible for living our lives in conformity to the heart of God. We live with the consequences of our choices in this life. One day we will stand before God to give an account and be judged for our actions.

C. Accountability only makes sense in the eternal context of God's power and goodness. Only a good and just God can hold us accountable for our words and deeds.

D. Accountability is both temporal and eternal. It concerns life on the planet and life in the hereafter.

E. The rich fool totally lacks this perspective. He seems to be living as if he is only accountable to himself.

IV. **Mortality:** We have one life to live, and the clock is ticking. "It is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

A. We do not get another try at life on this planet. We do not recycle into another family or another form. Jesus teaches us, consistent with the law and the prophets, that life is linear, not circular.

\*\*\*I know there is a great circle of life. I learned that in the Lion King. (Play the last climactic measure of that introductory song?). Reincarnation is absolutely opposed to everything that Jesus teaches us

B. The rich fool does not account for his mortality: "Eat, drink, and be merry" is not followed by the familiar line "for tomorrow we die." Instead, he assumes that he has "plenty of good things laid up for many years" (Luke 12:19). Everyone assumes "many years," it seems, even when we are old.

\*\*\*When my father was lying upon his deathbed, I asked him how he was doing. He said he was living one day at a time. Then he said, "Moment by moment," a reference to a hymn written by Fanny Crosby.

C. We all have an expiration date though we do not know what it might be. Given this truth, we are wise to do our planning but live this day as if it could be our last one here.

