

Joyful Generosity

Measuring your Life

Luke 12:13-21

May 3, 2026

Introduction

Last week, in a humorous attempt to inspire recurring giving in our congregation, I jokingly promised a John Walker refrigerator magnet to those who signed up for the first time. To my delight, our Facilities Director, Dennis McDaniel (AKA, The Most Interesting Man in the Universe) made this dream possible. These are now available, but you know what you have to do to get one!

Also last week, in attempting to illustrate how joyful generosity is a proof to ourselves and our church that we have been changed by grace, I gave an example in which one of my children had a bag of M&M's and wasn't willingly sharing. That evening, we hosted 16 adults and 8 children at our home for Discover Beech Haven, and one of those attendees brought TWO bags of M&M's for us, which I have already consumed and did not share!

Body

As it turns out, that M&M story is biblical. Something quite similar happened to Jesus, as you can see in Luke 12:13.

(Slide) Someone from the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

The scene here is not unusual, nor is the question out of line. Disputes in Jesus' day were often over how the Hebrew Scriptures should be interpreted, so rabbis and other respected teachers were frequently asked to adjudicate these kinds of things. And one can scarcely think of a more contentious issue than that of succession or inheritance.

Inheritance laws in Jesus' day indicated that the eldest son should receive a double portion.¹ The ideal was that brothers would live together without dividing the inheritance. So in this particular case, it could have been that the older brother didn't want to divide the inheritance and the younger brother did. Or it could have been that the elder brother was withholding the inheritance of the younger. In either case, the younger brother assumed that justice was on his side.

And in this moment, Jesus did what he often did: **he redirected the focus of the younger brother INWARD ... to his own issues ... as well as anyone around him that was listening.** Look at v. 15.

(Slide) "Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because one's life is not in the abundance of his possessions."

Jesus saw what the man did not see. **The real inheritance problem for this guy wasn't economic. It was spiritual.** The man standing before Jesus was already possessed by what he wanted to possess. And so Jesus tells a parable to awaken him to this reality.

Remember two weeks ago when Jesus said in Matthew 6:24 that we cannot serve both God and money? This is a parable of what happens when you serve money.

The Allure of Greed

Read vv. 16-19 with me. ***(Slide)***

16 Then he told them a parable: "A rich man's land was very productive. 17 He thought to himself, 'What should I do, since I don't have anywhere to store my crops? 18 I will do this,' he said. 'I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grain and my goods there. 19 Then I'll say to myself, "You have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy; eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.'"

¹ Deut 21:15–17

On the surface, this parable reads like a man we would all celebrate. He has planned for the future. He has insured his investments. He has saved wisely. He's been prudent, strategic, and independent. And if this parable were about budgeting and planning and good stewardship, then we'd be right.

But a closer look at the passage shows that what's really going on here is not stewardship ... it's idolatry.

- Five times he says “my”—my barns, my grain, my goods, my soul.
- His entire conversation is self-contained. He consults no one. He seeks no counsel.
- He gives no thanks. He sees no neighbor.
- There is no mention of God, much less of God as a provider.

(Slide) John Stott captured it well: “His conversation was entirely with himself. He speaks to himself, plans for himself, congratulates himself.”

So you can see here that what this man has done is taken the mechanism for his livelihood (his work and his earnings) and made it the meaning of his life. He worshiped the gift. Imagine him standing before his new barns, satisfied. The grain glistens, the silos shine, and he whispers, “Now, my soul, you can finally relax.” That is the tragedy. That is serving money ... believing that rest comes from accumulation.

(Slide) Tim Keller once said, “You know something is an idol when you can't be happy without it or be generous with it.”

That was the farmer's problem. His happiness depended on his barns being full, and his heart was closed to generosity. The irony of idolatry is that the more you have a false god, the less you actually have. You think your wealth is rising but it's actually falling. Greed pretends to secure us but quietly imprisons us. It paints a picture of abundance but leaves life barren.

The Result of Greed

The story continues in vv. 20.

20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. And the things you have prepared—whose will they be?’

That word “demanded” means “called back.” The picture is of a loan being recalled by its owner. It’s a repo! The man thought his life was his possession. It never was. It was on lease from God. Every breath was borrowed air. Every day was borrowed time.

God calls him “fool.” Not because he worked or saved, but because he substituted goods for God ... gifts for the Giver ... things that rust over the One who reigns.

Jesus then draws the moral in v. 21.

(Slide) “That’s how it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

It’s not the size of the account that’s being judged. It’s the direction of the heart. To be rich toward God means to treat everything you own as His, to see wealth as stewardship, not sovereignty. It means your treasure flows toward God’s purposes—toward generosity, mission, mercy, and love.

Conclusion

(Title Slide) When Jesus tells this story, He isn’t condemning success, savings, or strategy. He’s exposing the illusion that rest and security come from having enough. The farmer’s barns weren’t the problem. His heart was. He built bigger barns but left no room for God.

And this is where the gospel meets us. Because if we're honest, every one of us is a "barn-builder." We think, "Once I have this amount saved, this job secured, this need met, then my soul can rest."

But the rest we're chasing is not found in stuff we can store. It's found in a Savior who **gave** everything to secure our souls forever.

Jesus, the true and generous One, became poor so that through His poverty we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). At the cross, He traded heaven's wealth for our spiritual bankruptcy. He didn't hoard grace; He poured it out. And now, through faith in Him, we are heirs of a greater inheritance—one that will never rust, rot, or be repossessed.

So, being "rich toward God" doesn't mean emptying your account, but it does mean emptying your heart of self-sufficiency and filling it with gratitude, trust, and generosity. It means seeing every breath, every dollar, every day as God's, given to us for His glory and others' good.

And THAT is why Christians are joyfully generous! In our giving, we are declaring that Christ is enough. Every gift is a protest against the false God of money and a proclamation of the true God of Jesus Christ. Every offering is an affirmation that we will not be possessed by our possessions and that our joy is anchored in the generosity of our Father in the person of Jesus.

Church, let's be a people who live and give like our barns aren't big enough to contain all the grace we've received. Let's not store it up. Let's pour it out. Because we already have the only treasure that can never be taken away: Christ Himself.

Prayer

Father, You are our life. Help us to see the lie of greed and the truth of grace. Teach us to hold things lightly, to give joyfully, and to live faithfully as Your Kingdom children. May our wealth become worship. Make us rich toward You. In Jesus' name, Amen.