

“The matter of the heart” Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Today we will talk about ... yes, about the matter of the heart. When we read the Gospels, they tell us about how Jesus interacted with real people. With people just like us. How He tried to teach them and to explain what is that that He has brought us.

One thing that unites us with those people and with all people, is the fact that too often we are much more interested in our earthly matters than we are in the Kingdom of God. Our today’s reading illustrates this point quite well.

Thousands of people had gathered around Jesus, and He began to teach them about what is truly important. He warned them from religious hypocrisy – that our God doesn’t expect us to be simply moral people, but to love Him above all things and our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus encouraged them to fear God more than men, and to genuinely seek what pleases God and not how to please men.

Jesus said them: “I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.”

And then suddenly someone from the crowd shouts to Jesus: “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Spot on! Great request, very fitting into the topics that Jesus was just teaching. “Jesus, help me to get my stuff!”

That’s us. So often the earthly matters seem so much more important to our hearts than the Kingdom of God, that we can’t hear the word of God. For all our thoughts are occupied with here and now. “Pastor, don’t preach so much about the Kingdom of God, tell something about us, about our lives.”

Jesus was rather harsh in His reply. “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” That wasn’t polite an address, not at all. “Hey, man, do you think I have come here to worry about your stuff!” Then Jesus said to those present: “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” And then He told them the parable that we know as the parable of the Rich Fool. Then Jesus said a few more things to make His point clear. And Jesus’ point was about the matter of

the heart. Let's reflect on what Jesus said and perhaps we too can learn something that builds us up. "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'"

And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."'

But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Jesus was talking about the Kingdom of God, but this man's heart was tied to his inheritance. Obviously, there was a problem between him and his brother, but he wasn't looking for reconciliation, instead he was trying with Jesus' help to get what he believed would give him what he longed for.

We often believe that wealth will bring satisfaction of our deepest longings. That we will be in control of our lives, safe and happy ever after. Part of me still believes it. This parable reveals how wrong and dangerous such believes can be.

For even if wealth itself, as God's good gift, can be a great blessing, it has this potential to do a lot of damage to us. As we can see it in this parable, it can lead us to loneliness, to selfishness, to the loss of our humanity and eternal life.

"The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'" In the Near Eastern culture it is a commonplace to discuss everything in community.

Conversation is everything. Especially when it comes to big decisions. Then the feedback of family and relatives and neighbors is very important. This man was thinking to himself. He had his great possession, but ... he didn't have anyone to converse with.

How sad it is when you have something joyful happening, and you can't even share this joy for ... you are alone. We can see it also today, – the greater the wealth the further people tend to move from other people and the higher fences are built around their houses.

Selfishness. Another possible side-effect. He already had a lot. He lived in his community. But the only person he could think of after God has blessed him with this abundant harvest was ... himself. Not about his family, nor about his community, nor the poor... just "I will do this for myself."

Which leads to the loss of humanity. What do I mean? Remember, we are created for two kinds of relationships. With our God and with our neighbors. And if one or both of these relationships are distorted, we simply can't enjoy our humanity as fully as we are created to. Something vital is missing... In this sad situation, both relationships were distorted. Surely, he thought he didn't need God. For he had got it all under control.

And it seems he thought that he didn't need other people either ... why to spoil such great a company of himself?! "I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'"

Which led to the loss of eternal life. The rich fool had attached his heart to the gifts of God, and had forgotten about the Giver. He had rejected God's gracious invitation, and chosen to chase his happiness here and now.

"Fool!" That was God's verdict. "This very night your soul will be required from you... So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." I am sure we can see how similar our thinking and action often are to those of the rich fool. No denying of that.

But Jesus doesn't end with the critique only. He goes on and paints for us this beautiful alternative for our lives, that He has brought us, and where He invites us to join in and participate. This is what we need to hear from Him.

Jesus describes us what Christian life is like. The new life with the Triune God. "I tell you, do not be anxious about your life. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!"

God the Creator, who is our Father, cares for all His creatures. As we say in our table grace: "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and you satisfy the desire of every living thing."

He provides for everyone... How much more then He cares about you?! For He has chosen you ... yes, from before the creation of the world, He Himself has knit you together in your mother's womb, He has redeemed you paying the ultimate price, and now He has prepared a place for you in the age to come. Don't be anxious, – be confident and happy, be courageous and peaceful!

Besides, and this is such a great point: "Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?"

So true. Neither hour, nor even a minute. We are not in control of live is us. But what we do know is this, – that every day of our lives is written in the book of our Father. And He cares for us. We are here only thanks to Him.

"Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you."

Don't you worry about your daily bread! For that is where people who are without Jesus have attached their hearts. They need to worry, for they believe that their very lives depend on their running and efforts.

But you are free, for you know that everything belongs to our God. Everything! And you also know that your Father knows what you need, and that He will most

certainly provide for you. Therefore, as Jesus says, you are free to seek what truly matters – His kingdom, and these earthly things will simply be added to you.

And then comes the most glorious part. “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

“Fear not, little flock!” Easier said than done. But what would give us enough courage and confidence? Something that God has prepared for us and gives us already now? “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

This is why Jesus has come and this is what He brings us and this is what He teaches us. The Kingdom. True freedom. The big things. When the King of kings desires to give you His Kingdom, we shouldn’t be worried about our daily bread, for He knows what we need meanwhile. Instead, put your heart where it belongs.

Jesus knows what He is talking about. He had it all, He knows what it is like; the heavenly glory and splendor, the holiness and beauty of God’s presence, the everlasting joy and blessedness. But for a while He gave up all of that.

Why? For us, for you! He didn’t want to enjoy all of that without us. He wanted to have us with Him. So, He gave it up and became like us, so that He could make us to be like Him. He came to rescue us from sin and death and to free our hearts.

Yes, without Jesus we are enslaved to the power of wealth of this age, for it promises to give us what we desire. But as soon as we attach our hearts to the wealth of this age, instead of gaining, we gradually lose everything.

Jesus sets us free. He offers us new, alternative lives. Where instead of worrying about being rich here, He offers us to be rich in God. To attach our hearts to Jesus. To see things as God sees them. To look at everything that we have as belonging to God, and to ourselves as His loyal and trustworthy stewards.

Jesus gives us life, where we are free to be richly human. Rejoicing that we are not lonely, that we are not only God’s creatures, but through Jesus, also God’s beloved children, heirs of His Kingdom, and co-heirs with Jesus.

He offers us life where we can be rich in our love and commitment to others, for we daily receive it abundantly from our God. He offers us life where instead of covetousness or fear about future we can be driven by our generosity and compassion – so that as many as possibly would learn what matters the most. This this matter of the heart, – the Kingdom of God. When we have this new life in Christ, then even our wealth and riches can’t enslave us anymore, instead, they become what they are meant to be – God’s blessings, and then they enable us to be joyfully generous, and abundant in giving as our God is towards us.

May the Spirit of our Lord Jesus dwell with you and help you to experience this new life in its fullness. May He guide you in your usage of your possessions and may He walk with you as you journey to your eternal home. Amen.