

Building Bigger Barns

Speaking of the vanity of pursuing worldly riches, Messiah taught: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). Here is wise guidance which can be applied in so many circumstances in life: those who serve mammon cannot also serve Yahweh with all their heart, soul, and strength. Being pulled in two directions, it is impossible to wholly follow either masters. But it is a characteristic of the faithful of all ages, that they “seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness”, trusting that all other things will be added unto them.

In Luke chapter 12, our Lord gave a parable to address and illustrate this point. In this parable, there was a man who was successful in the things of this life. His ground yielded much fruit, to such an extent that he could not store them in his existing barns. Therefore there was a perceived need to build bigger barns to contain his riches. However “God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall be those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luke 12:20). In his case – as in ours - it was seen that his life did not consist of the abundance of his possessions: they can not save a man from the certainty of death. As Job remarked: “naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: Yahweh gave, and Yahweh hath taken away” (Job 1:21). The life of Job was not defined by his riches, even though he was a rich man. And in our day the same principles apply: we are not defined by our riches, but by our lives, and the choices that we make during our lives.

The true position is taught in the Proverbs, penned by the richest of all the kings of Israel, king Solomon:

“Honour Yahweh with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine” (Prov. 3:9,10).

In the parable we are currently considering, the certain man had his barns filled with plenty, but he did not honour Yahweh with all his substance. What he ought to have done, was to serve Yahweh first, with the firstfruits of all his increase. Whilst there is nothing wrong with possessing an abundance of this world’s goods, for those who are rich, there is the added potential snare that they might trust in their wealth rather than in Yahweh, the Great Provider of all things. As Jesus himself taught elsewhere:

“And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God.”

Whilst the rich have an added difficulty to overcome, Yahweh can do all things. Whilst “with men this is impossible, with God all things are possible.” Seekers of the Kingdom of God, both rich and poor come together in their same need for salvation from sin and death—and both can be saved according to the Grace of the Living God. Even as it is written: “the rich and poor meet together: Yahweh is the maker of them all” (Prov. 22:2).

SELFISHNESS AND RICHES

Notice in this parable, the repeated use of the words “I” and “my”. This man is primarily concerned with himself, and how he might benefit from his abundance of goods: “I will say to my soul, Soul, though hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry” (vs 19). And as summarized by the Master: “So is he that layeth up treasure *for himself*, and is not rich toward God” (vs 21). This attitude epitomises the lust of the flesh for carnal advantage, with scant regard as to how their treasures will be given to another in the day of death. As saith the Proverb: “Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them” (Prov. 39:6). And as Jesus taught: “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?” The way of the

world is to measure success in terms of material prosperity, but the accruing of possessions is a temporal thing: they will offer no security in the day of death.

It is interesting to compare another parable in connection with this. Whereas the field of the barn-builder yielded much produce, in Matthew chapter 13 we have another parable of a man who sought after desirable treasure, yet who had no regard to the condition of the field that contained it:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field” (Mat. 13:44).

Notice here, the attention is focussed upon the treasure, and not the field itself. Purchasing the field merely provided the opportunity to possess the treasure that was within it. The land might or might not have yielded much fruit, but that was irrelevant to the purchaser. Even so, the prosperity or otherwise of our individual spiritual “fields” matters not: we must focus our endeavours upon the treasure of the Word, and not the field itself. It may yield plentifully, or sparsely, but that doesn’t matter. The important thing is to purchase the treasure, without which all else would be but vanity.

In a third parable, also in Matthew chapter 13, the warning is given that the cares of this life can have undue importance in our lives. The Parable of the Sower describes that:

“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and *the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches*, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (Mat. 13:22).

Notice that here, the force that strangles the emerging Word-Plant is not hardships and difficulty—those things are referred to in other features of the parable. Here, it is rather the distraction of worldly things, and the undue carefulness regarding present achievements. Attention is spent far too much on these things, which inevitably means that less and less attention is spent on spiritual things—and that in turn means that the new man of the Spirit will languish and fade away.

NABAL THE FOOL

The parable of Luke chapter 12 records the thoughts of the rich man towards himself:

“Soul, thou hast many goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. 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?” (Lu. 12:19-20).

Here is a striking case of self-indulgence. He was a “fool” whose primary thoughts were directed at himself, and his own prosperity: “take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry”. These are the cares and priorities of natural men. But no man is guaranteed tomorrow, and the folly of this approach is readily seen: in death he will lose everything he laboured so hard for. The way of the fool is to take advantage, and enjoy everything he can, because he can’t take it with him: “let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die.” (Isa. 22:13). Yet tomorrow will be the termination of his life, commencing his dissolution into nothingness.

The Old Testament Scriptures provide an example of such a man, by the name of Nabal, of the family of Caleb. The word Nabal literally means: “fool”, as Abigail his wife said to David: “Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him ...” (1 Sam. 25:25). Here is the Divine assessment of this rich and prosperous man:

“There was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats, and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel ... but the man was churlish and evil in his doings” (1 Sam. 25:1-3),

This great man was approached by David, who was a fugitive from Saul, Israel's anointed king. Yet he refused to spare a small amount of his opulence to help David and his men: "Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know now whence they be?" (1 Sam. 25:11).

But just as the foolish rich man of Jesus' parable died in his sins, even so Nabal was stricken of the Lord: "... his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And it came to pass about ten days after, that Yahweh smote Nabal, that he died." (1 Sam. 25:37-38). "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psa. 14:1), and Nabal the fool was no different. As Messiah concluded: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Lu. 12:21).

The balanced view of things is expressed in the Proverb:

"Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny the, and say, Who is Yahweh? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8-9).

Desiring neither poverty nor riches "having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." (1 Tim. 6:8-9). Compare this with the next verse: "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (1 Tim. 6:10). How like Nabal this fool is this! Being of the family of Caleb, who was one of only two righteous men not excluded from the land, he erred from the faith, being lifted up in his own self interest, and loving the material things that he surrounded himself with.

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS CHRIST

Speaking of the example of our Master, Paul was moved by the Holy Spirit to write:

"Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

Again, the Proverbs teach a similar principle:

"There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches." (Prov. 13:7)

Here is the example of our Lord. He was poor, so far as material advantage goes. He is described by the Psalmist as being "the poor and needy man" (Psa. 109:17). He was poor materially, yet had great spiritual riches. He gave his all—his entire life—for others, that we might also be rich in spiritual things.

Our Lord, as we, sought for "glory and honour and immortality" (Rom. 2:7). But not in this life: rather in the Age to Come. We seek after "the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7), which is to be desired above all that the present world can offer. The ecclesia of Christ is made up of those who are materially poor, and others who are materially rich. But both come together in the same need of being saved from their sins. Our Lord Jesus Christ provides the example of giving to others; rather than to accrue wealth for himself. As Paul wrote: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let his mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:4-5).

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