**Luke 12:13–21** Someone from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But Jesus said to him, “Man, who appointed me to be a judge or an arbitrator over you?” Then he said to them, “Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because a man’s life is not measured by how many possessions he has.” He told them a parable: “The land of a certain rich man produced very well. He was thinking to himself, ‘What will I do, because I do not have anywhere to store my crops?’ He said, ‘This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and goods. And I will tell my soul, “Soul, you have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy. Eat, drink, and be merry.”’ “But God said to him, ‘You fool, this night your soul will be demanded from you. Now who will get what you have prepared?’ “That is how it will be for anyone who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Let’s just begin by talking about the very beginning of the text before us. The text says this to us, **“Someone from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But Jesus said to him, “Man, who appointed me to be a judge or an arbitrator over you?”** I want you to immediately notice something. Please note that we have extremely limited information here. We don’t know anything about the actual situation here other than the fact that one man feels he is being cheated by his brother when it comes down to the inheritance. Honestly, we don’t know if this is a dispute between just the brothers or if this dispute goes all the way back to the parents and the brother. For that matter we don’t even know if the brother is simply asking for a greater portion than what he got, because it is well known that in those times that the older brother got 2/3s of the inheritance and the younger would only get a third. Is this brother of our text the younger and is he seeking a greater portion than was actually to be his? Again, what is interesting is that we really have no information aside from the fact that clearly one brother is asking Jesus to make his brother divide the inheritance with him.

And it is clear that Jesus is having none of it, well, almost none of it. Jesus’ reply is very interesting. **“Jesus said to him, “Man, who appointed me to be a judge or an arbitrator over you?”** Let’s get a few things straight right away. First, Jesus is not saying anything about not ever being a judge. Don’t confuse these words with want is found in Matthew 7. **“Stop judging, so that you will not be judged.”** A very careful reading of the words of Matthew 7 will show that the lesson is not that we can never judge but rather that when we judge we need to be to absolutely fair, thus the words that follow which say, **“For with whatever standard you judge, you will be judged, and with whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you.”** So please note there is no passage that tells you that you can’t judge, just one that tells you to be careful and fair in your judgments.

I know, then you want to ask, “Then why doesn’t Jesus judge this case before him?” The answer is simple and Jesus gives you the exact reason. Jesus clearly says that he has not been appointed as a judge or an arbiter in this case. Why is that important? Because that is how things were done. In a dispute, the parties involved needed to go to a duly appointed judge or arbiter so that both sides could clearly be heard. In this situation, Jesus couldn’t do that. He would be trying to make a decision based on just one side and at this point Jesus does not have the authority to investigate, to seek all the information, to call in witnesses, or the time it would take to make a proper and a fair judgment. The wisdom of Jesus is seen as he turns down this call to settle this dispute of the inheritance. Jesus is letting this man know that there is a legal path to take if a wrong has been done and that is what he should do.

But then do you see what Jesus does? Jesus actually makes a judgement on the very heart of this man. You see, Jesus can read hearts and Jesus takes the opportunity to address a problem that He picked up on and he uses that situation to give everyone a lesson that is so important and needed. Our theme will be: **BE RICH TOWARD GOD.**

Here is what Jesus does address and again I think we have to recognize that Jesus spoke this way because of what he saw in the heart of the man before him. He says, **“Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because a man’s life is not measured by how many possessions he has.”**

Jesus begins to speak against greed. But please note that his words go deeper than what we might think greed is all about. One of my dictionaries that sits on my desk offers this definition: **“greed,** greedy behavior; greedy desire.” I can tell you this is not my favorite dictionary because any time you define a word with the word itself, as this dictionary tends to, it is just not helpful. But if we look down the page a bit we do find a helpful definition under the word “greedy.” It says, *“wanting to get more than one’s share, wanting to get a great deal.”*

Please note I think those definitions help but don’t view them as two separate things rather as one whole thought. Greed is really the desire for more and more and more. In other words, we can’t get enough. If you tend to measure your life by the amount of stuff that you have or by the quality of stuff that you have and so forth, then this just might be a lesson to be thought about. Perhaps thought about all the more when we consider what Colossians 3:5 says and recognize that is from our Epistle lesson today, **“So put to death whatever is worldly in you: sexual immorality, uncleanness, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.”** This verse helps us all the more to grasp the total impact of greed. It is not just wanting more, not just about materialism or being too rich, the Lord in his Word tells us that the real issue of greed is a matter of idolatry, that is having a false god in your life instead of just the Lord, the true God!

As you put all of this together you realize that such is exactly the point of Jesus. Let’s boil our text down a bit more. Jesus clearly states: **“Be on guard against all greed, because a man’s life is not measured by how many possessions he has.”**

I want you to know this can be a horrible problem. I recently watched a program on such a person. A retired orthopedic surgeon who had let his life spiral out of control. His house was filled with stuff, but his house was also filled with cockroaches. It got so bad that his kids told him clean up or we refuse to see you. They told him this because the last time he had visited with one of his kids, they ended up with a cockroach infestation. Yep it was that bad. He had a grandkid he had never seen as a result of this and still he refused to clean up, to get rid of all the stuff around him because that stuff, yes even garbage stuff, was so important to him. It was a sad and disturbing show. Sad that someone could let their life get so out of control. Even sadder that this man couldn’t and didn’t even see he had a problem.

Welcome to the struggle of our world. It is not wrong to have possessions. It is not wrong to be rich or have nice things, after all, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Job were all wealthy men who were strong believers. They had these things and yet they kept their hearts on the Lord. Please note that is exactly the point and lesson of Jesus. Keep your heart on the Lord.

You heard the parable Jesus taught in this connection. Note that it was the **“land of a certain rich man.”** The key to understanding this parable is the attitude of the man. Jesus reports the man as thinking, **“And I will tell my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy. Eat, drink, and be merry.”** Do you see the problem? Goods, things, stuff or material possessions have no impact on the soul’s destination. Things are earthly, the soul is spiritual and the soul has a spiritual destination to be concerned with. If we let things become the heart and core of the soul, then recognize that the spiritual destination of the soul becomes a problem. A problem because of the issue of “idolatry.” You have made your things more important, a replacement for God!

Isn’t that the warning of Ecclesiastes, our Old Testament reading? The lesson is clear and I think the lesson is sharp. Don’t make the things of this world your God. Because in truth, everything of this world is getting left behind. You can’t take it with you. You can’t use it to buy your way to heaven. You can’t save your soul by hard work, wealth, eating and drinking and the like. Those are things of this world. If you have them, use them wisely, consider them wisely, have the right and proper attitude toward them. Let the Lord your God be first and over all, not your stuff and fleeting life.

Jesus brought that out wonderfully in his parable, didn’t he? **“You fool, this night your soul will be demanded from you. Now who will get what you have prepared?”** (By the way, what if this parable was really the story of the father of the man who wants Jesus to settle up the inheritance? That thought just all the more highlights the lesson!) The problem with the rich man was that his wealth and stuff was his god. We know that is true because of the next statement found in our text: **“That is how it will be for anyone who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”** That statement tells us why the Lord God judged this rich man. The rich man had no time, no talents, and no treasures for the Lord. He was concerned only for his earthly life and that idolatry was going to cost him eternal damnation!

Well? You know what I am asking. Look into your own heart and tell me where the Lord is at. But even better, because sometimes we tend to not clearly see things, look at the spreadsheet of your life. I put it that way because in today’s world checks and check books aren’t as prevalent anymore. Many years ago, a very wise Professor told all of us, “As you go through your ministry, one of the best ways to measure your life is to look at your check book. $500.00 for golf and only $200.00 to the Lord? New car, new home, nice furniture, the best of everything around you, 20 bucks a week for the Lord?” To his words I add, “Your yard and everything you have is well groomed and kept up, but you have never given a bit of help to the Church and its upkeep?” You realize I could go on and on? I am not trying to accuse you of anything, what I am trying to do is exactly what Jesus was trying to do. Trying to get you to examine your heart. Trying to get you to truly and deeply think about your relationship with the Lord your God. Trying to get you to assess if this verse applies to your or not? **“That is how it will be for anyone who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”**

And then let’s just throw in the Epistle lesson for today. Here is the heart of what was said. **“Therefore, because you were raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. So put to death whatever is worldly in you.”**

You and I have the greatest treasure ever to be found in this world. We have Jesus and the gift of eternal salvation. Let that sink in! We have the promise of forgiveness and eternal life with Jesus. What we are being reminded to do is to make sure that it is Jesus who is our treasure and not the things of this world. Again, if God has blessed you with things, great, but make sure those things have not become more important than God! And again, be careful here. Any time you decide that the ways of the world are more important than what the Lord our God tells us, you have put the world ahead of God and that is exactly the warning we are being given. The Lord is the most important. Where is the Lord in your life? Can I see the Lord in your life? But most important, can the Lord see himself in your life as he looks at your heart? Your concern need not be me, I have the same looking to do that you do. Your concern needs to be with what the Lord, the all-knowing God sees. Make no mistake, this is about the Lord, about your faith, your heart and eternal life.

I hope all of us can hear the words of this text and learn. Lord, help me to be rich toward you, to truly treasure you and your gift of love in Jesus. Amen.