

# Luke 12.13–21

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## *Rich towards God*

Amington

Sunday 4 August 2019

### **Are you rich?**

If I asked, ‘Are you rich?’ what would you say?

Or rather, when I *asked* that question, did your mind immediately go to the size of your bank account?

Another way of posing the question: if you found a genie in a bottle who granted you three wishes, would you be able to resist wishing for *loads* of money?

A man is walking down the beach and comes across an old bottle. He picks it up, pulls out the cork and out pops a genie!

The genie says, ‘Thank you for freeing me from the bottle. In return I will grant you three wishes.’

The man says, ‘Great! I’ve always dreamed of this and I know exactly what I want. First, I want £1bn in a Swiss bank account.’

Poof! There is a flash of light and a piece of paper with account numbers appears in his hand!

He continues, 'Next, I want a super-yacht with staff to cook and clean and serve me night and day.'

Poof! They appeared on the deck of the most enormous and sleek yacht, in a Mediterranean harbour!

The man continues, 'Finally, I want to be irresistible to women.'

Poof! There is a flash of light and he turns into a box of chocolates.

The way you answer those questions – are you rich? what would you wish for if you found a genie – is one way of measuring how healthy your heart is.

I'm sure you've all seen the adverts that end, 'There are some things money can't buy... for everything else there's...?' *Mastercard*. It's quite a clever advert, because on the face of it, it says that the most important things in life are things you *can't* buy – and yet you end the advert wanting to do precisely that: *buy things*.

# What are you rich in?

Perhaps the most important question isn't *are* you rich but *what* are you rich *in*?

To an only child, the man in the crowd might seem rich – after all, he had a brother. We don't know the detail of his story – but we *do* know his motivation: greed.

To a millennial like myself, I can understand his motivation. Buying a house these days is getting close to impossible – only fifty years ago the average house cost £5,632.

If wages had risen in line with house prices, the average wage today would be over £90,000. If the price of bread had risen in line with house prices, a loaf of bread would cost over £4.50. A pint of milk would cost nearly £3.

Looking at it the other way round, if house prices had risen in line with inflation, the average cost of a house today would be around £70,000.<sup>1</sup> We are blessed with a vicarage to live in – but one day I will have to stop being a vicar, and we'll need a house of our own – so I can understand this man's desire to have his share of his inheritance.

I imagine Jesus' answer caught him by surprise:

‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.’

*Luke 12.15 (NIV)*

If I’m honest, I think this is one of the most important things Jesus says – particularly as we live in a wealthy nation, with a standard of living far higher than pretty much anyone who has ever lived, with an economy that functions on human greed.

**‘Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.’**

In other words: there’s more to life than having lots of stuff.

Last week Richard Branson said this:

I truly believe that ‘stuff’ really does not bring happiness. Family, friends, good health and the satisfaction that comes from making a positive difference are what really matters.

*iNews<sup>2</sup>*

In case you don’t know, Sir Richard Branson is 34<sup>th</sup> in the *Sunday Times* rich list, with a personal fortune estimated at around £3.2bn. He has a 74-acre Caribbean island – so we might respond to his comments, as many did, by mocking him – with not a little bit of jealousy thrown in.

But actually, he would know. He has a lot of ‘stuff’. It would take me nearly *150,00 years* to earn what he has. And yet, he would know. He would know whether or not ‘stuff’ brings happiness, *because he has a lot of stuff*.

I can stand here and spout off about how money doesn’t bring you happiness – but *how would I know?* I don’t have a vast fortune or a Caribbean island – and to be honest, it feels like having that stuff *would* make me pretty happy – but would it? Always wanting more is a trap: it means you’ll never have enough.

**‘Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.’**

## **The Rich Man**

Jesus told a story. There was a rich farmer who had so many fields, and such a big harvest, that he didn’t have space for all his stuff. So he said to himself, **‘I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones’** (18). He thought, **‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry’** (19).

It sounds good, doesn’t it? No worries about food or money; you can kick back and relax, put your feet up and enjoy life. He had won the first-century EuroMillions jackpot, he was a first-century billionaire businessman with the Caribbean island.

But like the man in the crowd, who cared more about money than his own family, the rich farmer was missing the point.

God doesn't give us stuff so we can hoard it all and be greedy – he gives us stuff to enjoy *with each other*. He gives us stuff, so we can share it *with each other*. He gives to us, so *we* can give to *others*. This is what Jesus means by being '**rich towards God**' (21) – we say 'thank you' to him by being as generous to *others* as he is to *us*.

So the question is: *what* are you rich *in*? What has God given *you*?

For some, it *might* be wealth in the worldly sense. We *might* have plenty of money – so be generous with it; give it away.

All of us have a unique mix of skills, gifts, talents – some of them come naturally, some of them are learned – so be generous with them; give them away, share them with others.

We all have the gift of time – some more than others, but all of us more than we think. Be generous with it; give it away.

How we use our money, skills, time – like those questions at the start of this sermon – they show us how healthy our heart are; if we use what we have mostly for ourselves – or if we *wish* we could – then that is a sign that we're like the man in the crowd: selfish and greedy.

That's the challenge.

The encouragement is that there is another way: instead of being greedy and always wanting *more*, we can be **rich towards God**.

How? By being generous. By giving away and sharing what we have, whether it is time, money, skills, gifts, or talents. By making God the number one in our lives, by making *his* desires *our* desires, by making *his* concerns *our* concerns.

Invest – not in the stock market, but in *God*. Look at yourself and figure out what you are rich in – and then use it, to serve *God*, to serve *his* church, to serve *his* kingdom. Desire more of what God wants for you, and set your minds on what is important: growing in holiness, in prayer, in love and compassion for others.

Friends this is the sort of investment that will bring *true* wealth – and its rate of return far exceeds *anything* you can get from a bank.

Jesus said, **'Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.'**

So let us not be greedy and selfish – let us be people of generosity, let us show the world another way, let us be people of *life*.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/mortgageshome/article-2462753/How-items-cost-risen-line-house-prices.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://inews.co.uk/opinion/richard-branson-saying-money-doesnt-bring-happiness-makes-sense/>