

“What is Your Vision?”

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Luke 12:13-21

I'm glad that you're here this morning, because what I have to share is vitally important. I'm going to remind you of something that you already know. Every person who is present here who has lived very long understands this. There are great truths in this scripture from Luke that remind you what you already know.

In our story, a man approaches Jesus – we don't know who he is, he's not identified, this is the only time we hear from him as far as we know. He asks Jesus to divide the inheritance between himself and his brother. Jesus understands immediately what is going on. This man cares more about the inheritance than he cares about his brother, so Jesus tells this strange parable, but before he tells the parable, he says these words that we all know, and I want you to hear them now. “Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Nine words: “Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Will you repeat those words with me? “Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

You believe that, don't you? If you won the lottery you'd give all the money away, wouldn't you? Have you ever thought about that? “I know Jesus said it's hard to be rich, but, boy, I'd like to try just one time. If I won that lottery I could help so many people!” Have you ever thought that to yourself?

This is a strange parable. It is perhaps the strangest of all the parables. At first glance, it seems to make perfect sense. What is wrong? The man has had a good crop. He wants to build more barns because he doesn't have enough room to store all of the crop. You've heard the saying, “If you fail to plan, you're planning to fail.” We know that's true. The words “eat, drink, and be merry” are in the Bible, did you know that? (From Ecclesiastes) What's wrong with what this man has said?

This afternoon, if you get out your Bible and look in that twelfth chapter of Luke and read what this man has said closely, you'll see what's wrong. Do you notice anything missing in the man's speech? He makes all kinds of plans, but the word that he says more often than any other word is the word “I” or “my.” There's no mention of God anywhere in the man's speech. Some biblical scholars say this man is a practicing atheist in the sense that he's a

practical atheist. In other words, he has no place for God in his life. His faith makes no difference in his life, and above all should not our faith make a difference in our lives? What's wrong in the story is that the man has left God out of all of his plans, and he has not been open to God's plans for his own life.

One of my favorite scriptures from the Old Testament applies to this story. It is a scripture that you've heard before. In some versions you might not recognize it. In some versions of the scripture, more modern versions, the scripture reads, "Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint." In other words, where there is no mention of God, there is no discipline in the people's lives. But we know the scripture more often as this: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Where there is no vision, the people perish, and it's not just *no* vision. Sometimes it can be the wrong vision, a competing vision, a distorted vision. In this story, all this man could think about was building more barns. If you think about it, that might be all he does. He builds so many barns that he doesn't have any room for his crops. That seems foolish to us, but how many of us do similar things?

I have waited for several weeks to mention this to you. Do you remember all of the stories about Miss Belvedere, that old '57 Plymouth they buried 50 years ago? Ever since I first started reading about that, I couldn't wait to share this with you. What they did wrong was this: at the unveiling of Miss Belvedere, someone should have read the scripture when Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and *rust* consume." People came from all over the country. People came from Europe. It was their vision to come see an old rust bucket. Miss Belvedere is a metaphor for much of what is wrong in our society. If we just save enough.... If we just hoard enough....

I had an uncle one time. He was married to my mother's sister. He had big plans. They had four children. As you can imagine, it was not easy to provide for those children, but he said he was going to be a good provider, a good husband, a good father, and he was going to be a millionaire by the time he was 40. I think he made it. I'm not sure because I lost touch with my uncle, because my aunt and my cousins lost touch with my uncle. My aunt left my uncle because she was convinced that he cared more about being a millionaire than he cared about her and their children.

It's easy to see this in the man in our story and perhaps easy to see it in my uncle, but it's not so easy to see it in ourselves, is it? Let me share this

story with you. When we moved from Ponca City to Wichita Falls, as you might imagine, we had accumulated several things, so many things that when we got into our house in Wichita Falls we didn't have room for everything, so we bought a storage shed. Do any of you have a storage shed? It's like building more and more barns. We filled up that storage shed with stuff. Then when we moved from Wichita Falls to Woodward, the house that we bought at Woodward had a basement. All of the stuff that was in the storage shed went to the basement in the house at Woodward. While we were there, we bought another house in Woodward that we remodeled, and you're going to love this if you have a lot of stuff, this garage was two cars deep and three cars wide. You could get five cars in that garage, literally. We had all kinds of room to store our stuff.

The problem was this: the basement in the first house leaked, and most of the stuff we had had gotten moldy. But, you know what? We moved it anyway. But when we moved here, we decided we're going to get rid of some of this old moldy stuff. There was a company in Woodward that would bring a dumpster and leave it in your driveway. We started getting stuff out of the attic and garage, and we filled up the dumpster with stuff. We called the company and they brought another dumpster, and we filled up that dumpster with stuff - stuff that we had just hoarded; stuff that was useless.

It seems that some people's only vision is the vision they see in the mirror. That's as large as their world is, is what happens and how it affects them. I hesitate to say this at this time of year: I love football as much as anyone, but if football is your vision in life, you're missing something in your faith. I'm going to go watch those guys practice at the PGA. Can you imagine anything sillier than that? Getting out there in the heat, not even to see the tournament, but just to see them practice. If that's your vision in life, your faith is missing something.

What is your vision? What is the controlling vision of your life? What is it that is most important to you? Before you answer, let me remind you of something else that you already know. Remember the name Mike Coolbaugh, the first base coach for the Tulsa Drillers? I doubt very seriously when he packed his suitcase to go to that game at Little Rock that he realized it would be the last time he would ever see his wife and children. This story reminds us that our days are limited.

This past week when some of those folks in Minneapolis crossed that bridge I doubt very seriously if they thought it was the last time they were

going to see their loved ones, but for some of them, it was. What is your vision in life? What is it that is most important to you?

The negative way to say this is to say that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. The positive way to say this is to say we discover true joy when God is the vision of our lives. Jesus called it being rich toward God. I'm not sure exactly what it means, but at least a part of what Jesus meant when he said it was this: It has something to do with loving God with all of the heart and soul and mind and strength, and it has something to do with loving one's neighbor as one's self. It means that you understand when God is the controlling vision of your life, all of the other things seem to be in order.

In a few moments we're going to sing this wonderful hymn:

“Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art...
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.”

May it be so for each of us, this day and always. Amen