

Some of you, who are particularly observant, (and maybe just a little bit disparaging) may be starting to think, “Michael’s starting to get a bit old”...

BTW, I don’t think of myself as old. I mean, how could I be old? I’m the same age as my Dad was when I was early HighSchool...

But the strange thing is, “I **have** noticed that some of my friends are getting old...” Even friends who are younger than me, are getting old... How does that work???

And, I guess, what really brought it home to me, is I have friends, and they’re only a fraction older than me, and some of them are planning (in the next few months,, and years), to retire...

Now, I am aware, that some folk like to retire early:

When I was working at the Ag College, there was a young fellow who started work there, and he had it all planned out. He’d already bought several houses to rent out, and his plan was to buy more and more of them...

And I think that it was his plan to have enough saved up, so that by the time he was 45, he could live a comfortable life, and travel, and never need to work again... I don’t know if he succeeded or not – he would be 45 by now.

I guess my superannuation provider, must think I’m getting old, because a month or so ago, they sent me an email:

Approaching retirement??? and then told me what to do to get ready for it.

Plan ahead, to enjoy your Super...

What are they thinking??? I'm only 54 – I **feel** like I'm only half way through my working life... But then I realised, "It's only 6 years until a person my age, (if they **have** been stacking it away), are able **access** their super..." And many can, and many do...

Today, we're going to be talking about "Life" and "Living". We're going to be talking about our "soul", and our "soul's hopes and dreams and desires"...

And the thing is, when it comes to this sort of stuff, Jesus is bold enough to address the sorts issues, that we might find it uncomfortable to talk about. And yet, it's stuff we **do** need to talk about, because if we **don't**, then we'll most likely (by default), just follow the ways of the world, because that's "normal"...

And one of those topics is "money & possessions & savings & retirement", and how they fit with Godly living, and in what way they mesh with our soul.

So, let me set the scene:

Jesus has just been teaching the crowds about the cost of being a disciple, and about how the Disciples of Jesus are going to get hauled up before the authorities and be in big trouble...

“But don’t be anxious”, Jesus says, “because the Holy Spirit will tell you what to say when that happens”...

At which point, a bloke in the crowd (who’s obviously not engaging at all, in the concept of “discipleship” and the cost of discipleship – his mind is clearly on other things), he pipes up, and tells Jesus to settle a family dispute...

“Tell my brother, to give **me** some of the inheritance”...

Totally out of place, don’t you think???

Yes, the people sometimes would call on a Rabi, to settle legal disputes, but surely not while they’re teaching the things of God...

And Jesus gave him “short-shift”... **“Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”** One of the commentaries I read, summed it up nicely:

*[Jesus] came to bring people to God – **not** to bring property to people...ⁱ*

But Jesus used that rude interruption, as a very profound teaching moment..., because Jesus **was** teaching about things eternal, but that man’s mind was fixated on “stuff”...

And so, Jesus said to the crowd:

“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness,

“Covetousness”, is to **want** something, that you do not have...
Sometimes we think of it in terms of “greed”, but
“covetousness”, is simply to want something that I don’t
have... And there’s all sorts of covetousness...

- This man, wanted some of the inheritance.
His brother had it; He did not...
- It might be money, we covet;
- possessions;
- a lifestyle;
- life experiences we covet;
- the abilities of another person;
- or the opportunities of another

And covetousness, is something that creeps up on us... That’s
why Jesus says, “be on your guard”... Covetousness, is an
enemy, sneaking up on you – be on guard against it...

Why? Because the lie of covetousness, is that by having these
things (things that you don’t have), your life is going to be so
much better...

- The new car;
- the bigger house;
- the flash holidays;
- the new tool;
- the bigger shed...
- new caravan;
- Luxury retirement;

Once you get that next thing, your life is going to be so much
better...

That’s the lie.....

Whereas **Jesus** says: **one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.**

But Robyn, I need that new gun... No you don't...

Now, we've already established that I'm pretty old... *I rang somebody the other day, and he described himself as being "In an advanced state of decrepitude"...* I'm not quite that far...

And even in my time, I have seen a **dramatic** change in what people are looking for in life. Our society has become so 'well-off', Most younger people today (in Australia), would **agree** that **one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions** – they're not chasing after possessions (many of them) – they've already got them...

What do we chase now? We chase experiences...

Why wait until retirement to get a few years of overseas holiday? I can do that before I start work... Maybe do a little bit of work to fund it, but make that time all about you... You deserve it – you've done 12 years of school...

But then I've noticed, when it comes time to buy a house, some folk wonder why they can't afford a deposit... Almost every day on the news, I hear the travesty that people in their 30's cannot afford to put a deposit on a house, and the government has to help them out somehow...

And yes, this is the same generation, who, for the last 10 years:

- dine out every week;
- buy their drinks at the night club;
- buy 2 or 3 coffees a day;
- Some have **never** made a cut lunch to take to work, because for them, it's normal to buy their lunch every day;

Many today are not chasing possessions – They assume “possessions” are “their **right**” – they're entitled to them... And so, what many chase today, are “experiences”...

And it's into this new culture that we have acronyms like FOMO... (What does FOMO stand for? Fear Of Missing Out...)

And so, in Australia today, **many** people would agree with Jesus, whole-heartedly... **one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions**

Whether it be:

- the geriatric, confined to his wheel-chair, wishing there were more people who would visit him. His possessions mean nothing to him – he longs for a bit of company...
- the 28 year old, wishing they could escape their mortgage, so that they could travel the world;
- the 55 year old, wishing they could retire now, while they're still fit enough to **enjoy** their retirement.

Every one of these, would probably agree, that **one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions...** Why? Because they've got oodles of possessions, and they're looking for something more...

The trouble is, the "something more" that they're looking for, often isn't the right thing.

The parable of the Rich Fool, reveals to us, that Australia, one of the richest nations of the world, is a conglomerate of overwhelmingly "Rich Fools".... Yes, we as a nation, are rich, and most in our nation, are fools...

*I am sick to death of how the **super-rich** feel that they have the wisdom and the moral high-ground because they have hundreds of millions, or perhaps billions of dollars... Why would we listen to them? Because they're rich??? Jesus would call most of them "Fools"...*

Anyway, Jesus told a story:

"The land of a rich man produced plentifully

Now, we don't know if he started out rich, so he then bought the best farming country.....; or whether he **had** the best farming country, and so he **got** rich...; or whether he just got the rainfall when he needed it...

But the way Jesus told the story, it wasn't because he:

- was a particularly hard worker, that he got rich; nor
- was dishonest; walked all over others and cheated them;
- was particularly wise in how he invested...

There isn't a hint at any of that... All we're told, is that his land produced some really good crops. He was blessed – that's how he got rich... And farmers understand that, don't we... We know very well, what makes a bad farmer, but what produces an **outstanding** yield, is often an extra inch of rain at the right time...

1.

Anyway, the first thing we have to understand, is we are rich. By world standards, you and I, are rich. The poorest person in Australia – a person living on social welfare, is better off than most of the world's population today...

By world standards, we have some of the best:

- nutrition;
- accommodation;
- education;
- healthcare;
- work conditions;
- working hours;
- life expectancy;
- lowest infant mortality
(except for those they kill on purpose)

And by historical standards, we are the richest people in history... My air-conditioned home, with electricity and sewerage, is far superior, to the palaces of many kings and queens of history...

And so, the first thing to understand, is “we are rich”... Of course there are some who are richer than you are, but by **world standards**, and by **historical standards**, you and I, there’s no doubt about it, we are very well off...

2.

We are blessed, and **that’s** why we are rich...

The pride of wealth says this: “I worked hard to get where I am / to get what I have” – that’s the pride of wealth , trumpeting its self-grandiosity...

Something that impacted me (early on in my life), was a very simple thing:

When I was a teenager, our youth group leader at the time, had spent some time in Indonesia. And he told us about these 2 men, who from sun-up to sun-down pulverised limestone rock with sledge-hammers, to produce pigment for paint... They would labour hard all day, to earn the equivalent of one dollar, which at that point, was just enough to feed their family...

And I remember him saying, “I’ve never seen someone work so hard”

And we have the hide to say, “I’ve worked hard to get what I’ve got”...

Seriously...

- We may have worked hard;
- We may have worked smart;
- we may have done some long hours at times;
- We might have been wise/clever in how we did things;
And
- there might have even been times we took risks;
- had to go without...

But even so, it is **pride** that says, “**My** hard work achieved it”...

If we have plenty, we should give thanks to God, because **God** is the One Who has blessed us with what we have...

If I believe that *I have what I have, because I have worked so hard*,,,, I’m deluding myself, and I need to get over myself... Have I honestly work harder than those 2 men swinging the sledge hammer??? Rubbish...

If you have money/possessions/investments, it is God who has provided, and we give Him thanks...

Anyway, this rich man: — his farm produced another bumper crop... And he had so much grain, he didn’t have anywhere to store it all.. And so he came up with a plan – to pull down his existing barns, and build bigger ones...

Now to me, that's just silly. If room is a problem, then just build another shed... What we have here, is a picture of lavish indulgence: to tear down several existing buildings, and to replace them with a bigger, flashier complex...

And **then** he would have room, not only to store his grain, but also to store all of his “goods”... “things”... “stuff”... We blokes know that shed-space is always a problem, isn't it... They're never big enough... We always need more room to put our goods/things/stuff... hmmm...

And this rich man, he's totally self-centred. Did you notice that???

17 and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' **18** 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. **19** And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." '

He kept it all for himself, and he had now accumulated enough stuff to see him out... – to relax and enjoy it – good times... Is this not, the sales pitch of the superannuation adviser???

Now, I want you to know, the language he uses, is **not** the language of “faith” – it's the language of death.

“I’ve got enough to keep me going for many years”... Faith, doesn’t worry about storing stuff up – we’re going to see that next week, when Jesus says, “Do not be anxious”... God will give you what you need... Don’t worry about it...

But, why is it the language of death???

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he contrasted 2 different perspectives of living:

- Those who are living for life eternal, and
- those who are not...

And basically, he was saying, “If we believe in Jesus, and if we believe in eternal life, then we will live for Jesus today, no matter what the cost... but ^{1 Corinthians 15:32 (ESV)} ... If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

If this life **is** the end, then you may as well be as selfish as you like, because when this life ends, it’s all over...

I’ve seen a few grey Nomads caravans, with a sign written on them, “Spending the kids inheritance”... And why wouldn’t they??? If I’m living for myself, and if it’s all about me, then I might as well enjoy what I have, and that’s it.

But, God has something to say to that:... **Fool!** You’re going to die tonight, then who’s going to get all your stuff???

Now, the thing is, people understand this... “You can’t take it with you when you die”. People know that...

That's why people are wanting to retire earlier – so they can use up all their accumulated wealth, before they die.

And that's why there's a new financial product that banks are now offering, called a "reverse mortgage"... The bank will lend you money, so that you can spend the value of your house, so that when you die, they get it. You don't even have to leave an inheritance for your kids – you can use it all up on yourself...

And it's why people are spending their money on "experiences". They're smart enough to know that they can't take their money with them when they die, so they might as well use it all up in having some luxuries and good times...

But, God's got a word to say to that logic too:::.... **Fool!**

Why? Because they have laid up treasure for themselves. And spent treasures on themselves, And they are **still not being rich toward God**....

Did you notice, Jesus didn't say "It's a sin:

- to be rich;
- to do well;
- to have money; or
- to have possessions...

If what we have, is a **blessing** from God, how could a blessing from God, be sinful??? Of itself, it's not... It is the state of the heart, that is either Godly, or sinful...

In V19, the rich man referred to himself as “soul”, ¹⁹ ... **I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods**

Alright, think of “self” (in fact, I think the NIV translates it as “self”) The “soul”, is the Psyche – it's who we are – it refers to “physical life” – what we think/do/reason... The human person is made up of Body; Soul; and Spirit...

- The Body gets old, sick, and dies.
When Jesus returns, if you are one of God's faithful, you will be given a new resurrection body that will not get old and sick and die...
- The Spirit, is that part of us that goes on
The spirit of the faithful will be in Glory;
The spirit of the faithless will be in torment; and
- The Soul, is the living being... . It is the Physical life.

And so when God said to the rich man, “**This night your soul is required of you**”, it means your life, will come to an end...

Now, when it comes to money and possessions, how does what you have, mesh with your soul/who you are???

In other words, what are you living for? Are you living for money/possessions/assets? Or are you living for God???

But it goes further than that??? *You see, it's not just about Scrooge McDuck storing up his gold in His money bin... - it's what we do with it...* When it comes to money and possessions (whether you have a little bit; or whether you have a lot), Are you living for “self”, or are you living for **God**??? How does your soul mesh with your possessions???

You see, the whole point of this parable, comes out in V21.

The **FOOL**, is **the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God** ... How foolish...

What Jesus **doesn't** tell us at this point, is what it means to “**be rich toward God**”, but that sorta goes without saying, doesn't it??? Jesus has already been telling us this. He's just been talking about the cost of being a Disciple, and what it means to be a faithful witness for Jesus... He's been talking about self-lessness, for the sake of God and the sake of the Gospel...

You see, the fleshly part of us:

- wants the money;
- wants the possessions;
- wants the bigger shed to hold all our possessions;
- wants the luxuries;
- the experiences;
- the things we can collect;

- wants the financial security that comes from having a significant nest-egg, set aside (just in case)...

But the **Spirit**, directs us away from self, to love God, and to love others...

No, it is not sinful, to earn a lot of money, but how would the Spirit have us utilise:

- what already belongs to Him;
- what God has entrusted to us???

And that's a question that **every one of us**, no matter what part of our lives we're at, need to consider.

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Whether I be a young person, just starting out... Is my soul – is the life of me, seeking the things of the flesh, - either:

- accumulating treasures for later satisfaction; or
- enjoying treasures now, for my own self-satisfaction?
- **Or** am I being guided by the Spirit, to be rich toward God???

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Or whether I'm firmly entrenched in the daily grind... Who am I working for???

- Is my soul – is the life in me, desperately storing up treasures, so that I can enjoy them later on???

- **Or** am I being guided by the Spirit, and being rich toward God (in my working life)???

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Or whether I'm recently retired... I've saved up my treasure – And **now**, what am I going to do with it?

Maybe retirement means I can now redeploy, to do something **other** than work – What am I going to do???

- Is my retirement going to be a series of holidays for the next 10 years, with gaps between, for me to recover, and to get my medical appointments in, to extend my life???
- Or
- is my retirement going to be an opportunity to serve the Lord?? – to serve Jesus in ways I have never had time to do in the past???

And my superannuation and my savings – am I going to invest them, to get the best return for me??? Or can what I have, make a difference for the Kingdom of God??? How can I use what I have, to help the Gospel to be preached???

And how much is for me, and how much can I be generous to the world's poor???

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Or maybe you've been retired for a long time, and your body is weak and frail, and you feel you've got nothing left to offer??? Are you going to hold on to your treasure??? Or are you going to be rich toward God with your treasure???

You see, it doesn't matter what stage of life one is at – the challenge remains the same... The FOOL, is the one who holds the treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God...

Being rich toward God, begins with Jesus... We've just come out of Easter, and we've remembered the price that Jesus paid on the cross; And with joy, we've celebrated His resurrection...

And through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven, and we receive the free gift of eternal life...

And through faith in Jesus, we enter into a new way of living... We live by faith... Death is not the end...

And so, the two life directions, are the path of Faith; or the path of the Fool,, are before us... And in Christ Jesus, we live for Him – we do not live for self, for that would be foolish.

And to be rich toward God, is to be:

- rich in time toward God...

1440 – that's how many minutes every person has in their day.

With how many of those 1440 minutes, am I rich toward God?

Be rich in time toward God – Give God your time.

- Be rich in **witness** toward God. Proclaim His Name.
- Be rich in **service** toward God. Love God. Love others. Do good...
- Be rich in what we have, toward God. Be generous.
Be generous:
 - toward those who are genuinely needy;
 - in supporting the preaching of the Gospel;
 - in supporting it locally, and in supporting it in the mission field...

God has been so rich toward you/me, and so, let us be rich toward Him. Let's not lay-up treasure for ourselves... Let's be rich toward God....

Questions?

ⁱ Morris, L. (1988) *Luke: an introduction and commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries).