You fool!

Luke 12:13-21

Key verse 12:20

**“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’**

Suppose you were a lion, and you have a choice to live in a zoo or in prairie, your original place in Africa. Which will be your choice? If you choose to live in a zoo, you don’t need to worry about anything. Almost all things you need will be guaranteed including food and safety. You do not need to hunt and you do not need to worry about starvation and you do not need to worry about injury. The only thing you do not have is freedom. But if you choose to live in African prairie, you have to hunt. Sometimes you may fail to hunt and go through many days of hunger. Other times you can be injured and die. There can be many other unexpected dangers such as wild fire, drought, and etc. But you have freedom. Which place will you choose? If you choose to live in prairie I want to ask you a question. Why? Why do you think life in prairie is better than the life in a zoo? Freedom? Yes. What does the freedom bring? It brings ‘true life’. We probably choose to live in prairie rather than zoo because it is the true life of a lion. Indeed, the true life of lion is in the lions in an African prairie rather than a lion in a zoon.

The same thing can apply to us. Sometimes we may want to live like lions in a zoo, possessing all necessary things guaranteed from God and without any worries. But does it make us truly living? Probably not. Then what makes us truly live? What makes our life truly vibrating and exciting and meaningful? That is the topic we want to think about through today’s passage. It is about true life, and how we can have such a true life.

**Part I. Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. (12:13-15)**

Look at verses 13-15.

“**13Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” 14Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” 15Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”**

Jesus’ teaching starts with someone in the crowd. He asked Jesus’ help regarding his inheritance with his brother. He probably did so because he was moved by Jesus’ marvelous wisdom. Possibly he did so because he thought his brother would listen to Jesus and divide the inheritance with him. The man in the crowd could have tried all things to settle the matter. But somehow his brother would not divide the inheritance with him. We don’t know the story of the other brother. Maybe the other brother had more reason why he would not want to divide the inheritance. There could be possibility that the someone in the crowd already took some money from his parents as his inheritance.

I know the story of two brothers. Their parents had 4 daughters and two sons. Their parents died and left inheritance. Then the older son sold one piece of his parents property without the consent of other brother and four sisters and used the money for himself. Later the younger brother found it out, and he got so mad that he revenged his brother by preventing him from taking his retirement money from the government. In this way their sixty years of beautiful relationship as brothers was broken at their age of sixties. What a sad story it is! But we hear this kind of story all the time.

So when the someone in the crowd asked Jesus’ help, **“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me”** Jesus could have said, “Oaky, can you tell me what happened?” But Jesus did not try to solve the problem, but rather Jesus touched the more fundamental issue of the matter. The inheritance matter is like a symptom, but the more fundamental issue was ‘greed’. So **Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” 15Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed” (v.14-15a)**

Dictionary (Merriam Webster) defines ‘greed’ as ‘**a selfish and excessive desire for more of money or other things than is needed’.**

To have a lot of money itself is not a sin but greed is sin. Once John Wesley, the founder of Methodist church, said **“Gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.”**

So to gain all the money we can and save all the money we can is not bad idea as long as we can give all.

But the greed is related to selfish desire for oneself alone. In Jesus’ parable, the word ‘my’ or ‘myself’ is repeated. “My crops” in verse 17, “My barns”, and “My surplus grain” in verse 18, “Myself” in verse 19.

Colossians 3:5 reads, “**Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”**

Greed is idolatry. ‘Greed’ is to worship of something other than God who is invisible. Especially money is one main idol. There days no one bows down before sun, moon, and stars like ancient people. But millions of people humbly worship money.

But “greed” is not limited to money alone. We can be greedy for knowledge, position, experience, power, glory, honor, and others. Basically ‘greed’ is about me over everything and everyone else. ‘Greed’ is about me first and others last if at all. Some are greedy with their time. They have no problem asking others’ help, but cannot be found when their friends need help.

Jesus added, “**life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”** Jesus said people become greedy because they think life consists in an abundance of possessions. So as we see here, the final and the most fundamental issue of inheritance is ‘life’.

Here “Life” does not mean physical life but true life. Man’s true life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. That is why we should be on our guard against all kinds of greed.

**Part II. Your life will be demanded from you (12:16-21)**

Look at verses 16-21.

**16And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 17He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ 18“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. 19And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ 20“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ 21“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”**

Jesus revealed the foolishness of one greedy man in this parable. The man in this parable was already rich because he was called as ‘a certain rich man’. But somehow at that year his ground yielded an unexpected abundant harvest. Then such a blessing produced one problem. **He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’** What should this man do? What could this man do? He had a myriad of options he could have done. What are they? For one thing, he could give his surplus crops to the poor people. But finally this is what he decided to do so. “**I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain.”** Why did he choose to do so out of a myriad of options? Why did he choose to build bigger barns when he was already so rich? Why didn’t he choose one of other possible options he could have chosen?

Verse 19 reads, “**19And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’** What the man said in this verse can be dream of many people.

Long time ago I knew one young man. At that time he was in his twenties. He worked so hard especially many hours of overtime earning 1.5 times of wages even though his salary was already pretty good. So I asked him why he worked so hard. His answer was ‘I want to pay all my home mortgages and all other payment and to retire at my forties and enjoy my life.” People can be really motivated to work hard because of their hope of early retirement and taking life easy; eat, drink and be merry.

It is true that many people’s dream could be, ‘**“You have plenty of money laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’**

In today’s passage, although the rich man was ready to take his life easy, by eating and drinking and being merry, there was one fundamental limitation of himself.

Look at verse 20. **“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’**

His limitation is ‘he cannot control his life.’ Here the word ‘life’ refers to ‘physical life’. His life is not his. God gave him the life and God has right to demand his life anytime according to his will. So God said to him, “**‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’”**

Indeed when we think about our lives honestly we find that we cannot control our life. Jesus said in **Mt 6:27-28a “27Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? 28“And why do you worry about clothes?”**

**James 4:13-15**

**13Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” 14Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”**

It is true that we don’t know what will happen to our life at all even one second later. But we want to store thousand years of money for ourselves.

Jesus’ conclusion of the parable is in verse 21.

“**21“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”**

So there is contrast in his verse. “Store up things for themselves’ vs ‘being rich toward God’. To store things for ‘oneself’ does not last but to store things for ‘God’ lasts forever.

Jesus said in **Mt 6:19-20.**

**19“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”**

So the answer for ‘what does life consist in?’ is ‘being rich toward God’ or ‘store treasure in heaven.’

But who can say they are rich toward God? Can anyone, even one person? **Romans 3:11b says, “There is no one who seeks God.”** If you ask anyone, he will say, “I seek God.” I think I seek God, but God says something completely different. He says, “No one! Not even me, seeks him.” Basically no one is rich toward God, not even one! We think we are, but we are always rich toward ourselves. **Romans 3:12a says, “All have turned away, they have together become worthless.”** We are not rich toward God. Instead all we have is worthless! And we ourselves have become worthless! This is the painful truth that we must face and address.

How then can we be rich toward God?

**Revelation 3:17-18**

**“17You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.”**

According to Revelation, we need to buy gold refined in the fire to be rich. What does ‘gold refined by fire’ refer to? It refers to ‘faith’. 1 Peter says ‘faith’ is more precious than gold refined by fire.

# 1 Peter 1:6-7

**“6In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”**

Indeed we can be rich toward God through faith in Jesus. When we believe in Jesus all of Jesus’ wealth will be ours. Everything he has will be ours. His love will be ours; his patience will be ours; his obedience will be ours; his wisdom, his glory, his power, his honor, and everything he has will be ours. And we will be truly rich toward God.

Through faith in Jesus we can be rich. Then we need to think about ‘what shall we do?’ We have been given an abundance: an abundance of wealth, time, peace, health, strength, support of family and coworkers. What shall we do with all of it? What is the answer or decision we make and why? That is the question we need to ask and answer everyday.

I had a hair cut about two weeks ago. By chance I happened to listen to the story of my hairdresser. She rented a small hairdresser shop and has worked there for the last 10 years. She told me how she ended up having a discounted rate of contract. She divorced because her husband had affairs, and she worked hard to raise up her two sons on her own. Finally they grew up and now they are in colleges. It was not easy for her to raise up two sons without her husband while she was working as a hairdresser in a small shop. But she told me she has been absolute about her one tenth offering even when her income did not cover her expenses. She told me she has three wishes. Number one: to make one tenth offering without fail. Number two: not to be indebted. Number three: to serve God wholeheartedly during weekends. Then I guess several months ago, the landlord of the shop came to her and wanted to have a new contract with her. But he raised the rent. She was poor. So she told him to give her discount about two more years until her oldest son graduates college. Her old son will help her when he graduates. The landlord did not listen. When she found that nothing would work out, she finally showed him the summary of her past 10 years of income and expenses. Then the landlord was convinced and immediately he gave her discount and she could have another contract. While I was listening to her, I was deeply moved by her faith. Here she is, she is only a divorced woman, raising up two sons on her own. Her skill is only hairdressing. But God gave her such precious faith that she could offer her one tenth offering even at the time of her loss. I could see that God helped her to get the discounted contract because he was pleased with her.

I knew in my deep heart that the Lord will take care of her according to her faith because the bible says, ““with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Since she treated the Lord by making offerings even when she was in a loss the Lord will treat her in the same way.”” I was deeply touched by her faith because I realized that I lost the faith she has. Once I had it but now I lost it.

Spiritually speaking, she is rich toward God although she is only a poor hairdresser without her husband. She is rich toward God not because the amount of her offering was great but because her faith was real and living one. Most of all, the very reason I was moved by her was because of her true life. Because of her faith her life was real life, the life of depending on God alone. Indeed she was truly living.

Why do I admire my hairdresser? Did she have more money? No. Does she have more position? No. Does she have more knowledge? No. What does she have more than I? It is the life in her, the very life that is living and moving and active. It is the very life of Jesus.

Interestingly when I think about my life, I had more life when I was extremely poor. Why? Because I completely depended on God for my life. But now I lost such life in the midst of abundance. Why? It is because I depend on my possessions. I began to depend on my experience and I began to depend on my knowledge and I began to depend on visible things. Then I began to lose my true life because true life does not consist in an abundance of possessions. My possessions including my knowledge and experience made me only self confident and made me rely on me more and then lose my life.

How can I have the life in God back? It is through restoring my faith in God. It is through depending on God for my own life. It is through giving my life for Jesus instead of trying to save my life or secure my financial life.

Because God wants to give us true life he does not remove our troubles, agonies in life such as troubles that comes from our job, our children, marriage life, financial matter, school study, broken relationships, and various kinds of hardships and trials even in a church. Why doesn’t God remove those troubles? It is because he wants us to have true life by depending on him alone. Many times true life can be gained through struggles against those painful hardships and agonies.

I wish I could be a pastor without any trouble. I really want to feel comfortable and peaceful and say, ‘Now everything is just fine and it will be fine. Just take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.’ But the reality I face is totally different. Every week I have challenges I need to respond in the right way. What is the right way? By depending on God alone. When I depend on God alone rather than my knowledge, experience, coworkers, or anything I can experience God’s powerful life working in me and through me, and problems turn into blessings. But when I depend on myself by depending on my knowledge or experience or anything else I possess, I can make a mistake and situation can become ugly. Most of all, I become ugly, not having the life of God in me.

Abundant possession can make man lose spirit and faith, and it can make man complacent, and ugly. The true life is in depending on God for our life and our life security. It is the life of faith in God. It is the life of giving all we have for God believing that God will take care of ourselves.

In conclusion, today we learned that how we can have true life. It is through faith in Jesus. It is through by depending on God alone because life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.

One word: Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.