

TCC Sunday 27th October 2013 – Luke 12v13-21

Title: “The Barn Builder”

Purpose:

To consider our “**One Weakness**”:

- The utter foolishness of Greed/Covetousness/Idolatry
- Its cause &
- How the gospel sets us free and gives us wisdom against such crass foolishness!

Introduction

Over the past couple of Sunday mornings we have been out-and-about with Jesus on his travels and we have been enjoying his storytelling.

So far:

- We’ve met - THE NEIGHBOUR - in that well-loved story of the Good Samaritan – and in that we had the Great Question – “**Q. What must I do to inherit eternal life?**”
- We’ve met - THE FRIEND – getting bread at midnight – and in that one we had the Great Request – “**Lord, teach us to pray!**”
- This week we get to meet no-one less than – THE BARNBUILDER

From a BARNBUILDER to a POSTMISTRESS

But before we go any further I want to turn from a BARNBUILDER to a POSTMISTRESS.

And to Dorcas Lane (aka Julia Sawalha) in the Period Drama – “**Lark Rise to Candleford**”.

To fill in a little background for those not familiar with that particular BBC Drama – Miss Dorcas Lane is the **postmistress** and one of the central characters and she has a particular saying that comes up with quite some regularity –she says: “**It’s my one weakness**”.

Let me play you a brief compilation of clips from **Lark Rise to Candleford**:

***** PLAY VIDEO/AUDIO *****

So as you can see MISS DORCAS LANE seems to have a **few more than just “ONE WEAKNESS”!**

Your one weakness

Let me ask you:

- Q. What is your “one weakness”?

- Q. What is your life taken up with?
- Q. What is that dogs you're your footsteps, that is, in your case, a besetting sin?

You can be thinking about that as we go through – and somewhat later we'll return to this.

Our passage today

I want to get into passage for today so we can meet our **BARNBUILDER** and see what it was for him, what was his **"one weakness"**.

Perhaps you will turn in your bibles to **Luke's gospel and chapter 12** – it is **p. 1044** in the blue church bibles and it'll come up on the screen.

***** READ Luke 12v13-21 *****

Tell a great deal about a person

They say that you can tell a great deal about a person from the:

- Questions they ask & the
- Requests that they make

And it seems that the man who comes to Jesus here is a bit of an open book.

On the surface at least – the man is seeking redress, he wants JUSTICE – **"tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me"** – but Jesus sees what's behind things.

A couple of observations

At this point let me insert a three observations, just really by way of aside:

1. **FIRSTLY** – we see how very up-to-date AND true-to-life the Bible is – in even a small group of people, some of us will have recently lost loved ones and quite possibly you are still smarting from some of the petty OR NOT SO PETTY squabbles that took place over things that would be in the will – and so these words "tell my brother (or my sister) to divide the inheritance..." very much sounds forth a familiar tune.
2. **SECONDLY** – that it is a good practice for us to learn to ask deeper questions of ourselves – so for example, if you had a telephone call and someone says to you "Oh have you finished looking through that catalogue I sent you" and you say "oh, yes, nearly done – how about I drop it round in an hour" – When the truth of the matter is you had totally forgotten – ask yourself Q. Why did I lie?
3. **THE THIRD THING** – is that Jesus shows us what it looks like to be on a mission, to be under the calling of God and he will not allow himself to be taken away from the King's business.

There is an easy temptation for Jesus to get into – what you might call "secondary matters".

It would not have been unusual perhaps for a man having some domestic squabbles to seek out a Rabbi to help him resolve his dispute – but Jesus is having none of that – **Verse 14 "Jesus"**

replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or arbiter between you?'

It is, I suspect, one of Satan's most well-used ploys to substitute the main thing that we are about as Christians for something else which is also good BUT NOT THE MAIN THING.

How many churches have gone down the road of looking to help the poor and the needy (and of course this is right and good and very much on God's own heart) BUT have at the same time have exchanged the ONE AND ONLY gospel for a SOCIAL gospel – one which, in the main, saves BODIES but not eternal SOULS!!

Jesus does not allow himself to be side-tracked – a powerful reminder of calling and consecration to that calling. "This one thing I do forsaking all other GOOD distractions!"

Back to our passage

So back to our passage and try and imagine the scene here, Jesus has just been addressing some pretty heady stuff:

- The unforgivable sin
- Blaspheming against the Holy Spirit

And, perhaps, seemingly out of nowhere, comes this man who has other things on his mind – things that for him feel rather unforgivable – "How could his brother, not be properly sharing the father's inheritance with him!"

And so Jesus "**maintains the mood**" – just as the man blurted out what was possessing his mind and his whole horizon, so Jesus, with the sharp sword of the Spirit, punctures the man's balloon, he takes the wind out of his sails bringing him to a sudden stop:

Verse 15 "... Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

The bottom line

This is what you might call the **BOTTOM LINE**– Jesus **nails the issue** – it's to do with GREED – all kinds of GREED.

Actually – this is "**BOTTOM LINE #2**" – at the start of the chapter in **Verse 1**, Jesus, homing in on the Pharisees says (**Verse 1**) "**...Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.**"

- **Hypocrisy** – is that **great evil** where the real thing is substituted for some mere surface appearance where we find the spirit of the matter being replaced by merely the letter of the law
- **Greed** – our second **great evil** to be on our guard against – is the subject that Jesus now illustrates with the parable that is usually known as "**The parable of the rich fool**" – but which I'm just calling "**The Barnbuilder**"

THE BARNBUILDER

The value of stories

I recently came across an account of a Jesuit priest working amongst Africans – and he tells how they all loved to hear and to tell stories.

Well in his particular priestly order they needed to train up people to assist in the work and so they selected local African candidates and they sent them off for training in Bible colleges in far off places such as Rome or Dublin or in New York.

When the candidates returned to take up their tasks – the villagers simply hated them – they called them “**Been-to’s**”.

And they hated the “**Been-to’s**” because they no longer told any stories – they had left their stories in the waste baskets of European lecture halls and libraries.

They would say of them: “Oh yes – this one’s ‘BEEN-TO’ Dublin or this one’s ‘BEEN-TO’ Rome.

**** We should never underestimate the power of a simple story. ****

I want to take our story, our parable under two simple headings and the first one is:

1. A BUMPER HARVEST

Not a mafia boss

The story begins with a successful farmer and we need to understand that the man we have in view here was ***NOT*** some sort of mafia boss raking in the money through some protection racket, he was simply a prudent, hard-working, God-blessed farmer.

No sin to be rich

Evidently over time, he had amassed wealth – as Verse 16 tells us he was a “**rich man**”. And it is worth pointing out that it is **no sin to be rich** – it was the blessing of God that he was fortunate to the owner of a farm which had particularly good and fertile land.

Many examples

We have many examples in the Scripture of those who God chose to bless with great material resources – we don’t have to rack our brains too much – we have:

- **An Abraham** or a **Job** with all their flocks and herds and servants - a **Solomon** with all his gold and horses etc. - representing the NT
- **Joseph of Arimathea**, was that disciple of Jesus, who provided the rich man’s tomb for the Jesus following his crucifixion

A bumper crop/A wonderful problem

Now the story kicks off with the news that this year is yielding a **massive crop** – truly a **bumper harvest** and this presents the man with a nice problem.

Q. So what does he do?

Q. What would you do as a prudent, hardworking & successful farmer?

Well – he says to himself:

- “Q. What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’
“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.”

All lines up nicely – so far

Now up to this point in Jesus’ story everything lines up very nicely – if this man was on **The Apprentice** – **Lord Sugar** would probably be reasonably impressed with his *common-all-garden good business sense*.

The real problem is *not* the harvest

But now, at Verse 19, everything begins to turn, and we suddenly realise that the bumper harvest is ***NOT*** the real problem in the story.

<u>Verse 19</u> goes on: “And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” ’

***** The rich man’s solution reveals the true problem. *****

Making it personal

I wonder if you have ever had a windfall – you know that unexpected brown envelope from HMRC telling you that you have “amazingly” overpaid on your tax and so here is a repayment cheque for £250!

Or perhaps it was a bonus from work, or money that came from a distance relative that passed away.

Q. Can you remember what your first thoughts were?

Q. Did you (after you had got up off the floor) say “**YES!! AT LAST!!**” - I can get a **new telly** or we can **redecorate the lounge** and get a **really nice pile carpet** to **match the curtains**?

Psychological profile

Despite the brief nature of this parable – we can build up quite a good psychological profile of our successful & wealthy farmer (our BARNBUILDER) here – let me draw out three facets of his character:

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS

1. **TRAIT #1 – He is SELF-CENTRED**

It is quite marked how many times he refers to “I” and “My” (at least a dozen times here) – he is caught up with himself – literally self-obsessed.~

A schoolboy, in a grammar lesson, was being asked what **part of speech** the words “I” and “My” fitted into – he replied (just slightly incorrectly) “aggressive pronouns” (he should have said “possessive pronouns”).

But he does have a point – it is pretty ugly and somewhat aggressive when people are completely taken up with themselves.

2. TRAIT #2 – He is SECURITY-CENTRED

He’s a man who believes that earthly riches equals SECURITY he says – Verse 19 “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy!”

That could be exactly you too – from time to time you are totting up your pension provision, seeing how much is stashed away in that steady interest savings account – and so long as that is in place – then you feel secure.

Q. You know what Jesus would say? YOU FOOL!

This man craved SECURITY – maybe that’s an idol of yours – and every month you come to the foot of that altar and make yet one more sweet offering.

(1. **Self-centred**, 2. **Security-centred**)

3. TRAIT #3 - He is SATISFACTION-CENTRED

So this man is drawing satisfaction from his riches.

(And let me say – God wants us to draw satisfaction from all our labour under the sun – work is good and we should be able to stand back and take real pleasure in a job well done!)

But notice how the man starts speaking – there in Verse 19: “And I’ll say to myself...”

Sounds a bit like he’s just talking out loud – reasoning to himself EXCEPT that the word he uses there is a rather stronger than just “MYSELF” – it is the word “SOUL”, in fact it comes twice in quick succession – this is how the ESV puts it: (ESV) Verse 19: “And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”

One writer puts it like this: (Herman Hanko) “The soul cannot find rest in corn....the soul cannot eat and drink money and houses....the misery of life cannot be drowned in drinking the cup of worldly joy and carnal pleasure.”

Well we come to the climax of the story and this is Jesus' assessment of this SELF-CENTRED, SECURITY-CENTRED and SATISFACTION-CENTRED (yet otherwise hardworking & successful farmer).

And this brings us to our second point:

1. A BUMPER HARVEST and now

2. A GRIM HARVEST

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?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

On the surface, it all seemed like the man was operating in the same entrepreneurial and prudent manner as he always had done – looking to the future – planning for progress, planning for expansion.

But God reserves the sternest rebuke for him - "**You fool!**" – in the original it is the word "**Aphron**" where the word "**phronimos**" means "**prudent**" – so essentially God is saying to him:

*** "**Prudent-**NOT*!!***" ***

A serious miscalculation

If you've ever done maths exams at school you will know that if you make a mistake early on in the calculations, you have virtually nil chance of still ending up with the right answer.

This man, made a slip up, from the word go. Nowhere in his calculations does God feature.

Personal application

Tell me: Q. Where does God feature in your calculations?

Maybe your equation has some serious similarities to our BARNBUILDER.

Maybe God will make this parable a "**pebble in your shoe**" to get you to go back over your workings and straighten things out before you have to put down your pens and stop writing!

Let's look at his miscalculations:

His miscalculations

- **FIRSTLY** – he himself is **VASTLY INFLATED** – he has a really arrogant attitude – he struts around, at least in his mind, thinking that the fields are his, the grain is his, the barns are his.

Q. But surely he didn't **create the earth he walks upon** AND surely he didn't **manufacture the seed** when he put into the ground AND surely he didn't have any part in making **the sun shine and the clouds rain** did he?

God says "I own the cattle on a thousand hills."

Jesus said of His Father that: "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

The apostle Paul – speaking about the gifts and talents we have says to the believers at Corinth (1 Corinthians 4 verse 7) "What do you have that you did not receive?"

When you drill down a bit you realise that you are not contributing an awful lot into the mix.

- **SECONDLY** – if he himself is **VASTLY INFLATED** his world or worldview is **BADLY DEFLATED** – everything, barring himself, seems to be rather **SHRUNKEN** to the point of invisibility.

Never do we get any sense that perhaps this **BUMPER** and **BONUS HARVEST** could go to the poor and needy.

It was a great opportunity for him to "make hay while the sun was shining" and lay up for himself treasure in heaven, but no this did not enter his mind and now it is all too late.

Truly one harvest is coming soon after another, but this harvest is not one that occasions any joy, not even in heaven, because this man is no repentant sinner – his heart is not tuned to anything that is above, anything that is eternal.

Jesus says: Verse 20: "This very night your life (or soul) will be demanded from you."

CONCLUSION

In bringing things round to a conclusion I want to do just 2 things:

- **FIRSTLY** - to look at that **GREED** keyword that Jesus introduces in what is the **PREFACE** to the **PARABLE** and then
- **LASTLY** to **DORCAS LANE'S "one weakness"**.

GREED

Jesus sees through this man that has come to him asking, at least on the surface, for some fair play over the matter of an inheritance.

He spirals in with pinpoint accuracy – and blows the man's pretensions out of the water.

Don't ever think that God will somehow not do that with you too. As the writer of Hebrews puts it:

(Hebrews 9 verse 27) "...man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment."

So here, in **Verse 14** he says:

“Watch out! Be on your guard against **all kinds of greed**; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

The word translated GREED is one which literally means “to have more”, it is that attitude that always wants more and which is never satisfied.

Eugene Peterson (the author of the Message Bible) writes “Greed is a nearly invisible sin, a tiny parasite that makes its home in the intestines of wealth.”

ONE WEAKNESS

Back to the beginning and Dorcas Lane’s One Weakness which though it displayed itself in many forms really had just one root underlying it which for us is our greed that lives on strongly in our hearts and needs to be recognised and rooted out.

Let us pray God will help us to learn from this parable and to be rigorous in detecting and rooting out greed and idolatry which are – as the bible tells us – the same thing. AMEN