

Wealth- blessing or curse?

Lord God, bless us as we come,
ready or unready, strong in faith or not so.
Without you our worship is nothing
and we would be nothing.

With your blessing
we are heirs to the wealth of your grace.
With your blessing
our worship is larger than words and songs
can ever express.

Bless us again, that we may openly celebrate your glory.
A glory which, though veiled, will be present
throughout all the busyness of this new week. Amen.

StF 489 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxpPla-BskY>

All I once held dear,
built my life upon,
all this world reveres,
and wars to own,
all I once thought gain
I have counted loss;
spent and worthless now,
compared to this.

*Knowing you, Jesus,
knowing you,
there is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love you, Lord.*

Now my heart's desire
is to know you more,
to be found in you
and known as yours.
To possess by faith
what I could not earn,
all-surpassing gift
of righteousness.

Oh, to know the power
of your risen life,
and to know you in
your sufferings.
To become like you
in your death, my Lord,
so with you to live
and never die.

Graham Kendrick

Luke 12.13-21

Address

It was that truly great American, Abraham Lincoln, who shared this marvellous insight: "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power." All of us, from the earliest years of our life, began to learn with increasing wisdom that fire can be a great blessing and also, an utterly destructive agent. Sex is the most beautiful expression of love between appropriate lovers, but it can also lead to utter devastation by the careless. Water, fame, food, work, religion, power, sex, fire, and so much more... they all have within them the potential for both blessing and curse. Wisdom knows how to enjoy the blessing and keep the curse caged. Such wisdom, though, does not come naturally. It has to be learned. The great Teacher, Jesus of Nazareth, used parables

Printed service written by Rev Mike Cassidy

to teach and pass on his wonderful wisdom. The subject matter of today's parable is wealth and of it is its place within the faithful community.

The first thing to notice is that wealth is not denigrated by Jesus. He knew and enjoyed the company of wealthy people. He even allowed a woman to pour onto his feet an extremely valuable commodity, and in such an eyebrow-raising quantity. Jesus did, though, often speak about the danger that wealth could pose. Jesus never says that wealth is evil, but it is dangerous, especially for those who would his disciple. It is dangerous because it so easily tempts us to desire more, and in doing so to flirt with the curse of greed. When that happens, accumulating more and more starts to become the most important thing in life. That is the reason Jesus warns us to be on guard against all kinds of greed. Beware of the consuming destruction of life by avarice, that insatiable desire for more leads to a false understanding and a false foundation for life.

All around us we are assaulted with lies about wealth. Lie number one is this: *the more you have, the more you are worth*. Wealth tempts us to believe the lie that whoever owns the most barns is the winner. So much of our culture and economy is based upon this lie. Too great a part of our society values those who have more above those who have not. When a wealthy person gets killed, it becomes shocking, front-page news. But the murder of a poor person is so commonplace it hardly deserves a mention. The world teaches that the value of a person's life is measured by the size of their net worth. But Jesus teaches that that is a lie. Each and every person is endowed with worth. Eternal worth is the gift that each one of us receives. We can choose to live out of that understanding of life ...or not. But we cannot add to the worth that we already have through Jesus Christ. Least of all by the size of our bank balance. Jesus teaches us to measure ourselves and others by God's standards. Life is more than possessions.

Lie number two: *wealth tempts us to believe that we have earned what we have*. The man in the parable said, "Soul, you have laid up ample goods for your future, relax, eat, drink, be merry." The man in the parable was a man who had had an exceptionally good year in business. Notice also that there is no suggestion that he had cheated, or mistreated workers or been unjust in any way. When his harvest exceeded the capacity of his barns, he built bigger barns. He was thinking ahead, planning for the future like any good business man/woman would do. He had worked hard and now he was looking forward to a well-earned rest. He was proud of all that he had accomplished and ready to enjoy the fruits of his labour. But this man had fallen into the trap of another lie. "My fruits," he called them, "my grain". But in what sense were they his? Could he command the sap in the tree, or the fertility of the soil? Were the sunrise and the sunset under his control? Was the faithfulness of returning seasons to his merit? If the rain had been withheld, where then would have been his wealth? The land produced abundantly. All the man could do was to take nature's tides at the flood. He was carried to fortune in grace, in the light, the heat, and the constancy in nature's cycles, which are boundless mysteries of blessing. And he called them "mine". But Jesus called him a fool. This man was ready to take credit for all the benefits he enjoyed without any awareness of the creator's contributions or those of anyone else, not least the parents who gave him birth and nurtured him to adulthood; the teachers and mentors who sharpened his mind and taught him the skills of farming; the workers who ploughed his fields and harvested his crops and built his barns; and, of course, his ancestors who acquired the land he had inherited. When we have been successful in accumulating wealth, it's so easy to believe the lie that we have earned all that we have. But each of us has received countless blessings that we didn't do a thing to deserve, and we will be held accountable for how we use them. Like the rich man, we may be tempted to call them mine, but that is to be seduced by a lie.

Lie number three: *what matters is taking care of number one*. The man in the parable seemed to know a lot about taking care of number one. He used the pronouns 'I' and 'my' six times each in this short parable. This was man who was engaged in a monologue. He talked to himself, planned for himself, congratulated himself, celebrated himself. He was an egotist with no thought for God or for other people. He never considered who else might benefit from a small share of his bounty. What

about the workers who helped to harvest his land? What about the needy in his community or in his own family? Was there no sickness to heal, no nakedness to clothe? Here is a man whose thought was only for himself. When the only thing that matters is taking care of number one, our interests become narrowed, our sympathies wither and our imaginations become deadened to other people's needs. Our world gets very small, and our own counsel is the only one that we consult, the only one we will trust. The man in the parable thought he was taking care of number one by stockpiling his wealth. But in the end, he lost not only his wealth but everything that mattered.

Lie number four: *you can secure the future with wealth*. The man in the parable thought he could secure his future in the possessions that he laid up for himself. He thought he was amply supplied for many years and decided that he'd finally made it. He could stop all the hard work, relax, eat, drink and be merry. The man wasn't a bad man. He was a fool, but he wasn't a bad man! By modern standards, he was a prudent man who capitalized on his investment and planned wisely for the future. Who of us, quite properly, doesn't do the same with our savings accounts, our pension plans, life insurances and so on? Isn't it prudent to put something aside for a rainy day? Isn't it wise to plan for the future? So why did God call him a fool? He was a fool because he thought that the stockpiling of possessions gave him control over the future. He looked to the things that he had acquired for the meaning of his life. This man sought security in the wrong place, He put his trust in things that could not last. The stockpiling of possessions against insecurity was not only an act of disregard for those in need, but it was also idolatry, putting possessions in the place of God. This man looked for meaning and control of his destiny through his wealth. But in the process, he squandered his real treasure: life. So, it is with those who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich toward God.

The future cannot be secured with abundant possessions because, sooner or later, each one of us must face the limits of time. When death knocks, each of us must answer for what we've done with the gift of life, the treasures of life. Have we stored up treasures for ourselves believing that life consists of possessions, or have we sought to become rich towards God? Jesus told this parable because he wanted us to recognise that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. The pursuit of wealth as the meaning of life and the source of one's security leads only to a poverty of soul and a thin imitation of life. You may be a prized Olympic champion, or a person born with no legs. You may be the brightest brain in the university, or you may be brain damaged and confined to a life of being cared for. You may be a celebrated personality, or you may be a despised prisoner serving a long gaol sentence. The immortal person within each one of us is that composite of the soul and spirit and mind. The intellectual, emotional, and volitional person within us. It is that immortal person within us which the death of the body cannot destroy. The essential being which has an everlasting relationship with God.

Essential, abundant life is what God offers each one of us through Christ. When we pursue this life, when it is the source of our meaning and security, when it is the goal that we live for and the means by which we seek to live, then we become rich toward God. Then we have the life that is more than possessions, the essential life which can never be taken from us.

Intercessions:

Compassionate God, prayerfully we tune our hearts and minds the needs of other people, and we pray that our small but sincere concern may unite with your immense love and bring blessing to those for whom we pray.

Deal gently with the timid and the anxious, those who jump at their own shadow, and those whose phobias make it a major project to go down the street or to visit a neighbour.

Deal patiently with the foolish who have placed themselves in sordid situations from which it is hard to break free, and with the slow learners who repeat old mistakes.

Deal confrontingly with the excuse makers who won't face up to their mistakes, and with the evasive ones who won't accept their responsibilities.

Deal effectively with the arrogant who trample over the wellbeing of others, and with any who would use their wealth and power to buy and bully their way past the rights of others.

Deal mercifully with victims of the callous, the neglectful, and the cruel, and especially with the many who today feel at the end of their tether, physically, or emotionally or spiritually.

Deal bluntly or gently with your churches according to their respective needs, and especially give your grace to those who are suffering harassment, ridicule or persecution.

Deal tenderly and cherishingly with the grief-stricken family of Kevin, our BB officer who has died in recent days. In memory of Kevin and with much gratitude for and admiration of his service to others, we give thanks for the Boys Brigade Movement and especially for its place in the wider church family here at Bramford Road.

In the stillness we continue with our personal concerns....

God of unspeakable love, where you can use one, or more, of us to answer any of the prayers of someone in need, please take us, guide us, and employ us, for the sake of our neighbour and to the glory of your name.

Through Christ Jesus our Redeemer. Amen.

StF 671 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKzcgng8EiQ>

What shall we offer our good Lord,
Poor nothings, for his boundless grace?
Fain would we his great name record
And worthily set forth his praise.

Great object of our growing love,
To whom our more than all we owe,
Open the fountain from above,
And let it our full souls o'erflow.

Open a door which earth and hell
May strive to shut, but strive in vain;

Let thy word richly in us dwell,
And let our gracious fruit remain.

O multiply the sower's seed!
And fruit we every hour shall bear,
Throughout the world thy gospel spread,
Thy everlasting truth declare.

So shall our lives thy power proclaim,
Thy grace for every sinner free;
Till all mankind shall learn thy name,
Shall all stretch out their hands to thee.

AG Spangenberg translated by John Wesley

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with all God's people everywhere, and for evermore. Amen.