

A Life That Counts **Luke 12:13-34**

It's graduation day today, a huge milestone in the lives of our graduating seniors. It's a day that marks the completion of 13 years of education and a major phase of growing up, but also a day that marks the beginning of leaving the nest and embarking on their own journey of pursuing their dreams. As they've been making this transition, they've been grappling with some big questions: "How am I going to live my life? What am I going to devote myself to?" Those are the same questions we keep asking ourselves whether we're 18 and graduating today, 45 and in the middle of our lives, or 65 and preparing for retirement.

Our passage for today is very fitting for graduating seniors, but very fitting for the rest of us as well as we think about how we're living and what we're living for.

At some point in my 20's I first started thinking about saving for retirement. I don't remember what started it, but I realized that I needed to have some kind of plan for supporting Amy and I in our older years. And it was at that point that I started learning about different kinds of financial investments. We didn't have much money, but all of it was either in a checking or savings account at Anchor Bank, right here in Amery. We didn't earn any interest on our checking, and probably only about a half a percent on our savings. But a mentor of mine started talking with me about something called mutual funds and the importance of investing in them.

If I started investing at age 25 and put \$100 a month into a savings account at .5% interest, by the time I reached 65 years old, I'd have \$53,000 in the bank. \$53,000 to live on. That probably wouldn't last even a year. However, if I put that same \$100 into mutual funds and got modest return of 8% over that same time period, by the time I reached 65, I'd have \$350,000 – 7 times more! Same amount of investment, same amount of time, but in the end, 7 times more to live on. I would be foolish to keep putting money into a savings account.

Each of us has been given one life to live and each of us has to choose how we're going to invest it. The world around us is very good at convincing us to live a certain way – to live our best life now, chase our dreams, make a lot of money,

spend it on ourselves, and get the most we can out of this life. That's probably the goal most graduating seniors have as they make plans to pursue their dreams.

But what kind of investment will that turn out to be? When we get to the end of our lives, if we decide to live that way, will it turn out to be a savings account or mutual funds?

Our passage for today takes place in Judea about 8 months before Jesus died on the cross. Jesus and his disciples were doing ministry there, spreading the good news about the kingdom of heaven in the towns and villages around Jerusalem. We saw last week that tensions were rising between him and the Pharisees and he was preparing his disciples for how to face pressure and persecution from them. Today we're going to see a teaching that would prepare them for how to invest their lives, for however many years God would give them.

After teaching about how to stand firm in the future when they were called in for questioning by the governing authorities, this is what happened next...

Read Luke 12:13-15.

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." ¹⁴ But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

So something was going on between this man and his brother so that he hadn't received his part of their father's inheritance. It seems that the father was no longer in the picture – he probably had died, and his estate would have gone to the oldest son who hadn't given anything to his younger brother yet. In that culture, the oldest brother was to receive a double share and the rest a single, but apparently that hadn't happened yet. So there was a dispute over a family inheritance, something that probably wasn't uncommon if things were anything like they are today.

This brother was so upset that he went to Jesus for help. I learned that it was customary in that culture for a rabbi to make a ruling about a dispute concerning

the law, so it appears that's what this man was going for. And when he saw an opportune time, he spoke up.

You can see that Jesus had no interest in getting involved: "Who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" His focus was on the kingdom of heaven, not settling legal disputes. But he did give attention to the feud between the brothers and what was causing it.

Jesus could see that it was a problem of covetousness – either in the older brother or this one, or probably both. And that covetousness was leading to their dispute. So after declining to get involved, he turned to the crowd and warned them to watch out for covetousness because "one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." What does that mean? I think he explains that in the story that follows.

Read Luke 12:16-21.

And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully,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.'"²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

So this man spent his life laying up treasures for himself. His dream was to reach a point where he could relax, eat, drink, and be merry. That was life. His soul was wrapped up in that, so he lived for it, planned for it, and poured himself into pursuing it. And he achieved it – he accomplished his dream. But he neglected to consider one critically important thing – this life isn't all there is to live for. There's another that comes after. And one day he would die and everything he lived for in this life would disappear. He would have nothing left. That's what Jesus meant when he said: "One's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." It didn't matter how much stuff he had, when it was his time to die, he wasn't going to take anything with him.

Jesus was showing his disciples, if they lived that kind of life it would be a waste. A life controlled by covetousness, devoted to attaining an abundance of possessions here on earth – the life that’s so common among man both then and now, turns out to be a waste. There’s a far greater way to spend your life so that your life actually counts for something in the end. Jesus referred to it as being “rich towards God” and he goes on to teach his disciples about how that’s different than what everyone else pursues.

Read Luke 12:22-31.

And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

So the reality for Jesus’ disciples was that they weren’t excessively rich like the man in the parable. He was amassing enough grain and goods to last the rest of his life, but they were just trying to make it day to day or season to season. For them, getting enough food and clothing was the focus. So even though they would never obsess over laying up vast storehouses of worldly possessions for themselves, they would obsess over getting enough food and clothing to meet their needs. And in that way, their lives would be similar to the rich man. And if that’s how they lived, they too would be wasted.

So Jesus taught them how to live a different kind of life – a life where they trusted their heavenly Father to know and provide for their needs so they could focus on his kingdom. He didn’t want them to be anxious about what they would eat and wear because “life is more than food, and the body more than clothing” – there

are much more important things to devote ourselves to. He reassured them that in the same way God fed the ravens and clothed the lilies, he would take care of their needs. All their anxiety wouldn't even add a single hour to their lives, so why live that way? All of mankind obsesses over material things, but their Father already knows they need them. So rather than being caught up completely in living for the things of this world, they were to seek God's kingdom and all the things they needed would be added to them.

He describes what it means to live that kind of life in the last few verses.

Read Luke 12: 32-34.

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

So he directs their attention and focus to a different kingdom: a future kingdom and eternal one – the kingdom of heaven. Their Father's desire is to give them the kingdom and it's an everlasting kingdom filled with riches and treasure that will never fade or disappear. All the treasures of this world will be left behind, but the treasures you store in heaven will last forever.

Jesus didn't want his disciples to waste their lives by giving all their attention to material things and earthly possessions, and the same is true for us today. It's good to have dreams and goals to aim for, but if those dreams only go so far as what we can achieve or experience for ourselves in this life, when we get to the end, we will have to face the tragic reality of the rich man in the story – it was all a waste.

If we truly want our lives to count for something, we need to change our approach to life. It's not primarily about advancing in your career, getting married, buying a home, and experiencing as much as this life has to offer. It's about being rich toward God – seeking him and his kingdom, following Jesus and seeking to live for him. It's ok to have and experience God's blessings in this world, but not to live for them. It's fine if we leave a bunch of stuff on the table. We don't need to complete our bucket list because it's our Father's good pleasure

to give us the kingdom. The thrills and experiences we think are so important here and that people often give their lives over to attain will be nothing compared to what's waiting for us in glory.

So while there's certainly a place for pursuing a career or family and buying a home, going on vacation, and enjoying many of the good gifts God often blesses us with on earth, they must not be our primary focus or life will be a waste. We must always fix our eyes on the kingdom that will last forever and live for the one who gave himself for us.