



Loving God Back

What is important in the life of a disciple? Jesus tells a parable about a rich farmer who allowed love of possessions to dominate life. Jesus warns us against all kinds of greed – which the letter to the Colossians identifies as “idolatry” – and challenges us to “love God back” by living in ways that are rich toward God.

Focus Scripture: Luke 12:13–21

In New Testament times, it was the custom for a rabbi to settle disputes. In this reading, a person comes to Jesus to settle a question about inheritance. But Jesus refuses to be drawn into this role. Jesus’ mission is not to enforce the Law, but to show a new way. Jesus warns against greed. Life, Jesus says, does not consist in the abundance of possessions. The real question here is not how to get a larger inheritance, but how to be rich toward God.

As is his custom, Jesus tells a story to help the questioner understand life in God’s reign. A rich farmer gives all his energy to acquiring possessions and building bigger barns. Secure in what has been stored, the farmer can relax. But death takes it all away. In verse 20, the Greek reads “This very night your soul they demand from you.” What is it that demands his soul? It is the farmer’s

possessions that have come to dominate his life. All his time is spent in acquiring things, storing them, and guarding them from robbers. The farmer has stored up treasures but is not rich toward God. What message does the younger brother take away from Jesus’ parable? What message might wealthy people among Luke’s first hearers have heard? Is it better to set aside questions about the fair and equal distribution of land than to be dominated by possessions?

Our world is built on anxiety. Financial companies urge us to set aside enough money for our retirement, scaring us with the prospect of poverty. We are pressured to earn enough to maintain a certain standard of living. We are encouraged to buy consumer goods that we don’t really need. What is prudent saving for the future and what is excessive accumulation of things? Jesus tells us that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. Of what then do our lives consist?

Paul gives the Christians at Colossae instructions about how to live in ways that are rich towards God. In **Colossians 3:1–11**, Paul exhorts them to set their minds on things above, where Christ is enthroned and exalted. Paul calls them to turn away from worldly things and from greed, which Paul calls “idolatry” – putting

possessions in the place of God and making them the dominant element in life. In Baptism, Christians are clothed with a new self. Old distinctions fade away; there are no distinctions between rich and poor; Christ’s reign sets divisions aside.

Hosea speaks of a God who is rich in love for us. Hosea’s own experience of an unfaithful wife leads him to use images of loving family relationships in talking about God. In **Hosea 11:1–11**, God is described as a loving parent who guides and cares for Israel. Even when the people turn away, God cannot abandon or punish them. God will never abandon us.

God’s rich love toward us is also the theme in **Psalms 107:1–9, 43**. The Hebrew word *hesed* in this psalm implies a kinship relationship, the kind of loyal and loving behaviour that those in a close family relationship owe and show to one another. God rescues the wanderers, frees the prisoners, heals the sick, raises up the needy. God’s love is reliable. It is forever.

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The parable of the farmer challenges us to look at our lives and to consider our attitude towards our possessions. What in our lives is demanding our souls? God is rich in loving care for us. How do we become rich toward God? How do we love God back?

