

Turn Your Storehouse into a Distribution Center

A sermon based on Luke 12:13-21.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Little Kimmy was so excited. She was going to her very first birthday party, and picking out the gift for her friend was heaven to her. And so, walking through the store aisles with her mom, Kimmy settled on an Anna from Frozen doll, because, come on, people, everything for little girls these days is still all about Frozen!

Then it came time to wrap the gift. As she put the put on, the mom could see the tears welling up in her daughter's eyes. "Why so sad, Kimmy? I thought you were excited to give this present." She was, but she also was having a hard time letting go of something she wanted as well.

Maybe you feel a little for Kimmy. Maybe that was you when you were younger. Maybe that's you now. You see, it's not always easy to part ways with some of the things we own and treasure. And it's just as difficult when it comes to our stewardship and our time, talents, and treasure. But if Christian stewardship is a way of life, and it is for you, it's not so hard to give. In fact, thinking that way makes it easier follow Jesus' encouragement and turn our storehouses in distribution centers.

So, steward, how's your life of Christian stewardship going? I hope this way of life is improving; that you are steadily working to improve as a Christian steward, as a manager of God's possessions! Well, as you continue to grow in that area of your faith life, Jesus is right there with you, encouraging you, and today, he's doing that through a parable, which we heard in our gospel.

Now, I'm sure Jesus loved it when teaching opportunities just fell into his lap. That's precisely what happened here. He was teaching a crowd of people, as he was apt to do, when a man spoke up, making a rather bold request of Jesus, that Jesus tell that man's brother to share his inheritance (which that man had no legal right to).

Well, Jesus wasn't going to arbitrate; that wasn't his job. But he could focus on what was really going on in the man's heart, and so he did with a rather pointed warning, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Great advice, but Jesus took it one step further and drove his point home with a parable. You know the gist. A man, a wealthy man had a great year farming; he hit a bumper crop. The potential problem he thought he was running into was insufficient storage space.

But we see the real problem in his words. Take a look at them again, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops...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. 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."

So, what was the problem? There was nothing wrong with him accumulating this wealth. I mean, let's just get that out there, being rich is not a sin. So then, what was this man's downfall? It was his demeanor. Look at how many times he mentioned the God who gave him not just this bountiful crop, but so many other riches. Zero. Zip. Not at all. Look at how many times he sang his own accolades.

He was basically saying and thinking, "Self, you did this. You are the man. You are so awesome. Just sit back and enjoy what you earned and saved up for yourself. Enjoy life...you deserve it." It wasn't even that he was greedy for more, but his selfishness bared itself in his desire to keep it all, with no thought to thank God, no thought of how he could use it to serve God, no thought of how he could be rich toward God, no thought of turning his storehouse into a distribution center.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it's hard not to get into that same mindset as that man, wouldn't you agree? And what makes the challenge of turning our storehouses into stewardship distribution centers even harder is what you're hearing out there..."Live for yourself. Take care of yourself. Store good things up for you. It's all about the money....getting as much as you possibly can. It's all about you."

But it's the complete opposite of what Jesus says here, isn't it? Listen again to God's threat to that rich man, "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 themselves but is not rich toward God."

So then, what is it for you? What's keeping you from being rich, or maybe being richer, toward God? What's preventing the distribution side of your life of stewardship from operating at maximum capability and potential?

For your time? "You know how it goes, seems these days life is just so hectic and busy, some things I'm not obligated to do, like be in worship regularly, help out with this or that event at church, spend some time with that member who's suffering health-wise or struggling soul-wise, they can get put on the backburner." Or your talents? "I'm not sure my particular skill is a good match with the church's needs or I'm nervous I might if I try to help out but I just screw up or I'm positive someone else can do a better job than I would, so it's easier for me to not do anything at all." Or your treasures? "I'm not quite at a place where financially I can give like I would like to, or I'm ashamed of what my offering would look like compared to whomever's, so it's easier to not give at all."

What is it for you?

There's a TV show I've run across called American Pickers, where two guys will drive around the country in their van, looking to pick through people's "junk" collections in search of some antiques they want to flip. Sometimes, the problem they run into is not finding people with huge collections with great potential. It's once they find something they want to buy, the "collector" will reminisce about that particular item's history and realize they're not ready to part with it. And so the guys will sometimes leave a house empty-handed while the owner is left with just as much clutter as he/she started with.

Maybe that's our problem. The intentions are good. I want to do more as a steward for God. I want to use my gifts to give glory to God. But then it's time for the rubber to hit the road, and we're not quite ready to let go, to distribute our time, talents, treasures.

Whatever it is for you, the problem starts in here (the heart). Right? Wasn't that the rich man's problem? He was so comfortable holding onto his stuff, it took over here (his heart). He knocked God down from his number 1 position.

And what he foolishly forgot is nothing he possessed could go with him after life was done. And God was rather blunt in telling him that since he failed to be rich towards God in his life, he would be poor in

life after death, with nothing but an eternity of hell in his immediate future. And nothing he had stored up for himself in life would matter anymore.

And the same applies to us as well. My dad once had a shirt that said, "He who dies with the most toys...still dies." It's so true. None of this gets to go with us. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal."

He might as well have said, "He who dies greedily, foolishly holding onto his own toys, who's selfish with his/her own time, talents, treasures, instead of freely distributing them, as God commands when he says, "Freely you have received, freely give," that person still dies and is in store for a much bigger problem.

So, friends, what will it take to get our distribution working properly, to God's satisfaction again? New management. It's time for someone to kick that selfish, greedy, Old Adam out of our hearts. And someone has. Jesus.

It was fitting for Jesus to be talking about being rich toward God here. You know, the Pope is here in our country this week, riding his soap box about sharing the wealth with the poor and needy. A fine cause, but he's missing it. He's so focused on people's physical well-being that he's neglecting their souls.

Only Jesus know what it takes to be rich toward God. Through his life, death, and resurrection, he distributed the greatest riches to you and me, his perfection and his righteousness through his full and free forgiveness. What Jesus had, he gave it all to you...he gave it all up for you, without even a second of hesitation. So, even if we were poor in this life and had nothing to our name, we have Jesus and we are already rich beyond compare.

But, blessing upon blessing, that's not all we have. Jesus has made every one of us even richer. He's taken over our hearts, kicked that Old Adam out and has brought a New Man to life by creating the gift of saving faith in every one of us, put us under new management. And he's gone even further. Again, everything, EVERYTHING you have is God's gift to you...for you to take care of. And the Giver's encouragement to you, again, is "be rich toward God."

So, how will you do that? With Jesus managing our hearts now, how will that affect the distribution center of our lives of stewardship? For the sake of the one who has given everything for you and everything to you, we want to give. We will give and distribute our time, our talents, our treasures.

And Jesus lays down some practical principles for how we can do that. We looked at a few in 2 Corinthians earlier. Sow generously. Pretty self-explanatory. Be generous with your gifts.

There's "each person should give what they have decided in their heart to give." Plan what you give. If it's your offering, if it's your intent to get involved in some ministry here, plan it, schedule it, make it your priority.

Another one is "each person should give...not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." We don't give because we have to. We get to use our money, our free time, our skills in a way that reflects the greatness and overabundance of God's grace to us. And I don't know about you, but thinking of it that way, I would love nothing more than to distribute my gifts in a way that brings honor and glory to God, and I hope you do, too!

And one that's not here but in Malachi – “Test me in this (in your stewardship, your giving),” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessings that you will not have room enough for it.” The principle is trust.

My father-in-law really encouraged me in that one. I was still in Seminary, and I chatted with him about how I found it hard to give with all the bills, with tuition, everything, I didn't think we could make it work. His words, “I went through that, but early on, Renee and I decided, before anything else, we were going to give the certain percentage in offerings to God, we would trust in God to provide and we wouldn't worry about money. And they never do.”

That's God's challenge/promise in Malachi. Give, trusting in God to provide, and God always makes sure you have more than enough so you never have to worry. In fact, you'll find the blessings are coming in too fast to keep up with the sending out.

And really, that's how we as a church, as a larger distribution center, operate, trusting in God to work through his children to provide time, talents, treasures so we can do ministry work. Can we do better? Always! Someone pointed out to me that realistically, based on budget and volunteers, we do bare-minimum ministry. Yeah, we do VBS, but besides that, nothing extravagant. No church-funded mission trips, no lavish children's programs, no huge community outreach programs.

Now, if that's the best we as a church family can do, God be praised! The gospel is still being proclaimed! We're still growing in our faith! Let's keep up! Let's rejoice that God has blessed us to be able to do this and find ways to still accomplish some extra ministry work under these constraints

But just like you're not content to be able to afford just the mortgage on your house, let's not be content here either. Continue to freely distribute your time, talents, and treasures so we can explore more ways to help our family here grow in their faith in Jesus and to reach out to our community with the saving love of Jesus.

Now, you might notice I put more of an emphasis on using your gifts to serve our ministries here. It's not that you can't or shouldn't use them in other areas of your life and other volunteer/charity opportunities. But, as a family of believers, we enjoy a special relationship, not just with each other but with our loving God, who encourages us in Galatians 6, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

So, family of believers, how will you continue to turn your storehouse into a distribution center? It starts with your heart, being managed by greatest giver, Jesus. His love is overwhelming; his blessings to you are overabounding. The solution is not more storage space. We've been blessed with quite a bit of that. No, as God richly gives to us, we will gladly, richly give back to God with our time, our talents our treasures. And we can trust he will always take care of us, because, as Paul says, “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and...your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.” Amen.