



CHRISTADELPHIAN ISOLATION LEAGUE

EXHORTATION

Date: 20th September 2020

SECTION LEADER:

BROTHER RODERICK TITLEY, HOLLIES FARM, ENGLISH FRANKTON, ELLESMERE, SHROPSHIRE. SY12 OJX, U.K.

Readings: 1 Chronicles 3, Ezekiel 16, Luke 12

The Parable of the Rich Fool

The immediate context for this parable is in **verses 13-15** of **Luke 12**. Jesus was asked by someone in the audience to arbitrate over the division of an inheritance. With his usual insight into the minds and motives of men, the Master refuses the request and turns it into a lesson against covetousness. *"Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* (**Luke 12:15** AV). The definition of the Greek word for "covetousness" reinforces the exhortation. The Online Bible Lexicon defines it as a 'greedy desire to have more', while Strong's Lexicon has 'avarice, extortion'. The person who is covetous is therefore not merely greedy, but the implication is that they are prepared to resort to deceit, extortion, and possibly even violence to acquire more wealth. The Lord's conclusion that the essence of life does not rest with material possessions has echoes in Paul's writings to Timothy. People who are covetous are: *"...men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness... But godliness with contentment is great gain."* (**1 Timothy 6:5-6**). Real gain is not the acquisition of greater wealth, but the development of a Godly character.

Against this background, Jesus puts forward this parable, from **verses 16-21**. Note the following key points in **verse 16**. He was already a "rich man", and since his ground "brought forth plentifully" he was about to get even richer. The question he faced was what to do with this abundant harvest. If he had been a faithful Israelite he would have known that the answer was in the Law of Moses: *"When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow."* (**Deuteronomy 24:21**). Any surplus in the harvest was to be left for those in need. **Leviticus 19:10** adds "the poor" to the list of those who should benefit from this situation, and adds a reason; *"I am the LORD your God."* This establishes an important principle. God is generous with us with the grace of salvation. *"God is able to make all grace abound toward you... (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever)."* (**2 Corinthians 9:8-9**). The quotation is from **Psalms 112:9**, where "he" refers to: *"the good man [who] sheweth favour and lendeth"* (**v5**). We are to imitate the generosity of God.

The rich man of the parable is quite the opposite. He wants to keep all his harvest and possessions to himself. The Greek word for "bestow" in **Luke 12:17-18** has the sense of 'to gather or collect'. He has no thought for the poor or anyone else in need. He thought only of himself, and so planned to build even bigger barns to store his plentiful harvest. Jesus says in **Luke 12:20** that God calls this man a "fool". The Psalms provide a further insight, into the attitude of the fool: *"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God"* (**Psalms 14:1**). The rich man had no time for God; indeed he behaved as if there were no God, and assumed he was master of his own destiny: *"...thou has much goods laid up for many years."* (**Luke 12:19**). There is a warning here. This is the attitude of people today, influenced by humanist philosophy. But the rich fool died in the very night he laid out his plans for the future. Hence the lesson; *"so is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."* (**Luke 12:21**).

In the Old Testament there is a very real example of a rich fool, who was doubtless in the mind of Jesus when he gave the parable. **1 Samuel 25** records the dealings of Nabal and his wife Abigail with David and his men. The name "Nabal" means 'fool'. He too was a rich man. But when David's men approached Nabal and asked for food to sustain David during his exile from Saul who sought his life, Nabal brusquely refused: *"Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?"* (**1 Samuel 25:11**). Note the repeated emphasis on "my" and "I". Nabal's focus was on himself. David was angry and set out to take revenge. However, Nabal's faithful wife Abigail, who recognised the evil character of her husband, approached David and

turned away his wrath, recognising the Divine principle: *"...vengeance is Mine, I will repay."* (**Romans 12:19**). She was indeed a Godly woman who seems to have understood the divinely ordained royal destiny that awaited David.

"My lord, as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the LORD hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies... be as Nabal. I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house." (**1 Samuel 25:26,28**).

How a woman like Abigail came to be married to a man like Nabal is a mystery not revealed. But despite this, she understood his destiny, which was not long coming. Nabal celebrated his prosperity with a drunken feast, and in the morning, when Abigail recounted her meeting with David, he was struck down: *"...it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone."* (**1 Samuel 25:37**). Ten days later he died. Once again the Psalms provide relevant exhortation concerning the attitude and fate of rich, greedy, vain, and covetous fools like Nabal, and the rich man in the parable:

"They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches... Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish... Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself. He shall go to the generation of his father's; they shall never see light." (**Psalms 49:6,11,12,16-19**).

Prosperity and riches and the honour from men that go along with them, cannot change the reality of mortality and death for all. For the fool who says in his heart that there is no God, and who trusts in his riches; his ultimate destiny is the eternal darkness and silence of the grave.

That was the destiny of Nabal. But for Abigail it was different. She married David. As the wife of the king she became a type of the bride of Christ. Her name means 'a source of joy' (Strong's), or 'a source or cause of delight' (Young's). This is interesting given how the Master continues in Luke 12. We are not to be concerned or worried about material things. God will provide what we need, just as He feeds the ravens and clothes the lilies of the field. If we seek the kingdom of God, all the necessary things of this life will be provided. He then provides this beautiful reassurance: *"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* (**Luke 12:32**). Given the preceding parable and its background with Nabal, it would seem that the words *"good pleasure"* are a play on the meaning of *"Abigail"*. She foreshadowed the bride of Christ, and if we heed the teaching of Christ, we can be sure that we too will be part of the bride of Christ, for it is God's good pleasure or delight to give us the kingdom. We must, for the present, strive to be a source of delight and pleasure to our Father in heaven.

Another verse from the Psalms provides a fitting conclusion. In **Psalms 35:27** the same Hebrew word is translated both *"favour"* and *"pleasure"*. Although not the same Hebrew word as *"Abigail"* the sense is the same. It applies to those who favour and have pleasure in the prosperity of the King (the author of the Psalm), who will ultimately shout for joy and be magnified in the kingdom. May that be the lot of each of us.

So let us come and remember the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who had little in the way of material possessions in this life and yet now sits at the right hand of his father in Heaven.

Brother Richard Mellows: Caerphilly UK 20.09.20