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Luke 12:13

“IMPROVING ON THE AMERICAN DREAM”

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Intro:

One popular TV show is called: “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.” In it, a man named Robin Leach—with a snobbish sounding continental accent---takes us on a visit to outlandishly expensive resorts, where famous celebrities throw money around like it grew on trees in order to satisfy their luxurious “caviar lifestyles and champagne tastes.” Or we are allowed to visit in their homes and learn how they live, when they are not in the limelight.

Amid the opulence, our eyes are suppose to pop out, and we are suppose to say, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful to live that way!”

It seems to be “the American Dream” to become either rich or famous...usually both. Most of our advertising promises us that the product will make us “the envy of all who see us.” It’s the American dream, and we have been influenced by it since childhood!

Would you believe that Jesus told a story about a man, who lived way back 2000 years ago, who achieved the American Dream. Why, I’m sure Robin Leach would have been calling him up twice a week, until he was able to interview him at his palatial home in Israel. And, probably, a lot of us would have “oo’ed” and “aah’ed” and wished we could live like he lived.

Lets’ look at the story again, and I’ll show you what I mean (vs: 16-20).

a.—vs. 16- His industry paid off. He had a bumper crop. He was “in the money.”

b.—In fact—vs. 17- he had more than he needed and had to look around for places to spend it.

c.—So—vs. 18- he used it to build bigger and better things for himself, until he had tremendous material security stock piled for his future.

d.—Until, finally—vs. 19:- he was able to live “the good life.” He could “take it easy.” He could “eat, drink and be merry.”

Boy, if that's not the American dream, then I've never heard of it! Why, all you have to do is add John Wayne or Jimmy Cagney, and you could make another smash hit movie that we Americans would pat to see again and again, because it's the old American dream! We love it!

But wait! Here comes the shocker! What did Almighty God think of the man who epitomized the American dream! God called him a FOOL! Vs. 20 "Thou fool." That's right, God says: "If all we want out of life is to get rich and become famous and live on "easy street" and indulge our own appetites, then we are fools!

Does that get to you, friend? It gets to me. I may be a "man of the cloth," but, I want to tell you, I grew up in a progressive American home, where these values were held in high esteem. I was weaned on these ideals. And, when I hear my Lord call them "foolish," it makes me stagger in my head-long rush toward my mental castles in the air.

I pray that it will make you stop and think, also. I suggest that we need to rethink what we are after in our lives, the way in which we measure our success, the goals for which we invest our time and energies. If there is any place where the Christians needs to "renew his mind" so that he can be "transformed" and discover God's will (Rom. 12:2), it is the area of our dreams and aspirations.

I believe we must "IMPROVE ON THE AMERICAN DREAM." We must learn from this fool's mistakes and set a better course for ourselves. This morning, let's look more closely at God's Word and ask two questions:

Why was this man's popular dream so foolish? And How can we improve on this popular dream?

I. WHY WAS THIS POPULAR DREAM SO FOOLISH?

Why would God call a man "thou fool," just because he wanted to prosper financially and to enjoy the good things of life? Personally, I don't believe it had a thing to do with the amount of money that the man made. Money is only a tool. It is neither good or bad in itself. Some of God's choicest servants have been very rich and some have been very poor.

Certainly, a loving Father in heaven wants the good things of life for His earthly children. What he doesn't want is for us to lose out on the really good things in life by substituting things that won't bring lasting satisfaction. He doesn't want us to take any wooden nickels! He doesn't want us to play the fool!

A closer look at the story will show why God called him a fool:

A. He thought that a man was measured by his possessions (vs. 15).

And he is not the only one foolish enough to think that way. I hear it all the time. "What kind of man is so and so?" "Oh, he's about a \$100,000 a year man!"

Well, if that's the way it is, then our Lord Jesus Christ was not much of a man. He only owned one coat, which they took away and gambled for, when they crucified Him. He had no place to lay His head. He had to pull a coin from a fish's mouth, in order to pay His taxes. And yet, you won't convince me that there has been anyone who ever lived as great as He.

The inventory of a man's life is not the same as the inventory of a man's business. Vs. 15 instructs us that "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of things a man possesses."

In fact, riches can become a source of constant temptation. I Tim. 6:9-10 says: "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a (trap) snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money (not the money itself) is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pang. Remember: what a man owns is not as important as what he is!

A second reason this man was a fool is because He thought that there was security in material possessions. Vs. 19

"And I will say to my soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease." He rested easy. He was secure, because he had many things laid up to fall back on.

How foolish! All the money in the world cannot buy one more minute of life, when it's your time to go. There is no lasting security in materialistic things. "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Nothing materialistic!

And we certainly can't take them with us. We'll leave them to our kids, maybe. Vs. 20 And most times than not, it becomes a curse to them because they didn't struggle for it, don't know the value of it, and quickly spend it. How foolish!

Again, he was foolish because He thought only of Himself. Vs. 21

"He that lays up treasures FOR HIMSELF." Notice, six times he says "I". Five times, he says "my."

Why, he even talked to himself (vs. 19). Maybe he was afraid to talk to anyone else. Like some other rich people, he may have feared that everyone else was out to get his money. So the only one he could trust to talk with was himself!

Every decision in life revolved around himself. His standard question was: what's in it for me? When he didn't know where "to bestow his crops," (vs. 18) and had to build bigger barns, the thought never even crossed his mind that he could bestow some of his surplus on those people who didn't have anything even enough to eat.

St. Ambrose, the second century Christian leader, commented: "You have barns—the bosoms of the needy, the houses of widows, the mouths of orphans." But he never thought of this. He thought only of himself. How foolish!

Then, of course, He Thought Nothing of Spiritual Things. And that was his most foolish mistake.

Vs. 20—He ignored his soul. Vs. 21—He was "not rich toward God." He was all dollars and not much sense. He completely ignored that there is a God whose guiding our destinies or a future beyond the grave.

Jesus reminds all such men (4:13-15) "Come now, you that say, today and tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get again. Whereas, you do not know about tomorrow. What is life? For you are as a mist, which appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, what we ought to say is: "If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that."

But this man forgot God and he forgot death. He made his plans for “many years” only. And that’s really foolish!

Do you see what I’m point out? This man could have been the epitome of the American dream, and yet God called him a fool...and for good reasons. Someone has even put three of Jesus’ parables together, in order to trace the life of this rich fool. Could he have been the rich young ruler, who refused to follow Jesus, because he had great possessions? Could he have been the rich man who was so wrapped up in money that he ignored Lazarus, the begat at his gate? And by now, his heart was so hardened by materialism that he thought of neither God nor man, until his life was taken. And he never wised up, until in hell he remembered the good things and begged to warn his brothers, lest they come to that place. Can’t we learn from his mistakes?

II. HOW CAN WE IMPROVE ON THIS POPULAR DREAM?

I believe we can. We can refuse to just go along with the popular idea of success and add to our lives some richness in the place of mere riches. We can have the best of both worlds, if we will do three things:

Look up,
Look around, and
Look ahead.

Let’s LOOK UP.

Let’s be sure to look up to God. Let’s be sure to be “rich toward God,” whatever else we accomplish in life. The spiritual dimension is the most important dimension in life. It brings a balance of everything. It is the final reality...the everlasting kingdom. It only makes sense to lay up our greatest treasures there (vs. 33-34).

Have you ever stopped in life’s mad rush to look up to God? I believe that’s why you are here today. But do you know how to come into His kingdom and become a part of His family?

You don’t have to buy it or earn it. Vs. 32 says that it is “God’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” You can receive a place in God’s eternal family, like you would receive a gift. Jesus already paid for the gift, when He died on calvary’s cross. He died to pay the penalty of our sins. He took the anger that God had toward our sins and allowed Himself to suffer our penalty of death. Oh, how God loves you and me!

And, today, if we will only believe this and receive Jesus into our lives, we can belong to His kingdom. We can be ambassadors for Christ here and be ready to go to His heavenly kingdom when death comes (John 1:12).

What a gift? Have you received it? Don’t complicate it. Just say: “Jesus, come into my life and save me today.”

Then the rest of days here as a “king’s kid,” as a good will ambassador of the kingdom of God. You will know the richness and satisfaction that money cannot buy.

But I have to live, don’t I? I still have to spend my life working and earning and saving. Surely! It’s not either/or...it’s both! But don’t you get your priorities out of order. Vs. 22-31 tell us that we don’t have to be anxious about what we will eat and what

we will wear and where we will live. God knows. If we will seek first the kingdom of God and what He knows is right and best for us, all these things will be added to us.

That's God promise! Just keep your priorities in order. Look up!

The second idea that will help us to improve on the American dream is to LOOK AROUND.

We cannot live unto ourselves and think only of ourselves. There are people all around us whom we can help and love and with whom we can share our abundance.

God has a law: the measure we give is the measure we get. (Luke 6:38) "Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you measure, it shall be measured to you again."

We actually can act as "clearing houses" for God. As He blesses us with plenty, we can look around and share, and then God will give us back to build up the supply in the clearing house. I Tim. 6:17-19-" As for the rich of this world, charge them to be haughty, not to set their hope on uncertain riches, but on God who furnishes us with everything we enjoy. They are to DO GOOD, to be RICH IN GOOD DEEDS, LIBERAL AND GENEROUS, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed." That's how we lay up treasures in heaven! (vs. 33). Look around!

Look up, Look around, then, LOOK AHEAD!

I mean way ahead. Prepare: not just for a rainy day and for your retirement years, but for ETERNITY.

It's a fact that one day God will speak to each of us those very same words: "This (day or) night thy soul shall be required of thee." Let's not be so foolish as to have failed to prepare.

Perhaps you are here today and have never yet made your preparations. I have told you how to meet Christ and receive His gift of a place in His eternal kingdom. In a moment, I will invite you to make that all important decision.

A college professor was talking to one of the graduating seniors. He said:

"Well, you are graduating next week. And what then?"

"I plan to go to graduate school and get my law degree."

"Fine! And what then?"

"Well, I'll go home and start my practice."

"Great! And what then?"

"I'm going to marry my sweetheart and raise a family."

"Right on! And what then?"

"I guess, I'll retire."

"And then what?"

"Well, I guess I'll die!"

"Yes, and what then???"

Oh, my friend, think ahead. And what then? It's foolish to ignore this question. Find Christ today. Seek first His kingdom. And be ready to continue your life and enjoy the true riches forever in His heavenly kingdom.

That's how to improve on the American dream!