

BIGGER BARNES
The Parable of the Rich Fool
Luke 12:16-21

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There is a fable called “Rich Man and Cobbler” by the famous Russian writer Ivan Krylov. In this fable a certain wealthy man lives a life of such worry and nervousness that he cannot even sleep at night. The tale surmises that perhaps he fears Judgement Day, or perhaps he worries about losing his millions. In any case, being rich causes him headaches and worries. If by chance he manages to fall asleep for a short time, music and singing from his neighbor’s house would keep him awake. For you see, next to the rich man’s palace there lived a simple, humble cobbler. The cobbler, although poor in money, was rich in happiness. He lived a happy-go-lucky life. He had a loving young wife, and he would sing and play music all day. The rich man, knowing the burden of worry that accompanies wealth, purposely gifts the cobbler with a large sum of money in a bag, knowing that possessing this money will bring worries and anxiety. Now the music and singing ceased, which is what the rich man hoped for. The cobbler would now lay awake at night and jump at the slightest sound, fearing that a burglar was breaking in to steal his bag of money. He felt so miserable now, that he wished he were drowned. He returns the bag of wealth to the rich man, telling him that he would forfeit a million dollars rather than lose his songs, his sleep, and his happiness.

In today’s parable there is also a rich man, and he also has his worries. He owns vast properties, and one year his wheat crops produce so abundantly that he doesn’t have enough room to store his abundance. He frets and worries, thinking to himself, “What shall I do?” He rejoices when he thinks that he has formulated a plan to solve his worries. “I will tear down my barns and I will simply build bigger barns! Then I will have so much wealth and abundance, that I can now take my ease for many years and eat, drink, and be merry!” Why do people assume that they have many years? How do we know how many years we have left to live? And even if many, the time will go by swiftly, and then in the end of what good will material wealth be to us? There are different types of barns, and different types of wealth. Sadly, this rich man has no thought about working hard to fill the empty spiritual barns of his soul with spiritual treasure, or, as the Lord says in the Gospel today, to “grow rich toward God.” That very night when he came up with what he thought was a brilliant plan to build bigger barns, God comes to him and says “Fool! This night your soul will be *demande*d, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” The Greek verb used to describe when the angels came for his soul is απαιτώ, which has been translated as “require.” In other words, the translators chose to write that the rich man’s soul will be *required*. However, this Greek verb can also be translated as *demand*, which seems to me to make more sense within the context of this parable. Therefore, the Lord said to the rich man, ‘Today your soul will be *demande*d.’ Demanded by whom? The angels do not demand, they *receive* the souls of the righteous. When the demons come, they do not receive the soul, but their action is violent, and they *demand*. Sadly, it is the demons with whom the rich man partnered in his life. It was the demons who were his counselors, and it was probably the demons who suggested that he build the bigger barns. The demons who demanded his soul have names. They are: avarice, harshness, cruelty, selfishness, inhumanity, and mercilessness. When his hour came, in vain he searched the spiritual storehouses of his soul, for they were all empty.

In the life of St. Spyridon of Cyprus there is the story of a rich man who just like the man in today’s parable enjoyed an abundance of crops of wheat. There was a famine, and the rich man refused to share with the poor and the hungry. “No money, no food” was his strict policy. The people came to their bishop St. Spyridon who comforted them and told them, “Don’t worry. Go home and tomorrow you will have so much wheat that you won’t know what to do

with it.” St. Spyridon was a simple and uneducated man, yet he was wiser than the most astute scholars. The people thought, ‘Our holy bishop is a simple man. He is just trying to comfort us.’ But that night St. Spyridon prayed. A fierce rain storm came and the barns of the rich man were all flooded. All of his wheat became soaking wet and flowed out into the streets. The wheat was now useless to him and could not be kept and sold. Now he was begging the people to just take his wheat.

The holy Elder Arsenios, the co-struggler of St. Joseph the Cave-dweller, used to make prayer ropes. He was asked why he was making so many prayer ropes. He answered, “When I die, they will be given out and everyone will pray for my soul.” Thus the Elder never forgot his mortality and he always had the remembrance of death. How many things would we have done or said differently in our lives if we also always had the remembrance of death? How many things have we said or did that we now regret and have to live with for the rest of our lives? With the precious time that is given to us on this earth, may we work hard to fill the spiritual granaries of our soul with spiritual treasure, so that on that day when the angels come, our soul will not be demanded of us, but will be received by the angels in the bosom of Abraham, where, by God’s mercy, we will dwell in the house of the Lord, immersed in the love and grace of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen!

