

Dr. Daniel K. Darko, Gospel of Luke, Session 20, Possessions and Provisions, Luke 12:13-34

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This is Dr. Daniel Darko in his teaching on the Gospel of Luke. This is session 20, Possessions and Provision, Luke 12:13-34.

Welcome back to the Biblica e-learning lecture series on the Gospel of Luke.

In the previous lectures, we looked at some of the teachings of Jesus, and the last part of the last session talks about preparedness of discipleship. As we go on with the journey that Jesus began in Luke, chapter 5, heading towards chapter 9, verse 51, heading towards Jerusalem, we are going to see a few things unfolding on this journey from Galilee towards Jerusalem. It is in that journey narrative, in the way Luke plots the account that he brings us to this session, that I have entitled the broader session to readiness for the coming judgment.

But the sub-session we are looking at specifically in this lecture is the session that deals with possessions and provision. So, let's go quickly and begin to look at the text. Before I read through the text, I'd like to give you a map to think through this subject I called possessions and provision in the kingdom.

Luke is going to draw our attention to the fact that it was in a contest between Jesus and a crowd that someone would come in and interject, if you like, interrupt the conversation and ask a question about inheritance. That seemed to provoke Jesus because Jesus, being Jesus, seemed to see through this person and where the question was coming from. So, the first part we will look at is the question is question of inheritance and how Jesus will address that issue.

We would also see how Jesus built off that will tackle the issue of possession by giving a parable that we have often called the parable of the rich fool. Subsequent to that, as I read the text, please have that mental mapping that Jesus would then talk about if it is a matter of care or concern about our needs that prompt the need or the cravings for things, then one has to be careful to have anxiety placed in the right place. He goes on to show, as I'll be reading soon, that, in fact, if there is a place to trust for one's future provision, perhaps the place to trust is to trust in God, who has the ability to provide.

In the last session of this particular passage, we will be looking at how Jesus will be closing this statement by challenging the audience. Though one person asked the question, his challenge will go to the audience, whom we think the disciples themselves were a part of, to begin to tell them what they need to focus on in the pursuit that is noble. So let's go on to begin to look at chapter 12, verses 13 to 15.

The session that I put here on the outline is the first one where the inheritance quest brings Jesus to talk about the subject of greed, and I read from Luke chapter 12, verses 13 to 15.

Someone in the crowd said to him teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me but he said to him a man who made me a judge and arbitrator over you, and he said to them, take care and be on your guard against all covetousness for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possession. So note that line the last line in this discourse it seems like the question is going to prompt Jesus to address the whole central thesis here life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. What seems to be going on in this passage is noteworthy.

First, when you look at verse 13, you see that the person who is unnamed who comes to Jesus refers to him as a teacher or rabbi, suggesting that this person recognizes the authority of Jesus in the matters of the law. The subsequent question also suggests to us that the person who is asking this question believes that Jesus will be a good arbiter of what the law requires and help to enforce the law. You see this observation of Jesus as a teacher and one who has the authority to enforce the laws that are prescribed, as I have put on the screen for you in Deuteronomy and Numbers regarding inheritance, is going to make Jesus begin to ask the question, why should someone come to me and ask questions about material possession? Prior to this, Luke told us that Jesus clearly told the disciples that in matters of the kingdom, one will have to be careful and ready for simplicity.

The kingdom's business does not relate to or does not require or does not project this whole materialistic concept of amassing wealth to be able to feel that important. Now, from the surface, one should say that this is a legitimate question. In fact, if parents have passed away and there are possessions for brothers and one is treating the brother unfairly, what should be the problem for that person to come to Jesus and say I recognize an authority who is capable of interpreting the law, and this person can help me and thereby ask Jesus to help enforce the law and get the brother to do what is right.

On the surface, this should not be a problem. Well, the problem is that Jesus seems to have seen beyond that. The response of Jesus seemed to suggest to us that he sees beyond this question someone who does not necessarily have a need but who is perhaps interested in creating some degree of evenness with the brother.

If that is so, then we are talking about someone who has enough but wants more. Jesus's response is not supposed to be read as affirmative. In fact, when Jesus said the Man who made me a judge or arbitrator over you, it is supposed to be read not so quite clearly in English, though, as a rebuke of someone who is asking the teacher to do what he does not advocate.

His primary task in the name of God is not to indulge in this whole usual business of people trying to assign and redistribute wealth and possessions. Jesus is concerned about this matter of evenness, and so here we see Jesus going to go straight to the point and deal with the issue. Another thing to note in Luke's discourse here is this.

Luke, like Matthew, will refer to God in the fictive image of a father and sometimes refer to the disciples almost in the language of brothers. Even to the extent that when Jesus' mother and brothers came to him, Luke would tell us that Jesus would say those who are my true kinsmen, so to speak, are those who are the true disciples. But here in this passage, let's look at how Luke phrases the language.

The one who is unnamed asking Jesus refers to a brother. The person he wants to create, even in matters of material possession, is a brother. Jesus would not be interested in that.

Not because he's not interested in natural kinship. Of course, he's interested in natural kinship. But he's not interested in this business of material possessions and helping people to get more of material possessions.

For him, as we will see below, that will be a misplaced pursuit in life. If there is something to pursue it must be something more than that, namely the kingdom of God. This brings me to the next part of the passage, in which Jesus will tend the conversation, knowing that the audience and the disciples will listen and give a parable.

That which we have come to call the parable of the rich fool. And it goes as follows. And he told them a parable saying, the land of a rich man produced plentiful.

And he taught to himself, what shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops. And he said I will do this. I will tear down my bands and build larger ones.

And there I will store all my grain and my goods. Notice the first-person references, the mind, and the eye—verse 19.

And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, fool, this night your soul is required of you and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays a treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.

Here, you will find what the beginning of this paragraph seeks to convey. If the guy is so interested in material possessions, Jesus is trying to say, be careful about where you place your priorities in life. Hence this parable.

I'll highlight two things out of this parable. First, I will highlight some key observations we should make from this specific parable. And then second, I will highlight some lessons that we should learn from this parable.

Now, let's go on to look at some key observations in the parable. Five things. One begins to realize in the parable that the rich landowner is unnamed.

And this unnamed rich landowner came from the crowd. We also notice from the parable that Luke wants to emphasize that Jesus was particular in his noting that it was the land that produced many crops. It was not the landowner that produced the crops.

To say the land produced many crops in the agrarian world is to say that God supplied rain. God made the land fertile. God blessed this man to have an abundance of crops.

So, if the land produced these crops, how come this emphasis, repeated emphasis on me? When I came to America, I learned some saying that they said something that affect me, I, and myself or something that emphasizes what I call the philosophy of me-ism. It seems like this man was living out that.

But Luke's parable reminds us of something here. No, it was not the man who produced crops. It was the land which produced crops.

The other thing we find here is that this is not a man whose land did not produce enough. His cravings for more were born out of abundance. In fact, the fact that he saw more from his land is the reason he wants more.

And therefore, he switched into this almost strategic thinking of saying, yeah, I have enough here. And because I have enough, I am now making calculating steps so that I can make provisions to enlarge my yield and live a good life. We see that, even in the parable, he begins to make that observation with an emphasis on the self.

When he consults himself, then he will say, I will make myself this, and I will tear down the bans, and I will build more, and I will get more harvest. Now, notice that Luke tells us in the parable that when he is talking about the increase in the future, he attributes it to self. But in the beginning of the parable, it was the land that produced.

So, you begin to see some interesting dynamics going on in this parable and the narrative. You begin to see this guy who says, it's all about me. I will tear it down.

And he turned to himself and said, you know what? I will now say I can relax. I can eat. I can drink.

I can have a good living. Jesus is giving these parables, this particular parable, in response to the question of a man from the crowd who said, teacher, can you help me get my share of possession, my share of inheritance from my brother? It is possible that Jesus already knows that this guy had enough. It is also possible that Jesus is aware that in the crowd that he was speaking to, there will be countless people who seem to have the same impulses, that the more they have, the more they want to have.

The more they have, the more self-confidence they build based on false predictions. The false sense of confidence that says, I have a hold of the future. I will detect how the future will hold, and I will determine the direction of the future.

You see, Jesus is touching on something here. In the kingdom of God, it is not that you should allow people to bully you and take advantage of what belongs to you. No, that is not Jesus' point.

Jesus is going to make a point on matters of priority in life. What lessons can we learn quickly from this particular passage? Here, we find some interesting things. On the surface, one may think that the landowner was a strategic thinker who just knows about forecasting and wants to make sure that he plans for the future.

In fact, growing up in a business home, on the surface, when I read this text, I go, wow, that is what a good business thinker is supposed to do. I have more, and I can make more in the future. So, I set up the conditions.

It is called projections. If you are able to make good projections for your projection and execute your plans well, you will be able to actually have a smooth running into the future with minimal surprises. Oh, yeah, that is good business thinking.

Those of you who have heard me talk about leadership in various platforms will know that I behave like that. But you see, I catch myself, like most of you, that when we get into that thinking, we get into this problem of thinking as if. Even in matters where we have to put absolute reliance on God and kingdom principles, somehow, we have control.

How much control do we have in the future? Life has surprised so many of us. Sometimes, it happens two minutes after a major claim. Sometimes, it happens a day after a major claim is made.

We try our best, but Jesus' point is not that. Jesus' point is to focus on the kingdom. So, what are some of the lessons here? First, we realize that this man focuses on self, and the focus on self builds in persons who seem to have this eagerness, this drive to want to have more.

But we all need to know that focusing on self usually, when it comes to matters of possession, is a wrong belief system. I was talking to someone just two days ago and reminded the person that anytime we focus on ourselves, we end up isolating ourselves, and we become alone. And if we don't take time, we become lonely.

Focusing on oneself will almost always blind us from the true source of provision and the true meaning of life. One needs to realize that the foolishness of this rich person is not in the prudence of projection but in the emphasis on himself and the usage of his yield. We learn from this parable that fools seek satisfaction in the abundance of wealth.

As you may remember, at the very early stages of this passage, when I read it, Jesus established the thesis that life does not consist in the abundance of possession. The one who came to ask this question was given that. Subsequent to that, we find this parable told.

The point of Jesus is that it is actually foolish for us to think that if only we have more, we will be satisfied. We will have true life. That is not so.

There are many people who are rich and miserable. You see, Jesus is going to build on the fact that or push on the fact in this parable that true disciples look beyond themselves to find treasures in God. The treasures in God are the true possessions one should aim to acquire.

As someone who is fond of ancient philosophers and tries to read the works of philosophers and compare their works to Paul, I could not resist as I thought through this parable to look to the works of someone like Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom. In the case of Plutarch, Plutarch talks about covetousness or greed; he says, Ask for those that spend nothing, although they possess much, and are yet always craving more. They may still increase our wonder at their folly.

For his distemper is not penury and want but an insatiable desire and thirst after riches, proceeding from a depraved and inconsiderate judgment of things, which, if it be not plucked out of men's minds like a tin twisted across and contracting them, they will always be in want of superfluities, that is, be craving things they have no need of. Plutarch's point is almost Jesus's point. By the way, Plutarch was a contemporary of Paul.

His point is that people who are greedy and are driven by craving for more are normally doing so not because they have wanted but because there's this insatiable desire to want more, even if one does not need more. To that, he says, is folly. In the words of Jesus, that is what the rich landowner is doing, and that's what makes him a foolish rich landowner.

Another philosopher who speaks to covetousness that I like a lot is Dio Chrysostom, who wrote a treatise on covetousness. Dio puts it this way, quoting just a couple of lines from his Discourse 17. He said, I maintain in regard to covetousness, too, that all men do know it is neither expedient nor honorable by the cause of the greatest evils, and that in spite of all things, not one man refrains from it or is willing to have equality of possessions with his neighbor.

But, a few lines down, greed is not only the greatest evil to a man himself, but it injures his neighbors as well. And so, it is no one who pities forsooth the covetous man; all care to instruct him, but all shun the covetous person and regard him as their enemy. Jesus' point to the person who wants him to divide their inheritance, with this vivid portrait in the parable, is drawn to that conclusion in that session of the parable that says, but God said to him, namely, the rich landowner, fool, this night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? The answer is, it will not be yours.

And then, verse 21, so is the one who lays a treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God. Jesus on possessions and provisions, he continued immediately and spelled out from verse 22, and he said to his disciples. Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, almost like a segue now. If you're talking about this possession and all that, let me tell you what kind of possession you truly need. He then goes on to echo what Matthew records in Matthew 7 on the mount, in chapter 6. Therefore, I tell you, he said, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on, for life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

Then, Jesus will use observations from nature to make sure that he illustrates God's ability to provide for the ones that they may not care too much about. The first observation from nature is ravens. He says, consider the ravens, they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, like the rich young ruler, the foolish land owner, and yet God feeds them, of how much more valuable are you than the birds, and which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life, if then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Luke goes on to place the second observation: if ravens that are not so significant, God takes care of them, and you don't think that you are more valuable for God to take good care of you, and therefore are anxious about trying to control what you cannot control, then observation from nature too come out here, and that is an observation from flowers, lilies.

As you see on the screen, I gave you different kinds of lilies. Like the birds, they look great. And that is the point of Jesus from verse 27.

Consider the lilies, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.

But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, or you, of little faith? In Matthew's account, we see Jesus starting from Matthew 6, from verses 24 to 34, repeating the terms of anxiety again and again and using these illustrations. Ravens are not so significant birds. And wild lilies are not so much for which you want to pay a lot of dollars.

When I go to the shop to buy flowers, I look for some beautiful flowers, and sometimes they come from a farm. Somebody spent a lot of time. But the wild ones, like the landowner's farm, the land produces them.

You see, the birds are mysterious, but they get fed. In other words, God feeds them. And Jesus said, look, lessons from nature should teach you that the God of creation takes care of his creatures.

Trust him. Hence the question, or you, of little faith. Three things noteworthy on these analogies.

One, Jesus's point here is, in response to the idea of dividing possessions, people may be thinking, people in the audience beyond the one who brought the question maybe thinking about what is most important in life, and so be anxious about life. In my actual classroom discussion on Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, I like to put a chart on the screen that shows that only 8% of the things we are anxious of are really things that are worthy of our anxiety. And of the 8%, 4% we have control over, and 4% we have little control over.

So, imagine that 92% of the things we are anxious about are things that are completely bogus. We create them in our imagination. We wind ourselves up.

We sweat a lot. We tell ourselves we have control over things we don't have control over. And then we go, go, go, go, go, go.

We mess ourselves up. Sometimes it destroys so many things around us. Let us get distracted by regular life and life conditions.

I don't want you to think about your home. I don't want to think about what is going on in your marriage setting with your children, the things that are scaring you today, the health situation. I don't want you to think about that for a minute.

I want you to go to Jesus's point straight. Jesus said, do not be anxious. As a disciple about life, about living, living being something that you and I don't have control over.

We can drop at any time. I have lived in situations like that. As a pastor, I have buried teenagers.

And I have buried people in their 20s. And I've buried people a little bit older. Circumstances and conditions that shorten people's lives vary.

We don't have control over life. Jesus says, do not be anxious about life as a disciple. God has control over it.

You see, the foolish landowner thought that he has control over life. He says, I will organize this, and I will organize, and I will amass more. And then when I amass more, I'm going to sit down and say, I'm going to relax.

I'm going to chill out. I'm going to have a great time. Wait.

The future is not in your hands. Jesus said, don't even worry about what you eat or what you wear. In some parts of the world, this is true as it was in the ancient world, that what people eat on a daily basis was a challenge.

What people would wear to keep themselves warm and to cover their nakedness did not come easy. The world from which we are recording now in America, our problem is we worry about what to wear, not because we don't have enough, but because we have so many choices. We worry about what to eat, not because we don't have anything to eat but because we have too much to eat.

And we are seeing that when we have too much to eat and we worry about them, they destroy us as much as the same level as those who don't have, and are worrying about them. So our anxiety scale could be the same. Jesus said, don't worry about that.

You know, I think it was about a year and a half ago, I learned one of the most important words I have learned in Brazil, and the word is tranquilo. I like the word. I like the Latin sound of tranquilo.

When a Brazilian wants to say, relax, relax, do not fret. If you are a disciple of Jesus, he says, trust God. The observation of how God works in nature is a major important point that Jesus wants to present here, that birds, living beings that need sustenance to live, birds that need to fly from one place to the other, birds that humans behold and admire, birds whose sounds and singing human beings could hear and enjoy, they show up to do what we are expected of them or what we anticipate of them, not because we take so much care of them, but because someone takes care of them.

Nature takes care of them. Inherent in that parable is God, who takes care of them. In the same way, the observation from nature, too, reminds us that God takes care of even the flowers.

For that reason, Jesus could say, trust God. Trust God. And in his final point on this particular session, you find Jesus saying in verse 29 of chapter 12 do not seek what you are to eat or what you are to drink, nor be worried.

For all the nations, that word translated the nations, can translate the Gentiles, all the nations of the world seek after these things. And your father, notice the kinship language, your father knows that you need them. Instead, this is what you should seek: Seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

And then, instead of anxiety, the word *marim* now for anxiety is the word for worry, the word for fear, the word for anxiety. Instead of worry and living in fear, he says now, fear not, little flock, for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Jesus reminds the audience about what true discipleship requires in matters of possession and treasure that God provides.

God is the one who can provide that which is lasting, that which brings true meaning in life. He is the one which you seek, even that God who is able to take care of everything, including birds and flowers. If it is the God we have believed in and we have truly placed our trust in that God, then Jesus reminds the audience that these are the things that the Gentiles seek, they worry about what to eat and drink and all the things because they have no such God who is all-powerful, all-mighty, able to provide and a place where they can entrust their faith into the future.

Unlike Matthew, though, when Jesus talks about what to seek and what to pursue, he says to seek the kingdom. In Matthew 6, in Matthew's account, Matthew 7 on the mount, Matthew renders it as seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Here, he says, seek the kingdom.

But lest we confuse what is going on here, Luke is, in effect, also saying the kingdom is the reign of God. The reign of God is the rule of God. The reign of God comes when people invite God into their space and into their situation, and it takes mastery over the situation.

And if God takes mastery over the situation, he provides what is needed to the people and to the circumstances. You see, seek the kingdom, and he says if you seek the reign of God, all these things will be added to you. The things you are anxious about, the material possessions, the things you want to eat and drink, the things that will bother somebody about the distribution of inheritance, all those, the possessions and stuff, they will be given to you.

But then here comes the pastoral heart of Jesus. He turns to the crowd and says fear not. The expression little flock presumes this image of a tender shepherd for his sheep.

Fear not, my little flock. Please, do you understand? Do you understand that it is your father's good pleasure, that your father is pleased to supply what you need? The only thing you need is to trust him for his provision. You see, when Jesus gave this teaching, Jesus came to a point that I think is a very, very important point in closing this discussion on possessions and provisions.

The crux of the matter, 33, 34 of chapter 12. Sell your possessions. If someone wants a share of possessions, he says no.

On the contrary, go and sell your possessions. Give to the needy. Don't build barns.

Don't build storehouses. Provide yourselves with money back that does not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches, and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Jesus calls for the need to substitute greed. For generosity. Instead of receiving, instead of taking, instead of acquiring, give that which you have.

He goes on to even say, sell, let go, let go of those possessions, and give what you have. To help others. For the challenge is this.

Seek that which has eternal value because the God who has your future in his hands is also the God who is able to provide all your needs. And I end this session with a quote from Joel Green in his commentary on the gospel of Luke that I think summarizes the central issue here.

Green writes, Therefore, seeking the kingdom is tantamount to setting one's heart on the kingdom. The consequence of this orientation of life is that it is a heavenly treasure that is neither subject to the exigencies of earthly existence nor endangered by the unexpected intervention of God. As you listen to these lectures, I don't know where you are in your relationship with possessions.

But I want to encourage you to understand the kingdom priorities Jesus lays in Luke. Also, at the back of your mind, remember that I mentioned earlier that Luke writes to an elite in society whom he refers to as Seth Theophilus. He reminds Theophilus about what status and possessions could be as Theophilus reads about all these encounters with Jesus and Jesus' teachings to many people.

If I were to apply these teachings to our lives today, I might want to ask you where your priorities in matters of possession reside. Your desire and pursuit for things. Do

you truly trust God to take care of you? I grew up in a small town, which I like to call a village, at Katanga in the northern part of a new district, a new region in Ghana called the Oti region now.

I was privileged to have been raised in a home that was doing far better than 99% of the people. But I was also honored to observe how a whole family that may be living on less than \$1 a day will live. I was able to observe my own classmates, especially in primary school, some of whom come to school barefooted.

And yet, the joy they have. And yet, they have a sense of fulfillment. And I've been blessed to travel and live in places where the economy is better and people live in much, much better conditions.

I have come to realize material possessions may matter, but they do not equate to a flourishing life. The question from the man from the crowd is for Jesus to help enforce the law so that he could get his share of the inheritance. Jesus saw greed, that is the subtext, and gave a parable and subsequently emphasized what people should be anxious about.

In other words, what people should seek. He calls you and me to seek his kingdom, his reign. Because if we do, God, who supplies the needs of nature, birds, and flowers, will meet our needs.

He invites us to come with him. We realize that if we can put our hearts in the right place and seek the treasure of God, that will be a treasure that will last. That is one which will give fulfillment in life.

May God bless you and keep you. May God re-energize you and give you and I the desire to know him more and be faithful followers who will not allow greed to rob us of the true life that he offers. Thank you for listening, and God bless you.

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