

Stories from the Road #3

Stories Jesus tells as he is on his way to die outside Jerusalem^a

¹³Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher [Jesus], tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

¹⁴Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” ¹⁵Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

¹⁶And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest.

¹⁷He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

¹⁸“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

²⁰“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

²¹“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”
(Luke 12:13-21)^b

Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you from the passage?

Q. Which character in the story do you most identify with?

Q. What question would you like to ask Jesus?

^a Luke interviews eyewitnesses and writes his biography of Jesus to a particular person. “I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1:4). In other words, he wants to add confirmation to what Theophilus already believes about Jesus. This story is from a collection of stories Jesus tells to his followers on the road as he heads towards Jerusalem to die (a journey which begins in Luke 9:51). Jesus is explaining what it will mean to follow him – and not just in a physical sense.

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Someone in the crowd wants Jesus to arbitrate in a family financial dispute. But Jesus calls it for what it is: opportunism. He then warns that life doesn't consist in the abundance of possessions. Yet isn't the sensible thing to do with a sudden economic windfall: to preserve it and take care of it? And yet God calls this man a fool. The question is – why?

Notice how many times the man mentioned the word "I" in his short speech. He's living without God in the picture. This is a denial of reality. God is the one who gave the bumper harvest, and God is the one who demands his life. This is what makes this man a fool. It is foolish to think that money can give power and security against the realities of life (and death). The problem with greed is that it misleads us into thinking life is just about what we can possess.

But if someone lives with God in the picture, and not just for what they can accumulate, then that means they could miss out economically. And who is going to take care of them then? In the next story, Jesus gives the answer.

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷ "Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon^c in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰ For the pagan world^d runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. (Luke 12:22-31)

They are not to worry because God will look after them, and God will do that well. They can keep living with God in the picture – putting him first - and trust that God will take care of the rest.

Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you from what you have just read?

Q. In what way has this story confirmed or challenged your understanding of Jesus?

Q. What do you want to take away and ponder further?

^c Solomon was a fabulously wealthy early king of Israel.

^d The "pagan world" refers to people who are not interested in living with God in the picture.