

**The Man Who Talked To Himself**  
**Luke 12: 13-21**  
**Don Lincoln**

12 years ago – August of 2007, I preached on this text. Here's how I opened the sermon that day:

Thursday, while watching the morning news, I saw the stock market had fallen below 13,000 for the first time since April. I had an immediate reaction. Should I do something? What about my retirement savings – that portfolio of funds, administered through the Presbyterian Church? Should I access my account? Move some money to less volatile funds? Is the downward trend going to continue?

What should I do? Should I act now?"

That was August 2007. That's how I started the sermon. Little did I know that 14 months later, the market would not just drop below 13,000, but would drop from 13,000 to 8,000; the most significant, most precipitous drop since the great depression.

I said twelve years ago this story is not just about some farmer in First Century Palestine; it's about you and me. And twelve years later it is, still, about you and me.

In the story, Jesus takes on a "first person" role as he describes the rich farmer and his thinking.

"Farming is so good – Gee, it's so good I don't have space to keep all my crops. What will I do? What WILL I do? Aha! I know! I'll tear down the barns I've got, and build bigger ones, better ones, newer ones, with some of those new-fangled loading chutes and severe weather shingling. I'll have the best barns in the county.

Then I'll say to myself, Ah-h-h-h....how lucky I am. I've got enough stored up to retire early and revel the rest of my life. I'll kick back and enjoy....my goods, my grain, my life.

The man believes he has all that is necessary – thinks he has it all under control – "got it wired", as we say. The problem is, Jesus continues, the man DID get to enjoy the rest of his life – all 12 hours remaining, for that night he didn't kick back – he kicked the bucket!!

Jesus warns **THIS** is how it is for those who pile up riches. They find their confidence in that pile. The man was rich in treasures stored up for himself, but not rich in God. Not rich toward God.

Let me unpack that a bit. First of all, the man is an incredible egotist. His sixty-one word soliloquy contains six “I’s and five “mine’s”. He has no thought of God. He talks of “my goods” and “my grain” as if he could command the sap to rise in the trees and is personally responsible for the fertility of the soil. He speaks as if he could guarantee the faithfulness of the seasons, and cause the rain to fall and the sun to shine. The man in this parable is a practical atheist – who acknowledges no need of God.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, heedless of God, he is also bereft of thought for others. Given the scope of his production, it’s unlikely he plowed the fields alone, harvested the crops by himself, or built his barns single-handedly. He forgets that wealth is **more a social than an individual achievement**.

**NO ONE** gets rich singlehandedly. Those who think they have, are the supreme egotists. There is no mention of sharing in here at all, not one mention of family, friends, neighbors. Not one.

I ran across Warren Buffet’s pledge recently. It’s a pledge he made in 2006 to give away more than 99% of his wealth. In 2010, Bill and Melinda Gates joined with Warren Buffet to form the “Giving Pledge” – inviting the very rich to give away at least 50% of their wealth. More than two-hundred – actually 203 to date – have signed up and joined them in that pledge.

Listen to what Warren Buffet has to say about his reasons for writing and establishing that pledge.

***Too often, a vast collection of possessions ends up possessing its owner. The asset I most value, aside from health, is interesting, diverse, and long-standing friends. My wealth has come from a combination of living in America, some lucky genes, and compound interest.***

*Both my children and I won what I call the ovarian lottery. For starters, the odds against my birth in 1930 taking place in the United States were at least **30 to 1**. My being male and white also removed huge obstacles that a majority of Americans then faced.*

*My luck was accentuated by my living in a market system that sometimes produces distorted results, though overall it serves our country well. I’ve worked in an economy that rewards someone who saves the lives of others on a battlefield with a medal, rewards a great teacher with thank-you notes from parents, but rewards those who can detect the mispricing of securities with sums reaching into the billions. In short, fate’s distribution of long straws is wildly capricious.*

*The reaction of my family and me to our extraordinary good fortune is not guilt, but rather gratitude. But were we to use more than 1% of my stock on ourselves, neither our happiness nor our well-being would be enhanced. In contrast, that remaining 99% can have a huge effect on the health and welfare of others. That reality sets an obvious course for me and my family: Keep whatever it is we can conceivably need and distribute the rest to society, for its needs.<sup>2</sup>*

Now – most of us in here are probably thinking, “Well, yeah.....if I had as much money as Warren Buffet, I’d be willing to do that too!”

First of all, let’s be honest. **No single socio-economic level has a corner on greed**, or self-centeredness, or a focus on storing up treasures for ourselves and building bigger barns. I’m guessing most of us already know that this attitude crosses every socio-economic strata there is.

But more importantly, while we all know Warren Buffett is WAY more wealthy than any of us in here, most of us who live in America profoundly underestimate how rich we are compared to the rest of the world.

In a recent study at Yale, interviewing average U.S. residents, when asked, they estimated the global median individual income to be about \$20,000 a year. In fact, the real answer is about a tenth of that figure: The global median individual income is roughly \$2,100 per year. When the same group of Americans were asked, they typically place themselves in the top 40% of the world’s income distribution. The reality is, the vast majority of U.S. citizens rank comfortably in the top 10% of the world’s income distribution.

Whoever we are – at whatever level of the income strata you and I find ourselves – is our planning more like the man with the barns, or more like the man who wants to give it away – who wants to make a difference in the world?

Jesus calls the man with the barns a fool because he left out God. You can extrapolate that that would include leaving out his “fellow man” – the men, women and children around him. Family, friends, neighbors, strangers. When he wonders where to store all the excess, he shows no concern for those who have none – those whose crops didn’t turn out so well this year. Somebody who doesn’t even have a barn. Somebody who has nothing. “What am I going to do with everything that I’ve got left over.”

The man thought he was planning. Making plans. Planning in advance. But his plans were short-sighted; near-sighted; they were not for the long haul – the final run – the last consideration. He had no contingency plans. He had no plans that included final plans of what to do with stuff. And Jesus said, “What will happen to all that you’ve gather?” His plans didn’t include anyone else. Didn’t benefit anyone else. Didn’t include God. So therefore, I submit to you, **he didn’t really plan. He had no plan.**

Our Endowment Fund wants you and me to think about planned giving – all this man thought about was planned keeping; planned accumulating; planned-for-everything HE could have – and forget the entire rest of the world in so doing. “That’s how one,” Jesus says, “gets consumed with wealth.” And notice what that does to you. Who does he talk to? Himself. Nobody else.

I have a friend who some years ago had a scare with cancer. It caused him to do some significant assessment. And planning. He’s always been a generous guy since

becoming a follower of Jesus; but because of that scare, he's done some additional planning, including establishing a vehicle whereby upon his death the proceeds of a charitable gift annuity will perpetuate a pledge to his church even after he is gone. That's cool.

I know he's got a Last Will and Testament fully in place to take care of all the details whenever necessary – If by chance, God calls him home as God did the man in the story. I know that because I KNOW he's also written his Spiritual Testament – an autobiographical accounting of his relationship with Jesus Christ. How he came to faith and how his faith has assisted him on his journey. He's written it down and given it to his children – passing on to them not just the material treasure, but the spiritual **treasure with which God has blessed him**. Now that's planning.

Most of us probably spend more time planning for a week's vacation – than we do for our eternal rest. Last Will and Testament? If you own anything and don't – shame on you. Shame on me. Place to be buried? Notes about a service? Disposition of our goods – so we might be a blessing to others, instead of the source of a family squabble?

This past week I spent a few days in Ohio, because my father broke his hip and is in the hospital. Sitting in his hospital room, while he was sleeping, I pulled out my laptop to look at my emails and try to get some work accomplished. I got an email from Donna Harrison, Westminster Financial Administrator, informing me of another donation to the Capital Challenge – a mini campaign we are doing this summer to eliminate \$230,000 worth of debt. "This one is special," she wrote. I opened the attachment, and saw a .pdf of a check from my dad to our challenge, in honor of my mother, who died a year ago. He wrote the check and mailed it the day before he fell.

My dad's on a fixed income. And let me just tell you, it's not the size of Warren Buffet's. But he tithes – as he always has – and that goes to the church in Cincinnati where they were members for 63 years. 10%. Planned giving. In season, out of season – committed to sharing 10% of his blessings with others through the ministries of the church.

The check to Westminster was over and above that. Because he also knows there are always needs that come along that will invite him to be able to respond with generosity. That's not his tithe. That's his offering. That's why each week we talk about tithes and offerings. One is your planned giving – a regular, intentional way of committing one's resources the first fruits – not to bigger barns – but to the work of the gospel. The other is an offering in response to a special need or some blessing or some bonus or some opportunity that one can lift up.

So – maybe you can't give away 99% like Warren Buffet, or 50% like he's invited and challenged others to do. Maybe you're not quite at the biblical challenge of a tithe of 10% – like my father. But is your giving and my giving **planned**? Or is it a knee jerk reaction if somebody gives you a good story. If it's not planned, might you and I consider moving toward a tithe?

Three weeks from today is dedication Sunday – when you and I are asked to turn in pledge cards toward next year’s ministry. If you don’t already, I invite you to consider planning your giving. Figure out how much you gave this year – as a percentage of your income. If it’s a half percent, maybe you could do one percent. Or if you get a raise, make sure it’s a half-percent of THAT new income. If you give 3%, could you do 4% next year?

You get the picture. How do you plan? And not just to accumulate and build bigger barns but to make a difference in the world. Keep what you need for you and your family, and be a blessing with the rest.

The point of the story – is planned giving. Not planned keeping. Planned giving. Not just at the end of life, but all through our lives. We’ve been blessed and freed to give our lives away. That’s how you and I, and those around us, will be rich toward God. Planned giving – whether it’s the church or some service agency, I don’t really care about that – it’s far more about us not being caught with PLANNED KEEPING as the driving force of our lives. PLANNED GIVING.

May it be so. Amen.

1. William Sloane Coffin, sermon May 17, 1987; Riverside Church, NYC; “This Night Your Soul Is Required of You.”
2. The Giving Pledge, [www.givingpledge.org](http://www.givingpledge.org); Warren Buffet’s “Philanthropic Pledge.”