

Jesus on Ownership: ***An Analysis of Luke 12.13-31***

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Confrontation

While Jesus was addressing “an innumerable multitude of people” (v 1), he was confronted by a man who was obviously too focused on the material aspect of life (v 13). Rather than consenting to the man’s request to speak out on behalf of his rights, Jesus confronted him, asking, “Who made me a judge or a divider over you?” (v 14). This set the stage perfectly for Jesus to present a rather large body of truth concerning material things.

Instruction

The bottom line of Jesus’ teaching concerning possessions is that we should guard ourselves from falling into the trap of greed or covetousness. When the desire to own is the driving force in our lives, we are of little use in God’s service. It is not that possession is evil; rather, the attitude that sacrifices all on the altar of ownership is toxic.

Explanation

Having warned his listeners to avoid the encumbrance of covetousness, Jesus immediately made an explanatory statement that brought his warning into context. What he said was simple, but its impact was gargantuan. He said in essence, life is not about owning. There is much more to life than material wealth. When the believer truly apprehends this truth, it is only logically consistent for him to follow the Master’s admonition to “beware of covetousness.” In sum, the world view that Jesus propounded was that what one owns doesn’t really matter at all; wealth in time is irrelevant in eternity.

Illustration

Jesus proceeded to illustrate his teachings with a parable. The story almost certainly kept the audience’s attention, and it reinforced the truth he had just stated openly. It is worthy of note that Jesus’ parable was not intended to condemn the accumulation of wealth, but rather the neglect of one’s spiritual condition (v 20). It is not wrong to possess; however, it is wrong to concentrate on possessions to the exclusion of attending to spiritual things (v 21). This is congruent with the aforementioned fact that the true meaning of life is not related to material things.

Application

In these final verses the proverbial rubber meets the road. It is here that we find Jesus’ application to daily living. It is here that discipleship begins to grow costly. The bottom line is that there are only two real material needs in life: food and clothing (vv 22, 29-30). The bottom line is that our worry will not help to see these needs met (vv 22, 25-26); and that our personal efforts cannot ensure their satisfaction (v 29). The bottom line is that God takes care of relatively insignificant birds and plants; the implication (which is overtly stated) is, “how could God not

supply the needs of those who trust him?" (vv 24, 28). Our basic responsibility, then, is to seek the advancement of God's kingdom first, allowing him to meet our needs (v 31). Our confidence is that our Father knows our needs (v 30).