

Christians Under Construction:
The High Price of Short Cuts
Luke 12:13-21

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In Tennessee Williams' play, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Big Daddy and his son, Brick, are in the basement sorting through stuff while the other children are upstairs arguing about the family inheritance. Big Daddy says to Brick, "You know what I'm going to do before I die? I'm going to open all these boxes." Then, realizing he doesn't have enough time left for that task Big Daddy says, "There's one thing you can't buy in a fire sale or any other market on earth. That's your life. You can't buy back your life when it is finished."

The crowd numbered into the thousands, according to Luke, when someone from the crowd shouted to Jesus, "*Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.*" Family fights over stuff never change from age to age. Instead of refereeing a family feud, Jesus spins a story about personal greed. It's a story about a foolish farmer. From it we discover some principles for a life that really matters. When building a life there are some short cuts we ought to avoid.

LIFE IS MORE THAN SUCCESS.

I suppose most of us would like to make something of ourselves. There is an urgency inside us to climb every mountain, ford every stream, follow every rainbow until we find our dream. Aggressive, self-starting people, who rise to new challenges like a bird dog to a scent are the kind of people I admire and enjoy being around. They never say never. They never wonder why. They never expect anybody else to do it for them. They roll up their sleeves and go to work.

The farmer in this story is clearly successful. "*The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop.*" I've raised a few crops. Crops don't get planted on their own, tended by themselves, or harvested without some help. He plowed the ground. He planted the seed. He chopped the weeds. He beat the weather to get it in the barn. I like this guy. He doesn't complain about his lot in life. He makes his lot in life productive.

The problem with success is that it is a moving target. If you don't do better tomorrow than you did today you feel like a failure. Many people spend their lives climbing the ladder of success only to come to the end and realize it was leaning against the wrong wall. After all, everything you have ever wanted will never be enough. Solomon, who achieved every good he set for himself, laments, "*Vanity, vanity all is vanity.*"

In 1923, a group of the world's most successful men met at Chicago's Edgewater Beach Hotel. They included the president of the largest steel corporation in America, the greatest wheat speculator in the states, the president of the New

York Stock Exchange, a member of the President's cabinet, the smartest investor on Wall Street, the future director of the World Bank for International Settlements, and the head of the world's largest monopoly. Within seven years, Charles Schwab died in debt. Arthur Cutter died abroad in obscurity. Richard Whitney became insolvent. Albert Fall was pardoned from prison so he could die at home. Jesse Livermore, Leon Fraser, and Ivar Krueger all committed suicide. Life is more than success, for life is a moving target.

LIFE IS MORE THAN STUFF

This guy had a lot of stuff, but stuff rots and rusts and molds and gets in the way. Listen to his predicament. It is a familiar story. *"What shall I do? I'll tear down my barns and build bigger barns and there I will store all my grain and goods."* He had a lot of stuff. So do we. There is a bumper sticker around which says, "The one who dies with the most toys wins." The truth is the one who dies with the most toys, dies. That is the reality of life. George Carlin said, "The essence of life is trying to find a place to put all your stuff." In a real way he is probably right though he was telling a joke. A close friend of mine owns mini-warehouses. Every time I see him I ask, "How's business?" And with a big smile he says, "Business could never be better because America is full of stuff." We have 32,000 self-storage businesses nationwide containing 1.3 billion feet of rentable space. One hundred million storage containers are sold by Rubbermaid each year so that we have some place to store our stuff. In fact, in the Tennessean today you can read that professional organizers will come to your house for as much as \$75.00 per hour and organize your stuff for you so you can have a place to store it in a convenient manner.

Life is more than your stuff. Life is more than your accomplishments. Life is more than your accumulation. Life is more than all the baggage you have, some of which you do not know what to do with. Life is more than what you have accumulated.

LIFE IS MORE THAN SECURITY

...Then I shall say to myself "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19).

Since September 11, 2001, the world has been obsessed with security. We now have a whole department of the Federal government called Homeland Security. We stay engaged in a war that won't go away trying to make the world safe.

Requests for elaborate home security systems have increased greatly in the last two years. You can't board an airplane or attend a ballgame without being security conscious. If the purpose of Al Qaeda was to instill fear in America, they have succeeded.

Jesus said, *"Fear not those who can kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both the body and soul in hell."* Life is more than being safe. Life is about faith, hope and love. It's about the

courage to carry on, the determination to hang in there when the going is rough and the enemy is real. There's more to life than being secure.

A LIFE THAT REALLY MATTERS IS A SOULFUL LIFE

But God said to him, *"You fool. This very night your soul will be required of you. Then whose shall those things be which you have accumulated?"* Jesus asked it another way, *"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, to forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Mark 8:36).

Soul is the real you; it's the real me. Soul is what makes us do what we do. The Bible is clear. Guard your soul. Nourish your soul. Don't sell your soul. In a culture that is rich in things and poor in soul, we need to hear these words.

Is it well with your soul? We expand our minds, improve our relational skills, tend to our psychological well-being, exercise to stay physically fit, but what are we doing to keep our souls in shape?

Mike Yaconelli, author and founder of youth specialties said, "Until a few months ago, I had no idea I'd lost my soul. In the busyness and clatter of my life, as I traveled all over the world serving God, I thought my soul was just fine. But it wasn't. I spent hours every day doing God's work, but not one second doing soul work. I was consumed by the external and oblivious to the internal. In the darkness of my soul, I was stumbling around bumping into the symptoms of my soul less-ness. I was busy, superficial, friendless, afraid, cynical, but I didn't even know where all these negative parts of my life were coming from. Then I began to learn there is a difference between believing in Jesus and being with Jesus, talking to Jesus and letting Jesus talk to me, acquainted with God out there, but a stranger to the God in here. Slowly my soul was reawakened by a loving Father calling me by name. I found my soul again." A life that really matters is a soulful life.

A LIFE THAT REALLY MATTERS IS A SAVED LIFE

Salvation is to know that someone beyond us must do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. "Zaccheus was a wee little man. A wee little man was he. He climbed up in the sycamore tree for the Lord he wanted to see." Did you ever wonder what heart hunger caused this chief tax collector to go to such extremes to see Jesus? It was not for gain or worldly pleasure. He had all these. Zaccheus was not only a tax collector, he was a chief tax collector. When the world has given all its pleasures and you have more plaques than will fit on your walls, there remains a hunger in the heart that God alone can satisfy.

Jesus sees Zaccheus lurching there, a little man up a tree. He calls him down. He invites himself to lunch. Before dessert is served, Jesus says, *"Today salvation has come to this house. For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost."*

*We have heard the joyful sound, Jesus saves, Jesus saves.
Spread the tidings all around, Jesus saves, Jesus saves.*

*Bear the news to every land, climb the steeps and cross the waves,
This our song of victory, Jesus saves, Jesus saves.*

A life that really matters is a saved life. We need to be rescued from the miry clay of me, my, and I and have our feet planted on the solid rock of Jesus Christ.

A LIFE THAT REALLY MATTERS IS A SIGNIFICANT LIFE

In 1888, Alfred Nobel picked up a French newspaper and read his own obituary. His brother had died and by mistake, the newspaper printed Alfred's obituary instead. In it, Alfred Nobel was remembered as the dynamite king, the merchant of death, a person who had amassed a great fortune out of explosives used extensively in wars. Alfred Nobel didn't like what he read. He set out to make a better name for himself. He established among other things the Nobel Peace Prize, which today continues to honor persons around the world who have championed the cause of peace. Alfred Nobel moved from success to significance.

All of us have within our bodies a fatal disease. We have a terminal illness called death. As a current country song puts it, "It's not what you take when you leave this world behind you. It's what you leave behind you when you go." Who shall deliver us from our foolish ways? Who will save us from ourselves? Where is the life you have lost in living? Why not a life that really matters?

The advice of Jesus is this: *Don't look for short cuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easy going formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff even though crowds of people do. The way to life, to God, is vigorous and requires total attention* (Matthew 7:13-14). So go for it. Don't live a foolish life. Go for a faithful life. We don't need bigger barns and bigger houses. What we really need is a bigger life! So why not a life that really matters?

Amen.