

Date: October 11, 2009

Title: Embrace Eternity 5

Scripture:

Luke 12:15-21 (NLT) ¹⁵ Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own." ¹⁶ Then he told them a story: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. ¹⁷ He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' ¹⁸ Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. ¹⁹ And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"' ²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?' ²¹ "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

Well, here we are at the end of our Live Like You Were Dying series. This is the last sermon on this topic. I hope that you have found this 30 day experiment valuable, I know I have. I hope that you have found the experience of being in a small group to be valuable and will consider continuing. If your group is not planning to continue, but you would like to, please see me later so we can see about getting you into one of the groups that plans to continue.

As I read our scripture for today the very first verse caught my attention. Jesus said to the people, "Life is not measured by how much you own."

It's not? Are you sure? Cause I have to say that if I drive through new housing developments or watch TV for a few hours it sure looks like that is how we measure our lives. Maybe Jesus just said that because he was living so long ago. I mean maybe if he would have seen how stunning High Def TV looks or if he would have felt the smooth ride of a Lexus SUV, he might not have said that. I mean how can you compare barns full of grain to



the kind of material wealth that is possible today? All you need today is to make a plan and work the plan and you will have the kind of wealth that makes everything else seem unimportant.

That is until some dramatic event comes along and refocuses your perspective; an event like the doctor telling you that the cancer has spread much further than we had first thought and you don't have much time left. We haven't said it in so many words, but the real point of this series is to help us take some time to consider how we are currently measuring our lives and then give some thought to how we really want to *measure* our lives.

In the story Jesus told, it was obvious how the man measured his life: accumulation of stuff. He was obviously good at what he did. He was able to amass a small fortune and about the time he got the grain stored into his last big barn, he had a heart attack and died. When we see the whole story, we have a little different perspective and we see that even though he was very good at amassing wealth, he managed to royally miss the point. Jesus called him a fool because even though he learned well how to make money, he somehow failed to learn what was really important in life.

So, as we continue this morning, let's consider 3 big mistakes that the man made with the hope of avoiding those same mistakes in our own lives.

The **first mistake** the man made is that ***he lived like this life is all there is***. This was a huge mistake. He focused all of his time and attention on the things of this world and when it came time to move from this world to the next he was totally unprepared for the transition. In Ecc. 3:11 Solomon writes, "*everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.*" God has planted eternity in the human heart



and yet it is so easy to get sidetracked into thinking that this life is all there is.

When professional golfer Paul Azinger went through a surprise battle with cancer it got him to thinking about what the chaplain of the golf tour said, "We think we are in the land of the living going to the land of the dying, but instead we are in the land of the dying going to the land of the living."

I'm reminded of a conversation that I had with a friend of mine a while back. I was remarking how I thought that God's perspective about death must be a whole lot different than ours; that from where God sits I would imagine that when we pass from this life to the next it is a lot like going from one side of a fence to the other. My friend, Judy, pointed out that all of us have moved from life in our mother's womb to the life we are now living. She then said, what if the transition from the life we now live to the next life is like the transition all of us have successfully made already. Think of it this way: Our perception of time has changed dramatically for all of us throughout the course of our lives. It has sped up a lot for most of us. When we were 2 years old, a year seemed like a very long time because it represented half our life. When we turned 10 it was still 10% of our life which seems like a pretty long time. But now that I'm 56, 10% of my life is 5½ years.

Imagine what time must feel like to a two-celled fetus. A few hours would represent a relatively long period of time to an embryo that is just a few hours old. Within a few weeks the fetus is developing muscle, nerve and bone cells that will eventually grow into the various organs and parts of the body. It is certainly within the realm of possibility to think that a 9 month old unborn baby would consider life in the womb to be about as long as we would consider 90 years.



And then, once the transition from womb living to life living begins, how many of you think a lot about the life you had in the womb? You could have experienced some very significant events there, but you don't give it a lot of thought. It does not seem all that important. I will not be at all surprised if when I get to heaven, assuming I do, to find that most of the things that I thought were really important here are not all that significant in heaven. I know that we get very wrapped up in things here, but no matter how old we live to be, much of our lives will simply not matter in the next life. You have probably heard the joke about the man who convinced God to let him take his most prized possession with him to heaven. All the angels were amazed that God would let this man do this and they were also very curious to see what the man would bring. So St. Peter asked the man to show him what was so precious that he brought it with him to heaven. When the man opened his suitcase to reveal 3 gold bars St Peter looked at the man quizzically and said, "You brought pavement?"

We make a dramatic error when we live our lives as if this is all there is.

The second mistake the man from our scripture made is **he lived like there would always be more time**. This is the most costly procrastination a person can do. Obviously, this man did not procrastinate on the things he had to do to amass wealth. He got right with the building program that would create his leisure, but he failed to realize that all that barn building would not serve well in the next life.

We can imagine him telling his rabbi that he would think about the next life after he had his fortune securely in place. I suppose if he even thought about it at all, he believed there would be plenty of time later to develop his relationship with God and to show love to his neighbor. But the real risk in chasing after material wealth or status or fame is that these things never quite deliver as promised. Once we achieve one earthly goal, the excitement is temporary and we find ourselves seeking just one more goal;



and just one more; and just one more until we find that all we have been seeking never satisfies no matter how wealthy or high up the ladder we climb. You've probably all heard that saying, "*No one on his DEATHBED ever said, 'I wish I had spent more time on my business.'*" I don't know if that is really true, but it makes sense. In this country, we spend a very large amount of our time trying to get that bigger house or that newer car or to get into that school or get that next job. I know that this is important, but I think the question we have been wrestling with is, "How important?" Is our pursuit of material wealth worth all the time and attention we in this country seem to give it? Or...is it possible that there might be something of higher value to which we should turn our attention?

I'd like to suggest to you that there is something that is of higher value. I believe that what is of utmost value is your relationship with the God who has promised life eternal. Eternal means life that goes on without end. Life without end is a really long time. What are you going to do with that much time on your hands?

The third mistake the man from the story made is that **he didn't live this life in light of the life to come**. That is to say he missed the opportunity to prepare for eternity.

None of us really knows for sure what we are going to do in heaven, but let's imagine that the man from the story that Jesus told arrives in eternity and he looks around for something to do and he finds out that there is no need of grain because everybody has plenty to eat. He sees that there are no rich people or poor people because every need is taken care of. He thinks that he needs to do something with his time so he decides that he will go fishing, because while he was on earth he always thought that perhaps fishing would be fun if he had had the time. So, he goes fishing, but the beauty of the heavenly realm and the majesty of being out in God's heavenly creation is lost on him because he never learned to appreciate it



while he was on earth. His time had been consumed with raising grain and building barns to store the grain in.

So our friend goes back to where some people are just sitting around telling stories. Everyone is totally engaged in the stories, and they all seem to really love each other, but when he tries to sit with them and get interested in what they are talking about, he finds it impossible. He can't relate to what they are saying because when he was on earth, he never really cared about anyone else, he was just too busy.

So he looks around to see what other people are doing and sees a bunch of people in an outdoor chapel worshipping Jesus. He stands with them for a while and soon he gets bored because he never learned about how deep the love of Jesus could enter into a person. If he had learned to worship anything, it was a barn that was overflowing with grain and there were no such barns here. And so, we can imagine this man wandering aimlessly throughout eternity not having a clue about what to do with his eternal life. I can see him sulking by himself, completely bored and consumed by bitterness at what a waste life has turned out to be. And for this man, indeed life has been a waste.

Obviously, I can't stand up here and tell you about heaven. I've never had one of those out of the body experiences where I came back knowing where I was going. I tend to go toward the sentiment of the song by Sara Groves entitled "What Do I Know."

*Well, I don't know that there are harps in heaven,
Or the process for earning your wings.
And I don't know of bright lights at the ends of tunnels,
Or any of these things.*

But I know to be absent from this body is to be present with



*the Lord,
and from what I know of him, that must be pretty good.
Oh, I know to be absent from this body is to be present with
the Lord,
and from what I know of him, that must be very good.*

It is indeed late in our lives. None of us knows how late, but it is never too late to get to know Jesus. Sara Groves says that from what she knows of the Lord, to be present with Him must be **very good**. Do you know that of God? Do you know the feeling that comes from giving every part of yourself to the one who offers to lead you and guide you and build you up? Who says, "I will never leave you or forsake you?" (Hebrews 13:5)

We are drawing to the close of our Live Like You Were Dying series. I hope that it has been a helpful way of looking at your life. Life is short and it is precious and it doesn't end with our death. I really do believe that this life has ramifications for the next. I don't know exactly what those ramifications are, I'm determined to leave that to my Heavenly Father, but I know that when I go to meet my maker I want to know that the one for whose sake I lived is going to be there with me. I hope that you all will be with me too.

If you have questions about this I would love to talk with you about it. I certainly don't have all the answers, but I do have a faith, and that faith has drawn me ever closer to the one I call My Lord. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord. From what I know of the Lord, it must be very good. Amen.