

# “Dearest Lord We Are Much Obligated!”

Luke 12:13-21

Thanksgiving Eve, November 26, 2014

It’s amazing, how often throughout the Gospels, Jesus’ teaching is given to us in response to some type of interruption. On this particular day, our Lord was teaching his disciples **to fear God alone and to trust him for everything**. All of a sudden a man in the crowd interrupted our Lord; rather rudely, with a request for Jesus to settle a family dispute.

Jesus could have settled that family dispute with great wisdom and skill, but he refused to do so. Why?

Because there are always those people **who want God to solve their problems but do not necessarily want God to change their hearts!** Jesus knew that this family feud over money was only symptomatic of a much deeper problem—a spiritual problem called **“covetousness.”**

**Brothers and sisters, when we are suddenly overwhelmed with a great personal realization of a wonderful set of circumstances that we see surrounding our lives, do we simply congratulate ourselves or do we break forth in praise of Almighty God for another great manifestation of his grace and goodness towards us?**

**Do we see God or ourselves? As this farmer considered his bumper crop he did not see the hand of God at work in his life! He only saw himself!** There are eleven personal pronouns in this man’s speech to himself. He had some major “I” trouble and here I am not spelling the word “I” as “e-y-e,” but I am instead spelling the word “I” as “I” the personal pronoun; “I” the ninth letter in our English alphabet.

When Jesus says, **“Beware of all covetousness, for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions,”** he is reminding us that an abundance of possessions is no guarantee of a happy and joyful life. **Things in and of themselves cannot give depth to our lives. In fact, the people who usually live for things only have a greater tendency to be very shallow.** The farmer in Jesus’ parable had everything all planned for a glorious future in his golden years, but that night he died.

**This man was obviously very greedy. This man was obviously very self-centered.**

But let’s consider, for a few moments, **what this man might have done**, had he been a man of true faith in God, **committed not only to serving God, but also to helping others!** He might have called his family and friends together and led them to a praise service, glorifying God for the rich harvest. He might have shared his wealth with those who were less fortunate. He might have distributed it to the members of his family to use while he was alive and not have them argue over it after he was dead. He might have invested that wealth in a wise way and used the proceeds for worthy projects to make his community a better place for all people to live.

**But it all depends on how we look at the situation in life we are in, doesn’t it?**

Recently I read a true story written by a pastor, who together with his wife, are living in a suburb of Atlanta. He wrote at the end of this present summer that he and his wife had recently taken their annual vacation to one of their favorite beaches in all the world—Destin, Florida.

**“We love Destin,”** the pastor wrote, “and the place where we usually stay is very spacious and plush! This year, however, we decided to take our family dog with us instead of boarding him in a kennel, so our options on where to stay were far more limited. We had to rent a pet-friendly condo. We found one through an advertisement on the Internet posted on a **‘For Rent by Owner’** website. The pictures on our computer screen looked very beautiful, so we booked it for our stay. When we arrived there, however, we were greatly dismayed that it was

much, much smaller than it was advertised to be. It was by no means spacious or plush. **The furniture was old, outdated and uncomfortable.**

**To make matters worse, it had rained heavily throughout our entire drive down Interstate-75 to the panhandle of Florida, and more rain was predicted for much of the week.** This did not help my grouchy mood," the pastor continued. "I have to admit that I was grumbling about the room and the rain when my wife and I decided to go to one of our favorite pizza places there in Destin, **"The Mellow Mushroom."**

After we drove to the restaurant, I let my wife out near the door because it was still raining. I parked in the parking lot a good distance away. Just before I reached the sidewalk, **I stepped into a very gigantic puddle!** Great, I thought to myself. Not only are my clothes now soaking wet, but my shoes and socks were completely soggy too!" the pastor grumbled to his self. "The rain had stopped by the time we were seated, and the sun was peeking through the clouds. Our table was by a window and just outside of the window was that very same gigantic puddle that I had accidentally stepped in!

**After we ordered our pizza, we looked outside the window. My wife then smiled and pointed to a sparrow that landed right beside the puddle of water** I had stepped in and began drinking the water. After the little bird enjoyed his freshly poured beverage, he began to splash around in the puddle. It was not just a little bath the bird was taking. It was a joyfully exuberant bath! We watched for several minutes as he splashed gleefully in the water. **He was so content and grateful that God had provided him a refreshing drink and a place to bathe.**

**Suddenly, I realized that God was speaking to me in a beautifully subtle way, and I began to see that puddle in a very different way. The sparrow and I had both encountered the same puddle. The different was our attitude about that puddle!**

That little bird did not have the material blessings that God had given to me and my wife. He did not have a condo to sleep in that night. He did not have a waiter that was about to deliver some refreshing drinks and hot pizza to his table. **All he had was a puddle. But he was so grateful for the water in that puddle.** Frankly, I was a little ashamed when I compared my situation to the little sparrow's situation. **I have so much for which I should be grateful, but instead I was concentrating on what I did not have. Instead of thanking God for blessing me with the means to take a vacation, I grumbled because I wanted more luxury and perfect weather.**

**God spoke to me at that moment and reminded me that greed is concentrating on what we don't have, but gratitude is concentrating on what we do have.** May I say that again: **Greed is when we concentrate on what we don't have! Gratitude is when we concentrate on what we do have.**

**Even though this farmer in Jesus' parable would have been a big success in the eyes of the world, Jesus ends up call him a "fool".** This man was so rich that his farm yielded tremendous crops; the crops gathered were so abundant that the farmer didn't even know what to do with them. But the more he thought about it **there was only one answer that came to his mind**—and that was to build some new and bigger barns so he could store all of his crops.

And then as he thought about this, all completely smug and self-satisfied, he said to himself, **"Soul you have many goods laid up for many years! Relax, eat, drink and be merry!"**

**But this story does not end with that man making his boisterous statement.** It ends instead by our listening to what the **LORD God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”**

**And so at the very height of his own personal prosperity, he died. If he were living among us in the city of Columbia today he would have no doubt been regarded as a “big shot.”**

**(1) Jesus didn’t call this man a fool because he made his money in a dishonest fashion.** There is nothing in this parable to indicate that this man was dishonest and that he made his money through conniving and exploitative methods.

**(2) Nor did Jesus call this man a fool because he was rich.** Abraham, King David, Solomon, Mary, Martha and Lazarus of Bethany were all rich, yet Jesus was close friends with those two sisters and their brother.

**Jesus called this man a fool because he allowed the MEANS BY WHICH HE LIVED TO OUTDISTANCE THE ENDS FOR WHICH HE LIVED.** He was so self-centered that he never thought about using anything he had to enhance the lives of other people all around him and because he was so focused on himself there wasn’t any room in his life for a relationship with God either.

**People who fail to see their dependence upon God will never see their proper dependence (or interdependence) on other people either.**

This man in this parable utters 60 words, and among those 60 words he says the words “I” and “my” more than fifteen times! He said “I” and “my” so much that he totally lost the capacity to say “we” and “our.” He failed to realize that he wasn’t a self-made man at all.

- This man talked like he had done all the design work on those bigger and better barns himself.
- This man talked like he had done all the physical labor of building those barns himself.
- This man talked as if he had gone out there and literally sown all of those seeds into the ground each spring all by himself.
- This man talked as if he had gone out there and tilled the soil, during the maturation of all that grain himself.
- He failed to realize that worldly wealth, no matter who has it, is the result of a commonwealth; a commonwealth of people working together as they are blessed by God to achieve great goals and to experience success together.

**Jesus called this man a “fool” because he has made provision for everything except for eternity.** Then Jesus ends that story in vs. 21 by saying, *“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”*

In the next few verses Jesus tells us not to let worry or anxiety ruin our lives. He talks about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and how God cares for them and that we are worth much more to God. In vs. 31, Jesus further tells us: **“Seek God’s kingdom and his righteousness first and all these other things will be given to you as well!”**

I like the story I heard about one family that was seated around their dining room table one Thanksgiving Day. As was their annual family custom, mom had instructed every member of the family to have a little speech prepared, ready to say before the whole family what they were thankful for. From the oldest to the youngest, they each took their turn to express their gratitude.

When they came to the 5 year old in the family, who was a rather precocious child by anyone's standards, he began by looking at the turkey and expressing his thanks for the turkey, saying although he had not tasted it he knew it would be good. Then he thanked his mother for cooking the turkey. And his father for buying the turkey. Then he said he was thankful for the grocery store for stocking the turkey, and the workers there who put it in the refrigerated meat case for his dad to find. Then he said he was thankful for the checker at the grocery store who checked it out. And he was thankful for the farmer who raised it. And for the man who made the feed that was used to feed that turkey. And for those who brought the turkey to the store.

Having said all this, he looked up solemnly and said "Did I leave anybody out?"

That's when his eight year old brother rolled his eyes and said: "God."

Without batting an eye, the 5 year old turned to his brother and said "I was just about to get to Him!"

I can remember an older man in the congregation where I grew up in Florida who never was heard saying the two words: "Thank you!" even though he was a very grateful man. Instead he said the words, "Much obliged!" The other day it dawned on me that I really haven't heard those words in a very long time. Unfortunately, those two words "much obliged" is an old colloquialism that has now become to a very high degree largely forgotten, even though they might very well express what a true Thanksgiving celebration really ought to be about, because "to be obliged" means that someone has done us a favor and therefore we feel that we are now indebted to return that favor back to them, when the opportunity presents itself. I think that is exactly what Jesus is saying to us in the 12th chapter of Luke.

We are much obliged dearest Lord that we have been blessed with a bountiful land in which to live.

We also are much obliged dear Lord for the gift of political freedom. We are free to come and to go as we please. We are free to choose our occupation. We are free to come to church. No one is standing with a gun, telling us what we can and what we cannot believe. Therefore, dear Lord, we are much obliged! We strive to never forget that so many of the freedoms we enjoy in our nation, are freedoms that were first won and later upheld by the shedding of much blood of American soldiers throughout the past 238 years of our nation's rich history!.

We are much obliged dearest Lord for all of your prophets and your apostles and evangelists of times passed!

We are much obliged dearest Heavenly Father above for Jesus Christ, your Son, for the change of heart he always seeks to bring about within us, fashioning anew our hearts and minds into a greater likeness of his own heart and mind!

We are grateful dearest LORD for those who at great peril to themselves dared to sail across the Atlantic Ocean to make new lives for themselves in this free land!

So in closing I thought I'd like to lighten the mood a little bit by sharing a few Thanksgiving jokes with you, the kind that you boys and girls can share with your extended family members and friends together! For example:

**What kind of music did the Pilgrims like best? Plymouth Rock**

**Why can't you take a turkey to church with you? They use FOWL language.**

**Why was the Thanksgiving Day soup so expensive? It had 24 carrots.**

**What happened to the turkey when he got into a fight? He got the stuffing knocked out of him.**

**What do you get when you cross a turkey with a banjo? A turkey that can pluck itself!**

**What did the turkey say to the man who tried to shoot it? Liberty, equality, and bad aim for all!**

**For all the blessings of health and life, for grateful hearts and minds---keen enough to recognize our total dependence upon you LORD God, as well as our inter-dependence also upon one another as we make our way through this life onto the next, guaranteed by our Savior's death and glorious resurrection from the dead, we praise you, O God our Creator and Redeemer! Amen**