

## THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Luke 12:1-13

*What are you saying to your soul?*

If the United States Government thinks that the average American can expect to live to be 70 years old, someone forgot to tell God. Everyone gathered here today is an average American. Not all of you will live to be 70 years old. Some of you may be taken tomorrow. Some may have years to go. I don't know the answer to that. Only God does. But, regardless, our question today is what are you saying to our soul. Have you told your soul not to bother you with thoughts of mortality because you are too young or have too good of medical coverage for that? Are you telling your soul that you'll have time to repent later when you're on your death bed? Do you tell your soul that tonight is the last sinful one, and that an ever-delayed tomorrow will bring change? Have you told your soul more about what's in the bank than what's in the font, the chalice, and the Word? Has your soul heard more spirituality from Oprah or Leno or Dr. Phil than guidance and proclamation from the Word and your pastor? What have you been saying to your soul?

Well, I don't know what you've been saying to it, but I have something to say to your soul today. Ready? Soul, one day that body you are joined with is going to give out on you, and you are going to collect the interest on the investments you've made with your time and attention. Soul, close your eyes and imagine. Imagine that day when your body is laid to rest, the first day of new life or eternal death. Look past the make up with which we Americans like to dress up death. Look past the euphemisms we give it. Look past the baseless assurances that "all paths lead to the same place." Tell me what you see. It is what you focused your eyes on throughout your earthly life. It is your Savior's gracious face or it is His back, as He turns away from you as you so often turned away from Him. Soul, now look at all your wonderful possessions. Are they there? Do you see the bank accounts, the video games, the luxuries. Do you see those pet sins, those secret sins, those sins we thought God would wink at and ignore? If you do, it means you have clung to them until death. Turn them over. They say, "Made in Hell," don't they. Why do they say that? Because when possessions and behaviors become our gods, they become Satan's tools to draw our souls' attention from things above to things below.

I know I am sounding morbid right now, and I fully intend to. Someone has to tell your soul the truth. The world gets all day to feed it lies, Christ only gets the few minutes or hours we provide Him. Souls, Christ did not come to give you guaranteed abundance, physical healing, or a trouble-free life. The Bible is not a get-rich-quick scheme. It is not a book of magic. It is not a blue print for a utopian society in this life. It is not a guide to some ambiguous, multi-purpose, preposterous power. It is not a transformation rocket, taking you from being only a sinner to being only a saint in 0.3 seconds. It is not a feeling factory, giving out free injections of happy every day. It is not a membership card to a secret club where everybody knows your name and there always glad you came. It is not a contract that nothing will ever go wrong and that nobody will ever hurt you. The Bible is something else completely. The Bible is the story of Christ, who came to conquer death, to set you on the Way, to tell you the Truth, and to give you real Life; Christ, who established His church as a hospital for sinners, not a showroom for saints.

Let me tell you a story about a Christian I know. He was born in a barn. His dad was a carpenter. When He was little, His family had to flee because there were threats on His life. He didn't get to go to the finest schools, so whatever He wanted to learn, He learned Himself or from His parents. When He got older, He also was a carpenter, like everyone expected. Later, He eventually became a homeless preacher, wandering the streets, teaching, and depending on the kindness of others for survival. When He spoke, some listened, but most mocked Him, even

threatened Him, and did their best to get Him to leave. His closest friends abandoned Him every time He needed them the most. His Father turned away in His darkest hour. He was executed by the state for crimes He did not commit. He was left naked for all to see, covered only in spit, in blood, and in derision. He did not lead the abundant life most churches today are promising.

After He died, some of His friends finally found some courage. They also became homeless to a great degree. They too traveled preaching. Some also listened to them, but most mocked them, even threatened them, and did their best to get them to leave. Most of them received numerous beatings. Most were imprisoned. Most were valued about as much the rats that scampered across the prison floor. All but one of them was killed. That one was exiled to the middle of nowhere. They led the victorious life, but not the one most churches today are selling.

Do you get my point? Consider the lives of Christ and His apostles. Where were their treasures? If their treasures were of this world, they sure did a good job of hiding them. No, their treasures were in the life to come, and they continually said so to their souls.

Do not get mad at God when you suffer, when things go differently than you'd like, or when your barns run empty. Thank Him for allowing you to build up a treasure no moth and rust can destroy. Thank Him for allowing you to suffer trials that you will one day wear as the most beautiful of crowns and jewels. How plain would you look at the Lord's heavenly banquet without the adornment of your earthly trial—the reward for your suffering. While those who suffer least in this life are often regarded as blessed, at the Lamb's wedding supper, those who suffered most, who bore their crosses and trials by faith, are regarded the most blessed and dressed in the finest linen. Even Christ Himself wears His suffering for all eternity, victoriously donning "a robe dipped in blood" (Revelation 19).

I know this life can be hard, but you do not need much for the journey. You need water—living water. You need food—life-giving bread and wine. Christ has already paid for the trip. Christ has already gone before you to clear the way. Christ is constantly talking to the Father, making sure you travel protected. Christ has given you the Holy Spirit to guide you on your way. You have what you need, so don't let too much baggage get in the way. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with possessions, with bank accounts, with plans for the future, but remember these concerns are for your bodies, not your souls.

Soul, close your eyes again. Imagine death. See that darkness. Look closely. See the flickering wick. That is God's grace, and He will fan it into a raging fire of hope. Death cannot stamp out Christ's love. Sin cannot erase His promises of mercy. Sickness cannot dry the saving waters of His Baptism. The bitterness of sorrow cannot dilute the sweet taste of His Body and Blood. The threats of the devil cannot shout louder than God's pronouncement of forgiveness in absolution.

You are going to die someday, unless the Lord comes first. You may get very sick. You may lose all you own. Your closest friends and loved one may abandon you. So, what are you going to say to your soul? Here's an idea. *"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."* Amen.