

IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE

I. I pray the Lord my soul to take -- This I ask for Jesus' sake.

Luke 12:13-21

TEXT: *Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ' "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

Many Christian parents have taught their children that popular little evening prayer: "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray thee Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray thee Lord my soul to take. And this I ask for Jesus' sake. Amen."

It's a beautiful prayer, a powerful prayer. I have used it over the years with dying Christian adults, especially when they were unresponsive and near death. Perhaps they hear the words and their hearts, from childhood days find peace and comfort as their hour draws near.

Before us is that famous parable of Jesus often called "The Rich Fool." His heart was not so rich toward God as to pray like this. His heart was set on earthly wealth and gain. So when his last hour came there was no such prayer. Instead he hears from God: ***'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."*** What if tonight were to be your last night on this earth? What if you were to die tonight before you awake?

That simple little child's prayer is not child's play, is it. Jesus' parable sets before us the most important matter of life for all people, both young and old: IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE, I pray the Lord my soul to take; and, This I ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Jesus sets the context for this little story He made up about a man who made it rich and who then planned to retire: ***The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ' Don't be this man! His heart is full of greed. That's what our Lord's warning is: "Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them this parable ...*** He was so fixated on material things, so worried that he would not have a chance to enjoy this life, so worried that the day will come when he would be too old to have fun, to experience the best of this world and relax, so full of self (greed) that all he could see was the happiness of his plans coming to fruition: His main concern was to have a plan that would allow him to live off the interest of his newly-acquired wealth. His plan was to retire and to simply enjoy the rest of his life.

We know what it feels like to be this man. None of us want to grow old with the desire to be poor beggars and to suffer. All of us want the best for ourselves, our children and grandchildren. We sanctify our desires for better times by calling our efforts "good stewardship." All of us have a sinful nature, the Old Adam, that is greedy at the core. It is by God's grace alone that any one of us have learned to repent of it and to work to overcome it so that our lives would not end like this man's life. It's a most serious petition when we pray: "If I should die before I wake, I pray thee Lord my soul to take."

The Christian will pray this simple prayer fervently because along with our sinful natures that are always inclined toward selfishness and greed, we live among a people and a culture whose god is money and good times and good things. That was the case even in Jesus' day, for the context of his telling the parable of the Rich Fool, involved a man whose greed was causing strife in his family. The Bible says: ***Someone in the crowd***

said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Note that Jesus doesn't condemn the "abundance of possessions" but the tragic error of those whose lives are obsessed with the earth's abundance. And that includes not just money or things, but the obsession for good health, leisure, prestige, or anything other than being, as Jesus says, rich toward God. What would happen to all those millions of people if "Face Book" would ever shut down? Not those who use it merely for communication, but for those who covet attention and prestige to the point that everywhere they go, everything they eat, and every little achievement they do they publish for the acclamation of others? Is that being rich toward God, or a frantic effort to be full of themselves?

All of this are forms of idolatry, and God does not tolerate idolatry, as he teaches here: *God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'*

Those who are "rich toward God" end their day with this simple prayer: Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray thee Lord soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray thee Lord my soul to take...! Take me to heaven! This I ask for Jesus' sake!

We ask this "for Jesus' sake." That's because we know what Jesus did to save us from ourselves and our own idolatry. Scripture says: *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross!* Phil 2 You already know this to be true because the Holy Spirit has enlightened you to what Jesus has done for us. You know that the baby born in Bethlehem is God in human flesh who would grow up to be crucified for our salvation. We cannot shake ourselves of this dangerous sin of idolatry and greed and we sadly repent of our failures to control it. But we rejoice in the fact that Jesus kept this commandment of God perfectly and demonstrated that fact when Scripture says: *being in very nature God, ... he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross!* Phil 2 So we pray: I pray thee Lord my soul to take. And this I ask FOR JESUS' SAKE... It for the sake of Jesus' holy name who promised us that our sin is forgiven and that his righteousness is ours! For his sake we are so bold to pray this way.

When that person in the crowd should out to Jesus: *Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."* we are reminded that Jesus did not become our Savior to make our lives easier on this side of heaven but to save us for heaven. *Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"* We also are reminded of what the true work of the Church is on earth. It is not to make the lives of people here on earth to be easier, but to teach them to repent of sin and to come to faith in Jesus. Repentance and faith is what is being "rich toward God" for without repentance and a turning from sin there is no salvation no matter how good a person's life on earth is!

This is the error that keeps so many from saving faith. They imagine that if they have it good here on earth then they must be doing something right. If they have an abundance of life's possessions and pleasures, then God must truly love them. They feel no need for the Gospel, have no spiritual hunger or thirst for the Lord's Supper, find themselves too busy to worship. Then it happens! That awful day when the voice of God whispers in their ear: *'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."* Don't be that man!

Instead, learn to pray, every day, that simple prayer of faith: Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray thee Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray thee Lord my soul to take. And this I ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.