

I WILL SAY TO MY SOUL

If you're over 50, you'll likely remember the TV show, Bonanza.

For those too young and those who didn't have a TV: Bonanza was a cowboy genre series that ran from 1959 to 1973; it featured a patriarch and his three sons who oversaw a huge ranch called the Ponderosa; they owned 1/2 million acres, near Virginia City, NV.

Ben Cartwright was the father. He was widowed three times.
For some reason, nobody was alarmed or suspicious about how his wives kept dying off.

Each of his three sons had a different mother.
Adam was a typical oldest son.
Hoss was the easygoing middle son, and Little Joe was the rambunctious youngest child.

It is also interesting that none of his sons ever got married. Perhaps, the father was a tad controlling. He didn't really empower or enable them by releasing any of his estate to them. In addition, in every show, they always wore the same outfits.
I think Ben was a tightwad, because he sure didn't spend any money on clothing.

Each episode tried to present a good message, laced with some cowboy excitement. Still, the overriding theme was protecting and building their vast empire--the Ponderosa.

In 1972, Hoss suddenly died, and that left, Ben and the two brothers, Adam and Little Joe.
The series ended the following year, but what if it was a "Reality" show? And, we didn't get to watch the rest of their story.

Well,..... as it happened, Ben died in 1987, after suffering from delusions of being a spaceship captain, called Battleship Galactica.

By then, after years and years of hard, extremely hard work, he had built the Ponderosa in a huge, mega ranch, worth billions.

Adam determined that being the first born to the first wife entitled him the entire estate.

Little Joe was livid, and while attending a lecture by a very esteemed and respected teacher, he decided to ask the teacher for help.

He went up to him and asked, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me."

The wise teacher refused to be baited into his controversy, because he realized there was a much greater and deeper problem embedded in their inheritance conflict.

It was a teachable moment, so the teacher told a parable.

We all know the parable of the "Rich Fool."

The rich man had a bountiful harvest, and was faced with the quandary of what to do with it. He decided to keep it, but didn't have enough storage facilities.

So, he chose to wastefully tear down his old bins, and build larger ones.

He contentedly declared, "I will say to my soul, 'Soul you have a fortune, so relax, ...be at ease,feel secure... and be happy!'"

But, God said to him, "You Fool. You have invested poorly, because tonight your life will come to an end.

All those "things" that you possess will be lost by you and claimed by someone else."

Jesus looked at everyone and added, "So, it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Anytime the scriptures feature a "rich" person, it should get our attention.....because, compared to everyone else, we are affluent.

AND,..... Biblical lessons tend to be rather harsh towards "rich people." God favours the weak and powerless.

To be sure, God loves justice and equality.

Moreover, I don't think God is a big fan of free market capitalism.. which is based on greed and the law of jungle.

Greed is desiring and striving for more for oneself, without reference to any "real" needor to others.

Greed is indifferent to others and is much like trying to catch the wind.

God is unhappy when the powerful seek more power and wealth, as they exploit and/or ignore the weak and poor.

God loves and cares for everyone, and doesn't appreciate some getting ahead while others fall behind.

The Colossians text, printed in your bulletin, ends with a call for equality, too.

So, featuring a "rich" person in this parable may cause a bit of discomfort, and rightly so, because the rich man was obviously greedy. He could have given his surplus away to those in need.

Nevertheless, the message is deeper than that,....just as the initial inheritance problem was not superficial.

The parable is not a judgment on being rich. Wealth is benign.

Greed was ridiculed; however, the lesson was more about the core issue, which is: what do we trust and value..... and how do we invest our lives.

Financial wealth and security is just an illusion / a projection.

The stock market fluctuates based on perceptions --illusions.

Things are given greater value merely on the impression of scarcity.
The more something is out of reach, the more it is desired,...much like chasing after the wind.

What good is a gold bar,.. ... compared to a roll of duct tape?

Yet, we chase after such things.
We Live and sacrifice for such illusions,.....thinking once we get the elusive *enough*,.....we will be content, safe, secure..... and happy.

Conventional wisdom states that it is prudent to work hard, to gather wealth and to build a nest egg. We are told that things and money will make us content and secure.

And of course,..... we tell ourselves that we are Also working hard and doing it for our family / for our children.

Yet, in what are we truly investing?
What will our labours and passions yield?

In hindsight, the philosopher in Ecclesiastes cried out, "All is vanity."

Vanity is defined as lacking real value, hollowness, worthless, trivial and pointless.
The philosopher bemoans discovering the shock that soon he will have to let go of all that seemed so precious,..... and for no benefit whatsoever.

It is a confession of deep regret / of realizing that a life of hard work was wasted / that his life was wasted. All what he thought would bring contentment and happiness, failed him. It was a myth; there was never enough/ no such place of fulfillment.

He relates it to chasing after the wind,..... and it is impossible to catch the wind,..... and if you could,.....what would you be grasping?
???

This past Tuesday, was my father's birthday.
He died 18 years ago, and there are only 4 people alive who could remember his birthday--his sister, my sister, my brother and myself.
I said, "could", because while talking to my brother on Tuesday, he admitted that he had forgotten.

It doesn't take long to disappear.

My father did not accumulate financial wealth. In fact, thanks to the American health system, he died with a significant deficit.

Still, he worked very hard all his life, and a measurable remnant of his life was hundreds and hundreds of sermons.

Out of respect, I kept them for a few years, but saw no point in moving those boxes again, and so they were all thrown away.

There are aspects of his life that I do cherish; however, none of them relate to how hard he worked or the things he bought for me.

I do wish he would have played more.

There are times when I regret working too much and being obsessed with getting chores done.

I have never, ever regretted playing too much.

I think we all need to play more.

I think we need to take life less seriously, and play more.

There will always be work to do tomorrow, but we may not be able to play with our children and our friends and our parents, tomorrow.

Most parents, thoroughly enjoy seeing their children playing and rolling on the ground in laughter and joy.

I imagine God, as a loving parent, feels the same way.

Even so, today's lesson is not really about playing, and it is Not about investing in heaven, either.

It is counter to Biblical teaching to think that we can increase our lot in heaven by the deeds we do on earth.

There will be no rich people in heaven. There are no heavenly treasure chests that yield perks or privileges.

In the Luke passage, Jesus invites us to be "rich towards God."

God gives self.

God gives love. God gives what is most precious to God.

Being rich towards God is doing likewise.

The parable of the rich fool is actually about being saved from wasting our lives, and it's about what we value and how we live.

Jesus leaves us with the tacit question:

What do I value,..... and am I giving it away?

What do we say to our soul?