

## **Luke 12:15-21 — Should I Build A Bigger Barn?**

**July 28, 2019**

The first time Urbanas brought up the idea, I thought he was kidding. Here we are on a huge farm. We are one of the most successful farms in our area and he was talking about tearing down all his barns and building bigger ones. I kept asking him, “Why do you want bigger barns?” He has lots of grain already stored up in the barns he owns.

But Urbanas kept talking about it. He said, “Suppose we have a famine next year, and a famine the year after that, plus another famine the following year. We could lose everything. We could starve to death. Those things can happen. We have to save for the future and plan for the future. You never know what can happen in the future.”

His desire to save and plan for the future made good sense to me, but something inside me didn’t feel right about his plans. He kept thinking of building bigger barns. I kept thinking of other things he could do with all the excess grain. There are so many gleaners in our community. Gleaners are the poor. According to the law, they are allowed to go through our fields after the harvest to pick up any grain that has fallen to the ground that we missed. There are always so many that come. They are tired and worn out. Life has been hard on them. So many have so little, while we have so much. It just didn’t feel right. I didn’t understand why Urbanas wanted to keep all of his success to himself.

One day I did the calculations. We could have given each of the gleaners a bag of grain. That grain would keep them fed for weeks, maybe months. We have so much we wouldn’t even feel the loss. One afternoon, I shared my idea

with Urbanas after work. I told him we should help those less fortunate than ourselves. He just laughed at me, then gave me an answer that was short and firm. “Why should I give away my grain to people that have done nothing to deserve it? I am not giving away what is rightfully mine.”

That winter, with the farm’s barns already bulging from last year’s crops, Urbanas began meeting with an architect. They pored over sketches. They talked over plans. They walked back and forth on the farm pacing out buildings for the future. They had one purpose — to build the most space possible for the money. Next he met with the builders and laid out a plan of attack to turn the sketches of the barns into reality on his property.

As soon as Passover was over in the spring, the builders arrived. Day after day I watched as they built the barns. First, they laid the expansive foundation. Next, they build the walls that reached high into the sky. After that, they added the rafters, and finally the roof. As one barn was finished, the contents of an old barn was emptied into it then the old barn was torn down to make room for another new and bigger barn. I thought the barns would take a long time, but with the size of the crew Urbanas hired, things moved quickly.

Of course, Urbanas wanted it that way. He was always a man of decision. When he made up his mind that he wanted to do something, nothing got in his way. He always pushed ahead without thinking about God or about others.

His goal was to have all the new barns finished by harvest. The last barn was finished just as harvest began. Of course he made his goal. The project came in on time and on budget. That was Urbanas. He was always good at

saving and planning for the future. That year, we harvested another record crop, which Urbanas chose to store away in his barns, giving him even more security for the future.

But as we relaxed in the success of the harvest, the gleaners began arriving to walk through the fields. They were so tired and worn out by life. Some of them were old women, hunched over and worn out. They were looking for a few grains of wheat left on the ground so they would have something to eat. If they found a few grains, most of them were too weak to bend over and pick it up. Others were children that crawled through the fields on their hands and knees hoping to find a few seeds to put in their pockets to take home to their parents so they would have something for dinner as a family. It seemed wrong that we should have so much saved up for tomorrow when the gleaners didn't have enough to eat today. I thought maybe I could persuade Urbanas to give away just a little of our grain to those in such desperate need. I decided to talk to him about giving away some grain for the second year in a row.

One day, after our morning employee meeting, I brought up the subject of helping those who had fallen on hard times. I wasn't prepared for Urbanas' reaction. He yelled at me. "You don't know what you are talking about! It is mine! All mine! I earned it! I plan to keep it! Why should I give away my hard-earned money to someone who doesn't deserve it?" After that, I knew there was nothing more I could say or do to change his mind. I decided to keep my thoughts to myself.

One night, a few weeks after that blow up, everything changed. Urbanas had his brothers and their families over for a visit. It was a family reunion. Of course only Urbanas had a house big enough to host everyone. He couldn't resist the opportunity to give his brothers a tour of the farm. Most farms can be seen in less than a day, but not Urbanas'. His farm was so large it took at least two days to see everything. Of course, he couldn't resist showing off the new barns, which were filled with grain for the future.

I must admit, those barns were impressive, especially in the morning sun. They made a statement that told people this farmer was a success. This farmer had arrived in life. This farmer had security for the future because he had plenty laid up for years to come.

Later in the evening, the men were relaxing on the roof of the house in the cool of the evening when one of his brother asked him about the secret of his success. "Urbanas, what made you so successful?" Urbanas leaned back in his chair and stroked his chin. Finally, he spoke. He said, "It is all a matter of saving and planning for the future. If people would just learn to save and plan, anybody could be a success."

It seems to me that something was missing from Urbanas' answer. Urbanas never gave God credit for his success. He just credited himself. It was as if God hadn't sent the rain at the right time to water the crop. It was as if God hadn't sent the sunshine at the right time to grow the crop. I kept thinking of all the bad things that happened to other farmers in our area. Some of them had crops that were drowned out in the spring rains. Others had crops that died out in

the heat of the summer sun. Some had crops beaten down by hail. Others had crops eaten by locusts. All of those things could have wiped out Urbanas, but they didn't. God protected him from all those disasters. Whatever Urbanas had planted had always produced a great harvest. But to hear Urbanas talk, he gave all the credit for his success to himself. He never acknowledged God's protection and grace upon his life.

That night, when Urbanas and his wife went to bed, there was a smile on Urbanas' face I hadn't seen before. It was almost smug. It was a look of pride in his success. He had done it. He had vast quantities of wealth stored away for the future and most of his life left to enjoy it. He was a self-made man. He was a successful man. He was the envy of others. In his mind, he had done it all himself.

Little did I know that was the last time I would see him alive.

In the early morning hours, from the servants' quarters, I heard a scream of horror that woke me from my sleep. Did I really hear a woman scream? I couldn't tell if it was reality or a dream. As I came to my senses, I tried listening intently. In the distance, I heard it. It was a woman weeping. The weeping grew louder again into a scream of panic. I recognized the voice. It was Urbanas' wife. Something was wrong. I flew out of bed, put on my clothes, and sprinted across the courtyard to the house. I flew up the stairs and burst into their bedroom. There she was standing over him shaking his shoulders with tears running down her face. "Urbanas! Speak to me! Speak to me!"

I tried to help. Seconds later, other servants also came running into the room. Together we shook him and tried to get him to breath, but it was no use. He was dead.

Of course, there was a large funeral. When people like Urbanas die, there is always a large funeral.

Then the problems on the farm began. Urbanas and his wife had no children so there was nobody to inherit the farm. The farm was too big for his wife to handle so she entrusted Urbanas' brothers with the important financial decisions. They were greedy and unwise. They used the farm assets for their personal advantage. Soon the farm was in decline and being sold off piece by piece. Even the grain in the barns was eventually sold off to pay off debt from bad business decisions. It wasn't long until the vast stores of grain were gone. The massive barns still dotted the horizon, but they were worthless because after only three years, they were empty.

Finally, they even let me go, their chief servant. They were forced to let me go because Urbanas' wife couldn't pay my wages. All of the wealth was gone.

A few weeks ago, I was in Jerusalem for Passover. I heard the words of a new rabbi named Jesus. He said many things that caught my attention but one thing he said really stuck in my head. He said, "Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourself with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in heaven that does not fail."

Jesus was right.

Urbanas was always saving and planning for the future but because he thought about it the wrong way. He lost everything he set aside for the future. He was so busy saving for his earthly retirement, he was never generous to those in need, so he never set aside anything for his eternal retirement in heaven. Since he died unexpectedly in mid-life, he never had a chance to enjoy all the things he set aside for himself on earth. Since he refused to be generous to the needy, he never sent ahead any of his vast wealth to be enjoyed in heaven. Urbanas was a man always saving and planning for the future, but in the end, he lost everything he set aside for the future.

Urbanas was always worried that if he didn't save and plan for his retirement, he wouldn't have enough for retirement. He forgot it was God who gave him success in his younger years and God gave him more than enough to meet his needs. It would be God who would have continued to take care of him in his later years and continued to give him more than enough to meet his needs. Urbanas could always have afforded to be generous to the needy because it was God that was providing and caring for him.

As I look back on the decision to build bigger barns to store away more excess grain while we ignored the needy in front of us, that was a bad decision. In this case, building bigger barns instead of being generous to the needy was the worst thing Urbanas could have done to save and plan for the future, not the best.

I wonder if Urbanas had heard the words of Jesus, would it have made a difference in the way he thought about saving and planning for his future? I don't

know if it would have made a difference but I wonder if it would have. I just wonder.

The idea for this message is based off a first-person narrative sermon by Alice Matthews found in the book [It's All In How You Tell It: Preaching First-Person Expository Messages](#) by Torrey Robinson.



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