

The cruise from Westminster Pier on the River Thames to the Tower of London only took half an hour, but the effects on me have lasted a lifetime. I must have been ten at the time of that school field trip. Although I lived only 30 miles from the capital, I had never been to the Tower. But I'd listened to my history teachers, I'd heard the stories of traitors and tortures, betrayals and beheadings, mayhem and murder. I looked over the side of boat into the unwashed face of Father Thames – the same brown water that condemned men and women stared forlornly at hundreds of years earlier, as they made that same journey I, in my schoolboy excitement, was making. We arrived at the Tower and in the way that children do, I gazed, transfixed at instruments of slow death, and instruments of fast, like the chopping block where Ann Boleyn bade farewell to her head, or should that be where she bade farewell to her body?

At the time, it was the gruesome stories and the bloody artefacts that caused me the most fascination. Of course, they did. I was ten. But there were other exhibits at the Tower that were less enthralling to a young boy, but which the teachers seemed quite keen to expose us to. They led us through a doorway and into some heavily guarded rooms. At each entrance there stood uniformed men looking austere and threatening. And there, in the center of each room, were glass display cases. Boring glass display cases. No iron maidens, thumbscrews, or other Tudor torture devices. No graphic drawings of people being hanged, drawn and quartered, or having burning coals placed on their chests, or experiencing their entrails being eaten by rats while still alive. In fact, nothing to laugh at all. Just glass display cases. Containing stones. Stones and hats. Stones and rods. Stones and crosses. Still, these stones and hats seemed to get the teachers quite excited. They were not your average, backyard stones, of course. These stones sparkled; they winked at you as you passed. They were transparent and pure; captivating - if you're into sparkly stones. We weren't allowed to get too close to them, not that we wished to. Some lad touched a glass case and one of the uniformed men appeared in an instant and rebuked him. It did the trick, probably because this was the Tower of London after all, where, no doubt over the centuries untold numbers of boys had been executed for touching the glass cases.

When I returned to the Tower, over thirty years later, the stones and hats were still there, untouched in the three decades since the first time I'd seen them. By now, though, my interest in the Crown Jewels had grown, and my time in the Jewel House was far more intriguing to me than it had been in my youth.

I guess as you grow your idea of treasure changes. As a child, my treasure was gory stories and bloody blades. As an adult my treasure had evolved into the symbols of sovereignty and the emblems of empire. Yet, the sparkly treasure, better though it was, than the gruesome treasure, is still unsatisfying to the truly mature and living soul. Diamonds and rubies, emeralds and sapphires are the best this shallow world can offer. They symbolize power, wealth, and success. They adorn the heads of monarchs and occupy the safes of aristocrats. Their appeal forces people to wage war. They cause conflict and hate, they pander to egos, they justify pride. They speak of mankind's lust

for power, our eternal impulse for greed. Their luster seduces good people into ruin and their brilliance destroys human souls. There was once a man who loved gold. So much did he love gold that he decorated his house in that color - gold parchment wallpaper, gold colored curtains, gold colored rugs and on his bed gold colored sheets, pillows and comforter. He even wore yellow pyjamas. But then he began to feel ill and came down with jaundice. His wife called the doctor who made a house visit and went up to examine the patient in his bedroom. The doctor was up there for what seemed like an eternity, and when she finally came down, the wife asked, "How is he?" "I don't know," she replied, "I couldn't find him." We lose ourselves in gold, it creeps up on us and gradually, ounce by ounce, carat by carat, steals our identity. We are God's noble and beloved children, but when we accumulate gold we soon begin to describe our worth in dollars, we brag about how our portfolios are signs of our greatness, our houses proof that we are good people deserving of God's favor.

Yes sparkly stones and lumps of gold are most definitely treasures of this earth. They lie, they boast, they steal. They destroy, and in time they will be destroyed. Sure, they're more grown up than the treasure of torture and death that I loved in my youth, but they are still part of this fallen and decaying creation. They are not immune from rust and moth, and one day they will be swallowed up in God's perfect kingdom.

"Do not be afraid, little flock," says Jesus. "Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

At the Tower of London they keep the treasure in glass cases. Scary men in uniforms watch them. The treasure of our lives, according to Jesus, is stored in heavenly purses. We put them in our pockets or handbags and carry them with us. They are never far from us. They contain the things we value most dearly, the intangible property that we truly live for. These purses don't wear out. We will take them with us after we die. What's in your wallet? Take it out. Open it up and examine what's inside. I did this literally as I was writing this sermon. I looked through my literal wallet. But it helped me consider what is in my metaphorical wallet, my heavenly purse, too. There was some cash and credit cards. I earned those. They are my pay. They represent my hard work and years of training. They stand for my dedication and sacrifices. But who am I kidding? I work no harder than a factory worker in Asia who is paid two or three dollars an hour. I risk less than a farmer in Africa who barely earns enough to keep his family alive. I am not as dedicated as the single mother who tries to raise her children by working 12 hours a day in two jobs. This money and this plastic does not really speak of my hard work and expertise, but my sheer luck at being born with an able body and an adequate mind, to a comfortable family in the London suburbs, who valued decency, education and hard work. I can't store my career accomplishments in my spiritual wallet. No, moth and rust will consume those successes.

Some other things in my wallet. My Green Card. A symbol of my residence in this

great country. A sign also, that I'm a citizen of somewhere else. But whatever my earthly nationality, whether my passport is red or blue, it would be foolish to think I could place it in my spiritual wallet, as if God has favorite nations, or some are blessed by him and others are not, or some are exceptional and others are ordinary or evil. My Green Card and my passport say nothing about me. They are earthly treasures, destined to be consumed. They have no place in my spiritual wallet.

Then there's my Giant shoppers loyalty card. This would probably be the most absurd item to try to place in my spiritual wallet. If I were to try I would be lying about myself, pretending that, at heart, what I truly am is a consumer. I would be agreeing with marketers and advertisers that my genuine identity is someone who buys goods and services. That is, actually, a powerful message, and one we encounter all the time, everywhere we go. But it's completely false. We are the free and dignified children of God, and we will not let ourselves be reduced to creatures who merely consume. There are creatures who just consume. We are familiar with them. They're called caterpillars, and they are not made in the likeness of God.

Another card in my wallet is my health insurance card. A statement that I am human. I get sick – in my body and in my mind. I need to love and care for these wonderful gifts from God. And I'm blessed to have an employer who loves me and believes it is important to insure me. But, again I can't hope to sneak this card into my spiritual wallet and hope to take it to heaven. It won't get past the border. Because I'm more than a mind and body. I'm a soul – a creature made for communion with the creator. This body and mind, in their current form, won't make it into the presence of God. They will need to be transformed and resurrected.

Just behind my proof of health insurance card is my library card. It reminds me of the fact that I can read. I received, at no personal cost to me and with no real sacrifices, an education. But there are many millions of people in the world smarter than I who were born in the wrong place or to the wrong parents, who can't receive a good education. So, once again, I'm left to conclude that this card will burn up if I try to pop it in my spiritual wallet. A title in front of my name and initials after it may impress human beings but God is not in awe of them.

Finally, in another section of my wallet – a flap that has a window in it, is my driver's license. Apart from the Green Card, it is the only item in my wallet that bears my photo. Very useful when trying to prove my identity. But my picture won't be of much use in my spiritual wallet. What counts there, is that God knows me, loves me, and has hidden my life in Christ, safe and secure. We are to find our identity in God.

This wallet will pass away. It will be consumed by mold, and its contents by moths. It is earthly treasure and contains earthly treasure. But consider with me that other purse. The spiritual one. You can't see it, but it holds a full and beautiful record of who you really are, and your acts of love, kindness and service will last for all time. When I compare those two wallets, the earthly one seems to weigh much heavier. It is stuffed to capacity. The spiritual has a lot of room in it. Jesus says it is when we sell our

possessions and give to the poor that we fill our spiritual wallet. In other words, acts of kindness, works of service, gifts of love. Those multitude of little gestures and words that demonstrate the love of God to those who need it. "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys."

Again, what's in your wallet? Earthly treasure or spiritual treasure? Money, plastic, objects, false identities, things rooted in this world that is passing away, sparkly stones and gory stories; or things that will last? Because where your treasure is, that is where your heart will be.