

Treasures in Heaven

Matthew 6:19-21

How do you measure your treasure? Many people identify the sum total of their earthly wealth as their net worth. That, of course, gives good opportunity for comparison to others. Some would simply refer to an annual salary to define their treasure, income. Perhaps your treasure is measured by the value or size of your home. The style and prestige of your cars. It could be an investment account or retirement savings. Or even, for a student, good grades. Academic success and achievement. Treasures on earth.

Your treasures might be more intangible. Your family would likely top that list. Your children. Or maybe, depending on your station in life, your treasure is your grandchildren. It could be your friends. It might be a job or professional position. Or a special vacation. It could even be a memory. A photo album.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones summarizes it this way, “Treasures is a very large term and all-inclusive. It includes money, but it is not money only. It means something much more important. Our Lord is concerned here not so much about our possessions as with our attitude towards our possessions. It is not what a man may have, but what he thinks of his wealth, what his attitude towards it...Indeed we go further. It is a question of one’s whole attitude towards life in this world. Our Lord is dealing here with people who get their main, or even total, satisfaction in this life from things that belong to this world only. What he is warning against here, in other words, is that a man should confine his ambition, his interests and his hopes to this life.”

But Jesus has a word of challenge for all of us. It is a challenge to our desire for worldly treasures of any kind. It is

actually a prohibition.

v.19

There is good reason for that prohibition, given how Jesus describes,

I. THE NATURE OF TREASURES ON EARTH.

Simply put, all earthly treasures are corruptible. They don’t last. They don’t survive. As Jesus puts it, “moth and rust destroy.” Moths known to eat fabric and clothing. Rust known to eat and destroy metal. Nothing is safe. Nothing endures.

Now, you all know that is true, but we are all prone to act as if it simply weren’t true. We act as if what we accumulate in terms of this world’s treasure really does add up to something valuable. It’s as if the old expression were true, “the one who dies with the most toys wins.” And the corollary seems to be true as well, “the only difference between men and boys is the price of their toys.” So we spend our life accumulating toys. Treasures on earth. And they all decay. Jesus’ words compel us to acknowledge,

A. The inescapable reality of natural decay.

Everything is subject to moth and rust. Everything in this world will fall under the curse of death. So, if your treasure is in the value of your house, then the next real estate crash might steal a large portion of your treasure. If your treasure is in the stock market, then you may well see the same result. And even if you succeed in preserving your worldly treasures as long as you live, you can’t take any of it with you.

Twice in my life I have seen the artifacts removed from King Tut’s tomb, and the display is absolutely fascinating. But the underlying motive is so obviously noticeable. He thought he could take all these riches with him into the next world. And, of

course, he failed. He died. So the one who is very, very wealthy and the poorest pauper actually leave behind the same amount when they die. Everything. They leave everything.

It is the obviousness of this that make Jesus' words so penetrating. Because we act as if it weren't true. We set our affections on the things of this world, as if they actually have lasting value. There is not one of us that is immune from that temptation.

Again, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones expresses the matter, "One of the most subtle problems with which the Christian ever has to deal is this problem of his relationship to the world... It is a question of one's whole attitude toward life in this world. Our Lord is dealing here with people who get their main, or even total, satisfaction in this life from things that belong to this world only. What he is warning against here, in other words, is that a man should confine his ambition, his interests and his hopes to this life."

John puts it this way,

1 John 2:15 "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

Such a pervasive temptation, indeed. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," treasures of this world. They all pass away. Jesus even goes further,
v.19 "...where thieves break in and steal."

So the problem is not only corruption. But as well,

B. The inescapable effects of the immorality of others.

What doesn't decay is liable to be stolen. What isn't lost to natural corruption might well be gone because of immoral oppression. It might be a flood or it might be a thief, but even the best home security in the world can't protect your most valuable possessions. You can't hold on to anything. So the words are pointed and personal,

v.19

As you read these words, consider your own heart and your own life. Try to identify those treasures on earth that are of the greatest value to you, and then come to terms with these words of Jesus. We simply cannot live well and live for God's glory if our treasures are earthly. What a dangerous delusion it is to believe Satan's lie that those treasures of this world can actually bring some satisfaction, for they cannot. They all perish. Everything in this world shall perish, for this we know, that,

2 Peter 3:10 "... the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."

Peter goes on, however, with the right and proper perspective. The antidote, if you will. The solution.

2 Peter 3:11 "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

That perspective, that eternal perspective, is precisely what Jesus has in mind as well when he contrasts the treasures of this

world with,

II. THE NATURE OF TREASURES IN HEAVEN.

v.20

A total, complete and simple contrast. And that highlights,

A. The necessity of an eternal perspective on life.

“Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Surely that must require you to realize that this life is but a journey, a temporary sojourn. We are aliens and strangers on earth. Pilgrims. We read of many who lived with this eternal perspective in Hebrews 11, those who lived by faith.

Heb. 11:8 “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God...13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

That is us, beloved. That is our life as Christians. Strangers and exiles on earth. We desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.” And God prepares a heavenly city for us. That’s the eternal perspective Jesus identifies in the sermon on the mount. Peter, too.

1 Peter 2:11 “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims,

abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.”

It is that eternal perspective on life as a whole that reveals,

B. The necessity of an eternal focus on treasure.

v.20 “...lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

What is heavenly treasure? Consider,

1 Tim. 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

It is your good works which become a stored treasure in heaven. Paul teaches the same thing about rewards in,

1 Cor. 3:12 “Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.”

And Paul’s own testimony,

2 Tim. 4:7 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

That’s your real treasure, the treasure of God’s reward in heaven. The treasure of good works that will last into heaven. The treasure of heavenly glory, even the city which God has

prepared for his people. Thus, your eternal treasures will have little to do with your accumulation of earthly and worldly wealth. And, in fact, your love of earthly treasures may well become a barrier to the effective working of the gospel.

Mat. 19:16 “Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”
17 So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”...20 The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?” 21 Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” 22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”

Ultimately, it is one or the other. You can pursue only one, not both. Treasure on earth or treasure in heaven. As we read just a few verses after our text in Matthew 6,

v.24 “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

So which do you pursue? That’s a personal question, isn’t it? And a challenging one. What is your focus on treasure? The words to the Rich Young Ruler can speak very pointedly to us, can’t they? “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

And all of this is, of course, a matter of the heart. A matter of affections.

1 John 2:15 “Do not love the world or the things in the world.”

But we do, don’t we? That is,

III. THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN HEART.

A. The human heart is attracted to the treasures of this world.

Those treasures have an appeal. They are a temptation. They look beautiful. Or as Eve would describe the fruit which God had forbidden,

Gen. 3:6 “...the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.”

That’s the nature of sin, isn’t it? The affections of the heart for that which is forbidden. The affections of the heart for that which is perishing. The affections of the heart for the treasures of this world. James puts it in a particularly pointed way.

James 4:4 “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

The nature of the fallen human heart is the nature of an adulterer. An adulteress. There is an attraction to that which is sinful, and Jesus’ point is that those sinful attractions are formed when we wrongly identify and define treasure. Because that identification of your treasure is not neutral. It is not neutral. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

That’s true in so many applications, isn’t it? We human beings cannot separate the desires of our heart from the actions of our lives. You cannot devote yourself to outward things without a connection to your heart. Your actions reveal your heart. The objects of your devotion reveal the condition of your heart. So we are instructed with great wisdom,

Prov. 4:23 “Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it

spring the issues of life.”

The idea is to guard your heart!

Mat. 15:18 “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. 19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. 20 These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”

It is a matter of the heart! Sin is a matter of the heart. Sinful idolatry is a matter of the heart. The idolatry of earthly treasures is a matter of the heart. And the love of earthly treasure is, indeed, idolatry. So Paul’s personal urging of Timothy is appropriate for all of us.

1 Tim. 6:6 “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. What you identify as your treasure will become the object of the affections of your heart. And, to put it positively,

B. Godliness requires that you redefine your treasures.

Verse 21 is not simply a rebuke or a criticism. It is also a marvelous definition of true, godly faithfulness. For those who redefine their treasures to be the treasures of heaven, the reward is great. Again,

Heb. 11:8 “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

The land of promise, the city of heaven! Thus Hebrews continues,

Heb. 11:13 “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth...16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

That is to be your faith. It is to be my faith. “They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.” The city of God, that’s our treasure. Heavenly treasure, eternal treasure—that’s real treasure. That’s our true treasure as Christians.

So where is your treasure? What are the things you count the most valuable in your life? What are the things you devote the most attention to obtaining and preserving?

It is often said that a man’s treasures can be identified by a quick and simple examination of two things, his checking account and his calendar. So what things do spend your time pursuing? What things do spend your money upon? No doubt, those things are the identity of your treasure.

Beloved, listen to Jesus this afternoon, beloved, and redefine your treasure. The things of this world will not last, and their

value as a treasure will be entirely lost, sooner or later. Listen to Jesus, and redefine what you will commit yourself to as a matter of priority. And be careful of the temptations of your own heart. Perhaps you need to offer to God your repentance as well.

v.19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”