

TREASURE

by Elaine Poproski

MATTHEW 6:19 – 24

What do you think of when you hear the word *treasure*?



Found in the pockets of a 4-year old's winter coat.



Treasures are things we value. They're things we hold onto. We'd willingly give up other things to have them and to hold onto them. I once knew a family who had a gorgeous, big, brick house. But inside, the house was almost completely empty. They slept on mattresses on the floor. The big living room had no furniture in it. The kitchen was sparsely outfitted at best. Affording their house, which they treasured, meant they couldn't afford to put anything in it. But they were ok with that because owning the house was that valuable to them.

What is it that you value? What are you willing to sacrifice for? Sometimes we sacrifice having other things, in order to have the thing we value. Sometimes we sacrifice our own comfort, even our own safety, for the thing we value. Maybe it's not a *thing* at all, that you value. Maybe it's a person or people that you value.

Organizations like churches or businesses or clubs often have a statement of values somewhere in their official documents. Walmer has a list of things we've said that we value. You can find our list on our [website](#). We say we value prayer as foundational to all ministry and spiritual growth. We say we value the Bible as that which helps us know God and be shaped by God. We say we value worship, through which we meaningfully engage in with God in prayer, confession, and praise. We say we value discipleship, which is about becoming more like Jesus. We say we value diversity, which is about creating a space of belonging in which everyone is welcome. We say we value authenticity – living, worshiping, and being together without facades or pretense. We say we value passion, in particular doing God's work with passion and boldness.

What do you value? Maybe there are things you value. Maybe there are people you value. Maybe there are ideals you value. One of the most reliable ways to identify our values is to look at what we spend our money on or what we spend our time on. Both money and time are precious and

limited in supply, so if we're willing to trade them for something else, it's likely that something else is something we value. It's a great way of checking ourselves – discovering how we might be lying to ourselves. Oftentimes, corporations, businesses, churches, clubs, individual people might say we value certain things, but as soon as we look at our budget or the way we're spending our money or our time, we discover that something different is true. What does the way we spend our money and our time as a church suggest that we value?

What do you value? What do you spend your money on? What do you spend your time on? What do you sacrifice other precious things or people or values for? Let's take a minute with that question. It would be great if you'd make a note of them in your bulletin or somewhere else. We're going to come back to this question in a few minutes.

Quiet Reflection.

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, at Matthew 6:19 – 21, Jesus had this to say about the things we value – about the things we treasure:

¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus' point here is not so much about whether or not it's ok for us to have treasures, as it is about our attitude toward those treasures. Sometimes those treasures, be they things or people or ideas, become so important to us that they become the point of life. Everything we do is about pursuing our treasure or holding onto our treasure once we have it. You might remember a story from much later in Matthew's gospel, in chapter 19. It's a story about a person who asked Jesus what he needed to do to have eternal life. Jesus' response, after some back and forth about keeping the commandments, was this: If you want to be perfect [which is what's required if you want to get into heaven], go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. The person, we're told, went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.¹

After the person went away, Jesus' disciples were astonished by what Jesus had said, because Jesus had gone on to say that it's easier for a camel to walk through the eye of a needle, than for a rich person to get into heaven. I think, sometimes, those of us who aren't rich, young rulers, look at him and say to ourselves, "Look at that rich young ruler who wouldn't give everything up and share it with those of us who feel poor!" We can get judgmental. But what if it's not just about money? What if it's about anything that we treasure?

What Jesus said to his disciples when they were asking how it was possible for anyone to get into heaven, was this: For mortals [for human beings] it is impossible, but for God all things are possible. In this story, Jesus is shedding light, not just on the reality of our treasures and how they become the centre of our lives, but he's also showing that there's nothing we can do to get into heaven – to have eternal life. It's not something we are capable of earning. It's not just the rich young ruler who was too greedy and wouldn't give away all of his possessions. None of us are capable, in our own power, of that kind of perfection. That's why we need Jesus. Jesus is the one who opens the way; Jesus is the one we follow into the kingdom of God.

I bring this story up because I think when we read Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, we're tempted to turn it into a statement about riches and wealth only. We're tempted to make it something of a parallel instruction to that story from Matthew 19. But this instruction – this commandment in the Sermon on the Mount – isn't just about wealth. It's not just about money. It's about anything we treasure – anything we put our trust in that's not God.

When Jesus invited his first disciples to follow him, they left everything to follow him. When Jesus invites us to follow him, it comes with the same expectation of total commitment to following – total commitment to Jesus. Whatever we may have been living for before Jesus, must become secondary to Jesus. However, we were living before Jesus, must be converted to a new way of living for Jesus.

That's what Jesus is talking about in these brief few verses in the Sermon on the Mount. He's confronting our split focus, our warring values, our earthly treasures. He's talking about anything that's so important to us, that it becomes the point of everything we do. When he says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," this is what he's getting at.

The heart is a metaphor. He's not talking about the heart as an organ that pumps blood inside us. He's not talking about Valentine's hearts that are all warm and fuzzy. For the centre of a person's being – the core of who we are. In Jesus' time, the heart was a metaphor that was used a lot to symbolize the centre of a person's being – the core of who a person is. When he says, "Where your treasure is, that is where your heart will be also," he's saying that's where the core of your being is going to be. Our treasures become the sun around which everything else in our lives revolves. That sun might be money or possessions, like with the rich young ruler, but it might just as easily be our honour, our education, our family, our freedom. What is the sun around which your life revolves? As you consider the things you made note of a few minutes ago – the things or people or ideas you value, consider them in light of Jesus' words: Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. There will you find the core of your being – the source of your motivation – the sun around which your life revolves.

Let's take another minute in the quiet of this place to think about that. Have a look at those things you value and hear Jesus' words: Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Quiet Reflection.

At first glance, the next words Jesus speaks in this Sermon on the Mount may seem to be completely disconnected from those we just read. But they aren't. Have a listen to verses 22 and 23:

²² The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

The eye is the lamp of the body. It's a metaphor for what we let into our lives. It's about how we see the world. It's the eye that sees other people's treasures and longs to possess them, or sees other people's needs and longs to meet them. It's the eye that determines whether we see the world through the lens of God's kingdom or through any of the earthly filters that war against or

subtly shift our focus away from God's kingdom. It's the eye that hones in on our own treasures and helps determine where our heart will be.

Last week we looked at the beginning of Matthew 6, in which Jesus was very concerned about why we do the things we do – particularly the religious acts we do. In those verses, Jesus warned against giving alms or praying or fasting in any way that draws attention to us. He reminded us to check our motivations behind our religious acts. He instructed us to do these things in secret – to remember that we do those things for God, not for ourselves, and not for the world around us.

This week, we've moved out of the religious sphere and into the places we live our lives in the world. We've moved out of the synagogue or the church sanctuary into our homes and our places of business, into our schools and our coffee shops and our grocery stores. We've moved into the world, the source and the home of so many of the things we treasure. And we're reminded that the world is not in sync with God's kingdom. We're reminded that the world is the domain of the devil. We're reminded that God's kingdom is not yet fully here – fully realized. And yet, our treasures are so often rooted in this world where God's kingdom has not yet fully arrived.

The things we treasure take hold of our hearts. They inform the way we see the world. And they affect what we do, as well. Jesus said, in verse 24:

²⁴ No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon.

I need to make a quick note about a translation issue with this verse. The last word of this verse may, in whatever translation you're reading, be *money*, or it may be *wealth*, but neither of these words quite capture the full meaning of the word Jesus used, which was *mammon*. Mammon does encompass wealth and money, but it's bigger than that. It's a Semitic term for any treasure a person trusts in. What Jesus is really saying in this last sentence is that we cannot serve both God and anything or anyone else.

This whole metaphor of slaves and masters is problematic for us in so many ways, not least of which is the true evil of slavery as we know it. That's why often we change up the wording from slaves to servants. It seems a bit less evil, I think. The point Jesus is making is difficult for many of us to accept. Because there's not a third option offered here. There's no choice to not be a servant or a slave at all. There's no choice to not have a master at all. There are only two choices: we can serve God or we can serve that which we treasure.

When a person begins to recover from an addiction, one of the most important things they must do is admit that they aren't in control. Whatever it is they're addicted to, is what's in control. I think this is imperative for all of us, regardless of whether or not we're an addict. It butts against everything our culture tells us about freedom and individualism and autonomy. When we start talking about being slaves or servants our backs get up and we become defensive and shout out, "I am my own person!" But Jesus doesn't offer independence or freedom from a master as an option. We live our lives in service. The only question is who or what we live our lives in service to. Do we live our lives in service to God? Or do we live our lives in service to whatever or whomever we treasure?

This is hard, not just for us to accept, but for us to face in ourselves. Have a look at those treasures you noted earlier. How much of what you do in your life is done in service to what you treasure? How much of what you do is done to grow it or to maintain it or to protect it? You cannot serve both God and whatever or whoever it is that you treasure. Take a minute with that truth. What does it mean for you?

Quiet Reflection.

The only treasure that will not pull us away from God – the only treasure that cannot be destroyed or stolen, that will not darken or blur our vision – is God’s kingdom. In Matthew 13, Jesus described the kingdom of Heaven – God’s kingdom – as being “like a treasure hidden in a field. When a person found it, they hid it again, and then in their joy went and sold all they and bought that field.” He also described it as being “like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When they found one of great value, they went away and sold everything they had and bought it.”ⁱⁱ

God’s kingdom is the only treasure worthy of our hearts. It’s the only treasure that will not darken or blur our vision. It’s the only treasure worthy of our devotion. Because God’s kingdom is the way of Jesus. It’s the way of abundant life. It’s light in a dark world. It’s redemption and reconciliation. It’s peace – shalom. It’s love and faith and joy. Every other treasure pales in comparison.

Sometimes, the things we treasure are good things. It’s good to value your family. All the things on Walmer’s website that we say we value – prayer and the Bible and discipleship – are good things. But if they become – if *any* of them become – if the Bible becomes – the centre of our life... The Bible is not the kingdom of God. If our family becomes the centre of our life... It is not the kingdom of God. Those things might help us discover and learn about and enter into the kingdom of God, but we dare not replace them with God’s kingdom. God’s kingdom is the treasure. It’s the thing we’re waiting for – a time when all that is evil and wrong, all the death and destruction and sin in this world is no more – is defeated forever. That’s what Jesus put in motion. That’s what we remember as we head through Lent and into Easter as we focus on the cross and the sacrifice Jesus made because he valued us – he treasured us – as essential to God’s kingdom. He was willing to give up even his life for that.

Is what we treasure, the kingdom of God? Is the kingdom of God the centre of our being? the sun around which our lives revolve? Or is it anything else?

ⁱ Matthew 19:16-22

ⁱⁱ Matthew 13:44-46.