

Treasures in Heaven

Psalm 16:1-11, Matthew 6:19-34

November 14, 1999

One afternoon not long ago a young mother in our church was home after school with her children and some other children were there with them and while she was working in a cabinet in the kitchen two family heirloom dishes—one a baby porringer of her husband's family and the other a platter of her grandmother's fell out and crashed to the floor broken in many pieces. And the noise of the children suddenly became a deafening silence as everyone turned to see what had happened. Her son, studying, got up from his table, came around, assessed the situation quickly and seeking to comfort her said, "It's okay, Mom. You have heavenly treasures." And in the midst of a real loss, there was cause for great rejoicing. For our children have learned the truths of the gospel and teach them to us again. They remind us of what is really important.

Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves the treasures on earth where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust consumes and thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Behind these commandments, behind these instructions, behind these do this, do that, lies the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news. One that we do have a treasure in heaven and two that we can lay up for ourselves the treasures in heaven. These truths function on many levels. But first of all, and most importantly, we do have a treasure in heaven and his name is Jesus Christ. We have a treasure in heaven and his name is Jesus Christ. If you do not remember anything else from today's service, please remember that. Jesus Christ is our Lord and Master. He is our Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer. And he is our Savior. This is the single most important reality in our lives. We do have a treasure in heaven, and his name is Jesus Christ.

It also the case that we can lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. Anything that is pleasing to God our Father is of eternal significance, worth, and value. That may include worship and adoration, praise and prayer, loving other people, caring for them and serving them. Yes, we know that salvation is a gift that we cannot possibly earn. Nothing we say here counts against that, but the gift of salvation does not negate the eternal significance of our words and actions following that either. Every good deed, every tender mercy, every kindness shown is a

treasure in heaven. Jesus urges us to cherish, to treasure, to value what is heavenly, lasting, and eternal.

Now we may want to ask why we should do that. Why should we value, treasure, and cherish what is invisible in favor over what is visible? Jesus gives us three reasons which amount to saying that things here fade away and are lost. Things in this world are subject to the ravages of nature and the natural processes of decay and decline, as he said, by the moth which consumes. Things in this world are subject to the ravages of time as indicated by the word “rust,” which works slowly, but over great periods of time can consume even massive pieces of iron. Things in this world are also subject to the ravages of human evil and to thievery. So what we have here is not lasting, but is only passing.

The other reason that Jesus gives us for this encouragement is that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. This sounds backward to us. We would think and prefer to say where our heart is, there we put our treasure. But Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. Find the treasure first, he says, and there you will have a person’s heart. Where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. That’s the way we are made. And with our treasure, with our ambition, with the goals of our lives, with our purposes, with our aims, with what we cherish, God captures our heart, our soul, and ourselves.

To treasure our heavenly treasures is to have our whole lives oriented toward God. How can we apply these ancient teachings of Christ to our lives? First of all again, we have a treasure in heaven, and his name is Jesus Christ. Therefore we have an ambition, a passion, a love, a treasuring, a cherishing, an eagerness for God. Jesus Christ does not teach us to squelch our ambition, to push down our goals. He knows that’s the way we are made; that is who we are; that is what we are about, but he does redirect those. He focuses our lives, our hearts, our souls, our energies, our ambitions upon God and then the imagery becomes athletic—run the good race; fight the good fight. Be strong and eager in the pursuit of our ambition for the things of God.

Moreover, it is because we have a treasure in heaven whose name is Jesus Christ, it is because of that, that we also have countless other treasures in heaven which we refer to as the communion of the saints. God has given us the gift of eternal life. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ God has promised us eternal life. And because we have life eternal we have relationships that are eternal. Relationships that we will enjoy with the saints who have gone before us. Relationships that we will enjoy with the saints yet to come after us, and, yes, relationships in eternity that we will share with each other, those whom we love and know and cherish now. The love that we have for each other is a part of eternity.

The building we are in today will someday vanish. The nation of which we are citizens shall someday vanish. The planet which we inhabit shall someday vanish. But you and I will still be alive in the presence of God and his Christ, and the love that we share now will carry over into that time.

The relationships that we build now are a part of the life of the heaven yet to come and are a part of our heavenly treasures. Why should we waste our time on that which is passing away when we could spend our energies on that which is eternal?

It is also the case that attachment to heavenly treasures means detachment from earthly treasures. A good exercise in this, a good indication of this, is found in our stewardship and in our giving. If we cling too tightly to the money we have, that's a pretty good indicator that we love it too much. Jesus says much later in the Gospel According to Matthew to the rich young ruler, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

You can not have it both ways. You cannot love God and love money—it is one or the other. You cannot have heavenly treasures and earthly treasures in the sense of storing them up and cherishing them and treasuring them. We cherish the one or the other.

One way to lay up treasures in heaven. One way to show ourselves that we are not under the control of our earthly treasures is to relinquish the earthly treasures, to give of our substance generously and graciously and even sacrificially to the glory of God and for the work and mission of God's church.

One of our members told me of the days in this church when the offering plates would be so full that runners from the back had to bring up empty offering plates to switch them out several times to finish taking up the offering. When will we have a problem like that again? I urge us all to pledge and to give more than we ever dreamed possible.

In this world dishes break, and treasures are lost, and loved ones die. We know that. But there is another world, a better place. So in the name of Jesus Christ who is our treasure in heaven, I urge us all to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

To God be the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

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