

Title: Where is your Treasure?
Text: Matthew 6.19-21
Theme: Living for Eternity, Free to Serve
Series: Living For Eternity – Nov. 2006
Prop Stmt.

Read Text:

I saw a sign on a bank this week that read, “Let us create more for you.” Now that is interesting – isn’t it? How can a bank create? How can it bring something into existence? Now, I know what they are trying to say, but the truth is, we can only re-arrange what is already made. We are the creation, we cannot in the true sense of the word – create.

“In the beginning God created...” (Genesis 1.1)

God made, while He himself was not made. That means that God is eternal, he has no beginning. God is independent. He needs no food for energy, no rest for strength, no daylight for warmth, and no instruction for information and wisdom. He is self-existent and self-determinative. He is the One from whom all purposes and actions come without any outside motive or undetected influence. He is absolute in his dominion, eternal in his power, unequalled in his strength and unparalleled in his skill. He is; the most pure, the most consistent and the highest spiritual being of all essences. He is infinitely perfect, eternally self-sufficient, and making all that has ever been made, he himself needs nothing of what he has made. He is limitless in his immensity, inconceivable in his mode of existence and indescribable in his essence. He is known fully, by Himself alone because only an infinite mind can comprehend an infinite being. Simply put, God is a Being who, from his infinite wisdom cannot err or be deceived. He will not misguide, or break down because He is incapable of anything less than the very highest of perfection and can do nothing except what is eternally just, and right.¹

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. There is a lot to ponder in that statement. Particularly for a world that thinks that getting to the next level of a video game is awesome! Or finding a two-for-one deal at Wal Mart. You want awesome? The Hubble Space Telescope has given us the ability to see things that are truly incredible. Take for example the Eagle Nebula. This star-forming region in the constellation Serpens is located about 7,000 light years from planet earth. If you were traveling at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second) it would take you 7,000 years to get there. But once you got there, since the Eagle Nebula is about six trillion miles from top to bottom it would take you over a year to travel from the top to the bottom. I love how one reporter describes the Eagle Nebula: “Towering clouds of gases trillions of miles high, backlit by

¹ Adopted from Adam Clarke’s definition of God found in Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature, vol. 3 John McClintock and James Strong, eds. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1894) pp. 903-904.

nuclear fires in new forming stars, galaxies cartwheeling into collision and sending explosive shock waves boiling through millions of light-years of time and space.”²

And we think we are something special because we built a telescope that can see this! Think of it! For thousands of years, God has been watching, and enjoying and rejoicing and celebrating His own handiwork. God gets a front row seat where He can laugh and feel pleasure in what He has made. William Cowper wrote:

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never ending skill,
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.

This awesome, holy being created this universe and as an amazingly intricate part of His entire creation, he made this world, this earth, this terrestrial ball, as our home. This God who did not need us, made us. This God who did not need our affection, chose to love us. But only God is God. We are not God. We are created, dependent, mortal, insufficient, tired, hungry, irritable, squirmy and rather ignorant beings. We need revelation from God. Without revelation from our Creator, we would go our own way and do that which is right in our own eyes. We need someone to tell us how to live, otherwise we would think that this life here and now is all that there is. That is what we are tempted to think. We forget that eternity is what really matters. For that reason, every November I usually preach a series on “Living for Eternity.” The theme that I have chosen for this year is “Free to Serve.”

Some of you watch someone play the guitar or piano and you think – “Oh I wish I could do that?” You are not free to serve like that because you did not do the hard work of practicing to get to that level. The same thing is true in every area of the life of a Christian and frankly in the life of a church. If you want to be free to help another person with a problem, you have to be in a position to be able to help. A tow-truck caught in quick sand is not much benefit. A lot of good it is to the car stuck in the ditch for the tow-truck to say – “Hey, I know what it feels like to be stuck.” If you want to help someone break the bondage of drugs or alcohol, you have to be able to do more than say – “I know what you are going through.”

A young man I knew was dying of cancer. As he lay in the hospital, a chaplain came in to see him. Realizing that there was no medical hope for the young man, the chaplain simply shook his head and said, “You are in tough shape” and turned to walk out of the room. This chaplain did not have anything to offer because his own life was not free to serve where it was needed the most. Some of you are not free to help others because your own life is not in order. When you live for the moment, instead of for eternity, you really have nothing to share. Some of you are in bondage to debt and you are not free to serve because you make so many poor choices because you live for the moment. Some of you are in bondage to your stuff. You have to spend so much time and attention taking care of your stuff that you are not free to serve. Therefore, for the next several weeks, I

² Joan Beck, in the Daily News (LA), Nov. 2, 1995.

am going to be talking about your heart, your money, your stuff and eternity. I am aware of the stereotype church that always has its hand out begging. I resent that picture, and have because of that probably neglected to teach as systematically on this as I should. Now, follow the logic of God's Word.

- God is God!
- God is good! The cross answers that.
- God created you to enjoy life with him. You will not enjoy life like you were intended to enjoy life if you try to live in disobedience to him.
- God is wise. He knows that He is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him. He also knows that in order to be satisfied in Him we have to fully trust Him.
- God knows that if you trust in stuff and money, instead of trusting in Him, that you will not enjoy Him because you are loving something more than Him.

Therefore, God loans you stuff and money as a test to see how much you really trust Him. This is a struggle for all of us which is why Christ says so much about money and stuff. This passage is part of what we call the Sermon on the Mount. Here Christ is telling what it means to live under His kingdom. The commands are very clear.

1. **Do not treasure treasures on earth.** V.19

Let's define some terms:

A. **What are treasures on earth?**

In this context, Christ is referring to something that moths and rust can destroy as well as something that a thief could take. His audience would understand that to be clothes and money and frankly just about anything of material value. An earthly treasure is anything that is vulnerable to being corrupted, lost, broken or stolen.

B. **What does it mean to store up?**

Jesus is not talking about saving as an act of prudent stewardship in order to be prepared for tough times. He is talking about the tendency to hoard things and to trust in what you have. We can make an idol out of anything. The question isn't – do you own something – the question is – does that something own you? People hoard things (money, magazines, animals, stuff) because they appear to have value, or they appear to provide security or they get “love” from them (animals) that they do not find in relationships. In one case in Lancaster, CA a lady had over 250 animals in her home, 200 of them were Chihuahuas. Now, that's a little extreme and these sorts of stories appear on a regular basis, but we are all tempted in this area. People hold on to certain things even to their own demise, because they appear to have value to them. They appear to have value because people have lost sight of what is truly valuable.

One of the most telling illustrations of this is the incredible number of rentable storage lockers that we have all over this area. They are easy to build, easy to maintain and are more profitable to own (I am told) than apartment buildings. They are also incredibly popular because people keep buying stuff that they cannot use, but stuff that they don't want to get rid of, because it owns them. David Wells said, "For while modern life fills us up with its goods and trinkets, it also empties us out."

Why do we want so much? We want so much because we have been willing to settle for so little. But you were made for more than that. God does not have you on this earth so you can accumulate stuff. How do you know if you treasure earthly treasures? Do you get a little nervous when the preacher says he is going to speak about money? Do you get defensive?

What happens when we focus on treasures on the earth?

- We ignore God's Word.

That is what Adam and Eve did. They focused on what they thought would bring them happiness and disobeyed God's clear instruction to their demise.

- We destroy those around us.

That is what Achan did. Achan's lust for that garment and wedge of gold in Jericho resulted in his own death and the death of his own family. People who's life is controlled by stuff are miserable people because they do not know what life is really about. You think that money buys you happiness, and you find that it doesn't, so you try to buy relationships and affection with it – what a joke! It's not the money – it's how you view it, and use it as a means to use others.

- We are willing to sin to get it or keep it.

Ananias and his wife were willing to lie to the church about a financial transaction. What a waste! But we can do the same thing. We can get so preoccupied with a thing, that we will neglect the church, and rob from the Lord in order to get it. It is easy for a pastor to get preoccupied with earthly things. Like most of you, I am susceptible to a compliment. If you say to me, I have listened to MacArthur, Piper, Sproul, Mohler and Dever and that sermon you preached has to be the greatest sermon I have ever heard, I would probably give you anything you wanted if I had it. Seriously, if I live my life for earthly praise and I treasure and hoard for myself the praises of men – guess what...they don't last. And what is worse, in order to get the approval of people, I will compromise the truth of God. That too is storing up treasure on earth.

- We waste our lives.

God did not design you so that you would simply waste your life.

2. **Store up treasures in heaven.** V.20

So, the whole point of this message is, give more money to the church – right? Wrong! First of all, there are plenty of examples where church leaders have told their people to

give money so the leaders can store up treasure on earth and that isn't right. Also, if you give money in order to be seen by others, and if we encourage that type of giving, then we have really missed the point of Christ's message. If you are going to live under the reign of Christ, you need to know that even if your external behavior and surface attitude appears to be correct, God is not willing to define righteousness in such shallow terms. God wants your heart. That is why he goes after the issues that affect our hearts. Earlier he said that if you give so that others will think you are spiritual, He is not impressed.

So, how do you store up treasures in heaven? Invest in the priorities of God, without a "What's in it for me" attitude. Do things because they honor God, not because you get a reward. The way you handle money is part of that. Time is part of that. Your abilities are part of that. Give generously to this church. Teach your family by your example that you understand this. Truly, the happiest people I know are the people who are deeply in love with Christ and therefore are deeply in love with His church.

- 1) Christ died for the church and has called you to be part of it. This is your family.
- 2) The local church is the means that God has established to reach people and grow them into fully devoted followers of his.
- 3) When you give your money and your time to this ministry, you know how it is used because you know the people who are making those decisions. You get the reports. You get to ask questions.

And he lays it on the table. Here it is - you cannot serve God and serve money at the same time. You cannot have your heart in heaven while your heart is being controlled by the stuff of this world.

3. **Your heart follows your treasure.** V.21

Isn't this an interesting statement? Do you see what Jesus is saying? You can lead your heart. You can lead your heart by what you put your treasure in. Guys, when was the last time you invested in your wife? If you are thinking, that we just don't have those same romantic feelings like we used to, invest in her, invest in him. That's the point of this - your heart follows what you invest in. And based on what Christ has died for, I am telling you that you cannot put your treasure in anything greater than the church.

I am not a fund-raiser, I am a pastor. It is my goal to see your joy deepened and your hope secure. I want to help you be free to serve. Free from the lies of materialism, free from the bondage of debt, free from the bondage of sinful habits that steal your joy and free to be able to meet legitimate needs as they arise. I want you to be free financially, and free personally. What is true for you individually, is also true for us as a church family. We want to be free to be able to respond to ministry needs as they arise. I am convinced that we need to pay down what we owe on this building so that we are increasingly free to be able to serve others more in missions and in our community ministry here. Early next year, we will be presenting some steps to move us in that direction. The way we handle money is a barometer of how we view the priorities of the Christ and his kingdom. That is the heart that I want you grasp.