

FAITH AND TREASURE

(1) HOW TO FIND IT

Matthew 6:19-21

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SCRIPTURE

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21 NRSV).

INTRODUCTION

Did you ever go on a treasure hunt? Even if you haven't, we are all familiar with stories about looking for lost or buried treasure, especially those involving pirates. I can remember going off with my friends with shovels in hand to look for buried treasure on many a summer day. Most times we just headed off into the fields or woods near where we lived. (Obviously, I did not grow up in an urban environment.) When we saw a spot that looked interesting or had some loose soil, we would begin to dig. Sometimes we would find glass bottles, and one time I found an old hatchet, but usually we came up empty-handed. If we were really adventurous, we would make up a map and sometimes bury treasure ourselves and see if we could find it later.

Today, modern treasure hunters use metal detectors to look for buried treasure. You often see them at the beach. There are also those who look for sunken ships and their treasure using sonar to scan the ocean floor.

For most of us, our treasure will never consist of Spanish doubloons or caches of rubies. Instead, we need to ask ourselves the far less exciting but far more important question, “What do I really treasure?”

1. WHAT DO I REALLY TREASURE?

Jesus says:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal” (6:19).

In the ancient world currency and banking were not as widespread or as reliable as they are today. So people tended to accumulate wealth in other ways. Many invested in fine

and elaborate clothes. When Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, wished to make some profit out of an officer Elisha had helped, he asked him for two festal garments (see 2 Kings 5:22). He did this, not because he was going to a party but because the clothes were of great financial value. But such things were foolish to set the heart upon, for the moths might get at them, when they were stored away, and all their beauty and their value be destroyed.

The word "rust" in this passage is not limited to the oxidation of iron. The literal meaning of the word (*brosis*) is "an eating away." This can describe what rust does to iron but it can also refer to any consumable item. Many people in Jesus day accumulated wealth by storing corn and grain in great barns. But the grain could be eaten away by rats and mice, and thus be lost.

Many people kept what money they had in a small hole in a wall in their home. But walls in those days were little more than baked clay and more than once a burglar successfully stole someone's treasure by digging into the wall of the home from the outside.

These then were the three most common ways people accumulated wealth: fine clothing, grain storage, and a secret hole in the wall. Perhaps this helps us to better appreciate Jesus' warning:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal" (6:19).

This passage is not saying that it is sinful to have money or to have such things as life insurance, retirement plans, and savings accounts. Nor is material gain in and of itself wrong. We can even agree with the late great heavyweight champion Joe Louis who said of money: "I don't necessarily like it, but it quiets my nerves."

Nevertheless, earthly treasures can consume us if we let them. Jesus is telling us that we are not to set our hearts and hopes on that which does not last.

There is 2.3 billion square feet of rentable self-storage space in the United States. We have so much stuff that our homes can't hold it. But our treasure is not found in stuff.

By the way, the Faith and Treasure series is not an indictment on stuff. You got to have *some* stuff. While still living in Rapid City, and in anticipation of changing our residence, my wife and I placed a lot of our stuff into a storage unit. Then when we got to our new home in Battle Creek, we used almost everything we had packed away. The furniture, tools, extra bedding and what not all went to good use. What I learned, though, was that

those things are not my treasure.

Over the years I have had the opportunity and privilege to be with a number of individuals in their last days. Rarely in those last moments do people talk about the things they have acquired on earth – the kind of treasure that moth and rust can destroy, the kind that thieves can break in and steal. People in their last moments seem to have a different perspective on what to treasure. They talk about their family, friends, moments with God, children they have taught, mission trips they have taken. They talk about vacations and laughter, and they share stories that are amusing and meaningful. They talk less about salaries and more about promises shared with God and with people.

2. HEART FOLLOWS TREASURE

This series on Faith and Treasure is about where you are investing your life, but there's no denying that it's also about money. That's because Jesus talked about money. In fact, Jesus talked more about money than about heaven and hell combined. Jesus talked more about money than anything except the Kingdom of God. Eleven of Jesus' thirty-nine parables are about money. One of every seven verses in the Gospel of Luke talks about money. Why did Jesus talk so much about money?

In the Sermon on the Mount we see that Jesus is looking at the heart. He cares about the hearts of God's people. Jesus talks about money and treasure because he knows that they affect our hearts. He knows money stresses our relationships. Money causes division in and among people. Money and its pursuit can be all-consuming and burdensome. Those who have lost jobs or find money hard to find will tell you that it is not just a financial issue but an emotional and spiritual one. Jesus talks about money because he cares about our hearts. He caress about our souls.

We usually think that where our heart is, our treasure will follow. Jesus says that it is the opposite. Where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. This is not just a change in semantics. Jesus knows that the place where we spend our money will become our treasure, whether we want it to or not. Financial commitments require time and energy. They pull our heart in a direction that perhaps neither we nor God ever intended. If you buy a house that requires a large percentage of your income, you have no choice but to spend time and energy and money in paying for it. When you put your treasure into anything, your heart will follow.

Want to find your treasure? It is quite simple, really. Just look where you spend your money, time and energy. That is your treasure, whether you like it or not. Do you feel your heart divided? Want to change how you feel? Then change how you spend your time, money and energy.

Billy Graham was asked late in his life, "If you could, would you go back and do anything differently?" His answer may surprise you:

"Yes, of course. I'd spend more time at home with my family, and I'd study more and preach less. I wouldn't have taken so many speaking engagements. . . . Whenever I counsel someone who feels called to be an evangelist, I always urge them to guard their time and not feel like they have to do everything."

3. HEART INVESTMENT

Jesus says:

“Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (6:20).

If you didn't have your debt or commitments, and if you could choose where to store up treasure, where would it be? Jesus tells us we have the opportunity to lay up treasure in heaven. When we are investing our lives in the things of God, we find that our hearts no longer feel disconnected from God but rather are in unity with God.

The phrase "treasures in heaven" was well known in Jesus' day. It referred to unselfish acts of kindness and generosity. In other words, what is selfishly hoarded is lost, but what is generously given away brings treasure in heaven.

There is an old Spanish proverb that says, "there are no pockets in a shroud." In modern English we would say, "You never see a U-haul behind a hearse." We cannot take our material possessions with us when we die. The only thing we can take out of this world is the essence of our character or souls. So we need to be careful not to lose our hearts to this world and to the things of this world. Jesus put it this way:

"What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?" (Luke 9:25 NRSV).

Eugene Peterson translates it this way:

"What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?"

So let us invest in treasures that endure, that have import for all eternity, knowing that what we keep we lose and what we give away in Christ's name we shall have forever.