

Real Treasure

Matthew 6:19-24

**A sermon preached by Dr. Calvin Warpula
at the West University Church of Christ,
Houston, Texas, on August 7, 2011**

What a joy it is to be home with you today! I have been gone for three Sundays on vacation. Judy and I had a refreshing and uplifting time with our families in TN and in IL. I appreciated your prayers while I was away. Every day, I prayed for you and the ongoing ministry here. The first ten days we were gone we spent with my brother and three sisters and their spouses in the Great Smokey Mtns. We also did some painting and repair at my sister's home in Knoxville. Her husband is Russell Cook who recently resigned his ministry at the West End church due to his brain cancer. I am thankful to say that Russell is doing as well for a patient who has had surgery and treatment for glioblastoma. Judy and I next traveled to her home town of Pittsfield, IL, about 100 miles north of St. Louis to visit her mother who was celebrating her 90th birthday. The family reunion here brought 105 children, grandchildren and great grandchildren together. Judy and I brought seven of our grandchildren home with us for four days. Judy is delivering them now to their homes in Austin and Midland. She will be back Tuesday night. Thank you for giving us this time to be with our families and be strengthened and refreshed. We love and appreciate you.

Do you know what subject Jesus talked about more than any other social issue? He taught more about this subject than he did marriage, politics, work, sex, or power. What was this subject that Jesus spoke about in half of his parables? It's something necessary to provide for our lives and yet at the same time it's something that can easily totally absorb us and maybe even be loved and worshiped? What is this subject? Its money and possessions.

Money is a problem then and now. We are concerned with how to get it, how to keep it, and how to spend it. A husband was berating his wife for her extravagant spending. "How many times do I have to tell you," he shouted, "that it's economically unsound to spend money before you get it?" "Oh, I don't know about that," the wife snapped, "This way, if you don't get the money, at least you've got something to show for it." Today, personal

debt is skyrocketing. Household debt and installment debt is at its highest level. Hundreds of million credit cards are circulating, many of them maxed out. Collection agencies are handling millions of delinquent accounts every year.

For the past several weeks, we have been in a careful study of the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. While I was away, Lane dealt with the teachings of Jesus in the first part of Matthew chapter six. Here Jesus talks our relationship to the father in giving to the poor, praying, and fasting. The main thought here is warnings against hypocrisy. In the second half of Matthew chapter six, Jesus talks about our relationship to the world around us. Here the main thought is on anxiety. These subjects, which may seem separate and opposite, are actually related at the core because they both deal with whether our lives are self-centered or God-centered. When we focus on self in doing good and worshiping, then we are hypocritical. When we focus on self and our earthly needs and worry about life, then we are anxious. Both of these place God in the background and us in the front.

During his life and ministry here on earth, Jesus lived in the midst of this world, not in a monastery. He showed us how we should live in the world, but trust God and put our priorities on heavenly values.

Let's start by noticing what Jesus said in Matthew 6, verses 19-21.
[read]

Jesus teaches negatively and positively: our treasures are not to be on earth, but they are to be in heaven.

Jesus is not against money. Money is simply a commodity of exchange but because it represents our blood, sweat and tears, our lives, then it can easily become our god. "Greed is good" can easily become our driving force and focus.

Jesus is not against money. He never told us to sell everything and live as parasites off the resources of others. The Bible teaches that both poverty and riches can be a curse. Hear the book of Proverbs, chapter thirty: [read vs. 7-9]. If it was not right to own things, then the eighth commandment against stealing is meaningless.

When Jesus speaks of treasures on earth he is not just speaking about money. These treasures would include any earthly goals, desire, and ambition. Jesus is dealing here with a basic attitude of life. Do we get our real joys in this world? Are we in love with this world's status, position, work, and family? Jesus is encouraging us not to focus our lives on anything that stops in this world. We lay up treasures on earth by giving our time and

attention to the things of this world. We think about them, we plan our lives around them, and we give our priorities, energies, and concentrations to the things of this world. We, in a word, are self-centered and earth-centered, and not God-centered and heaven-centered,

Jesus tells us to use money, not love it. He tells us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. How do we do that? By using our money to give to and serve the needs of people. In Luke 16:9, Jesus said that using our money to help teach others about God, is a way to bring people into the kingdom of heaven where they will be our friends for eternity. Hear the Lord [read]. It's interesting that alchemists have dreamed of turning lead into gold but Jesus says that we can turn money into eternal investments.

The apostle Paul taught the same thing in his first letter to Timothy, chapter 6. Hear what he wrote: [read vs. 17-19]

Later in Matthew, in chapter 25, among the very last teaching of Jesus before he went to the cross, Jesus describes the final judgment. Those who use their money to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and care for the sick and imprisoned are those who are welcomed into the heavenly kingdom.

Jesus speaks of our earthly treasures being eaten up by rot, rust and decay. Nothing is permanent on this earth. Our land is filled with cemeteries, scrap yards, and landfills to prove it. We are all losing it. When Howard Hughes died, someone asked, "How much did he leave?" Another answered correctly, "He left it all." I have never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer. We cannot take it with us, but we can send it on ahead.

We are just pilgrims here on this earth. We have one purpose: to live for the eternal, not the earthly, for the earthly is so temporary and is passing away. Abraham was a man who left it all for God. He moved from place to place under the divine guidance of God. He was looking for a city that endured. Hear these words from the book of Hebrews, chapter 11: [read vs. 8-10, 13-16]. God gave Abraham the ultimate test when he asked him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on the altar. Abraham was ready to give up his son to obey God. He believed and trusted God, no matter what. This gives us a right view of our money and our possessions.

So, good people, we are just pilgrims on this earth. We just pass a milestone a day, and move our tent a day's march nearer heaven each day. I am here for God, not for myself. When considering any purchase, or use of money and possessions, my question is not, "How much will it cost?" but "Will this glorify God?" We live in a state of blessed detachment. I do not cling to things. I am not governed by them. I am their master, not their

servant. Our one aim in life, our one joy in life, and our one desire in life is to give glory to God.

A wealthy man moved in next door to a Quaker. The Quaker was a plain and simple man. The rich man moved in his expensive furniture, clothing, and decorative pieces. The Quaker noticed all these things and said to his neighbor, "Brother, if you have need of anything, please come see me and I will tell you how to get by without it." Sometimes I have walked through the Galleria, or a big supercenter discount store, and never bought a thing, but thought to myself, "Look at all the things I can live without."

There's a verse in the Jewish writing called the Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus, in the apocrypha, in a modern paraphrase that says, "God made man simple; man's complex problems are of his own devising" (chapter 29). Jesus knew this. He was a simple man with simple tastes. He spoke about economics more than any other subject. He knew how luxuries can become necessities. Things can own us instead of us owning them. We all know that clutter can be debilitating. That's why it feels so good to clean out our closets, our garages, and our attics. We are simplifying our lives. We need to buy things for their usefulness, rather than their status. We need to develop a habit of giving things away. We can learn to enjoy things without owning them. Owning things is an obsession in our culture. We can develop a greater gratitude for creation: the air we breathe, the water we drink. We can watch the hummingbirds, the butterflies, and appreciate the beauties of the periwinkles and sunflowers. We can grow a garden, even if it's just a few tomato plants on our patio. We can avoid "buy now, pay later" schemes. We can refuse things that keep us from our main goals in life.

Earthly treasures do not satisfy. We always seem to want and need more and more. The more we gather possessions in order to feel secure, the more we feel we need them in order to feel secure. Then the more we need to guard them to maintain our security. Therefore the more secure we think we become, the less secure we actually are.

Jesus says that the earthly treasures do not last. They are just temporal and passing away. Actually, nothing is really secure in this world. Even we ourselves are passing away. Who cares who the richest man in the cemetery is? One day, several years ago, Dennis R. Barnhart of Los Gatos, CA became a multimillionaire. He put his stock in his company, Eagle Computer, Inc., on the open market. In just one day, he gained \$37 million. \$37 million. He was just 40 years old. He had the world on a string. Or did he? That very afternoon, on his way home, his red Ferrari ran through a

highway guard rail and into a ravine. He was killed instantly. What good was that \$37 million to him then?

He who dies with the most toys still dies. As a kid, I loved to play Monopoly. It's a game where you buy land and collect money. When you have a monopoly on a set of properties, then you can buy houses and hotels and collect rent. Eventually, one player gains enough money and property to bankrupt the other players. When the game is over, all the pieces go back into the box. People who live for the present, who spend their strength on what cannot last, are like children who play Monopoly as though it were reality. In the end, we all get put in the box and we are gone. What matters is what remains when the game on earth is over.

A few years ago, a 30-year-old English woman met a handsome Arab. Over the next two years, they dated, supposedly fell in love and planned to be married. She became pregnant with their child.

She needed to travel to Israel and bought tickets to fly El Al, the Israeli airline to Tel Aviv. Her lover and husband-to-be bought her new luggage and packed it for her. They kissed goodbye. She went through security to the plane. At the entrance the El Al guard asked to see her handbag. "Sure," she said, "no problem."

The guard noticed that it weighed ten pounds and had a thick bottom. He opened it. Underneath the woman's personal items there was a false bottom with plastic explosives. These explosives would have blown up in flight, killing everyone on board, and caused the crash of the plane. Everyone would die, including the sweetheart and her unborn child.

A few hours later they caught the boy friend. He had plotted his finance's death in an act of terrorism against Israel.

Now, this world that we love and serve will someday blow up on us and we will lose it all. The devil wraps his bombs in pretty packages with plenty of glitter and tinsel. Nobody serves the devil and profits eternally by it. We may be doing great now but that's part of the plot. The girl did great with her lover until the bomb detonated. To serve the world is to commit suicide. Every penny invested in this earth will be lost. If we have lived and loved for the things of this world only, then we will perish with them.

Jesus speaks of heavenly treasures that never decay or perish. The apostle Peter wrote that we have reserved for us in heaven an inheritance than can never perish, spoil or fade (I Peter 1:4). No one can ever rob God. We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen (2 Cor. 4:18). We must judge all things from heaven's viewpoint. Ask yourself about your values, your use of time and energy, and resources: "In one hundred years,

what difference will it make?” What difference will it make in fifty billion trillion millennia?

My encouragement for you is to fix your eyes on Jesus (Heb. 12:2). Set your mind on heavenly things (Col. 3:2). “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” The things we treasure are the things that we will live for and the things that we will be passionate about. Live for God. Live for the world to come. Make every decision in view of eternity.

Invest in heavenly treasure by using your money to give and serve God, the church, missions, and the needs of others. The prophet Malachi spoke of those who serve their own pleasures and rob God (Malachi 3:8-10). I wonder what he would say to church members today who spend more on recreation and entertainment than they do in giving to God’s work. The tithe of the Old Testament and of our Jewish friends is ten per cent, and yet the giving level of most church members is about 2 to 3%. Your giving to God’s work reflects your treasures and your heart. No one who ever put God first in life ever died to regret it. Those who live for this world die and have an eternity of regret.

Think on these things. Let the words of Jesus challenge you today to invest in heavenly treasure.

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