

Treasure Map

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[0 : 00] Hi guys, keep your Bibles open to that passage in Matthew and let me pray for us.

Father, even as we come to this passage, which is for many of us very familiar, we ask that Lord you might again speak to us from it and if needs be to challenge us to change our lives. Give us your spirit to help us to do that. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, one of my daughter's favorite shops is Smeagol. They're here tonight so they can vouch for it. I'm sure most of you are familiar with it. It sells brightly colored stationery and accessories, mainly for young girls, I think. So often when they have saved enough pocket money, that's when I would take them there to spend. And, you know, it would normally be no more than \$10 at a time. And so as I take them, what's in my mind is that, you know, really this should take no more than 10 minutes. Of course, what was I thinking? Or as my girls would say, silly daddy. Because here they were shopping like it was their last \$10 ever.

And boy, do they have some hard choices to make. So is it going to be the colored, fruity smelling pens or the fancy notepad, the sharpener or the pencil case? And invariably, their choice would add up to \$10.50. And then they would come to me and plead for me to chip in to make up the difference. To which I would say, no. Well, I know you think I'm heartless. But, you know, we too face a very similar situation with our passage tonight. Except what we're spending is not \$10.00. But we're asked to spend our lives. And instead of choosing stationary, what we're deciding is between types of treasures. Well, those of you who've been coming along to the Sermon on the Mount series would know that Jesus has been saying some rather radical things with his teaching. Radical and counterculture, which challenge commonly held values, not just in his day, but ours as well. So, for example, it is not the rich and the powerful that are blessed. But Jesus says that it is the poor in spirit, those who truly are sorrowful about their spiritual condition that are blessed. And then he criticizes the elite in the society, teachers of the law. And he says that their righteousness is useless because it does not extend to their heart. It was superficial, done for others to see, rather than to please God. And so Jesus continues in this radical vein with our passage tonight.

Except this time, Jesus challenges the blind spot that is our love of money and wealth. He challenges where our treasures are. Now, Jesus presumes that we all store treasures. It is our nature to seek security and safety, to provide for a rainy day, to be assured that we've got necessities in life.

[3 : 29] Now, this may not faze you if you're still young, but my guess is that you're probably relying on the treasures of your parents, if that's the case. But for the rest of us, we seek this security.

And whatever we find it in, that is our treasure. And so the question tonight is not whether we seek treasures or not, but what types of treasures we do. And so in verse 19, look with me, Jesus clearly tells us what to do. He says, Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

And so it's pretty simple, isn't it? Jesus says that when you choose treasures, you need to choose those that last. Make sure they last. Because if they don't, they're ultimately useless. They cannot guarantee the security that you're looking for. And so traditionally, that's why people stored gold and diamonds as treasure, because they didn't decay, and they could be passed on from one generation to another. Of course, these things could be stolen, which is why Jesus still says, do not store them.

Nowadays, instead of gold and diamonds, our preferred treasures are what are called investment portfolios. So they come in various names, balanced, capital guaranteed, index linked, passive, aggressive, passive aggressive, not quite, but you name it, and they've got it. But as the global financial crisis has proven, these don't last either. When the GFC hit, what many people took decades to build up, simply disappeared within a matter of days and weeks. By contrast, Jesus says that treasure in heaven cannot be destroyed by vermin or be stolen. Now, heavenly treasures are not just sort of shinier versions of the stuff on earth. I mean, we're not talking about heavenly gold or celestial mentions. No.

If what Jesus is saying is that we are to store treasures in heaven, what he's saying is whatever we turn to for security are our treasures. And so to store treasures in heaven is to seek our security in heaven.

[5 : 50] And if we look at the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, this security is none other than God himself. So time and time again, we read, it is our heavenly father who hears our prayers, who sees our good deeds and rewards us, and who cares for us from heaven.

And so to set our treasures, to store our treasures in heaven is to actually set our hearts on God, to look to him for security and not to the treasures on earth. He's the one that cannot be destroyed, who will last. And when long after everything on earth is gone, we'll still be there. He is the treasure that lasts.

But secondly, Jesus also wants us to realize that all treasures enslave. So these are not neutral things that we get to own, but actually they get to own us. So if we look to them for security, they begin to capture our hearts and to own us.

And so that's what Jesus says in verse 21, Now again, this is very countercultural because most people look at their bank accounts or their investments or their houses and cars, and they say, this is all mine. I own my treasures. But Jesus actually says, no, it's the other way around.

If these things become your treasures, then they start to own you. Now that's what all idols do. We give our time and energy to it, and they start dictating our choices in life.

[7 : 29] And we start beginning, we start becoming obsessed with them. Most of you would know the Lord of the Rings. Well, it's just like the ring, if many of you remember, that enslaved Schmeagel.

That's him. Not to be confused with the stationery store. And he called it his precious. He says, I want it. I need it. And it is this obsession that turns him into a ghastly monster, which I think Tolkien calls Gollum.

And our earthly treasures have that same power, doesn't it? It's enticing. It's captivating. And once we set our hearts on it, it starts to enslave us.

Many years ago, I experienced a little of that power when I bought my first shares and I opened my first ComSec trading account.

And for a time there, I was constantly checking the share prices, checking how much money I was making and losing, valuing and revaluing my portfolio all the time.

[8 : 32] It started to become an obsession. Now, I'm not saying that Jesus is saying here that it's wrong to own material possessions. They are actually God's blessings.

But we also need to be very careful because these things are so easy to instare us. Our sinful hearts are such that we fall so easily for them and we make them our idols.

As Tim Keller says, our hearts are idol factories. And so when that happens, it begins then also to dominate our entire lives. And so I think that's what Jesus goes on to say in verse 22 when he explains this point with the analogy of the eye.

So look with me with verse 22. It says, The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness.

Now, some people find this analogy a bit difficult to understand. But I think Jesus' point is this, that what the eye sees impacts the entire body. That's why Jesus calls it the lamp of the body.

[9 : 41] It illuminates the rest of the body. And how we understand the world is determined by what we see with the eyes. So if the eyes are healthy and sees correctly, then the rest of the body is full of positive light.

But conversely, if the eye is unhealthy, then the rest of the body is darkened. And so it is with our spiritual eyes, so to speak. What we have our eyes on, we use those terms, eventually affect the rest of our lives.

So if we are focused on making money, then we'll do whatever it takes to achieve that. We'll spend our time dreaming how to get more of it. We'll risk our families and our marriages and our relationships in order to get more of it.

And we'll be willing to hurt other people if they get in the way. And so the more we feed those desires, the more it comes to dominate our lives. And Jesus then goes on to warn in verse 23 that all this could actually be happening even as we're not recognizing it.

And so the second part of verse 23, If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness? That is, if all this while you think you've got light in you, but you don't realize that what Jesus is saying is that it is darkness that's really in you, dominating you, then how great is that darkness?

[11 : 02] And I just want you to pause and think about that. I mean, what a scary thought. But the danger of greed and the love of money is just that, isn't it? It hides itself so easily and so well from us.

So I wonder how many of us, for example, have actually sat down and searched our hearts on this matter to honestly ask ourselves whether money has a greater hold on our lives than we realize.

Most of us instinctively think no. And Tim Keller makes this very amazing sort of observation. He says he's counseled a lot of people in his time and people come to him all the time telling him about their sins and wanting to confess their sins.

But the one thing nobody has ever done is that nobody has ever come to him and said, I'm suffering from the sin of greed. That's pretty telling, isn't it? And I think many of us, I think, take this attitude.

We try and hedge our bets. And so we say we sincerely want to serve God. But then, you know, we'll just store a bit of earthly treasures just in case. Or we say, okay, it's okay that we become rich.

[12 : 15] It's okay that I'm seeking to become rich because I actually want to use my wealth to serve God. But if we go on to read in verse 24, Jesus says, Again, Jesus is not saying that you can't be rich.

But if your goal in life is to become rich, then I think you're almost certainly serving money. If you make decisions in life primarily based on what it does to your finances, if that's your number one criterion, then again, I think you're almost certainly serving money.

And the word here, serve, is actually very strong. It has a sense of being enslaved. You're enslaved to it rather than just serving like a public servant, as how we use the term today.

And once you're enslaved to one treasure, then it excludes all the others. So you can't serve two masters, especially not with money and God, because the aims of money and God's aims for you are so opposed to each other.

So money, for example, feeds on your selfishness, whereas what God wants to do is train you to be selfless. Money is a parasite, always asking more of you and yet leaving you feeling empty all the time.

[13 : 36] Whereas when you serve God and treasure him, he fills you more and more. And so the only way, I think, to stop idolizing money and serving it is actually to serve God instead.

We need to so fill our lives with God that it crowds out all the other masters in life. And practically, with money, I think one of the best ways of breaking the power of money is actually to give it away.

That's one of the things that I learned when I read Richard Foster's book, Money, Sex and Power, many years ago. He says, learn to be generous. Whether you're rich or you're poor, whether you think you're rich or you're poor, be generous, especially if you're the type that always tries to keep tabs on your money.

Now, he's not saying, again, be profligate, but he's saying be generous to the extent that it is costly. So giving \$2 when you've got \$2,000 is not being generous.

He says, do this because in this way, then money does not have that place in our lives that it does not deserve. By giving it away, we put it in its right place. We're treating it in one sense with contempt or with disdain and saying, you know, you don't have a right to tell me what to do.

[14 : 57] I'm going to just give it away. And that giving actually destroys power's money over us. But it's got to be practical.

You can't just say, I think I want to give my money away. You actually have to do it. And it's also got to be habitual because it keeps, like with all idols, it keeps trying to usurp God's place in our lives.

Over and over again, we think we might have conquered it. And yet, it always tries to creep its way back into our lives. Now, if you think this is all rather challenging, then maybe my suggestion to you is to start somewhere.

Start small, maybe. Start small in faith and then stretch yourself over time and see what God can do to your life as a result. Now, some of you might be thinking, well, that's fine.

But, you know, what about those bills at home that keep coming in? If I do what you suggest, how am I going to survive? Well, that's what Jesus turns to next in our third major point.

[16 : 02] And this is what Jesus wants us to realize, that when we serve God, we are actually serving the only treasure that also provides for us. It's the only treasure that actually gives back more than we actually give up.

So look at verse 25. And actually, we look over 25 to 34. Three times, Jesus tells us what not to do. So in verse 25, he says, And then again in verse 33, So do not worry, saying what you shall eat and what you shall drink or what you shall wear.

And then finally in verse 34, So I think we get Jesus' point, don't we? Are you saying?

Don't worry. Why not? Well, Jesus answers this with a series of what I call greater to lesser arguments. And so his logic goes like this, that if God has done the more difficult thing in your life, then why wouldn't he do the more easy thing in our lives?

So Jesus asked in verse 25, Is not your life more than food and your body more than clothes? That is, he's done the more difficult thing of loving you and saving you for eternity.

[17 : 19] So if he didn't spare his only son for you, why would he not feed you? Why would he not feed and clothes you for the rest of your short life? And then he goes on to say, Just look at nature.

Verse 26, Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns. And yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they are?

Again, you're greater than the birds. And then in verse 27, And just as an aside, he says, Well, worry doesn't work anyway, because can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

And the answer, of course, is no. But then he returns in verse 28 with another example. And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, you of little faith? Friends, I wonder whether you've seen those last four words at the end there.

[18 : 23] Because I think at the end of the day, that's the real issue, isn't it? We worry because we lack faith. Worry is actually a question about faith.

Worry shows that we don't recognize who God is, that we don't trust in his promises. We don't realize that he's actually our loving father who owns and controls this universe, who has sent his son to die for us, who has saved us for eternity.

And so, in a sense, if we trust him in that, in all these big things in life, why would he not provide for the small and practical things in life? And so, he says in verse 32, For the pagans run after these things, but your heavenly father knows that you need them.

Now, the pagans run after these things because they don't know our father. All they see are the earthly treasures on this earth. All they can trust are their bank balances, their career prospects, stuff they own.

That's all they have. But we are not like that. But we live by faith, not by sight. And we can trust our father at his word. And we can trust that he will provide for his children.

[19 : 36] Instead, Jesus says, Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well. So, just like in verse 19, where we're asked to combat what is wrong by doing what and concentrating on what is right.

So, here Jesus is saying, Concentrate on serving God, seeking his righteousness, and God will take care of the rest. Make God your priority in life.

And all these earthly needs that he talks about, God will take care of them. Most of you would have heard that Old Testament reading tonight from Malachi.

Malachi was speaking at a time when God's people had returned from exile. And, you know, in a sense, they were doing it tough, and their crops were failing. And so, they reacted in the way that I think most of us would.

They worried, and so they withheld their tithes and offering. But what does God say? So, in verse 9, and I've got it on the screen again, he says, You are under a curse, your whole nation, because you are robbing me.

[20 : 41] Bring the whole tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your field will not drop their fruit before it is ripe, says the Lord Almighty. Then all the nations will call you blessed. For yours will be a delightful land, says the Lord Almighty.

Now, again, I don't think we should read this and think this is some automatic get-rich scheme. God's point is not that, you know, you give him the 10%, he'll give you 10 full back. But they were withholding their earthly treasures, even when times were tough, because they didn't trust God.

It was, at the end of the day, God's point was that, not so much that they have robbed, withheld the tithe, but that they had failed to trust him. And so God's reply is this, Trust me, my children.

Why hold on to that little that you have, when if you trust me, I will bless you more than you know. And then he goes on to say, Test me, the Lord says, and see how faithful I am.

[21 : 54] And so it is with us. We will never really know the true and great blessings from God if we don't trust him. We will never know that Jesus is all we need until Jesus is all we have.

And friends, the type of worry that Jesus is talking about here is not just that emotional kind, you know, the type where you've just discovered your mom or your child, you know, is in hospital and you're worried sick.

No, Jesus is talking about premeditated and planned worry. It is a type of worry that shows up in how you order your life and how you make decisions. It's a type of worry that so surrounds your life with things of this world because you don't know life without it.

You're so surrounded that there is no longer any room to trust God. That is the kind of worry I think that Jesus is talking about. And, you know, it's a type of worry that when you say, hear God say, I would like you to do this and obey me on this, you say, I can't because what about this, this, this, and that?

You cannot trust God today because he's not answered all your questions, all your uncertainties that may happen tomorrow. It's as Jesus says, you worry about tomorrow when you should really just be worrying about today.

[23 : 18] That is the worry that I think Jesus is talking about. And it's only by seeking God first, by stepping out in obedience, that we can get rid of that. So, friends, this is, if we bother to actually search our hearts, I think this is actually a very challenging passage tonight, not just for, for me as well as for you.

But I think we should ask because the stakes are high, isn't it? If we go down the one way, we end up serving money and we destroy our lives as a result. We're not just choosing how to spend \$10.

We're choosing how we're going to spend our lives. And one day, we will wake up and find out whether we've got stuff that has been destroyed, has been eaten, or actually, we've got heavenly treasure.

Do we trust and serve God only? Or are we enslaved to money? Is God our only treasure in life? Because if he is, we don't have to worry.

He's given us the promise to provide for all our needs, not just in this life, but for eternity. Let's pray. Father, we confess that many times we live by sight and not by faith.

[24 : 40] We see all the things that other people have and we think we need them. We see all the things that we have and we fear losing them. So, Lord, if that has been our experience, we ask that you forgive us tonight.

Help us to be so caught up in the treasure that is you that all the other treasures seem or are what they truly are, temporary, prone to being stolen, prone to destruction.

Help our hearts to long after you. Help us, Lord, to make you our treasure. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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