

**“Treasuring Heaven”**

Matthew 6:19-24; Luke 12:13-21  
Sermon on the Mount Series

*“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight”*  
Jeremiah 15:16

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## Introduction

If we continue reading in Luke 12 we find many of the same sentences as found in the next section of Matthew 6.

Luke placed this parable of the rich fool where Matthew placed treasure in heaven.

A rich man's good luck continues, his crops overflow, and he has enough for many years. His response: **Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.**

God's response: **You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you.**

As we focus on Matthew 6 – Treasure in Heaven, keep the story of the rich fool in mind.

And also, another story. The first time Matthew uses the word treasure in his Gospel.

There are three wise men and they come to Jesus. Here is the story

**When they saw the star** (the light they followed to find Jesus) **they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasure chests they offered him gifts . . .**

Two stories; four rich guys; one foolish and three wise.

What is it we treasure? When our passage connects treasure and heart it refers to what "I" in the deep recesses of my soul hold to be of highest value. How do we identify our treasure?

Certainly, our material possessions.

To some degree the basics required to support our life – our home, our vocation, our means of daily support – we treasure these things.

Also, those possessions that represent treasured intangibles. If fire broke out and I had to flee from my study I would grab the pictures and mementos that in themselves are not overly valuable but they represent treasured relationships and ideals.

However, as we listen to the stories surrounding our Scripture reading in Matthew it is fair to say that the "treasure" Jesus refers to is indicated in how we allocate the material surplus that comes our way; that which is beyond the basics. How we handle our surpluses is a good indicator as to where our treasure is.

Of course, one person's basics are what another person could only have through a surplus, there is no absolute standard, but the rule holds – where we put our surplus indicates where our heart is, what it is we treasure.

## Text

In the passage before us Jesus opens a new chapter in the overall scheme of his sermon. Remember his sermon is both about the nature of his life – the sermon demonstrates how Jesus lives – and the ways in which Jesus forms those who follow him as their master.

In this section of the sermon Jesus first addressed religious practices that shape our personal disposition toward Jesus as our master: charity to the poor; prayer; and fasting.

Now, Jesus addresses how his life in us affects the handling of our possessions and how we trust God to provide. This morning's passage focuses on getting our priorities straight about possessions and then next week's passage, verses 25-34 with trusting God to provide for our needs. (Talbert)

We have three short paragraphs: treasures in heaven; light or darkness in our person; and serving only one master.

First, Jesus calls to our attention what should be obvious to us. The insecurity of our possessions, insurance notwithstanding, is complete. Even if we are fortunate to avoid spoilage, rot and theft; no possessions will accompany us beyond death. So, if we are courageous enough to face the facts, how will this shape what we treasure?

The second paragraph at first can be somewhat confusing because in the ancient world it was generally understood sight was possible because light streamed from the eyes. We know the opposite is true. I think the notes at the bottom of the page for verses 22 and 23 explain the scholarly consensus on the meaning of being filled with light or darkness. The words used here for the result of light and dark – health and unhealthy relates to generosity with resources in contrast to stinginess. The paragraph is related to treasures. Do we have a generous open hand regarding our surpluses because though valuable our treasure is elsewhere; or do we hoard everything as our treasure against future possibilities?

Finally, Jesus concludes his sayings about our priorities over possessions with a statement: **You cannot serve both God and Money**. First, the language here – master and service come from the ancient slave culture. We can have two employers but as a rule a slave is owned by one master. The original word for money, of course, is mammon – which means various kinds of resources, money, property and possessions – the idea particularly is that mammon are the material things we trust in for the security of our lives.

In these verses Jesus addresses our 'treasure': the resources we have beyond what supports us in our daily life and warns us to trust in treasure for the security of our lives is unreliable. Now Jesus does not call us to poverty, there was certainly material wealth among the company of his followers. Though it is the case that when Jesus encountered a rich young ruler he challenged him to sell all, give to the poor and come follow him. Albeit in that case the young man through his family connections would always have much more "mammon" than the average person.

And, yes, people have different 'standards of living' according to their family backgrounds, vocation, good or bad fortune in the business of life and so on.

However, a person's surplus, as in the stories I mentioned, indicates a person's values, what is important to them, what they treasure.

We have two potential treasuries: heaven and earth; two potential dispositions indicating where our treasure lies: generosity and stinginess; and two potential masters who when our life is at risk will provided for us: God and Mammon.

Jesus calls us to choose and he is warning us about making the wrong choice.

Jesus represents the generosity of God; he supplies the deepest needs of those alienated toward him; unfriendly toward him, hostile toward him; not deserving of his kindness;

But nevertheless, God is generous, even loves his enemies!

To follow Jesus does not, first and foremost, mean to intellectually believe some ideas about who Jesus is and what he has done. Rather to follow Jesus means to live as he lived. Followers are generous as their leader is.

### Application

As I step back and consider what Jesus says here I find myself facing two challenges:

First, what is heaven to me? Is heaven as real as the earth is to me?

Generally speaking, in the Western world, with our science and technology, appearing to explain many mysteries about the universe, a majority of the population and certainly the public sphere are practicing agnostics.

An agnostic is a person who holds the view that nothing can be known of the existence of God or anything beyond material phenomena.

When I first began in pastoral ministry it was common to hear of death bed confessions and conversions to Jesus. No longer. When I first began in pastoral ministry it was common to arrange for a Christian funeral. No longer.

Increasingly people no longer believe in Heaven. There is just this life and when we die there is nothing. (Albeit, given the most watched television programs, it appears people still believe in Hell, what with the Walking Dead, The Vampire Diaries, 13 Reasons Why, Stranger Things, and on and on.)

The rich fool did not plan with an early death and subsequent accountability. Heaven did not count, and consequently when he had a surplus, when he had some 'icing' on the cake, he responded in a personal reflection:

**And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years: relax, eat, drink, be merry!**

Here is how Jesus' words challenge us, today. Given our life in today's society, will we focus more than in prior generations on Heaven being as real as Earth. How? Scripture informs us: Heaven, life with God, eternal life is practically on every page.

I would suggest living with a real sense Heaven, means living with a grip on knowing that death is coming, through which we can take nothing material, and that Heaven is not just a fairy tale where everything will be just okay, but that entrance to Heaven is to be acquired; first through the gate to Heaven which is our Lord Jesus Christ and then that life in the way of Jesus stores up treasure in Heaven.

I have memories of doing pastoral visits with 90 year olds in Vancouver, those on the very doorstep of heaven, and their emphasis, as they reflected on their lives, that they wished they had not spent so much time worrying about money! Get to know

some of our elderly saints who have travelled through life, faced material prosperity and scarcity, who know death is not far away; they have wisdom to share about treasure in Heaven.

Second, the entire Sermon on the Mount reflects on the treasure to be stored up in Heaven.

Treasure in Heaven is found when living through the values of Jesus in my life today.

When Jesus instructed us about prayer, he laid down a basic platform from which to work from: hiddenness, being alone with God, free from distraction, some silence.

The basic platform for storing up Heavenly treasure is generosity with our material resources.

Jesus says: be generous, especially with our surpluses, looking to whom we can assist and bless. Work with the attitude of a steward, who controls material resources but does not own them. William Barclay's comment helps: Of everything the Christian must say, "This is God's, and I must use it as its owner would have it to be used.

What does it lead to? Trust in God. Trust God will provide, not just for the necessities but even for our comfort and therefore we can risk being generous with others as God is with us. Generosity is the welcome that opens the door for the provision of God; for the storing up of treasure in heaven. Amen.