

“TREASURE (#1): WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE?”

(Matthew 6:19-21)

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1. Read CEB Text: Matthew 6:19-21 and Pray.
2. When I say the word "treasure," probably what comes to mind for most of us are images of pirate ships, deserted islands, gold medallions, jewels, and an *X* that marks the spot.
 

A--Treasure, after all, is something we search for, fight for, and go great distances to find. It can bind people together, OR it can also create great division. It can be hoarded and hidden away, OR shared and enjoyed. <sup>1</sup>

B--And whether we acknowledge it or not, ALL of us have treasure in our life -- things we're searching for, fighting for, and storing up.

C--True... the items found in our each of our "treasure chests" are all different, but we all have "treasure" that holds great value to us.
3. So, today we're beginning a four-week series called "**TREASURE**" in which we're not only identifying what our "treasure" IS, but also exploring how *what* we invest it IN can (and does) have eternal meaning and value.

--II--

4. You know, one of things I and other clergy agree to when we become United Methodist pastors is to go and serve wherever God sends us through the appointing of our Bishop.
 

A--So, every few years, Trish and I pack up everything we own, put it on a moving truck, and move it all to a new town, a new church, and a new house.

1--And each time we do it, we're amazed at how much *stuff* we've accumulated since we moved there.

2--As a matter of fact, she and I have a sort of unwritten "rule" which says that if we have a box that we haven't opened or an item that we haven't used since the *last* move, maybe we should get rid of it (and quite often, we do!)

B--And yet, all of that sorting and packing always forces us to consider what we really *need* versus what we merely *want* -- how the real "treasure" of *our* lives is NOT found in the things we *own*, but in the relationships of love and faith that we take with us wherever we go.

5. And I've found this same definition of "treasure" shared throughout my years of ministry, as well -- especially as I'm visiting with those who're in their last days here on earth.

A--In those visits, we talk about a lot of things. But I can't think of a single instance where our conversation ever focused on the "things" that person *acquired* in their life.

B--No. They talked about their family and friends, the special vacations they'd been on, the children they'd taught, the mission trips they'd taken, the laughter they shared, and even the tragedies and difficulties that God helped them overcome.

C--For them, "treasure" also was more than just what we own.

6. Well, in today's scripture from Matthew 6, Jesus was trying to move his hearers (and us) from a focus on the *temporal* to a focus on the *eternal* -- from a focus on investing in earthly *possessions* to a focus on investing in spiritual *passions*.

A--In Verses 19-20 he says, "*Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don't eat them and where thieves don't break in and steal them.*"

1--Now, I don't think Jesus here is condemning "stuff." I think he knows that we need a house to live in, a car to get us where we need to go, technology to help us communicate and do our work, and so on.

2--But I think what his words are pointing out is that our lives here on earth have a *higher purpose* than for us to simply accumulate "things" to fill the rooms and closets of our earthly homes.

B--And while we're not *entirely* sure what he meant by "*collecting treasures in heaven*," I think he was referring to things *like* our relationships of love & faith both with Himself and with others <sup>2</sup> -- essentially helping us *redefine* what "treasure" truly IS and means.

--III--

7. That said... this passage is *not only* about "heavenly treasure" but also IS about how we use and invest our *earthly* treasure, as well (i.e., our time energy, and yes, our money).

A--Now, I know that talk about money at church makes most of us uncomfortable. And yet, *Jesus* wasn't uncomfortable talking about it.

1--In fact, he talks about money and possessions more than he talks about heaven, hell, love, and prayer *combined*!

2--20% of the gospels, including 1/3 of Jesus' parables, are about money. <sup>3</sup>

B--Why? Why did Jesus talk so much about money and possessions?

1--Well, Jesus knew that these things cause stress in life, division in and between people, and that their pursuit can be all-consuming and burdensome. <sup>4</sup>

2--And since he cares for our hearts, I think Jesus talked so much about money and possessions because he knew that these things (these "earthly treasures") impact and affects our hearts.

8. Remember his words in Verse 21, "*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*"

A--Now, I don't know about you, but I've always thought about this verse as meaning that if we're passionate about something (i.e., if it's where our "heart" is), then *that's* where we'll devote (or "invest") our "treasure".

B--But the more I read this verse, the more I realize that that's NOT what it says -- it *doesn't* say "*where your heart is, there your treasure will follow,*" but the other way around: "*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*"

C--In other words, the *reality* Jesus is identifying here is that what's in our heart is actually *shaped by* where our money *goes* (whether we want it to or not)! <sup>5</sup>

1--For example: If we buy a car or house that requires a significant percentage of our income, we have no choice but to spend time, energy & money paying for it -- and since our "treasure" is there, then *that's* where our heart is going to be!

2--You see, Jesus is saying that our worldly financial commitments (needed though some of them are) require time and energy that (if we're not careful) can force our hearts to "*collect treasure on earth*", rather than allowing us to invest in "*treasure in heaven.*" <sup>6</sup>

9. So, during this series, as we think about "Treasure" in terms where we invest our time, energy & money, I want us to begin by *honestly answering two questions for ourselves*:

**(#1) What is it that you WANT to invest in?** I.E., If you didn't have debt or other restrictive commitments (mortgages, car payments, school loans, etc), what "treasure" in life would you *want* to invest more in? E.G., would you spend more time with your family? go on a mission trip? help build a Habitat for Humanity house? give more money to your church? what would you WANT to invest more in?

And as you consider that, then ask yourself **(#2) What are you actually investing in?** I.E., Where are you *actually* spending your time, energy & money? What does your calendar & checkbook (or online equivalent) tell you about where your priorities are?

A--And so, based on your two answers, are there things you'd RATHER invest in besides what you're currently doing?

B--You know, for many of us, the things we most value and love the *most* -- our spouse, family, God, church, friends --often get the *least amount* of our time, energy, and money (our "treasure").

C--Again, it's because Jesus spoke *realistically* when he said that our hearts follow our treasure: no matter how much we *want* to give our hearts to God or our family, if our time, energy, and money are flowing to or invested in *other* things, then our hearts will in those places and things *instead of* where we *want* them to be.

--IV--

10. Now, the good news is that there's hope! We CAN change where our hearts are focused by changing where we invest our "treasure"!

A--For example,

1--If we want a healthier marriage, then we have to be willing to invest more time and energy and emotion in that endeavor.

2--If we want a more whole family, then we have to be willing to invest more attention and focus to that.

3--If we want a healthier and more dynamic church, then we have to be willing to give more our volunteer time, more of our financial resources, and more of our prayers to that task (just like our video testimony speaker shared earlier).

B--Now, none of this is easy...

1--For some, the first step may simply be to acknowledge that you *need* help re-aligning your priorities and your investments to match your ideals.

2--For others, it may mean attending a Financial Peace University class to learn how to get out of the financial mess you're in, or creating a personal budget to *prioritize* the things you *want* to be a priority.

3--And for still others, it may mean saying "no" to something *else* you want to do *so that* you can say "yes" to God by serving in or giving more to your *church*.

C--You see, in the end, Jesus cares about our *hearts*. He wants our hearts to be at peace so we can invest our lives in heavenly "treasure" that really matters!

11. So, where are you *currently* investing your time, energy and money? Is it making you happy and content? Or just stressed?

A--If it's latter, maybe you're investing in the wrong thing(s).

B--Jesus invites us to invest in a *different* kind of "treasure" -- a "heavenly" one, where our hearts are at peace, no longer disconnected *from* God, but in union *with* God.

C--So, "*Where is YOUR Treasure?*"

12. [PRAYER]

### ENDNOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> If we're not careful, treasure can become the focus of our lives: it can consume us, and lead to an obsession not only with obtaining it, but also with holding onto it at all costs.
- <sup>2</sup> After all, these are relationships that originate here *on earth* but which *accumulate blessings* to us *in heaven*; they are things "moth and rust" can't destroy, and which thieves have no way to steal.
- <sup>3</sup> In the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) the only subject that Jesus talked about more than money and possessions was the kingdom of God.
- <sup>4</sup> Those who've 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.
- <sup>5</sup> Most of us ideally want our treasure to follow our heart. But Jesus is revealing the reverse reality that our hearts follow *whatever we invest our treasure in!*
- <sup>6</sup> Even the way we spend our *time* is not immune from this problem. For instance, most of us tend to spend the majority of our time *working* to make money so that we can what?... *pay for our stuff*: our house, our cars, our furniture, our computers, tablets, and smart phones, our jewelry and clothing, and so on. So, even our use of time often falls prey to slavery to becoming an "earthly treasure."