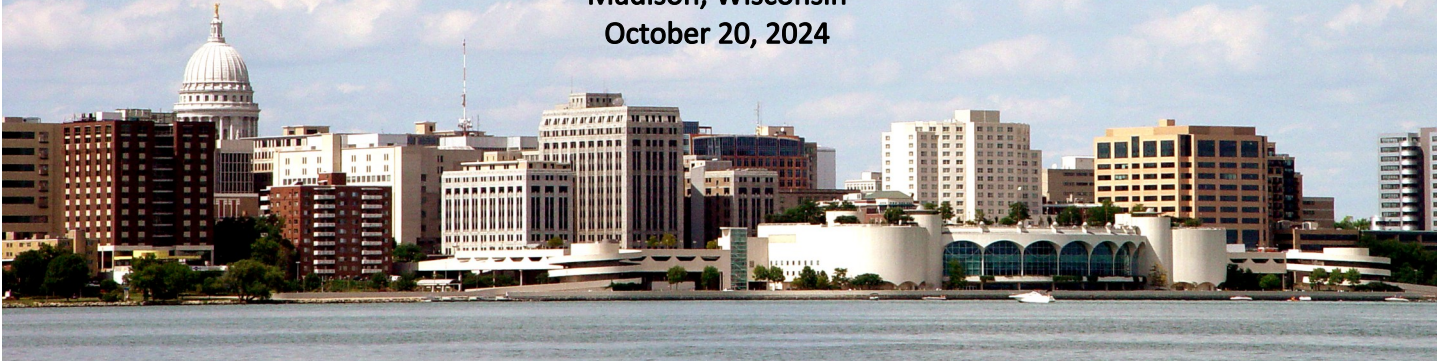


Eternal Treasure

Matthew 6:19-21

Baxter T. Exum (#1756)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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It is an awesome blessing to be able to be together this morning! If you are visiting with us today, we are happy to have you with us, and we'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card – either online or on a card from the pew in front of you. And we also invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns in that way. Today is Michelle Howard's last day with us for a while, as she is getting ready to move to Florida. I'm giving you a heads-up, because John Higgins will have just a few words after our closing prayer today.

We are here this morning to preach the good news that God loves us. He sent his Son to save us from sin: He died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the first day of the week. This is the good news, and we obey this good news through faith, repentance, confession of our faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and then by allowing ourselves to be buried with the Lord in baptism (an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins). During COVID, we started putting this at the beginning of our lessons for the benefit of those who are joining us online. And so, if you only tune in for a minute or two on YouTube or on the phone, we want you to hear the good news first! And as we've done for the past four years or so, we are sharing some pictures of what it looks like to obey the gospel. We are starting today with some good news that comes to us from Uzhhorod, Ukraine. They say, "Today Roman, Natalia and Tatiana joined the Kingdom of God. Their decision was to accept salvation and to be baptized for the remission of sins and to receive the Holy Spirit (Mk. 16:16; Acts. 2:38)."

This next one comes to us from the Shephed Church of Christ in the UK, located right in the middle of England. They say, "Last night Joshua made the life changing decision to give his life to Christ and decided to get baptised! A beautiful evening witnessing Josh make the most important decision of his life surrounded by family and friends and loved ones." And to me, this was one of the most interesting baptisms we've shared over the past several years, partly because the entire congregation got involved in filling the baptistry! I saw bowls, and buckets, and watering cans – everybody had a job to do. One young woman was there with a tennis racket, and I'm guessing she was getting stuff out of the water. And to top it off, they even had a dog in attendance, one of the weirdest looking creatures I've ever seen. But, we are certainly happy for Josh and his new life this week.

This next one comes to us from Spencer Ross at the Northwest congregation down in Fort Worth, Texas. He says, "[It was] so awesome witnessing Richard and Joanna trust and obey the good news last night at

Northwest. I overheard one of their young daughters being held by some of our members ask, 'Why is mommy going swimming?' This was an innocent yet powerful question. The answer to that question can be found in Acts 2:38; 22:16; Galatians 3:27; and 1 Peter 3:21." So good to see it!

This next one comes to us from the Mount Vernon congregation down in Kentucky. They posted this week and they say, "Oh Happy Day!! We are rejoicing with Heaven today as we have gained a new brother in Christ. Ovie Cromer was baptized this morning for the forgiveness of his sins. At 86 years old, Ovie decided to take up his cross and follow Jesus! You're never too old to be born again and Christ's blood is just as powerful as it was over 2,000 years ago!" They then quote Acts 22:16, where Ananias says to Saul, ***"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."***

I know we've had several, but I'll share one more today, this one coming to us from the Wanchai Church of Christ in Hong Kong. This may be a first from Hong Kong as far as I can remember, but they posted online this week, and they say, "A new sister in Christ. Melanie Bermudez. She was baptized into Christ and have put on Christ last Sunday. Welcome to God's family, sister Melanie." And one thing I really love about this post is that they included a picture of the women studying together before Melanie's baptism. And this is what we'd like to offer you. As always, we share these pictures by way of encouragement and as our invitation to you to consider obeying the good news yourself. If we can help, if you'd like to study together, please let us know. We won't stalk you, or harass you, or hunt you down, but we would love to study the word of God together. Pull me aside after worship, or give me a call or send a text to 608-224-0274.

This morning, as we think about the storms and the flooding that's been going on down south, and as we think about other disasters that happen from time to time, I want invite you to think with me for just a moment about what you might grab from your house if you only had minutes before something like that were to happen at your place. This picture, by the way, comes from Cody Michael, a friend who works with Project Unify, a group he helped establish to travel from place to place clearing up storm damage with the mission of sharing the gospel. This comes from north Georgia a few weeks ago, after a family spent the night between their kitchen island and the fridge, as multiple trees fell on their house all night long. Some of you have been in similar situations. The house is on fire, the floodwaters are rising, the tornado is minutes away: What do you grab? What do you save? Obviously, people come first, but if you could save only what you could carry, what would it be? Or to put it another way, what do we treasure? At our house, I half-jokingly say that I would save the ink-jet refills. On a per-ounce basis, that ink is perhaps the most valuable thing that I own. But, although expensive, it is replaceable. In reality, I would probably grab the kids' baby books, with those early ultrasounds and those pictures from the first few months of life. I might grab a few photo albums or maybe a hard drive or a laptop. Perhaps we might grab a scrapbook or maybe a picture hanging on the wall. These are the things we treasure.

And speaking of treasure, I have an actual treasure chest in my study at home. It's a wooden box I made in 4-H many years ago, and it actually says "TREASURE" on the top. It's wood-burned right on top. I opened it up this week, for the first time in years, and I found the report cards from my swimming classes at the "Y" when I was a kid. I found random pictures from my work as a photographer in high school. I found the press pass from my first job as a newspaper photographer. I found various graduation tassels, and coins, ribbons. I found the loupe (a magnifier) that clipped on my glasses, something I used for years to look at negatives in the darkroom. It was a walk down memory lane. These are apparently the things that I treasure, although virtually worthless to anyone else. This, though, is treasure.

This morning, I would invite you to be turning with me to Matthew 6 as we revisit a short passage we actually covered as the result of an interesting request back in 2019. But since then, we've been very slowly working

our way through the Sermon on the Mount, so I'd like for us to look at the passage again this morning. And it's the first paragraph in a larger section leading up to a powerful lesson on anxiety. And I don't know about all of you, but I need Jesus to help calm my heart over the next few weeks as we get closer to the election. So, that's what I hope to do today and the next two Sundays as we allow Jesus to calm our hearts. But we start today with Jesus focusing our thoughts on what is truly important in this life.

And this comes right after a chunk of verses we looked at several months ago, where Jesus encouraged us (in the first half of Matthew 6) to do the good things that we do "for an audience of One," with God being that One. Perhaps you remember our study of giving, and prayer, and fasting. In Matthew 6:1, Jesus says, ***"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."*** He then explains that if we give, and pray, and fast to be seen by those around us, that praise we receive is all the praise we'll ever get. On the other hand, if we do these things for the Lord, then our Father who sees what is done in secret will reward us. So, we're already seeing a difference between a reward here in this life and a reward that's coming at some point in the future (a reward in heaven). Knowing that we are reward motivated, Jesus makes a contrast between a lesser reward now and a greater reward at some point in the future. Well, this contrast continues as Jesus now speaks of ***"treasure."***

It's a word Jesus uses several times in today's passage, and it's a word that refers to a collection, or a stack, or a pile of things that have been placed somewhere for a reason, and that's why we're looking at some stacks of coins up here. The word Jesus uses is actually almost identical to our English word "thesaurus." A "thesaurus" is a stack or collection of words that have been placed or set together. So, let's keep this in mind as Jesus speaks of ***"treasure."*** He's speaking in terms of an investment, a stack of resources that we are setting aside for some need we may have in the future. Let's look together at Matthew 6:19-21, where Jesus says,

¹⁹Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

As we allow these ancient words to guide our hearts this morning, as we prepare for another week in the world, I want us to work our way through this passage by following what Jesus says here: 1.) He gives a warning about stacking up the wrong kind of treasure, 2.) He gives us the positive alternative, and then 3.) He gives the reason for what he's said here.

I. But first, let's start in verse 19, where Jesus warns about THE DANGER OF STORING UP FOR OURSELVES TREASURES HERE ON THIS EARTH.

And as I understand the grammar here, he's telling us to "stop" doing this. So, it's not just "don't," but it's, "You're doing this, and you need to stop it." We are to stop laying up for ourselves treasures on this earth. So, is it wrong ever put something in a bank? Have I sinned by building a treasure chest when I was 9 years old? Am I wrong for having more than one pair of pants in my closet at home? Are we wrong for having more than a day's worth of food in our freezer at home? To answer those questions, we need to understand the warning here. The danger, Jesus says, is that earthly treasure has a way of disappearing. Earthly stuff is temporary.

And Jesus gives us three categories here, starting with the fact that treasures here on this earth can be destroyed by ***"moth."*** Back in ancient times, wealth was often expressed outwardly through a person's clothing. Clothing could be seen and it was somewhat portable (you could wear it from one place to another). Clothing, though, is temporary, because clothing can be eaten by moths. I have more wool now than I did a

few years ago (due to my sister's advice on what to wear hiking), but one downside of wool is that it can be eaten by moths. A hundred years ago, everybody had a cedar chest. The purpose of a cedar chest was to try to protect wool clothing. But even when we protect our clothing, it still has a way of wearing out, doesn't it? Clothing is temporary.

In the same way, Jesus also refers to "*rust*." Most of us hear "*rust*," and we think of our cars here in Wisconsin. The salt we put on our roads takes its toll. Or we might think of the trouble we're having with the railing on our ramp out front. Gary is on it, but we are losing the railing on our ramp to rust. Metal itself is temporary in that regard. A car, especially one that we drive here in Wisconsin, is not a really good long-term investment. The word Jesus uses here literally refers to "eating." Our cars are getting eaten! In ancient times, the reference here was probably to food or stores of grain. I'm in some online groups for baking sourdough, and people down south have more trouble with their flour getting infested with these little worms that eat the grain. Food is not a good long-term investment. It goes bad, it gets eaten by teenagers.

The other danger here is theft. So, even if we have something a bit sturdier than food or clothing, there's a danger it may get stolen. So, in Bible times, we have several references to people hiding their treasures in the walls of their homes or maybe burying it out in a field somewhere. Stuff gets stolen. Several years ago, I woke up to start our wood stove around 4 in the morning and caught some punks checking the door handles on my car parked in the driveway. Stuff gets stolen, and we do the best we can by using cameras and by locking stuff up, but it still happens. Several weeks ago, I borrowed my sister's bike to do a bike-n-hike up to the Olympic Hot Springs, and on the night before I was supposed to leave on the hike at 5 a.m., I locked her bike to this huge concrete picnic table at my campsite. But when I tested the lock, I twisted off the key in the lock. So here I am in the wilderness, halfway up a mountain, with my sister's bike cable locked to a concrete picnic table. Long story short, I drove back down into town a few times and ended up getting a 28" cable cutter at Harbor Freight for about \$24. That thing cut through a cable the size of my pinky like it was nothing. If you ever need to steal a bike, I would be glad to help. My point is that even when we protect our stuff, it is still susceptible to being stolen. Nothing is safe these days. Even our identity can be stolen. What a hassle!

The warning here, then, is that stuff is a terrible long-term investment, and the problem comes when I look to my stuff to give me purpose in life. Jesus wasn't condemning stuff itself. We read about all kinds of earthly stuff in the New Testament – fish, and bread, and tunics, and sandals, and towels, and on and on. Stuff is not bad in and of itself, but there's a danger in putting our hope and trust in stuff that is truly temporary. Your boss can steal your retirement funds, we might lose everything in the stock market overnight, a flood or fire may come and completely destroy everything we've accumulated. But the danger comes when we trust in earthly treasure to give us the kind of satisfaction that we can really only find in heavenly treasure. So, we are not to treasure our treasures. Whether it's a pile of clothing, a garage full of cars, or a stack of gold, the lesson is the same: We are not to put our long-term trust in short-term investments. So, what is the alternative?

II. Well, in verse 20, Jesus tells us that we are, instead, to STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN, WHERE NEITHER MOTH NOR RUST DESTROYS, AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK IN OR STEAL.

As Elijah read for us earlier (from 1 Peter 1), Jesus is referring here to our "*inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away*," the inheritance that is "*reserved in heaven*" for us. But going back to Matthew 6:20, I really want to ask: But Jesus, what do we do? How do we actually "*store up for ourselves treasures in heaven*"? How do we do what you are telling us to do? Unlike the Law of Moses, we don't have a list of ten bullet points here! And I know we haven't read it today, but we alluded to it earlier, going back to what Jesus has already said in the Sermon on the Mount. Several times in this sermon, Jesus has already

referred to being *“rewarded.”* If we endure persecution, he says (in Matthew 5:12), *“our reward in heaven is great.”* And then, when we give, and pray, and fast in private, our Father who sees what is done in private will reward us. Later in Matthew, Jesus will go on to say that those who receive a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward and that if we give a child a cup of water, we will not lose our reward.

We gain this eternal reward (or treasure), then, through worship and by serving others. In a sense, we send our treasure on ahead of us by giving it away here and now. And what we do will never be destroyed by moth or rust and can never be stolen. The problem, therefore, is not treasure itself, but the kind of treasure, where we store it, and really, the timing of it. In investing, we hear people talking about horizons. There are short-term horizons, and there are long-term horizons. Short-term, I’m saving for a new furnace and air conditioner. Long-term, I’m saving for retirement. And the strategies are different. We’re almost there on the furnace, so those funds are not in the stock market. For retirement, though, we have a few things going, including a fund with a target date of maybe 2045. We have short-term and long-term. Well, so also with spiritual investments. What Jesus is encouraging here is thinking long-term. If my goal is being comfortable in this life only, that’s short-term. Jesus is saying: Invest beyond that! Invest in what cannot be destroyed by moth or rust; invest in what cannot be taken away. We give, we serve, we endure, we teach, we share, we love, and God rewards eternally, in heaven.

But this doesn’t make sense, does it? If I have \$20 in my wallet, I can keep it and use it however I want to. However, if I take that \$20 and use it to buy soup for the children at Shults-Lewis, my money is gone. But that’s not really true, is it? In a sense, that \$20 has been invested. In a sense, that \$20 has been sent on ahead. However, if I hang on to it, if I stack it up, if I treasure it, if I stockpile it, I will be losing it. It will be moth-eaten, destroyed, or stolen at some point. What Jesus is teaching us here is that using what we have to help others is really the only way to save for the truly long-term horizon. Or, to put it another way, the only treasures we get to keep are those we give away.

III. This brings us to the end (to verse 21), where Jesus explains all of this by saying, “FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO.” ****PPT****

Ultimately, God wants our heart. That’s what this is all about. And God knows that where we put our treasure is where our hearts will follow. However, it’s always been so interesting to me that this isn’t the other way around, because the other side of this also seems to be true, doesn’t it? If Jesus had said, “For where your heart is, there will your treasure be also,” that would have also been a true statement: Get your heart right, and your treasure will follow. Yes, that’s true. But instead, Jesus turns it around here, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* And I know we’ve illustrated it this way before, but we might imagine a hiker coming to a difficult stream crossing and throwing his or her pack across the stream first. And the idea is: Now that my gear is on the other side, now I have to get to the other side! I no longer have a choice in this, because what is important, what is critical to my survival is now over there, and I need to get to it. In the same way, my heart follows my treasure. If I send my treasure on ahead, now my heart wants to get there.

And really, the same is true in other areas. What we spend our time and money on has a way of getting more and more important to us. I spend so much time and money on a car, or on a hobby, or whatever it is, and I get more and more invested to the point where I’m now even more committed than I was at the beginning. I can’t go back, because I’m already this far in. And this is one of the dangers of pornography or any number of other habits or addictions – or even obsessing over politics. The more time we spend on this thing, the more we tend to care, and our heart follows that initial investment.

We might think of something that's not inherently sinful, like the stock market. There was a time in my life when I didn't really care. But now, the older I get, the more I care. I'm not obsessing by any means (I log in maybe once or twice a year), but I do think about now. This thing that's happening in the world right now might affect my investment. Well, so also with my treasure in heaven. When I'm invested in the life that comes after this one, I care more about it. Maybe we sponsor a missionary. If you've done that (as we have), you tend to pay attention to those monthly reports. And so, we start by sending the treasure, and our hearts follow along afterwards. So also with eternity.

On the other hand, if I'm obsessed with stockpiling treasure down here, if I'm putting all of my time and energy into stockpiling clothing, and cars, and money, and stuff, and even my candidate over yours, my heart gets invested as well, and I am heading for an eternal let-down. Thankfully, though, we don't have to go down that road, because we have the ability to choose to invest in what is spiritually important. We choose to care for the fatherless and widows. We choose to lift burdens. We choose to encourage. We choose to come together to sing, and pray, and study, and partake of the Supper together. We choose to spend time on what is eternally important, and our hearts will follow.

Conclusion:

What do we treasure? What's important to us? And to get the most accurate answer here, maybe we should ask: What do those who are closest to you think you treasure? What does your spouse think you treasure? What do your kids think you treasure? What do your friends and coworkers think you treasure? What does your bank statement think you treasure? And then, are we laying up treasures here on earth (where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal), or are we laying up treasures in heaven? Our mission this week is to invest for the long term, laying up treasure in heaven.

Next week, we hope to continue with the next few verses, and we're heading for the realization that constantly pursuing the treasures of this earth can be emotionally exhausting. For now, though, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the great and awesome God, the one and only all-powerful invisible God, creator of heaven and earth and everything we see around us. Today, we are thankful for your Son the eternal word. We pray that you would establish your kingdom, your rule, in our hearts. Be with us this week as we put your kingdom first, as we store up for ourselves treasures, not on earth, but in heaven, where we will never be disappointed. Open our eyes to the needs all around us where we can make a meaningful and eternal difference.

We ask this in Jesus' name. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com