

We are halfway through our summer series on the Sermon on the Mount, and so far we've looked at almost all of Matthew 5 with messages on the Beatitudes, being salt and light, loving our enemies, and anger. And if you haven't had the opportunity to hear those sermons, I really encourage you to check those out on our Facebook page. Evan, Cody, and Susan all did great jobs.

So we've called this series "A Curious Kingdom" because a main theme of Jesus' sermon is how the kingdom of God flips on its head our understanding of what and who is valuable or blessed in this world, and today's passage looks quite literally at what we consider valuable. If you have your Bible or Bible app with you, this morning we are going to turn to Matthew 6, to a passage that is often titled Treasures in Heaven. I'll be starting with verse 19 and reading from the New Living Translation. Jesus says:

Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

When I hear the word "treasure," I first think of a pirate's treasure chest full of gold coins and rubies, something of great monetary value. But "treasure" is broader than that. In "The Divine Conspiracy," Christian scholar and philosopher Dallas Willard describes treasure like this: "Treasures are things we try to keep because of a value we place upon them. They may be of no value whatsoever in themselves; nevertheless, we take great pains to protect such things."

So last week, I asked my Facebook friends what kinds of things they collect—things they value and hold onto—and for many of them, the items are inexpensive souvenirs from their travels. The items aren't worth a lot of money, but they're treasured because of the memories associated with them. With each new destination, they collect postcards, patches, keychains, and magnets; others look for teapots, seashells, and Christmas ornaments. One person inherited the thimbles their grandmother collected on

her travels and has decided to continue that tradition. In these instances, the treasure is more than the physical souvenirs they've collected but also the experiences and memories each item represents.

The things I treasure now are of sentimental value, like heartfelt cards and letters, but when I was preparing for this morning, these verses reminded me of two things that I collected as a child—and if you're in your early 30s, you might be able to guess what they are—1) pogs, and 2) Beanie Babies. For those of you who weren't caught up in these '90s fads, pogs were essentially cardboard circles. One side was blank, but the other side had some kind of image on it, like a photo of a tree frog or a picture of Bart Simpson, and if you were lucky, you found one with a holographic foil background. Now technically, you were supposed to play a game with them, but for most people it wasn't about playing pogs but about collecting them.

And then Beanie Babies—they're like a cross between a small stuffed animal and a bean bag. Each one had a heart-shaped tag that listed the Beanie Baby's name and birthday and included a short poem about them.

A big reason why I wanted to collect both pogs and Beanie Babies was because of the social value. Among elementary school students at the time—and quite a few adults, actually—the more pogs or Beanie Babies you had, the better. YOU were better.

After a few years, the pogs and Beanie Babies craze ended, and they lost their status as social currency. But for those of us who collected them, it was hard to let go. At least for me, it wasn't because I had an emotional attachment to these things. It's because everyone believed they would be worth a lot of money some day. Having a collection of pogs or Beanie Babies was supposed to be a financial investment in your future. If you kept your Beanie Babies in mint condition, one day you could auction them off on eBay and be set for life. Unfortunately that never panned out. I held onto my Beanie Babies for about 20 years and eventually gave them away when my parents moved to Florida.

For my 8-year-old self, my collection of Beanie Babies was among the treasures I had stored up on earth. Their worth was not in any special memory but in the potential they had to offer me greater social status and future wealth. And while they weren't destroyed by moths or rust, and no thief ever wanted to steal them, in the end they lost all their value.

Treasures on earth are destined—and often designed—to lose their value. Since 2007, Apple has released 29 different models of the iPhone—at least one new model every year. And with each new model, the old ones lose more of their value financially, socially, and practically as their technology becomes outdated. And even if we're aware of this pattern, we often feel the pressure to keep up or catch up with what's considered valuable in our world, whether we're pre-ordering the newest devices, or updating our wardrobe with the latest trends and popular brands, or investing in certain stocks and cryptocurrency. Treasures on earth have value for a time... until they don't.

Jesus' words about earthly treasures challenge our understanding of what's truly valuable, but it's not a completely new idea. Ecclesiastes is an Old Testament book all about how everything is "hevel," a Hebrew word that means "vapor" or "meaningless." Everything is vapor. Everything is meaningless. And in Ecclesiastes Ch. 5, there's a passage about the futility of wealth. Starting with verse 13, we read:

There is another serious problem I have seen under the sun. Hoarding riches harms the saver. Money is put into risky investments that turn sour, and everything is lost. In the end, there is nothing left to pass on to one's children. We all come to the end of our lives as naked and empty-handed as on the day we were born. We can't take our riches with us. And this, too, is a very serious problem. People leave this world no better off than when they came. All their hard work is for nothing—like working for the wind.

Hoarding riches, accumulating wealth, storing treasures on earth—none of it has lasting value and in the end, it's meaningless. So what does Jesus say to do instead?

Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven.

Now I want us to remember something Pastor Evan shared at the very beginning of this series several weeks ago: when Jesus spoke of heaven in the gospels, most of the time he wasn't talking about a place we would go to but what God was bringing here to us. And so when Jesus says to store our treasures in heaven, he's not really talking about what we'll access in the afterlife but about what God invites us into in this life.

N.T. Wright puts it this way: "As with other references to heaven and earth, we shouldn't imagine he means 'don't worry about this life—get ready for the next one.' 'Heaven' here is where God is right now, and where, if you learn to love and serve God right now, you will have treasure in the present, not just in the future."

Storing our treasures in heaven is about investing in the work God is doing here and now—the things that last and won't lose value, things that can't be destroyed or stolen. Our money, time, and energy—three of our most valuable and limited resources, our greatly protected treasures—we invest them into things like loving God, caring for others, seeking justice, and pursuing peace.

We can give financially to ministries that are serving the poor. We can spend time caring for the forgotten and showing love to the vulnerable. Being here, spending time in God's presence, teaching our kids about the love of Jesus, sharing hope with our neighbors—these are all investments in God's lasting work and kingdom.

And so Jesus offers us an invitation and a choice. We can store up our treasures on earth, or we can store up our treasures in heaven. In weighing our options, we remember what Jesus said next: **Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.** When we look at where we spend our money, time, and energy, we can see a picture of what our heart values. And at the same time, what we value influences and directs where we spend our money, time, and energy.

Maybe a desire of your heart is to feel important or significant, and so you invest your treasure in the pursuit of significance. You spend 60, 70 hours a week at work so your boss thinks of you as a hard worker who deserves a promotion and a corner office. You buy the fanciest car so that your friends and neighbors will envy you. You obsess over what people think of you, and what you can do to make them think of you more highly.

Or maybe a desire of your heart is to help all people know how loved they are, and so you commit your treasure to the good of others. You spend every Saturday afternoon with the widow who lives across the street so she doesn't feel so alone. You buy extra groceries so your neighbor can feed his family while he's out of work. You consider the needs of others, and what you can do to show them the love and care of God.

Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. When the desires of our heart are focused on ourselves, we tend to store our treasures here on earth, investing in material things and pursuing achievements and status that hold temporary value. But when the desires of our heart are focused on the work God is doing here and now, we store our treasures in heaven, investing in the lasting value of God's kingdom and serving others.

Jesus puts this another way as he continues with his sermon in verse 22 and 23. I'll be reading this time from the NIV:

"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. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

There are two ways to look at this passage. Some translations and scholars interpret the eye as a window that allows light into the body, that when we focus on God and things that are good, we will be full of light. And in the same way, when we turn our focus away from God and to the things of this world, we will be full of darkness.

Other scholars interpret the eye as a window that allows the light of God's grace within us to shine through to the world as compassion and generosity. When our eyes are healthy or when the desires of our heart are focused on God's kingdom, it's reflected in our generosity. When our eyes are unhealthy or when the desires of our heart are focused on ourselves, it's reflected in our greed.

And greed is not so much about what you own or how much wealth you have but how deeply you want to gain it and keep it. Has the accumulation of wealth or material things become a source of joy? Is the thought of losing what you have a source of sorrow?

Later in His ministry, Jesus was approached by a man who wanted to know what good deed he would have to do to have eternal life. In Matthew 19, starting with verse 17, we read Jesus' reply:

"Why ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. But to answer your question—if you want to receive eternal life, keep the commandments."

"Which ones?" the man asked.

And Jesus replied: "You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother. Love your neighbor as yourself."

"I've obeyed all these commandments," the young man replied. "What else must I do?"

Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

For the rich man, he had stored up treasure on earth, and he was content with that. It's what his heart desired. And even though he asked Jesus how to have eternal life, he

wasn't willing to make the sacrifices Jesus asked of him: to sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor. Just the thought of losing what he owned saddened him, and he was unable to be generous with his wealth because of the darkness within him. Jesus told the rich man how to have treasure in heaven, but he valued treasure on earth much more.

The rich man is a picture of what Jesus says next in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says in Matthew 6:24,

"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money."

The rich man thought he could serve two masters. He thought he could hold on to his wealth while accomplishing whatever good deed would earn him eternal life, but his devotion was not to God. When serving God required selling all he owned and giving the money to the poor, he remained enslaved to his many possessions.

He was given the choice between two masters, and he had to choose one or the other. Jesus literally offered him treasure in heaven, but the rich man opted to serve his treasure on earth. So while he may not have committed murder or adultery, he had made an idol of his possessions and worshiped his wealth instead of God.

In his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Scot McKnight says this about the idolatry of wealth: "When Jesus stood up to warn his followers about attachment to or accumulation of possessions, he stood in a long line of biblical laws and prophetic announcements about idolatry, the danger of accumulation, justice, and the need to distribute one's excess in order to care for those who had little. Like the ancient prophets, Jesus' teaching in our passages isn't simply about the ideal society, and neither is it an economic theory; this is about worship and idolatry. What Jesus had to say to his followers who were seeking to embody the kingdom vision of Jesus has even

more to say to the affluence of Christians in the West. Jesus' message can be reduced to these ideas: Live simply. Possessions are mysteriously idolatrous. Trust God."

Live simply. Possessions are mysteriously idolatrous. Trust God. One of the core values for the Brethren in Christ denomination is "living simply." The core values statement says, "We value uncluttered lives, which free us to love boldly, give generously, and serve joyfully." When we hold our material possessions and our time with open hands instead of tight fists, we can respond obediently when God asks us to sacrifice our treasures on earth, and we open ourselves to God's invitation to join him in the work he's doing around us.

So as the worship team comes up to lead us in a time of response, I invite you to consider what your treasures are—what you value, protect, and try to keep. Maybe it's your money, time, and energy—or maybe it's certain relationships, your reputation, your sense of control. How might God be inviting you to sacrifice and invest these treasures in the lasting work He's doing here and now? What does God want to reveal to you about the desires of your heart and which master you've chosen to serve?

1 Chronicles 29:14–16

"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are foreigners and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you."