

## *“Treasure Chest”*

*Matthew 6:19-34*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • April 14, 2013

There is one subject that we just don't like to bring up in church. Money. Somehow when it comes to our money we would prefer not to talk about it. After all, it's my money, I earned it and it's nobody's business what I do with it, right? Not exactly. Jesus spoke more about money and how we handle it than any other topic!

Think about this for a moment? How would you define rich or poor? It's estimated that the wealthiest person in Corpus Christi is worth about 40 million dollars. That seems like a lot. Until you compare that with someone like Michael Dell, the second richest person in Texas, who is worth 40 times that at about 16 billion. But then Bill Gates is worth three and a half times as much as Dell at around 57 billion dollars. How do you know if you are wealthy or in poverty?

The answer to that question became very clear to Eddie Ogan at Easter in 1946. Her father had died five years before, leaving her mother to raise seven school kids with no money. By 1946, four of her siblings had grown and moved out leaving 14-year-old Eddie and her two sisters who were 12 and 16.

Eddie describes how a month before Easter the pastor of their church announced that a special Easter offering would be taken to help a poor family. He asked everyone to save and give sacrificially. So she and her family sought ways to save for this special offering. They bought 50 pounds of potatoes and lived on them for a month, saving \$20 of their grocery money for the offering. They kept the lights and the radio off. The girls cleaned houses and babysat and they made potholders which they sold at three for \$1. They made \$20 on pot holders. Eddie wrote, “That month was one of the best of our lives.”

The day before Easter, Eddie and her sister walked to the grocery store and got the manager to give them three crisp \$20 bills and one \$10 bill for all their change. She said, “We ran all the way home to show Mom. We had never had so much money before. That night we were so excited we could hardly sleep. We didn't care that we wouldn't have new clothes for Easter; we had \$70 for the sacrificial offering.”

Here's how Eddie described what happened next: “We could hardly wait to get to church! On Sunday morning, rain was pouring. We didn't own an umbrella, and the church was over a mile from our home, but it didn't seem to matter how wet we got. Darlene had cardboard in her shoes to fill the holes. The cardboard came apart, and her feet got wet. But we sat in church proudly. I heard some teenagers talking about the Smith girls having on their old dresses. I looked at them in their new clothes, and I felt rich.

When the sacrificial offering was taken, we were sitting on the second row from the front. Mom put in the \$10 bill, and each of us kids put in a \$20. As we walked home after church, we sang all the way. At lunch Mom had a surprise for us. She had bought a dozen eggs, and we had boiled Easter eggs with our fried potatoes!

Late that afternoon the minister drove up in his car. Mom went to the door, talked with him for a moment, and then came back with an envelope in her hand. We asked what it was, but she didn't say a word. She opened the envelope and out fell a bunch of money. There were three crisp \$20 bills, one \$10 and seventeen \$1 bills.

Mom put the money back in the envelope. We didn't talk, just sat and stared at the floor. We had gone from feeling like millionaires to feeling like poor white trash.

We kids had such a happy life that we felt sorry for anyone who didn't have our Mom and Dad for parents and a house full of brothers and sisters and other kids visiting constantly. We thought it was fun to share silverware and see whether we got the spoon or the fork that night and the two knives we passed around to whoever needed them. I knew we didn't have a lot of things that other people had, but I'd never thought we were poor.

That Easter day I found out we were. The minister had brought us the money for the poor family, so we must be poor. I didn't like being poor. I looked at my dress and worn-out shoes and felt so ashamed—I didn't even want to go back to church. We sat in silence for a long time. Then it got dark, and we went to bed. All that week, we girls went to school and came home, and no one talked much. Finally on Saturday, Mom asked us what we wanted to do with the money. What did poor people do with money? We didn't know. We'd never known we were poor.

We didn't want to go to church on Sunday, but Mom said we had to. Although it was a sunny day, we didn't talk on the way. At church we had a missionary speaker. He talked about how churches in Africa made buildings out of sun-dried bricks, but they needed money to buy roofs. He said \$100 would put a roof on a church. The minister said, "Can't we all sacrifice to help these poor people?" We looked at each other and smiled for the first time in a week.

Mom reached into her purse and pulled out the envelope. She passed it to Darlene. Darlene gave it to me, and I handed it to Ocy. Ocy put it in the offering. When the offering was counted, the minister announced that it was a little over \$100. The missionary was excited. He hadn't expected such a large offering from our small church. He said, "You must have

some rich people in this church." Suddenly it struck us! We had given \$87 of that "little over \$100." We were the rich family in the church! Hadn't the missionary said so? From that day on I've never been poor again. I've always remembered how rich I am because I have Jesus!"

Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

What Jesus is asking us is, "Where is your heart? What is most important to you? What are your priorities?" As humans we have a tendency to focus on things that are not always the most important things. Sometimes we get caught up pursuing money or fame or status or our bodies. If any of those become your primary purpose in life they have become a god and they control you. As Americans we don't like the idea of something or someone controlling us, but that's exactly what can happen.

In the pursuit for more we find that we can never get enough. If it's tobacco or alcohol or drugs we call it an addiction. But if we're talking about our desire for more and more money we don't like to call that an addiction. We call it the American Dream.

We think that we can serve God on Sunday, pursue wealth Monday through Friday, and take Saturday off for ourselves. The problem is that this reduces our service to God to being similar to a hobby. For example, I can certainly work at my job during the week and go fishing or play golf or garden on the weekend, right? Jesus answers by saying, "No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and money."

We're not talking about fitting work and church into your life. We're talking about slavery. In the sixth chapter of Romans, God shows us that all of us are slaves to something. We are slaves to sin. But when Christ enters our lives he sets us free from that slavery to sin. But it doesn't mean that we're completely free. We become slaves or servants to Christ. Romans 6 says, "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God." It's impossible for a slave to serve two masters. That's what Jesus is saying here. You have a choice. You can love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, or you can love something else with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, but you can't do both. "You cannot serve God *and* money." And money may be a good servant but it's a bad master.

Jesus goes on to tell us why we shouldn't serve earthly things as our first priority: earthly things don't last. What the animals don't eat will decay. And even if your earthly possessions are well cared for and last, you won't. Our bodies wear out. Our time here is limited. So Jesus says, "where are you going to invest? In the earthly things that can't last or in the heavenly things that last forever?"

Then right in the middle of this section on money, we find verses 22 and 23 where Jesus says, "The eye is the lamp of the body," and He talks about light and darkness. What a strange passage. To help us make sense of it we need to know that in ancient times they had a different understanding about the way eyes worked. Today we know that the eye gathers light and focuses it to form images that our brain can understand. But the common understanding in the ancient world was that rays shine through the eyes and touch whatever they see and your "inner light" is what makes your eyes shine. Sometimes even today people will say, "the eyes are the

window to the soul." In ancient Judaism, the term "evil eye" was used to express the opposite of generosity – namely selfishness, covetousness, and in general an evil and envious disposition. So what Jesus is saying is that the person with a sound eye is the one who, by being generous, serves God instead of money and therefore stores up treasure in heaven.

The last part of this passage talks about what keeps us from being generous – fear. We worry that we won't have enough food, or enough clothing or enough money. Jesus points us to nature to show us that God is in control and that he takes care of us. For us to worry about those things is really a lack of faith. If you're constantly worried you aren't trusting that God will provide the things you need. That doesn't mean that we are to sit around and wait for food and clothes to fall from the sky. Other places in the Bible are very clear that we are to work hard to provide for our needs and for our families. And it's not wrong to have wealth. But it is wrong not to share our blessings with other people.

That brings us to the climax of this passage. Beginning in verse 31 Jesus says, "Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." How do we seek the kingdom of God? First of all, we seek the kingdom by seeking the King, which means bowing to Jesus as Lord. You and I personally submit to God's reign by obeying him, usually at some personal cost. We also seek the kingdom by praying, "thy kingdom come." We pray for kingdom causes. The third way we seek the kingdom of God is by inviting other people into a relationship with Christ. Fourth, we seek the kingdom of

God by working for righteousness in our dealings with other people and in our society and government. Finally, we seek first the kingdom of God by investing in it generously with our time and our money. Our level of investment in God's kingdom shows us clearly where our treasure is, because it shows that we trust God to provide the rest.

So what does this mean for you? I think we find two sides of the same coin. First, don't spend your time in worthless worrying, because if you trust him God will provide for your needs. But here's the cool part. By trusting God and being generous with your resources, investing in his kingdom, *you* are the way that God provides

for others. Eddie Ogan and her family learned that in 1946 and it changed her life forever. She and her husband Phil went on to have 13 children, 12 of them adopted, many with special needs. As they were generous in sharing what they had God continued to provide for them. When you and I are willing to trust God for our own needs we get to partner with him to help provide for other people's needs. Your generosity keeps the cycle going. Investing in heaven is the best deal on earth. There's never a bear market in heaven and the dividends are eternal.

*Amen*