

“Buried Treasure”

Matthew 6:19-34 • Exodus 35:4-10, 20-29

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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X marks the spot. The idea of buried treasure has probably intrigued most of us since childhood. It’s the stuff of story books. But it also sometimes happens to be true. In 1861, John Singer, whose brother Isaac owned Singer sewing machine company, lived on South Padre Island with his wife and family. Over the ten years they had lived on the island they had developed a successful cattle ranching business and had become rather wealthy. But then the Civil War started and the Singers were forced to move back up north. Before they left they buried much of their fortune – gold, silver, coins, and jewelry – in the sand dunes near their home. When they returned after the war the dunes had shifted and they were not able to locate their treasure. Many people have searched but it has never been found.

However, a couple of years ago in northern California a young couple was out walking with their dog on their property when they spotted an old tin can buried in the dirt. When they dug it up they discovered that it contained solid gold coins dating to the 1850s. They eventually unearthed several cans with similar coins worth millions.

Jesus tells the story of a man who is walking across an empty field. Perhaps he’s in a hurry and taking a short cut to town. This was acceptable in those days. As he’s walking along his walking stick suddenly hits something and makes a *thud*. This is not a rock. He bends down and clears away the dirt. Like the couple in California he discovers it’s buried treasure. He can’t just take it. That would be stealing. So the man goes and sells everything he owns and buys that field. When he discovers something more valuable than what he already has his priorities change.

In Matthew 6 Jesus says, “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?” In his great little book, *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn points out that “there’s a fundamental connection between our spiritual lives and how we think about and handle money.” 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. 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.