

The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached
The Sermon on the Mount Series (Part VIII)
“Treasure!”

Liturgical Date: Lent 2 (A)

Primary Text: St. Matthew 6:19-24 (not assigned Gospel text for Lent 2 A)

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Second Sunday in Lent, is the Gospel Lesson from St. Matthew 6. Our sermon series “The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached: The Sermon on the Mount” continues today with the eighth installment. The title of the sermon is “Treasure!”.

Who doesn't like treasure? Many people are interested in treasure stories. Of course, the riches of a treasure are great, but there is the aspect of the “thrill of the hunt” as well. There have been many books written and movies made that are about searching for and finding lost treasure. Pirates are interesting to learn about, but they are also interesting because they had treasure and were famous for hiding it. The heart could get pumping if you came across a pirate's treasure map with the “X” marking the spot.

As a child I was always very interested in stories of lost treasures. Perhaps you were too. I read books about lost treasures. Some that were discovered, some that were still missing. I watched movies about treasure, I loved the Indiana Jones series of movies. What excitement! And another of my favorites was “Treasure Island”, the Disney version with “young Hawkins” and the double-crossing Long John Silver.

I even made an attempt to find treasure, I actually ordered a “treasure map” of pirate treasures in Florida. I believe that I saw it advertised in the back of a comic book or something. It arrived in a manilla colored tube. With glee I opened it up, thinking this could be it! Well, it actually was an artist’s rendition of the state of Florida with graphics and text about famous treasures said to be there. It was all very general, rather than a detailed map with directions, paces, and all. Undeterred, I even bought a metal detector and insisted on taking it on a family vacation to Florida (which interesting enough was to an island off the coast of Tampa called Treasure Island) and spent some time going over the beach with it. I had fun, but didn’t find any treasure. However, I did a little research for this sermon and discovered that despite all the professional treasure hunters that invest lots of money in searches, some of the most valuable treasures have been found essentially by accident. One worth almost 4 million dollars was found in 1992 by a farmer in England who had just plowed a field and dropped a hammer. He had a neighbor help him find it with his metal detector and instead found a treasure of gold coins and other artifacts dating back to the 5th Century AD. Sometimes we have a plan and find no real treasure, other times the treasure is basically put into our laps-the sermon will bring that out today.

In the portion the Sermon on the Mount that we heard this morning, Jesus speaks about treasure. And He continues with His pattern of making contrasts. Our Lord specifically contrasts treasures, eyes, and masters. There is the material, and there is the spiritual. Jesus preaches a similar message in St. Luke 12 as well. Again, Jesus is not saying that all earthly wealth is wrong. But He is saying that if this is your primary pursuit and this is where you find true value, then you not taking the right path.

Earthly treasures are not all they are cracked up to be. I mentioned earlier that one of my favorite movies was the Disney version of *Treasure Island*. Of course, then, I showed it to my daughter when she was a child. Shashana and I planned to take her to Disney World one year and we came up with a plan that was to create a letter and map sent to her from the “Long John Silver Society”. She followed the map and clues which took her around our yard, and she dug in the spot. The treasure that she unearthed was Disney World tickets! She believed the whole thing and we had to tell her that we did it!

And many people believe the treasures of this world are the real value of life. They devote a large portion of their lives to pursuing them. And I am not just talking about “get rich quick” schemes, but often times just working and accumulating wealth, trying to live the “good life.” Yes, money and wealth are necessary to survive in the world so we can have shelter, food, and clothing, but so many want more. But as Jesus points out, these treasures of earth are not as great as most people think they are. Verse 19 tells us that the treasures of earth are fleeting. Moth and rust take their toll on them. Thieves can steal them. How many people lost money in the recent FTX crypto currency scam that has been in the news? A thief did not break into their house, but billions disappeared electronically in a matter of minutes. And even if you manage to keep your treasures till the day you die, then what happens? A man reported to a friend that a wealthy person they knew had just died. The friend said, “how much did he leave?” His response, “I believe he left it all!”

And as we examine our own hearts, we must be honest about how much of our pursuit of wealth is greed, which is sin. Greed will lead people to do things they never thought they would do. It will lead them to hurt others. They may

have started out rationalizing that they would use their money for good, but then greed took complete control. In the popular television series “Breaking Bad”, that is exactly what happened with the main character, Walter White. He starts producing illegal drugs as a way to make money to provide for his family after he is gone because he has cancer. But then he steadily descends into a darker and darker place in his pursuit of money and power. And he ends up losing everything he originally thought he could save.

Luther in preaching on these verses focuses much of what he says on the sin of greed. He personifies greed calling it “Sir Greed” and characterizes it, along with false teaching, as one of the two great enemies of the Gospel. He points out the foolishness of serving earthly treasure as a false god, asking, *“What sort of a god is this that is not capable of defending himself against moth, rust, or thieves?”* His evaluation of the world is stark but accurate, *“The world is one big whorehouse, completely submerged in greed. We too, have to live in it being tempted by these examples and allurements.”* And it is not just the rich that fall victim to greed. They may have additional challenges, but many a person who lacks material wealth has been scheming and greedy. The rich and poor alike collect all types of earthly possessions in which they often treasure and define themselves by.

And what are we to make of verse 23? Jesus says, *“But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!”* The Greek word there translated as “evil” in the KJV version could also be translated as “bad” or “unhealthy”. To understand what Jesus is communicating to His original audience, it is important to know some of the beliefs about the eye in the Mediterranean culture. The

eyes were seen as the window which light entered the body, even a window to the soul. Even today we talk about “making eye contact” and “reading people’s eyes” to learn about them. The belief in the “evil eye” is still very strong in these regions today. It is believed the misfortunate can be brought upon someone by looking at them a certain way or gesturing with your fingers from your eyes toward someone. People will wear amulets, often of a clear and open eye, to protect them from the “evil eye.” We can also understand that the eye guides us. What we see directs our minds and bodies to take certain actions. How we see will affect what we do. If your spiritual vision is “evil” or “unhealthy”, such as being focused on material possessions, then your whole path of life will be wrong.

The third example of the wrong orientation of life is brought in by Jesus speaking of the two masters in verse 24. Jesus preaches that you cannot serve two masters, as a slave or servant will only have one. Essentially, you will either be a servant of God or a servant of the world (the devil). If you try to have “spiritual double vision”, it will only lead to disaster. A choice between two masters must be made. This is because as Jesus said, what will happen is, *“for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other.”*

Jesus closes this section of the Sermon on the Mount with a blunt statement to bring this dichotomy into focus. *“Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”* These are the two masters. The modern translations generally translate “mammon” as “money” or “riches” as the meaning of the word “mammon” is lost on modern readers. However, to get the most literal meaning of what Jesus is saying here, “mammon” is the best word to use. This word is derived from an Aramaic term, which was the common language spoken at the

time. It is more than just money; it is broader in meaning essentially “materialism”. This takes us back to the idea of earthly treasure and its folly. Yes, money is the pursuit of most of the world. However, that money can buy lots of other things too. It could even be a person does not have expensive things, but still finds their identity in the material things that they have. It is not the money itself that is evil, but the love of it, the pursuit of it above all else, the willingness to do all types of things to gain worldly wealth. At the root of this, as Luther preached, is greed. It is coveting. It is making something else more important than God. This all harkens back to the 10 Commandments, which we have said multiple times in this sermon series is one of the main things Jesus is doing here in delivering a New Testament version of Mount Sinai.

Thus, it is apparent what Jesus is doing in contrasting the eye, the focus, that brings light as opposed to the eye that brings a pursuit of evil. And that two paths are presented here: the way of God and the way of mammon, or materialism. Followers of Jesus are to be those that live in the light of God, serving and following Him above all else.

Before we conclude, we need bring into proper focus the true treasure. I believe that the key verse to understanding this portion of the Sermon on the Mount is verse 21, *“For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also.”* By heart here, it is meant the whole being of a person: his or her mind, emotions, and will. What is your life all about? What are your goals? Do you serve God, or have you created a false god of materialism, which is really just serving yourself because we want these temporal things? What is precious to you, what is at the center of your life? What you spend your time and energy pursuing will reveal your heart. Jesus, as He always is, is dead-one with what He speaks in verse 21.

Because there are two types of treasure. We heard about the first type earlier in the sermon. The treasures that the sinful nature and world pursue are only temporary. Moth, rust, and thief come-and ultimately death will come and these treasures will be of no use to you at all. They certainly won't buy your way into heaven. On the other hand, life can be spent accumulating treasures in heaven. A life of service to God and serving your neighbor is this path. It is one that acknowledges the need for some physical and material things, but one that is not centered on obtaining those things. It is trusting in God to provide for our needs. Despite what the sinful world screams to us, the treasures in heaven are the best treasures. They are not temporal, but eternal. The moth will not come to devour them, or rust to deteriorate them, nor the thief to steal them. There may be some "delayed gratification", but they are better and more glorious than any shiny object the world can offer.

Yes, we do good works as servants of the true God. But the greatest treasures of heaven cannot be purchased with any money we have earned. This is the best part of it all. The treasures of heaven are not earned by us but earned by God Himself and *donated* to us. They are a gift-right into our laps. These treasures are received in faith. They have been paid for by the suffering and death of Jesus Himself. The treasures of forgiveness, eternal salvation, and eternal life in the most glorious Kingdom of God are ours. The treasure of heaven is our eternal home. This is where God treasures to live with His people eternally. May our hearts be there also.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.