

Where Your Heart Is

Matthew 6:19-21

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Your life is not an accident. It was created for holy purposes. Of course, it is up to you to decide if you want a holy purpose to your life. You make that decision by choosing what you will do with the things you are holding.

Usually, when the Bible introduces a new character to us, that person is holding on to something that they treasure. It is something on which they are betting their lives. Abraham was clinging to what little family he had. Jacob was clinging to the heel of his older brother. Moses was holding a shepherd's staff. David had a slingshot. Some of the disciples were holding fishing nets when we first met them. A young boy was holding five loaves and two fish. A rich young ruler was clutching his wealth tightly. A poor widow was holding two copper coins, all that she had.

Sometimes they are holding only a little, sometimes a lot. Sometimes it is money or a weapon, a profession or a relationship. But always, before these people were found by God, they had some cherished treasure. And they held it so tightly, because with this treasure, life seemed secure and hopeful. Without their treasure, they felt vulnerable in the harsh world.

You understand that, don't you? Certainly we all know that the world is a hard place. And if you are going to make it, you have to have some treasure, something you can clutch for dear life that will get you through. Whatever it is serves as the symbol for your life.

The staff Moses was holding when God called him represented more than his job as a shepherd. Moses picked up that staff 40 years earlier when his dreams for life in Egypt didn't work out and he had to abandon his early hopes of saving the Hebrew slaves. Now he just had a day job as a shepherd. That staff, to which Moses clung day after day, was the symbol of his determination to forget about making a difference in an unjust world and just take care of himself.

The heel that Jacob clutched during his birth belonged to the other guy who always got the breaks. So Jacob held it tightly as a treasured symbol of his resolve to hustle a blessing for himself. Zachaeus hoarded money. Jairus cherished his sick daughter. The woman caught in adultery clung to her sexuality. Paul carried his distinguished profession as a Pharisee with him on the road to Damascus. Clinging to all of their treasures, these men and women made a fist and shook it in the face of the hard world saying, "At least I have this going for me. I'll be okay as long as I have this one treasure."

Now what about you? If the Bible were introducing your story, what would you be holding? A child? A job? A tattered resume you've used too many times? What would you hold? Some of us are still holding the hurt we received a long time ago. We've held it so long we just can't imagine who we would be without it. Tragically, hurt has now become our treasure. Others are holding onto dreams for the future or memories of the past. And they hold on so tightly that they cannot receive the gifts of today.

But when it comes to treasure, most of us are holding onto our money. It doesn't matter if you have a little or a lot. Money can be the passion of the poor just as easily as the wealthy. If we do have a lot of money, like the rich man in the New Testament, we are tempted to think that we are okay. We have so much that we have to build bigger barns to hold it all, more tax shelters in which to keep it. If we don't have money, we can devote our lives to the treasured illusion that we would be fine if only we could get a little more.

The point of today's text is to remind us that some treasure can be lost, and some will last forever. Treasures on earth are the kind that are always lost. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust consumes and where thieves break in and steal." The word for rust in Greek is *broisis* which actually means to eat away at something. The longer you hold onto an earthly treasure, the more

you see it getting nibbled away. Health, accomplishments, and nest eggs will just slip away from you day by day until eventually, it is all gone. As a pastor I have stood by many death beds. In the end our posture is always the same - flat on our backs, with our hands open and empty.

A while ago I saw a full-page advertisement in one of the weekly news magazines. It portrayed a beautiful woman hailing a cab on a city street with her arm outstretched. You could see her stunning and very expensive watch, which was the product being sold. On the opposite page, the magazine was running a story about children dying of starvation in Sudan. In the middle of the article was a large photograph of an emaciated child. When you held the magazine out, and looked at both photographs side-by-side the contrast was striking. Then it occurred to me that both of these people are dying. But only the starving child knew it.

It doesn't matter what you collect along the way in life, you won't get to keep any of it. The great thief of life, called death, will see to that. Unless the things you are collecting are treasures in heaven.

"But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves do not break in and steal." Treasures in heaven are things that last for eternity. According to the Apostle Paul, it is things like faith, hope, and love that abide. These are the only things that cross over the river of death with you. Faith, hope, and love. No one can steal them, and unlike the earthly treasures that slowly get nibbled away, the more you invest in the treasures of faith, hope, and love, the more you receive.

"Wherever your treasure is," Jesus said, "there will your heart be also." If your treasure is earthly, even if it is something wonderful like health or relationships, then those are the things that God most wants. That is because those are the things that are keeping you from giving God your heart. Above all else God has always been more concerned with your heart than anything else, including your money. Now I really believe this, but it scares me, because I'm afraid that if we ask for your hearts, the church won't receive your money. And the Lord knows, we are in great need of it to continue our ministry of faith, hope and love. But Jesus has made it clear that your treasure and your heart always end up in the same place. That is why God asks for your money. It is not because he needs your money, but because you need to invest your heart in things like faith, hope, and love.

Actually, today's text doesn't tell us to give up our treasures. It tells us to stop holding them and to allow God to hold them. That is when the miracles can start. In the hands of God, all our earthly treasures are transformed into eternal testimonies to the power of faith, hope, and love.

In the hands of God a sling shot can kill a giant, a shepherd's staff can part the Red Sea, and a 90-year-old woman can have her first baby. In the hands of God, fishermen can become fishers of men and women, a persecutor can become an apostle, and a few loaves and fish can feed 5,000 hungry people. And in the hands of God the treasure you anxiously hold can be used to change the world.

That the grace of God is waiting to do that with your life is crystal clear. Page after page of the sacred Scriptures tells story after story of men and women who encountered a God who had already invested his heart in them. And they became so grateful that they found the faith, hope, and love to invest their treasure and hearts in God's work. And that is when their own lives were changed into men and women who made a difference.

Now we return to the story of your life. Wouldn't you love for it to be the next chapter in the great story of transformed lives? Wouldn't you love for your life to count for something of eternal significance? It can. It all depends on where you give your heart. God has already given you his heart. You won't be changed into a person whose life is eternally significant until you give him your heart as well. You do that by taking a long hard look at the things you are holding today. The things you have counted on for so long --your treasure. And then you place it in his hands. Even as you do that you can start to feel the faith, hope, and love change your life.

You can't say, God has my heart, but unfortunately all my treasure is going to my bills. No. Where your treasure is going, your heart is following. Why would you let your heart be nibbled away by accumulating more and more bills? Take control. Determine how your life is spent!

O God at the end of life, may we be found to be good and faithful stewards who were not afraid to give you our treasure, our hearts, our lives. Amen.