

Matthew 6.19-21

Where's Your Treasure

Amington (Online)

Sunday 15 November 2020

Treasure [2]

Pirates

When I was little I *loved* pirates, especially stories about treasure maps. You know the sort... classic 'X' marks the spot. I used to dream of an exciting find – a chest full of gold bullion.

I wonder what I'd like to find in a treasure chest today? Perhaps a lifetime's supply of Apple Macs and iPhones and iPads? Maybe the key to a lovely secluded cottage, overlooking the sea, with a roaring fire and comfortable sofa...

I wonder what *you* would like to find in that treasure chest? I wonder what *your* heart desires, most of all?

Money

Jesus talks about money and possessions a *lot* – in fact he talks more about them than anything else except the kingdom of God – even when he was talking about other things!

Why does he speak so much about money? Partly because it's all around us – we all need it, use it, and have it (to varying degrees).

But mostly he talks about it so much, because it is dangerous. That's our first point today: Money Demands Loyalty.

An Alsatian, a Labrador, and a cat die and go to heaven. God greets each of them, and then asks what they believe in.

The Alsatian says: 'I believe in loyalty to my master.' 'Wonderful,' God says, 'You can sit on my right.'

The Labrador says, 'I believe in the loyal care and protection of my master.' 'Wonderful,' God says, 'You can sit on my left.'

Finally God asks the cat, 'And what do you believe in?'

'I believe,' says the cat, 'That *you* are in *my* seat.'

Money Demands Loyalty

Last week I talked about the young man who came to Jesus to ask about eternal life. He was religious, he was wealthy – in human terms he was top of the pile.

‘One thing you lack,’ Jesus told him: God. He looked for all the world like he was the model believer, but his heart was in the wrong place. His heart was loyal, not to God, but to money. That’s why when Jesus challenged him to give up his money and follow Jesus instead, he **walked away sad**. He was loyal to money, not God. Money Demands Loyalty.

In our reading today Jesus says, **‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth’** (19). Now, elsewhere in the Bible we are told to provide for our relatives (1 Timothy 5.8), to work hard so we can make provision for our future (Proverbs 6.6-8), and to enjoy the good things God has given us (1 Timothy 4.3-4). We must be good stewards of what God has given, however much or little.

Jesus is not talking here about provision, but greed. **‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,’** he says. There’s a selfishness here: gathering wealth, not to serve others, but **for yourselves**.

And there is a greed here as well: storing up wealth so you can hoard it, not using it but for the pleasure of having it and the feeling of security it brings.

Money promises so much: significance and security, freedom and fulfilment, pleasure and power. It promises much and demands our loyalty. But it can't fulfil all those promises. With money, you will never be satisfied, more is never enough. With money, the more you have, the more you've got to lose. With money, all the things it brings are superficial and short-lived.

Money Doesn't Last

Money Demands Loyalty, and Money Doesn't Last. Jesus went on to say: **'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal'** (19).

I detest insurance – it feels far too much like gambling, and even when something goes wrong you usually have to fight to get what you bought it for. But we need insurance – why? Because none of this stuff is permanent or secure – it can be stolen, it can break, it can wear out. Money Doesn't Last.

It doesn't last in this life, and we doesn't last into the next.

John D Rockefeller was the richest man in the modern era. He was one of the first oil barons in the USA, and at its peak his fortune was worth \$418 billion, if you adjust for inflation to 2019. To put that into perspective, that's a little over 1/7 the size of the entire UK economy in 2019. One-seventh!

After he died a journalist asked his accountant, 'How much did he leave behind?' The answer came back: 'All of it.'

Hear these words from Psalm 49:

Do not be overawed when others grow rich,
when the splendour of their houses increases;
for they will take nothing with them when they die,
their splendour will not descend with them

Psalm 49.16-17 (NIV)

Now, you might say, I know Money Doesn't Last. I know I can't take it with me. But I quite like the sound of growing rich and for the splendour of my house to increase!

Treasure Leads

Jesus said, '**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**' (21).

It's as if the thing we treasure has a gravitational pull, drawing us towards itself. If we treasure this, we'll be drawn towards it. If we treasure that, we'll be drawn towards that.

Treasure Leads – and we cannot help but follow.

Jesus knew that. He didn't say all this because he was a killjoy – he said it to *warn* us. He wants what is best for us, he wants us to head in the right direction: away from what can be destroyed, stolen, and lost, and towards what is permanent, satisfying, and safe. I'll say it again: Jesus wants what is best for us, for *you*.

This is he says: **'Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal'** (20).

'Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven' – in other words, this is good for you! 'Do it for yourself!' Jesus says. This is what's best for you. This is the direction you need to travel in. It's not about buying our way into heaven – not at all – it's not about buying favour from God – of course not, he gives it for free.

No – it's more like setting the destination on a satnav, or keeping your eyes fixed on a landmark. You might have a few hiccups along the way, but you'll get there eventually.

That's the connection between faith and finance – it's not about buying our way into life, it's about where we *focus*.

Treasure Leads. So where's your treasure leading *you*?

Generosity

For some of you, money really is a snare – it's the destination in your satnav, the landmark you're focusing on.

For others of you, money doesn't bother you that much – but there will be something else that distracts, that pulls you away from God.

For most of us, there will be *several* of those distractions. But don't let that minimise the power of money in your life. It's so subtle that it can command our loyalty whether we have lots of it, none of it, or a bank balance somewhere in between.

Perhaps it might be better to think of it from the other direction: how well do you keep your focus on Jesus? Does your attention drift? Do you get easily distracted?

If you do, one of the most powerful ways you can reset your satnav, refocus on God, is to be more and more generous with what he's given you. Time, talents, treasure – give it away! Use it, don't keep it for yourself! The more you do that, the more you will find the treasure that is truly valuable.

Why? Because the more you clear that stuff out, the more room you make for God. The more you give away, the more you'll find what truly matters, what truly lasts, what brings true joy: God.

And you can do all that **for yourself**, because it's good for you, it's the best thing for you – and, unlike being greedy – it's good for everyone else, too.

Where's your treasure? My prayer is that we all learn to find it in heaven, with God, and be pulled ever more close to him.

Amen.