

Where is Your Treasure?
Matthew 6:19-21
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Jacob Armstrong is a pastor in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee. He tells the story of coming home to visit his parents. Jacob was getting in the car to return and when his Mom handed him a cardboard box, heavy in his arms. When Jacob opened the box he realized that she had been cleaning her closets. The box was filled with Jacob's boyhood treasure. Over the next several visits just as Jacob was about to leave, his mother would hand him a box filled with treasures from his childhood. Soccer, baseball, basketball and pinewood derby trophies. One box had his baseball card collection, which he had pored over for hours in elementary school. All the treasure of the first 18 years of life fit into five cardboard boxes.

Where do you keep your treasure? In a cardboard box? A safe deposit box? Under the mattress? In a retirement account? A checking or savings account? Does your treasure fit in your wallet, your purse? Maybe your treasure is a boat or truck in the garage or a family heirloom/antique. Our treasure can be the house we live in, the place we called home for so many years we can't imagine ever leaving it.

I want to tell you about some treasure I had once and what happened to it. This particular treasure was stored in my living room. The treasure was a Mason and Hamlin baby grand piano. This piano made in the early 1900's had belonged to my grandmother. It had been in her house in California, and was moved to Wisconsin in the late 1960's. With the change in humidity and overall climate, the piano's sound board had to be redone. I sat at that piano for hours playing as child, a youth. When I was established with a family of my own, the baby grand piano became mine. It followed us with every move. We moved to Columbus Wisconsin in

2005. The house where we lived had a rather small living room. The piano took up about half the room. But in time my treasure became just stuff. A plumber botched a simple repair job on the faucet in our bathtub on the second floor. He had finished his work, closed the door behind him and no one had come into the house for several hours. When I returned about 3 p.m. I heard the sound of water flowing. And walked into the living room to see water pouring through the ceiling of the living onto the piano, through the piano, onto the floor and into the basement. The piano was ruined. Our insurance company hired Tim Farley of Farley's House of Piano's in Madison to assess the damage. It would have cost 34,000 to restore the piano to it's original state. Instead of paying that much, we took the insurance settlement money and bought a much more modest electronic piano which served our family's needs adequately for many years after that. We later learned the Mr. Farley bought the remnants of the piano from the insurance company for several hundred dollars. He ended up restoring it and putting it on his showroom floor in Madison. The price tag was \$35,000. I visited the restored piano once or twice because it still had such fond memories.

Today we're talking about treasure and stuff. Treasure and stuff can find their way into our hearts. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches us that if we're not careful the things we invest in are not true treasure. Jesus says "stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them."²⁰ Our treasure, our stuff, is stolen from us in several different ways. I had a Barbie Dream House when I was little. I loved that Barbie Dream House along with my Barbie doll collection. After college I went looking for my Barbie dream house in the attic. And I couldn't find it because my mother had thrown it out! That's a relatively unimportant treasure. Losing other treasure is more serious. I learned recently that some students in the Reedsburg school system never showed up for class the first day in the fall. Because of the flooding in late August and early September their families had to abandon their homes and move away.

Water damage had made their homes unlivable. The heartache of losing your house can be devastating, not to mention the financial repercussions of just walking away from a house and the mortgage payments. The thieves that can break in and steal our stuff and our treasure can be floods, bad plumbing jobs, a recession, accidents or overly zealous mother in a cleaning frenzy or just the passage of time. The treasure we can hold -- material goods -- in time becomes stuff -- something we need to let go of in order to move on with our lives. People who have downsized, moved or do any home reorganizing know the painful yet also liberating process of de-cluttering, getting rid of stuff.

Jesus was not against having stuff. Stuff can be useful. We all need to spend money on things like refrigerators, vehicles, a roof over our head. And we also spend money and time and energy on things we don't need but that we want, things we think will make us happy. These can be things or experiences like vacations. Jesus teaches us that whatever we spend money, time and energy on -- this is our treasure.

What Jesus is teaching us here is: be careful about where you invest your time, your money your energy. Because that will become your real treasure. Listen again to what Jesus says: "Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don't eat them and where thieves don't break in and steal them."²¹ Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus is reversing the order of what we'd typically expect. You would think that what we really value -- our treasure -- is what we spend time, money and energy on. You would think that the things we value and hold dear will determine where we focus our energy, time and money. But Jesus turns that upside down. Here's how Jacob Armstrong puts it in his book "Treasure": "Jesus says you will learn about someone's

heart by looking at his or her treasure (not vice versa). [Repeat.] Jesus knows that where our money is going will shape what's in our hearts (whether we want it to or not). If you spend lots of time and money on building or refurbishing a house, that will find its way into your heart. When you spend money on a car or truck, you have to spend money and time on keeping it in good working order. If you put your treasure – money -- into something, your heart will become attached to that thing.

Here's the problem: the things we spend our time and money on doesn't always match up with what's in our hearts. We don't always spend time and money on the things that truly matter. Our priorities get skewed. The Evangelist Billy Graham was asked late in his life "if you could ,would you go back and do anything differently in your life?" His answer was: "Yes, of course. I'd spend more time at home with my family, and I'd study more and preach less. I wouldn't have taken so many speaking engagements... . Whenever I counsel someone who feels called to be an evangelist, I always urge them to guard their time and not feel like they have to do everything." Everyone can get tempted by the good things of life that we forget about the things that matter most. And that is what Jesus calls "treasure in heaven."

In Matthew's gospel Jesus talks the Kingdom of Heaven instead of the kingdom of God like we find in Mark and Luke. In Matthew Heaven means God. He uses heaven to avoid saying the sacred name of God, which was taboo in ancient Judaism.

Treasures in heaven is what we get when we invest in the things of God. We build up treasure in heaven. When we invest in treasure in heaven (and not in satisfying our selfish desires not in over valuing material things that will all one day be gone), then we are being faithful. Floods, moths in cleaning frenzies, thieves, time itself will one day take away everything we own. But there is a treasure none of these things can take away. It is eternal: it springs from faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ. If it wasn't possible for you to have treasure in heaven, Jesus wouldn't have encouraged us to seek it. So that is what we're going to do these next four weeks together.

We're going to be invited to trust God's promise: that treasure in heaven can be yours. We'll be listening to Jesus' teaching about treasure in the Sermon on the Mount. These services in October are a great opportunity for all of us to think about what really matters in our lives. I'll end with this story about how someone gained that treasure in a way he didn't expect.

It's a story about Old Mutare, Zimbabwe. In the days before the Great Depression in the United States, a wealthy member of a Methodist church made a sizeable contribution to the establishment of a mission school at Old Mutare. When the school was completed and occupied, missionaries took pictures of the excited students and the buildings and brought them to the United States to show to the donor. However, in the interim, the donor had lost his fortune in the Depression. When the missionaries arrived with their pictures, he insisted that we could no longer help and did not want to see the pictures. They would only discourage him. However, the missionaries persisted and the man did look at the pictures and hear the exciting story. As our missionaries were leaving this interview, the donor is reported to have said: "There is a great mystery here. Everything I kept for myself I have lost. Everything I gave away I still have. I thank God for that school and those children." All that man had invested in his company was gone in the great Depression. All that once wealthy donor had invested in a mission school – in the things of God – remained secure.

Today Jesus challenges us to think about these questions: where is my treasure? am I investing my time, my money, my energy in the things that really matter? Where do I want to invest my treasure at this time in my life?

Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don't eat them and where thieves don't break in and steal them. ²¹Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Jacob Armstrong "Treasure" Abingdom Press 2014)