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*“Do not store up for yourselves **treasures on earth**, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.*

*But store up for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.*

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Obviously the key word in these verses is **treasure**. “Treasures are things we try to keep because of a value we place upon them (Dallas Willard).” If the place where you lived was on fire and you only had a few moments to grab a couple of things, your actions in that moment would reveal what you treasure. Beyond making sure other people got out, some of us might grab things that didn’t have much monetary value, like a wedding album, special pictures, letters, a keepsake or heirloom rather than the most expensive pieces of jewelry or an envelope of cash.

Beyond material goods we may treasure our relationship with another person, or our reputation, or the reputation of our school, company, church, or country. There are many things we can treasure, however, **the most important commandment in the Bible is to treasure God more than anything else**. That’s what it means to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. It means to treasure God, to hold God and God’s people and creation dear. It means to aid God in achieving God’s purposes. Our fulfillment and security lie in treasuring God. When we treasure God, we also will treasure other people as God treasures them.

Everyone has things they treasure, even people who are in prison or who are homeless. While some of the things someone carries around might seem odd to us, if we allowed that person into our attic or basement they would likely find things just as crazy for us to be keeping. All people even children, have treasures, it might even be a special stuffed animal. Part of intimacy between two persons is knowledge of their treasures and treating that knowledge and those treasures with respect. When we demean, look down upon or scorn someone else’s treasure because it may seem trivial, pointless, or of no value to us – we do serious harm to that relationship. If you truly care about me you will at least treat with respect the things I value, even if it doesn’t have a similar value to you. This is why it is so important to take a serious interest in anything that is a treasure to some one who is important in your life. You don’t have to like boating, knitting, football, opera, classical music, video games, or whatever as much as they do **but to value someone’s**

treasure is to express that you value that person. To devalue someone's treasure or to treat it as trivial is to devalue that person. It is not as vital to know why someone treasures something, as it is to understand that they do. For example, my parents like very different kinds of music – my mom likes classical, my dad likes Big Bands, however, my dad always is willing to go with my mom to the Boston Symphony because that is something she enjoys and values.

We reveal what our treasures are by what we try to protect, secure, and keep. Every bank and many homes have a "safe." Look in a dictionary and a safe is described as *"a place or receptacle to keep articles (as provisions or valuables) safe."* We can treasure far more than gold, money, stocks and bonds. Often our treasures are totally worthless to other people. Going through a person's home after they have died one encounters their treasures, many of which cannot speak for themselves as to why they were important. What memory, trip, person, or experience made an item important? It is sad that often this knowledge is lost with the person and what was treasured becomes merely trash.

To discuss our treasures is to discuss our treasuring, it means dealing with what we believe is valuable and important. The first thing Jesus says about treasures is that **treasuring material, earthly things is not a smart tragedy for treasuring.** Treasures of the earth simply can't be kept intact forever. Nature's process of decay, things as small as moths munching on our clothes or rust on our cars, or as large as a hurricane like Katrina, or human intervention such as stealing or corruption or incompetence can take away our material treasures. It can be hard to deal with the fact that everyone and everything we value will die or otherwise pass away.

This is why understanding and living based on the wisdom of Jesus is so important in order for people to have hope and meaning in life.

Jesus says we are to store up or stockpile for ourselves treasures in heaven where forces of nature and human evil cannot harm what we treasure. **When we invest our life in what God is seeking to do in the world that is a treasure that cannot be lost.**

We invest our life and store up treasure in heaven by investing in our relationship with Jesus. We will give Jesus time and attention through reading what he says in the Bible, learning more about who he wants us to be and what he wants us to do. We will seek to listen to him in prayer and will express our desires to him. Like Jesus, we will devote ourselves to the good of other people who we have the power to affect because we know God treasures people. This includes caring for ourselves and our own souls. We will also care for God's creation which the Lord called good and which we are all dependent

upon for life. Paul says in Galatians 6:8-10 that the way we store up treasure in heaven is by *“sowing to the spirit,”* by focusing on the spiritual.

Jesus says when we focus on the eternal this will shape our actions and decisions today.

A wealthy businessman decided to take a walk and eat his lunch at the same time. As he strolled near a large park, he purchased a hot dog and a soft drink. On two occasions, men approached him and asked, *“Can you help me? I’m hungry.”* Each time the man looked straight ahead and kept walking. Later, for dessert, he bought a chocolate éclair from a vendor. Just as he was about to take his first bite of the pastry, he had to jump out of the way to avoid a boy on a skateboard. The éclair fell to the ground, landing in a wet area. The man picked it up and tried to clean it, but it was useless. The pastry was covered with mud.

As he was about to throw the éclair away, an idea struck him. He walked over to one of the beggars and handed him the dirty pastry. *“Here, my good man is something for your hunger.”* He smiled to himself, and walked back to his office.

That night the man dreamed he was sitting in a large, crowded café with waitresses running back and forth, bringing customers delicious cakes and tortes. The waitresses all ignored the man though he waved at them continually. Finally he caught the eye of a young woman and asked for something to eat. She returned in a few minutes with a dirty piece of pastry.

The man was outraged. *“You can’t treat me this way. I have the right to be served like anyone else. I expect to get good value for my money.”*

“You don’t seem to understand,” the waitress said kindly. *“You can’t buy anything here. We don’t accept money. You have just arrived in heaven, and all you can order is what you sent ahead of you while you were on earth. The only item we have listed for you is this muddy éclair.”¹*

In financial planning, professionals encourage diversification, meaning not putting all your money in one stock, fund, or financial account. Jesus encourages us to invest heavily in heaven where the value of what we give can never depreciate, wear out, or be taken away.

One of the places we enjoyed visiting during our sabbatical two years ago was Westminster Abbey in London. Many well-known people are buried and memorialized there, however, one of the best inscriptions was to a Mrs. Katharina Bovey and it said,

¹ William R. White, *Stories for the Gathering*, 128-129.

“It pleased God to bless her with a considerable estate, which, with a liberal hand guided by wisdom and piety, she employed to His glory and the good of her neighbors. Her domestic expenses were managed with decency and dignity suitable to her fortune; but with a frugality that made her income abound to all proper objects of charity, to the relief of the necessitous, the encouragement of the industrious and the instruction of the ignorant. She distributed not only with cheerfulness but with joy, which upon some occasions of raising or refreshing the spirit of the afflicted, she could not refrain from breaking forth into tears flowing from a heart thoroughly affected with compassion and benevolence.”

God’s love can transform our prayers from “Give me, Lord” to “Use me, Lord – all that I am and all that I treasure.”

After all, you can’t take it with you, this has not stopped people from trying. Once there was a very rich man who bombarded the throne of God with petitions, asking for the right to take his wealth with him when he died. Each time the man made his request, God replied, *“There is no need to take it with you.”*

Finally, however, God relented. *“Since you refuse to listen to me, I will allow you to take a portion of what you have with you. You may take as much as you can carry in a suitcase.”* The man was ecstatic and immediately purchased the largest steamer trunk he could find. He then set upon the task of determining what portion of his estate he would place in the trunk. *“If I take stocks or bonds,”* he reasoned, *“it may be impossible to redeem them. If I take currency it isn’t clear whether I should bring dollars, pounds, euros, or yen.”* Finally he decided to bring gold. *“There is always a market for gold,”* he thought. Quickly he turned most of his wealth into gold bullion and placed the heavy bricks in his trunk. Then he put the trunk next to his bed, and waited to die.

After the rich man died, he showed up at the gates heaven, carrying his trunk, a pretty remarkable feat considering how much it weighed. St. Peter said, *“Sorry. People who enter these gates must come empty-handed.”*

“I have special permission,” the man insisted.

St. Peter looked in the record book and was amazed. *“I’ve never seen this allowed before. Do you mind if I look in your trunk?”*

“Not at all,” the man said, as he proudly opened the large trunk packed with gleaming bricks of gold.

St. Peter looked at the contents of the trunk and then looked befuddled at the rich man.

“Paving stones,” he said shaking his head. “Why did you decide to bring paving stones?”²

Treasuring God above all else gives us the wisdom of an eternal perspective, the safety of knowing what we value most can never be taken away from us – not even by death, and true fulfillment, purpose, and meaning because we know what we are investing our life, our resources, our time, and energy on will have eternal consequences.

Invest your life in what God is doing. How do we do that?

Invest time and effort in a relationship with Jesus.

We devote ourselves to the good of other people – especially those we can directly affect.

We care for our own souls.

We care for the earth and delight in God’s creation.

St. Antony one of the early church fathers left us these beautiful words:

“Some of those who stop in inns are given beds, while others having no beds stretch themselves on the floor and sleep as soundly as those in beds. In the morning, when night is over, all alike get up and leave the inn, carrying away with them only their own belongings. It is the same with those who tread the path of this life: both those who have lived in modest circumstances, and those who had wealth and fame, leave this life like an inn, taking with them no worldly comforts or riches, but only what they have done in this life, whether it be good or bad.”³

Prayer:

“Give us, O Lord, steadfast hearts, which no unworthy thought can drag downwards;
unconquered hearts, which no tribulation can wear out;
upright hearts, which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside.

Bestow upon us also, O Lord God,
understanding to know you,
diligence to seek you,
wisdom to find you,
and a faithfulness that may finally embrace you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Thomas a Kempis

² White, 129-130.

³ St. Antony, in E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer, eds., *Early Fathers from the Philokalia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963) 30.

For further Reflection:

What do you think of first when you hear the word “treasure”?

The futility of building up treasures on earth for ourselves:

Proverbs 23:4-5; 27:24

Hebrews 13:5

James 5:1-3

Jesus urged his disciples to focus their values on things that would bear an eternal return. How do we build treasure in heaven?

Read Matthew 19:16-22 about The Rich Young Man.

He had it all – money, youth, power, even good intentions.

The thing he lacked was an *eternal perspective*.

The importance of values – we are trusting in God more than in expendable commodities.

According to one scholar, the Greeks used the word “*heart*” as we use the word “*mind*.” Our heart, mind, focus, attention, affection, and resources will center on our treasure (what we supremely value) see Jeremiah 29:13.

Remember Matthew 6:1, whose nod of approval matters most, who do we work for, who defines what really matters?