

“Where Your Heart Is”

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-34

Text: Matthew 6:21

Wordsworth wrote, “My heart leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the sky:/ So was it when my life began;/ So is it now I am a man;/ So be it when I shall grow old, or let me die!”

He was not merely expressing an isolated incident he experienced in the Lake District of England. He was telling us where his heart was. He was telling us where his treasure was.

Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also.” He was saying that our treasure is that which makes our heart “leap up.”

- I. So when Jesus spoke of treasures on the earth he spoke of something more encompassing than money. Money isn't eaten by moths—clothes and furniture are. And the word used for “rust” refers to anything that eats or consumes valuables—whether it be mildew or termites, or anxiety. Jesus was speaking of all that “which in a moment dies.”

- A. A nameless Old English poet wrote a poem in which he evaluates the treasures of the earth. It is a lament of a man who has lost his feudal lord.

He tells us that he “dreams of the dealing of treasure, the days of his youth, When his lord bade welcome to wassail and feast.”

But now his lord has died and he says, “No wonder therefore, in all the world, If a shadow darkens upon my spirit when I reflect on the fates of men—How one by one proud warriors vanish from the halls that knew them, and day by day all this earth ages and droops unto death.”

Finally, in despair, he concludes his lament by telling us, “Here wealth is fleeting, friends are fleeting, man is fleeting, maid is fleeting; all the foundation of earth shall fail!”

- B. The poet of nearly a thousand years ago catches the mood of many people in modern America. There is a feeling of helplessness and acquiescence to our fate. Unemployment is at 6.8%. Inflation continues. The war drags on.

Historians are writing such books as The Twilight of the Western World. Kenneth Clark, the narrator of the recent BBC special “Civilization” series over and over expressed the fearful lament that our civilization is about to slip back in the Dark Ages.

One of the signs that points many people to the disintegration of Western Civilization is the increase of escapism.

- C. Malcolm Muggeridge, former editor of Panch magazine, giving his farewell sermon after resigning in disgust from his post as rector of Edinburgh University in Scotland, said: “...there is practically nothing that they (the students) could do in a mood of rebelliousness or refusal to accept the ways and values of our rundown, spiritually impoverished way of life for which I shouldn’t feel some degree of sympathy. Yet, how infinitely sad; how, in a macabre sort of way, funny, that the form their insubordination takes should be a demand for pot and pills, for the most tenth-rate sort of escapism and self-indulgent ever known!...”
- D. Probably all of us would offer a hearty “amen”. But what are the things we treasure? Can we or are we laying up for ourselves any more enduring treasures? It is true that our treasures are not so apt to be the treasure of the flesh, nevertheless our treasures are no less indulgent and far less exciting. Advertisement is aimed at creating needs rather than meeting them so that our treasures are those of the world. We end up with a house full of things that are

not needed and will rarely be used. More and more we find ourselves becoming dependent on things we have no need for while many young people are attempting to shed all appearance of affluence. Where would we be without electric tooth brushes, and shoe polishers, and pretty soon anyone who doesn't have a waterbed will be qualified for welfare.

II. Jesus does not forbid the possession of property in itself, though. He was a man. He ate and drank like his disciples, and thereby sanctified the good things of life. These necessities, which are consumed in use and which meet the legitimate requirements of the body, are to be used by the disciples with thankfulness.

A. Earthly treasures are not condemned in themselves. Here merely advises us not treasure them up. Earthly goods are given to be used, not to be collected. For where our treasure is, there is our trust, our security, our God. Hoarding is idolatry.

This is the idea George MacDonald was trying to get across in his fairy tale entitled, The Princess and Curdie. He writes:

“Nothing that could be got from the heart of the earth could have been put to better purposes than the silver the king's minders got for him. However, there were people in the county, who, when it came into their hands, degraded it by locking it up in a chest, and then it grew diseased and was called mammon, and bred all sorts of quarrels; but when first I left the king's hands it never made any but friends, and the air of the world kept it clean.”

B. Jesus was warning us against this misuse of earthly treasure, of the things of which we really have no need but was also warning us of finding value only in the things we can touch and taste and see.

Thus, when Christ refers to “earth” he is not speaking of the planet between Mars and Venus, or to the dirt under our fingernails. He is referring to the place which symbolizes all of human existence reduced to earth, air, fire, and water. “Earth” in

the context of this passage of Scripture is reality reduced to what you can see and touch and taste.

Again referring to MacDonald's story of The Princes and Curdie he tells us that some of the king's miners were beginning to become skeptical of anything they couldn't buy with the jewels that they mined. He tells us:

“There is this difference between the growth of some human beings and that of others: in the one case it is a continuous dying, in the other a continuous resurrection. One of the latter sort comes at length to know at once whether a thing is true the moment it comes before him; one of the former class grows more and more afraid of being taken in, so afraid of it that he takes himself in altogether, and comes at length to believe in nothing but his dinner: to be sure of a thing with him is to have it between his teeth.”

For some of us it has become increasingly difficult to believe or find any value in any quality of life that goes beyond the physical, material and purely sensual.

Our life in the second half of the twentieth century is characterized by a peculiar irony. We have the most superstitious credulity in some directions—for example, in the ability of technology to bring us progress and a better way of life.

And certainly nothing feeds on this credulity as voraciously as modern mass media advertisements which promise us treasures waiting to be layed up for ourselves if we use the right kind of toothpaste or mouthwash.

Yet, on the other hand we have an extreme skepticism when it comes to anything we cannot see or touch or reason out. It's becoming almost impossible to find anybody that believes in elves and dwarves anymore.

We cast out with a contemptuous disbelief and discredit without examination the ideas and thoughts and experiences of the most dynamic and beautiful lives that have ever lived, merely because they lived 2,000 years ago.

But G.K. Chesterton reminds us that “What man can believe depends upon his philosophy, not upon the clock or the century. If a man believes in unalterable natural law, he cannot believe in any miracle in any age. If a man believes in a will behind law, he can believe in any miracle in any age.”

So, as we treasure up for ourselves treasures on earth we become more and more like MacDonald’s description of a young miner who was growing faster in body than in mind—“with the usual consequence, that he was getting rather stupid—one of the chief signs of which was that he believed less and less in things he had never seen...he was becoming more and more a minder, and less and less a man of the upper world where the wind blew. On his way to and from the mine he took less and less notice of bees and butterflies, moths and dragonflies, the flowers and the brooks and the clouds. He was gradually changing into a commonplace man.”

III. But Jesus said it was possible to lay up treasure in heaven. We don’t have to become common-place men and women. We can be men and women of the upper world where the wind blows and the birds sing.

A. More than once Jesus spoke to his disciples about laying up for themselves treasures in heaven and about the rewards which those who follow his teaching may expect to receive here and hereafter. It is sometimes justly objected that such a doctrine is merely a cloak for prudent self betterment, and that one ought to believe in and practice virtue’s sake and not for the sake of reward.

A fuller examination of Jesus’ ethical teaching, however, will reveal that he completely reoriented both the idea of the nature of rewards, and the question of their being inducements or bribes for living the good life.

When Jesus advised his followers, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,” his meaning is not, “Take steps to get in heaven the things men treasure on earth;” but, “learn to treasure, to love, and delight in the things of heaven.”

Jesus’ doctrine of reward is completely unmercenary. He distinctly opposes all human calculation of rewards from God and denies that man can have any kind of claim before God.

- B. So I would suggest that if we want to know how we lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven that we look at the life of the one who advised us to do so—for I am assured that Jesus’ heart was with the things he treasured. Christ showed in his life and words where his heart and treasure were.

The Gospel writers tell us frequently that Jesus woke up before dawn and went into the hills to pray...or he went into a lonely place...or he withdrew to the wilderness and prayed. He was man whose heart leaped up for fellowship and communion with his unseen Father.

His life also shows that his heart went out to people in every kind of need. To the guilty he gave forgiveness...to the sick he gave health...to the unloved he brought the warmth of concern and compassion.

The New Testament writers used several words for “heart”. The Gospel writers frequently use one of these words to express the feelings of Jesus.

They tells us that Jesus saw a great crowd; his “heart” went out to them, and he cured those of them who were sick...a leper came to him begging his help and asking for healing, and Jesus’ “heart” went out to him...He saw the crowds like sheep without a shepherd and his “heart” went out to him...two blind men asked to receive their sight and Jesus’ “heart” went out to them, he touched their eyes and they received their

sight. He saw a widow in the funeral procession of her only son and his “heart” went out to her.

In His own life Jesus showed us that he treasured people in every kind of need and had a sensitivity to them that is almost embarrassing to us. He treasured people and his heart went out to them.

But his treasure is to be found also in the things he talked about and the examples he used. He was man who treasured the beauty of his Father’s world. He took notice of the birds of the air. He took pleasure in the simplicity of the lilies of the field for he was man who treasured long walks in the grain fields and on the Palestinian hills. He spoke of foxes having dens...and sheep wandering without a shepherd. His heart observed and treasured the things of nature. He treasured beauty and simplicity. His committment to God and unseen things did not cause him to take less and less notice of the beauties of the earth. He merely warned us that these beauties are not the kind to be treasured up or hoarded.

We know where the heart of Jesus was because we know the things he treasured in his life. The word “heart” in the New Testament refers to the seat of one’s inmost thoughts and secret feelings. The heart refers to who we really are and what we really take pleasure in.

Jesus was saying that who we are and what we really treasure lies not in our words and what we say but in what we actually do. For the heart in the thinking of the Greeks and Hebrews contained more than mere emotion...it was also the seat of our will. The word refers to the total personality of an individual.

So Jesus was saying that our treasures is not necessarily where we claim it is---rather it is where we ourselves are...it is where we ourselves are going. So then, ...where does that put us?