

Basic Training: Where's Your Treasure?
By Jason Huff
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Isaiah 33:5-6; 1 John 1:5-7; Matthew 6:19-23

Friends, our final Scripture reading today comes from Matthew 6:19-23. Listen now to the Word of God. [Jesus taught,] "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. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

Stuff. Everybody's got it. Everybody wants it. The economy is built on it – everybody wants to convince us that we need their stuff. Our houses and basements and garages are overflowing with stuff until we buy a new home to have more stuff, which quickly gets filled. We have tons of stuff we never use. Sometimes, we even hold onto stuff we don't want hoping someday it will be worth selling...to buy more stuff. We are stuck with stuff.

Jesus teaches about stuff a lot because Jesus came to usher people into the Kingdom of God...and stuff is a chief reason why people reject it. Jesus brings it up time and again as a problem. In Jesus' day, if you were rich, people believed it was a sign of God's blessing. Jesus taught it was easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into the Kingdom of God. If we're not careful, we'll trust in our wealth rather than God, and that's why Jesus addresses it so often.

In today's passage, Jesus starts, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal." He says that stuff is fleeting. Fine clothes were a show of wealth in His culture, much like it is today. But garments are susceptible to moths common in arid lands. Our clothes wear out differently; they aren't as well made. Zippers break and hems give out quickly. But they still don't last.

When the ancients thought of rust, they didn't think of a rusty car; they thought of money. Coins made of precious metals were used for trade. But most metals rust. They wear down and aren't good for trade any more. Even today, coins only circulate about 30 years before they are replaced. That's less than half a lifetime! Pure 24 karat gold doesn't rust, but it's rarely that pure. In 2010, 24 karat gold coins minted by the Central Bank in Russia began to rust. Other metals got mixed in. Somebody ripped off the Russians!

That leads to the next issue: theft. Jesus literally says that the thieves "dig in." Thieves didn't come in the front door; it was barricaded. They would literally dig their way into a mud-brick house when no one was watching. It was pretty common. Things don't change, do they? Think about America and guns. People have a million reasons to keep guns, and we have that right. But most are around for two reasons. Thieves have them to protect themselves while they're taking stuff, and ordinary citizens have them to stop thieves from taking their stuff.

But stuff is so fleeting. Everything is made to make you buy another one soon. How many of us have the same cell phone we had five years ago? The same computer we have ten years ago? The same TV set, refrigerator, couch, car? Even if we're not extravagant, we have to replace things. Books yellow and bindings fall apart. Records warp; CDs and DVDs rot. Sports equipment breaks. Cottages and campers wear out. Nothing on this earth is permanent. Yet we spend a fortune maintaining and protecting *things*.

You can invest your money for the future, for trips, for family, for college; it's a wise choice. But a couple bad investments, the market falls, the economy drops...you know the rest. Invest wisely – absolutely! Make the most of what God has given to you and don't use it frivolously. But all of it can all be gone in the blink of an eye.

But we value our stuff. We are lost without our cell phones! And we get excited about trivial matters. In our household, we're looking forward to the new Star Wars movie coming out at Christmas. It will be a lot of fun. But I can't be too excited because what is it, really? It's a two-hour movie. If I love it and watch it twelve times in my lifetime, it will be one whole day of my life. That's a lot of anticipation for a very little thing. As far as eternity goes, Star Wars doesn't matter. Neither does the ball game or the hobby we spend our time on. We've got to pursue things worth pursuing, that will last.

That's why Jesus says, "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." Jesus says that there are treasures worth having, treasures worth saving up. They're just not the ones the world is interested in. He assures us that treasures stored up in heaven, treasures that exist there, are safe. They're protected. They aren't going away once they're there.

What treasures can we have in heaven? What has Jesus already taught us in the the Sermon on the Mount? Give in secret, fast in secret, pray in secret, and the Heavenly Father will reward you. Part of the treasure is the change of heart and life that comes from doing God's will. When we follow Him and obey Him, He changes us from the inside out. You love, you become more loving; you give, you become more giving. Part of the treasure is becoming like Jesus.

But there's more than just our change of character. Jesus tells stories of faithful servants given charge of kingdoms, of rewards being great, of rewards according to what we have done. Paul says that when we serve Christ, we will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a result. We don't know how heavenly rewards work, exactly, but they are promised over and over based on our obedience. If God blesses us in this life even in the midst of our sinfulness, we can't imagine what heavenly rewards will look like once He has perfected us in eternity!

How do we get these treasures? Set them aside now. How do we do that? There are two parts. First, to store up treasures in heaven, you have to believe in Jesus Christ and follow Him. Jesus told His disciples that He has gone to prepare a place for us, for all who believe in Him. A lot of people out there think that they can do good deeds and that will earn their way into heaven without actually knowing God. They think they can store stuff up in heaven that way.

But would any of you buy a big TV without a home to put it in? No, of course not! Leave it out in the Michigan weather for a day and it won't work anymore! It's always really sad to see pictures of people who've been evicted with all their stuff out on the road because we know it will be stolen or ruined. God will preserve every treasure we lay aside in heaven if His Son has prepared a place for us there. If not, there's no point; there's no place prepared for us to put it. Don't try to be good and bypass obedience to God and relationship with Him. You just can't do it.

If we have faith in Christ and our home with Him is assured, then we store up treasures by following His ways. Some rewards come from relationship with God; the person who regularly seeks God will find Him and be rewarded. Some rewards come from our actions for the Kingdom. We are all called upon in various ways to build His Kingdom. Some of us are primarily teachers. Some are workers, setting things up, making things happen. Others are givers, financing the Kingdom work. Some are prayer warriors, lifting up God's people and encouraging them by speaking to God on our behalf. All these things set aside rewards for us. It's OK to be motivated by rewards; let's make sure that we're motivated for God's Kingdom!

That's where the second part of this passage gets us. Jesus says, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" This is tricky because we think of light and how it works differently than the ancients did. But Jesus is also talking about spiritual light.

Here's what He means. The word translated "good" literally means "simple." The translation is excellent because "simple" doesn't mean much to us without explanation. But "simple" meant clear and unaffected. A good, simple spiritual eye is clear; it sees without any distortion or fuzziness. We see God for who He is; we see our spiritual state for what it is; we see our own problems and sins and address them; we accept Jesus' forgiveness on our behalf and know that He is our Savior, the only One on whom we can rely for salvation.

A bad spiritual eye is not blind, but darkened without knowing it, mistaking it for light. We've had two lights out in the racquetball court we play in three times a week, and we'd started to get used to it. One of them was back on Monday morning and it was almost blinding. We'd gotten used to the darker court to the point we'd started to forget how it was supposed to be.

That's what spiritual darkness is like. We assume we're in the light when we're not. We assume the problem is with others. We are in trouble whenever our vision is compromised and we don't know it. I still remember when I first found out I needed glasses. My family went to see the movie *Driving Miss Daisy*, and several minutes in, I had to lean over to my folks and ask if somebody had forgotten to focus the projector. Turned out the projector wasn't the problem; my eyes were! I don't know how long I'd not been seeing clearly. Thankfully, it was before I got my driver's license. And we all know people who get behind the wheel of a car whose vision and reflexes are impaired from alcohol or substances are the most dangerous people on the road.

Is your spiritual vision clear? Do you have insight into your spiritual condition? Take a hard look this week. When it comes to our possessions, our stuff, we are often blind and we don't know it. We have a lot of reasons why we want the things we want and very few reasons why we should do without. We don't like being confronted with the fact that *we love stuff*. But spiritual clarity, good spiritual insight, requires us to make an honest assessment.

It is better for us to learn we are blind and need the light of Jesus to fix our vision than to continue down the road with double vision. If you recognize you need help, if you know your stuff has you more than you have your stuff, if you can't part with it, that's OK. Jesus said He was a doctor for the spiritually sick. The only way you can be healed is if you know you're ill and need help. The only deadly problem is refusing to recognize our sin-sick state.

The way to check your spiritual vision and its clarity is through the phrase Jesus taught: "where your treasure is, there is your heart." If you want to track down where your treasure is, look for your heart and figure out where it is. Because we're human, we're all going to have affection for things of this world. God uses things of this world to reflect His glory. We can read a great book or watch a moving film or enjoy the poetry of a half-court shot and give God praise. He made us as a reflection of Himself, and at our best, things we do and create reflect His goodness. We can appreciate those as God's blessings.

But where is our heart? What moves us? What gets us going? Do we work to get stuff? Or do we work to further God's Kingdom? Do our hobbies get in the way of time with Christ? Or are we excited when we have a chance to do Kingdom work? When we hear someone has become a believer in Jesus, are we overjoyed, or just bored? When someone gets over a sin habit or has a spiritual breakthrough, do we praise God, or are we more interested in what's on TV? If you had \$100, would you rather use it so somewhat got saved or to buy a new gadget?

Be blunt in your assessment. I have to be. Many years ago I realized I was more in love with stuff than Jesus. Both Catha and I had good jobs, no kids, making double what we make now, and I still wanted more. Stuff became overwhelming. I bought a ton of Christian music and used that as an excuse. But stuff that has a Christian label slapped on it can trap you too when it becomes your god instead of God. God doesn't care how many Bibles or crosses or Christian trinkets you have. He wants to own your heart, not for you to own stuff about Him.

If we're honest, this is hard. It is harder than pointing out other sins. I can point out lots of sins in the Bible that don't affect most of us; that's easy. This one is hard because everyone needs stuff just to survive. You can't live without some money. Yet that fact leads us to hoard what we have and want more and more.

But here's the good news: if you are honest with this and admit that you love some stuff, whatever that stuff is, it doesn't have to own you. You can still store up treasure in heaven. You don't have to be chained to the things that once bound you. It's never too late to give it over to God and say, "God, you have control of my stuff, my finances, my wealth, what there is of it." There are opportunities every day to store up treasure in heaven. If you have genuinely asked God for forgiveness, He has accepted you as a daughter, as a son, and He wants you to have treasures in heaven. He will help you set them aside.

It's liberating. When you no longer live for stuff, you don't have to keep up. You don't have to have the latest gizmo. You don't have to keep up with the Joneses. You'll be pursuing things of permanence. You'll know your work will last when you do it for the Kingdom of God. Our default mode is to covet stuff and hold on to it, but Jesus teaches us a new and better way. Instead of feeling guilty, we can feel free to pursue those things that really matter – the acts and deeds that build the Kingdom and our treasure trove.

What about our worries and fears that we won't have enough? Jesus knows about that too. In two weeks, we'll tackle the next part of the passage. For now, trust in this: God is good! Don't fear. When you give your material possessions over to God to use as He pleases, you will find yourself far more free than you might expect...even free from worry. If God can free us from sin and death and hell, He can free us from fears that keep us from using the wealth He's given us as we should.

As we wrap up this evening, I want to give you two opportunities to store up some treasures in heaven. They're ways to build up God's Kingdom directly. The first is our youth workcamp fund drive. Five of us have signed up to go help make a difference in Indianapolis this summer, myself and four youth. We're going to head down the end of July and touch some folks with the love of Jesus. They will be changed; our youth will be changed.

The trip will cost \$1,250. Every family has contributed at least \$50 to their camper going. Through our recycling drive, we've raised another \$250, which is fantastic. To raise the final \$750, there's a hammer in the back with a bunch of envelopes on it. There are some worth a lot and some worth just a little. I'm going to encourage every one of you to take one and fill it with the amount on the envelope. It should be what you can give with a cheerful heart. Everyone here can afford at least one envelope. When you do, not only will you help a camper serve, you will be storing up treasure in heaven.

The second opportunity comes next week. Sam and Crista are missionaries with our denomination, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. We've prayed for them many times from the pulpit over the last year. They are heading to Siberia this summer to minister to a Muslim people group there. I am asking you to have an amount in mind to give to their ministry specifically next Saturday night apart from your regular giving to CrossWay. Again, it should be what you can give with a cheerful heart. The ministry they are doing is on the front lines. It has the potential to be dangerous. But Lord willing, they will introduce Christ to people who have never really met a Christian or know who Christ is. If you want to store up treasure in heaven, I can't think of a better way. They'll be doing a Q&A with me next week during the sermon time, and you won't want to miss it.

Friends, let's remember our blessings this week. Jesus Christ came to forgive us, to make a place for us in His Kingdom, and He's even gone to prepare a place for the treasure we'll have in eternity. Will you trust Him with your finances, your resources, your stuff, this week? May it be so for all of us.