

Treasure in Heaven

Exodus 20:12-16; Mark 10:17-22

Sunday, September 8, 2024, the 16th Sunday after Pentecost at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- **Introduction**

Our consideration today is the idea of treasures in heaven and how to respond to them (found also in Matthew 6:19-21 and Luke 12:31-34) . I admit that I find the idea of treasures to be strange. Why would I need treasures in heaven if I have heaven? What more could I possibly need. I felt the same about getting a crown upon my arrival in heaven and wondered the point of that for the same reason. I have heaven. Why do I need a crown? What do I need anything else? I've since learned by one of the saints, the crown would be handy for we throw our crowns at the feet of Jesus when we see Him face to face. It is yet one more opportunity to honor Jesus. So the point of the crown is not what, but who. Maybe it is the same about treasure.

- **Set the Stage**

To set the stage, so to speak, Jesus has a conversation with a mysterious and tragic figure who is a man of wealth, education and who holds a position of power and responsibility. He is a religious seeker, who asks Jesus as a good teach what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus begins His response by inquiring about the commandments, and the rich young ruler says that he has kept them all his life and Jesus is impressed. Some scholars believe that our Lord was ready to ask Him to join His inner circle of disciples, but the Lord find him lacking in one thing; he loves his money too much. Jesus tells him, the man seeking eternal life, to sell all that he has, give to the poor in order to have treasure in heaven, and then take up his cross and follow Christ. The man, crestfallen, turns and walks away. We never learn his name. How many other people are like him, morally good but too in love with their wealth to give it up for Christ, and so they continue on a trail of luxury and power that ultimately leads to hell. But at the end of this sad conversation, look at Jesus' challenging invitation. Give up what holds you to this earth, gain treasures in heaven and take up your cross. Here's a couple of thoughts about that invitation.

- **Main Point:** Treasure in heaven involves what you can invest in other people. Taking up your cross involves a certain rejection of the world in order to follow Christ.
- **Application:** Giving up a treasure to pickup a cross doesn't sound like a good deal, but the things of earth are temporary, and the cross leads to eternity. So how does one pick up a cross if there are no literal crosses to carry?
not what but who?

Let's first consider treasure in heaven, a phrase well known in the days of Jesus. Unlike caches of money and stocks, etc. that we have on earth, treasures both on earth and in heaven could be people. Loved ones, fellow saints who are cherished in life and beloved in heaven. The treasures could be people that have ministered to us or influenced us toward Christ for whom we did the same. Dickens's classic A Christmas Carol has a brief scene in which a poor woman, carrying a shivering child walks in tears down a London street seeking shelter followed by the ghost of greedy men who would not share their wealth with the poor were cursed in the afterlife to be chained to crates full of money and have to drag them around wherever they go. They cried for their failure to help that

poor mother and child when they had the chance. There is the old saying, "don't love money and use people, use money and love people." Perhaps our treasure in heaven is people.

there is a holy disillusionment with earth.

Along with the call to have treasures in heaven, Jesus invites the young ruler to take up his cross and follow Him. Though taken largely as symbolic today, the invitation to take up a cross sends shivers up my spine and it must have for the rich young ruler, for it is possible that both he and Christ actually saw people hang on a cross. Symbolically, it represents a commitment to Christ that no hardship and overcome, a willingness to sacrifice, to face rejection and even to risk martyrdom in some cases. I remember a friend of mine named Larry who gave a sermon at a church in India or Pakistan or someplace like that. The sermons were broadcast on loudspeakers. During the sermon Larry said that he would be willing to die for Christ, but his translator changed it because there were too many people within earshot who were willing to oblige him. There is a risk of losing everything and everyone of earthly value in following Christ, and to an extent there is even a certain rejection of the world in taking up the cross. It is that rejection, a certain jaded attitude to the temporary pleasures and widespread cruelties of this life that is expressed in Paul's great verse in Galatians 2:20, *"I have been crucified with Christ and it is not I who lives, but Christ lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered himself up for me."* There is a certain rejection of the world in that verse, and others like it. I remember going on a drive with mom in northwestern Iowa to find an old rental home in the woods beside a gravel road. There was a tree growing in the living room, and the days in which it housed a family were long gone. So many things come and go, and for all the beauty of the world, it is a fallen planet with much evil. Only people have value in light of eternity. The world can be rejected, and investment in people can help turn some of them into treasure.

- **Rabbi Maimonides**

A great rabbi and scholar who lived 1,000 years ago wrote of several stages of giving to the poor. The highest stage is when the person giving the help develops a personal relationship with the poor person and invests personally, not just monetarily. It doesn't guarantee that person will become a treasure, but it is a good effort.

- **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I believe that the real treasures in heaven is not money. We don't need money in heaven. The treasures are people, people who helped us chose Christ and people we helped chose Christ. We invest in people because it is people who matter for eternity. Wealth, power, prestige, seasons and circumstances all come and go. People who have taken up their crosses know that, and they are the ones most likely to gain treasures in heaven.