

SERMON ON THE MOUNT: PART 2

Matthew 6:19-27

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First Christian Church

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16 'And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

19 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 'The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; ²³but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

24 'No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

25 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

Throughout our lives, the things that we classify as “earthly treasure” can change rapidly.

I would have to say that, one of my most notable instances of possessing a great earthly treasure came when I was sixteen. Like so many sixteen year old's I anticipated my birthday with bated breath. And bright and early on my birthday I was at the DMV to acquire my driver's license. I had completed drivers-ed the previous summer, obtained my permit, and had driven under the supervision of my parents for a year. I had even managed not to damage anything except maybe the passenger

floorboard of my mother's car where she seemed to stomp on an imaginary brake pedal for dear life every time I was behind the wheel. But finally the day came and I could take to the road on my own. It was then that my parents and grandparents gave me what I thought was the most precious treasure on earth my first truck. It was not anything fancy just a little single cab dodge that was a hand me down from my grandfather but I was awe struck. That earthly treasure of a truck meant freedom, responsibility, and a boon to my social life. Yes, that little truck was my greatest treasure. As I grew older though my treasures changed. As a young adult my treasures took on a slightly more pragmatic nature, a smart phone and laptop to stay connected to the world around me; a real job, bills payed, money saved. Finally even amassing enough earthly treasure to buy a ring and embark on life's next adventure with my wife Elizabeth. As we combined our treasures under one roof, once again my earthly treasures changed. Now a good set of non-stick cookware, some pieces of furniture, appliances and organizers that converted my bachelor pad into a home, became the valued treasures of our life together. Having the basic needs of life met, I began to recognize earthly treasures for more than there financial or utilitarian worth. One of these treasures, which I came across cleaning up my garage a few weeks ago, is my grandfather's tackle box. While not worth more than a few dollars, when I open it up and see his fishing lures, and ancient fillet knife my mind is flooded with so many of my most treasured memories of fishing with my grandfather. Even the empty slots bring back memories as most of them are evidence of one of his many, many lures which I lost in trees and in lily pads while that very patient man tried to teach me how to cast. Other treasures, are treasures because of who gave them to me, a handmade stole with the handprints of the youth group, and a commentary given to me by a mentor on the day of my ordination also round out my

stored up earthy treasures. Then almost six weeks ago, when I was handed a gift from God, and the greatest treasure of all, my newborn son. Little did I know that my relationship with earthly treasure would change yet again. Now rather than tools or toys, gifts or purchases, I have a new near and dear earthly treasure. That treasure is a dinky little fisher price bouncer. While it is not terribly expensive, or linked to a precious memory, it has rapidly become a prize possession. When that little thing does its magic and lulls our fussy little milk monster to sleep in the wee hours of the morning, that bouncer is worth its weight in gold.

Earthy treasure is a funny thing. What we consider as treasures changes over our lives, some get their value from their price tag, or the sacrifices in acquiring them, some from their sentimental attachments, some from their usefulness and necessity; yet each one is prized by us highly. At least, that is until things change and we get a brutal dose of perspective. Yes the whirlwind of events surrounding the corona virus, social distancing, and quarantines has also had its impact on our relationship with earthly treasure. As goods are flying off shelves, as panic buying has set in, it is funny to see what is considered treasure. Or, at least it would be funny if it weren't so troubling. Paper goods, canned goods, cleaning supplies, formula and diapers, things that most of us would have thought little of swinging by the store to pick up on the way home are now scarce treasures to be highly prized. My treasure that I stumbled upon last week was an eight pack of toilet paper from Walgreens. I have never been so excited for such a purchase in my life, and it was just Angel-Soft, not even Charmin Ultra. Our relationship to treasure has once again changed. And that is where our scripture finds us this morning.

I say this is where the scripture finds us very deliberately, because I have to be honest in saying I didn't go looking for it. Many of you know that here at First

Christian church of Wichita Falls, our theme for 2020 is learning from the 100 vital scriptures that we as Christians need to know. This section of text was planned for today well in advance. The text for today was, I thought the work of planning and filling out a calendar, but now I see the finger prints of God all over it. If I am being honest I was quite intimidated by this passage this week. A short time ago this sermon would have looked quite different. It was one thing to talk about storing up treasures when that meant achievement and accolades, savings accounts and social status, but when those treasures are reduced to basic necessities like paper towels and pinto beans; that's another thing altogether. Likewise Jesus admonition to have a favorable or generous eye is one thing to consider when our eyes are offended by rush hour traffic and differing political opinions, but what about when our eyes are fixed on the CDC for updates. Or when our eyes are glued to our local news for numbers of confirmed cases in our county, or on school districts and places of work to try to determine when we might again see some sense of normalcy. And then there is Jesus' instruction not to worry...oh that's a good one. We could probably all have used a little convicting on that one when our worries were deadlines and overcrowded schedules, but now they are worries about health, society as a whole, and how to take care of our families. Jesus' words from the sermon on the mount might seem a little hard to hear for us today. But maybe in that is a blessing in disguise. While the truths taught to us by this scripture are eternal, our changing circumstances just may prepare us to learn them in poignant albeit painful new ways.

This text may be hard to hear right now, but it was certainly hard to hear for those people listening to Jesus speak these words more than 2000 years ago. While we are simply looking at a piece of the sermon on the mount, when we look at it in its entirety; we can see that it was a radical call for those first Christ followers then,

and maybe we can reclaim that call within our own time and place. The big takeaway from the Sermon on the Mount is that God's people are called to live differently than the world around them. In Jesus' day His audience was living as part of a small kingdom within the mighty Roman Empire. To them Jesus' words serve to turn their worldview, their social norms on their heads. For the hearers of Christ's words, social standing and honor was everything, yet he starts off with, blessed are the poor, the humble, and the persecuted. Those around Jesus would have seen adherence to the law as the ground of righteousness but Jesus calls them to changed hearts instead. He tells them the law tells you not to murder but even a person with anger in their heart is in danger of judgement. Jesus' audience would have seen public displays of charity and piety as part and parcel of righteousness and thereby granting one social standing. Jesus however tells them to do good works in secret, pray simply, and fast quietly. Jesus message is one of how to respond to God's call in a truly heart changing and life consuming way that is above and beyond what is normal or expected by the world around them.

So with that in mind, how will we respond to that call today? How will we display radical faith in the midst of a world that is reeling in despair? Let's consider the three things Jesus addresses in our passage, our treasures, our eyes, and our worries. In the midst of a world where earthly treasure is at a scarce premium, here today and gone tomorrow; may we invest in treasure that bears fruit. In this time of isolation when it would be natural for connections to break down, may we invest in the treasures of strengthened relationships. May we use this time to reconnect with our own families, connect as a church in new ways. Even though it may be via phone, Facebook, or zoom conference call; may we as Christ followers build and strengthen our relationships within our community because we are needed now more than

before. How can we as Christ followers attain the eye that is good, generous, and full of light as Jesus calls us? In the midst of a world where it would be all too natural to see others as a threat, as competition, or at least as an inconvenience; may we have an eye to see them differently. May we see our anxious neighbor, the line at the store, and even the rants of others on our news feed as an opportunity to extend grace and patience, a kind word, a calm presence. And lastly that all so troublesome call to not worry...well friends these are worrying times and a worrisome world. But we do not have to be ruled by worry and by fear but by faith and by love. May we not allow our worries to turn us inward, but rather may they cause us to open our eyes to our neighbors in need. To the work in our community that needs our support, and to the vulnerable around us who need our help.

Those first Christians got the message. It was the response to Christ's radical call that stood out amid their society that gave birth to the Christian movement, to the Church as we know it today. Christ's followers responded to the worries of their day in such a way that it pointed a broken world to a reconciling God. It was a response to a call, a changed way of living that made waves, the ripples of which we the church still feel today. May we also live in response to that same call. May we too handle our treasure, our eyes, and our worries in the midst of a world that is hurting in such a way that it points to the source of our treasure, faith, and courage. Our lord Jesus Christ.