

TITLE: "Eternal Treasure"

TEXT: Matthew 6:25-34 (NT p. 6)

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? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive FIRST for the kingdom of God and [God's] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own.

Introduction - You can't take it with you

Once there was a man who worked hard at the small business he started, but he still made just enough to make ends meet. He never married and had no friends outside the few people who worked for him. Finally, in his 60s, the business began to flourish and he suddenly found himself with lots of money.

However, just as he started to enjoy his newly acquired wealth, he has diagnosed with a terminal illness. He then became obsessed with the idea that he would be able to spend his money when he arrived in heaven. With only days to live, he summoned his pastor, doctor and lawyer to his bedside. He then gave each \$100,000 in cash with specific instructions for each to put the money in his casket.

He died the next day. When the funeral was over, the pastor and the doctor went up to the casket and carefully placed their stack of money beside the man. Then they watched as the lawyer walked up, took the money they had placed there and stuffed it in his pockets, then put a piece of paper into the casket and walked away.

Utterly shocked, the two confronted the lawyer. "Let me assure you that I have lived up to his terms," he said. "The paper I placed in the coffin is a check for \$300,000!"

This morning I will be preaching about money. ...Why? You may very well ask. If you have read your newsletter, you know that church income is keeping up with expenses through February. I will not ask for a raise during the sermon, so you don't have to worry about that. No, this morning I am preaching about money because what we do with our money DIRECTLY affects our spiritual life, and God wants us to know exactly HOW our money directly effects our spiritual lives.

1. Where your treasure is...

Many places around the world are in a mess right now: uprisings in Libya and Egypt; continuing unrest in the Middle East; the earthquake in New Zealand; and the flooding in Australia. I don't know about you, but the earthquake, tsunamis and now the radiation leaks in Japan have hit me the hardest. I hope that you will give to help the people of Japan as Carol and I have done. More information about this is in the bulletin.

Sad as they are, these disasters have had two positive effects. First, they have made me very grateful. We certainly have problems in America: recession, unemployment rising prices for fuel and health care, but I would not want to live anywhere else in the world. Nor would I want to live elsewhere in the country. Yes, it's warmer in California, but there are mud slides, wildfires and the constant threat of earthquakes there. Yes, the winters are a lot milder in Florida, but there you have to deal with summer heat and humidity and hurricanes. And yes, I'm a little sick of cold and snow, but, you know, a long winter is really a small price to pay for living in this wonderful place.

The second positive effect of the worldwide disasters is that they have helped me to put things in perspective. I watched a clip from Japan last week. The scene was of a whole town, where over 10,000 people lived, that was completely obliterated by a 55 foot high wall of water. There was nothing left ...nothing—just some piles of rubble. A middle-aged couple was picking their way through the rubble calling out the name of their daughter, hoping beyond hope to find her alive.

That hit me pretty hard. That could be me, or you, looking for a child. ...It brought these words of Jesus to me:

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.

What is YOUR treasure? If every material possession you have was suddenly washed away, would you still have your treasure?

Do you see God's point? Yes, our homes, cars, clothing and other possessions ARE important, but they are NOT our treasure. Our TRUE treasure is LOVE:

Love of our God; Love of our family; Love of our church family and friends;
Love of those in need, like that husband and wife looking for their child in Japan.

2. Inverted giving

My nephew Jesse and I share a couple things; we each love to fish and we each have a bad back. He has an inversion machine. I have not seen it, but it's supposed to help a bad back. You put your feet in these clamps and then you get flipped upside down so that you hang by your feet. It's supposed to put your spine into traction and take the pressure off the nerves in your spine. I haven't tried it yet because being upside down, with my blood rushing to my head, does not appeal to me.

Yet turning things upside down is what God asks us to do with our finances. Our natural tendency is to use our money to pay for the needs and wants of our life and then give what is left over to God's work in the church. But Jesus says: "³³But strive FIRST for the kingdom of God and [God's] righteousness, and [THEN] all these things [that you need] will be given to you as well." In other words, what God is telling us to do is to give to God FIRST, and then to live on what is left.

Why does God tell us to DO this? ...It's NOT for God, it's for US. Three times in this morning's passage, Jesus says, "Do not worry." If we put ourselves and our families first, and give God what is left over, we WILL worry about the future. We'll worry about our jobs, our investments and our possessions. If we give to GOD first, it gives God the opportunity to start providing what we need and want in life.

And if we do what God tells to do, God WILL come through for us. We had an old dishwasher that we repaired many times over the 16 years we had it. Last time it broke down, we thought of replacing it, but after prayer decided to fix it one more time. Recently it became painfully obvious that it needed to be replaced and we prayed and felt it was OK to do so.

I checked *Consumer Reports*, and Carol and I found the highly rated one we wanted. We went to the store and found that particular model was on sale at 20% off. If we had it installed, there was no sales tax and they took the old one away for free. Plus, through another promotion, they took off another 10%.

When you start to give to God FIRST, God provides for your needs in ways that are sometimes AMAZING. But the BEST part of it is that in the PROCESS you begin to TRUST God instead of trusting in money. I can tell you, this is a very freeing feeling.

And what is more, when you start trusting God for the things you need in THIS life, it's easier to start trusting that God will provide for your needs in the NEXT life. And that is why Jesus tell us, 3 times in this morning's text, "Do not worry." If you trust in money, you WILL worry. If you give to God FIRST, and see how God takes care of you, you WILL be able to stop worrying about your finances and you will have a lot more peace about what will happen to you after you die.

3. How much are we to give?

How much ARE we to give God? In Malachi 3:8-12, God says this to his people:

⁸Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, "How are we robbing you?" In your tithes and offerings! ⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! ¹⁰Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

A tithe is 10% of our income. That's tough. I KNOW it's tough. Martin Luther said: "The very last part of a person to be saved is his wallet." But test God on this. Start out below 10%, but give a percentage, write that check out first, and SEE how God will come through for you!

And when you give, give with a glad heart! In 2 Corinthians 9:7 we read: "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." How is it possible to give so much cheerfully? This comes from the Rev. John Van Nuys, Pastor of the Wabash Avenue Presbyterian Church, Crawfordsville, Indiana (from PCUSA Stewardship materials):

"Last Sunday after worship, an usher handed me a pledge card to pass along to our Stewardship Chair. I was about to routinely file it in her mailbox when I noticed the handwriting. I immediately got a lump in my throat. The pledge card was from a child. The scrawled name read Tyler Brunty. Tyler is a bright-eyed eight-year-old who loves baseball and singing in our youth choir. Then the lump in my throat got bigger and several tears welled up when I saw that Tyler had pledged in 2011 to give to God through the church \$1 per week.

I called his folks Sunday evening to ask them if they knew about this. Tyler's mom Jennifer said, 'Oh, yes. Tyler asked us to please get him a pledge card.'

After giving him the card during the Prelude, his parents explained to Tyler that their giving as a family included Tyler and his sister; that Tyler's gift was already a part of the 2011 pledge his parents had made.

But Tyler replied: 'I know that you give for us, but I want to give God something from me.'

He said, 'I don't give anything now, but if I do next year, just think of all the good things God will do through my gift! That is why I want to pledge.' His parents looked at each other and smiled as Tyler happily put his pledge card in the collection plate.

Jennifer said, 'On the way home after church, Tyler kept talking and talking about his pledge, asking his dad and me about the chores he could do to earn his \$1 a week to give to God.'

Hearing this story Sunday night completely humbled me — and encouraged me. On Tuesday, I saw Tyler's grandmother and asked her if she had heard of her grandson's incredible act of faith and love.

Grandma Nanette nodded and said, 'There's more: Tyler hasn't stopped talking about his pledge. He now wants to do even more chores so that he can give God \$2 each week.'"

Conclusion – Eternal Treasure

Where IS your treasure? Is your treasure money and the things money can buy, or is your treasure Love: Love of God, love of family, church family, friends and those in need? ...Wherever your treasure is, there is where your heart is.

Do you want to stop worrying? Start giving to God first and living on what is left. When God comes through for you, you WILL begin to TRUST God and stop worrying about money and about your eternal life.

Tithe your money ...and do it cheerfully. If you do, you will get to know, to trust and to love your Heavenly Parent in ways you never dreamed possible. And what's more, that love and trust will last forever and ever and ever.

Amen.