

2018 Stewardship Month
The Gift of Treasure
Matthew 25:14-30
Jan White, Associate Pastor, Simi Valley SDA Church

INTRODUCTION

After Jim Bridger and his scouts discovered coal in Southwest Wyoming and the transcontinental railroad was laid, the town of Rock Springs became a magnet for coal miners. There was a gold rush of sorts, “black gold”—coal. Coal was plentiful, and it was important for the railroad and for heat. The population grew as people arrived for jobs. Often, housing was limited.¹

- Some of the miners dug shallow caves in the sides of the gullies and extended them with wooden frames for quick shanties at low cost. They might have a mattress, and a stove to cook their beans and wild game, but conditions were meager.

Conditions were deplorable for some; they lived on the edge of existence. Other families lived in town and had become part of the established fabric of society. As the story was told to me, a group of women from these families calling themselves, “The Good Deeder’s Society,” looked for people who seemed the most destitute and, anonymously, made plans to help these individuals. Sometimes it

was food; other times, clothing. They sought to assist in whatever way would be the most helpful to the person or family.

As the Good Deeder Society looked around for the next person or family to help, they focused on a single man—a miner who had little, almost nothing. He was a rugged sort of man—a loner. They felt compassion for him. He lived in one of those cave-like hovels with a grimy stinky old mattress and little else.

They carefully saved up their money and bought him a brand new squeaky-clean mattress. And one day, when the miner was deep in the earth, they carried the new mattress into his little hovel with clean sheets and blankets. They tidied up his place and carried that old, stinky, grimy, lumpy mattress to the dump and burned it.

So it was that the lonely miner finished his shift and came up out of the mine and returned to his hovel. He was filled with rage as he discovered his dirty, old, stinky mattress was missing.

Immediately, he began inquiring as to who these Good Deeders were and demanded to know what had become of his mattress.

They told him that they thought they were doing him a favor by giving him a nice clean new mattress, and that they had burned his horrible, stinky, grimy mattress.

They were chagrined to find that he had stored all of his earnings in that old stinky mattress, and they had burned his entire fortune!

The Gift of Treasure. *Where do we store your treasure?*

When preaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave a short discourse on the Gift of Treasure:

• Matthew 6:19-21, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth or rust destroys • and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.”*²

What did Jesus mean by this statement? Shouldn't we live prudently and plan for retirement? Shouldn't we be comfortable? Can't we have nice things?

You might be asking, “Isn't Jesus invading my private space a little too much? Hasn't He gone to meddlin'?” After all, it's my money and I'll buy what I want to. Right?

Have you ever experienced a thief coming into your home and stealing from you? I have. A few times. When I was attending boarding academy, a friend stayed with me for the weekend. She stole my only store-bought dress. For months, I wondered where I had misplaced it. She finally confessed several years later.

While in college, a close friend gave me some clothes that she no longer

wated. I went to wear the dress the next morning, but it was missing. Other clothes were missing as well. I think it was my roommate, but I couldn't prove it.

Once while teaching in Denver, my roommate and I came home to discover the front door wide open. My stereo was missing, along with her money.

Most of these things were replaceable. But I felt violated. Cheated.

People have all kinds of things stolen—cars, credit card information, jewelry, towels, silverware, old coins, paintings, and electronics.

Have you ever stored a treasure in a box only to discover that humidity warped or disintegrated the treasured piece? It's disappointing and discouraging.

Where's your treasure?

All it takes is a mud slide, a busted pipe in the wall, a fire, an earthquake, a tornado, or a gas leak and explosion, and it's all gone.

The prophet Haggai was given a message from God. God had been listening to His people. He heard their words in their dining rooms and in their bedrooms, and in their conversations with their friends. They had been saying, "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built."

In other words, their priority was to be comfortable and contented rather than work on the house of the Lord.

- "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses and this temple to lie in ruins? Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in

little; you eat, but do not have enough, you drink, but are not • filled with drink.

You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes. . . You looked for much but indeed it came to little; and when you brought • it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the Lord of hosts, "because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house," (Haggai 1:4-9).

Picture those hard working children of Israel. They were careful merchants. They sowed the field to yield a great harvest. They carried the best wool to sell at the market. Everything went into making a sure, quick profit. But, alas, everything got ruined. The hailstorm came. The well went dry. The oxen developed limps. The goats get sick. Things went different than planned.

Not much different than today, wouldn't you say? "I won't have enough for groceries," or, "I won't have enough to pay utilities," or, "I won't have enough to put gas in my car." You made an emergency visit to the doctor. The car needs more repairs. It's tempting in situations such as this to say to yourself, "I can't afford to tithe." Or maybe you've returned the tithe, but give offerings? Now *that's* a different story! Somebody who has more resources than I do can support the church.

Have you ever worked hard, brought your money home, and it seemed that God blew it away? Did you blame God or did you ask Him to give you His perspective—His honest assessment of your stewardship practices.

Later on in Haggai 2:8, God exclaimed, “‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts.”

Everything we have belongs to God. We are simply stewards of His resources. I’d like you to say that with me, “Everything I have belongs to God, and I am simply a steward of His resources.”

We return a tenth of our income to show that He is Lord of our lives. We give free will offerings to support the ministry and mission of the church. But what about the other 80 plus percent? Of course, some of it belongs to Caesar: “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” Or, Uncle Sam in our case!

But after that, I can do whatever I like with whatever is left. Right?

I don’t know what God is asking you to do. But I have a few questions.

Has He convicted you about your stewardship (or lack of)?

In what ways is God calling you to a life of generosity in place of a life of selfish living?

In what ways can we cut our spending and have more to give to those in need?

Maybe you buy a Starbucks Coffee a couple of times a week. How much do you spend in a year? • According to the Acorn Money Matters Report, the average American spends \$1,100 a year on coffee.² What if God asked you to replace that habit with generosity towards a needy family in Africa, or even right here at home?

Maybe you buy a candy bar a couple of times a week. What would that look like for a homeless person? Or even a Marantha project?

Are your treasures tucked away at home? You could sell them and give the money to buy literature, or to help someone in need, or to renovate God's house. You won't miss it. And you can't take it with you. It may disintegrate in storage!

It reminds me of the story about a man who all his life saved all of his money. He loved money more than just about anything. Just before he died, he said to his wife, "I want you to *promise* me one thing. When I die, I want you to take my money from under the mattress and put it in my casket so that I can take it all with me." He died, and his wife kept her promise. She went in and got all that money the day he died, went to the bank, deposited it into her account, wrote out a check to him, and put it in his casket."³

What are you doing with your treasure? How faithful are you to God?

God gives us treasure—we are stewards of the resources He gives us. But there's another side to this coin. *Jesus is the Gift of Treasure.*

• Matthew 13:44-46: *“Again the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again the kingdom of heaven is like a • merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”*

In these two parables, both the farmer and the merchant sell everything—all that they have to acquire the treasure. Others around them believe that they are reckless or crazy. Why would you sell everything for that lousy, rocky piece of land? Or that one pearl?

• Isaiah the prophet exclaimed, *“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not • bread and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me and eat what is good and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live • and I will make an everlasting covenant with you. . . Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the • Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God for He will abundantly pardon,”* (Isaiah 55:1-7).

• John the Revelator said, *“Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor,*

blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined • in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed, and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see,”
(Revelation 3:17, 18).

Friends, Jesus is a gift! An incredible, indescribable gift. He is available to the rich and to the poor. He is available to the young and the old. The challenge that you and I face is that often we undervalue Him. We do not understand the price that He paid to redeem us. We do not value the gift. We believe in our semi-comatose state that we can hang on to this world and its treasures. We think we can have one foot in heaven and be OK.

Peter and Andrew, James and John caught a glimpse of the gift. They left everything to follow Jesus. Nicodemus and Joseph of the Armithea, although it took a few years, embraced the gift and gave all. Moses left the riches of Egypt to hold onto the gift.

Jesus, Healer, Redeemer, the True Witness, the Beginning and the End. He's promised to break the chains of our addictions and lusts. He's promised to give us a new heart of flesh. He's promised us the Holy Spirit. He's promised to live in us. He's promised to be with us always. He paid the ultimate price to rescue us from the pit. Oh, if I could only describe what a treasure He is! Gold, silver, diamonds,

precious metals, they all pale in comparison. Our clothes are nothing compared to the pure white character He is willing to put around us.

If only I could help you realize how temporary our little pieces of trinkets that we call treasures are compared to the vast heavenly riches of Jesus. We've been stashing away corruptible riches in our dirty, stinky, lumpy mattresses that will burn one day, when we could be investing in the eternal riches of heaven.

CONCLUSION

Where's your heart? I want to challenge you this week to have an honest conversation with God.

"God, I know that everything I have is from You and belongs to You. My stewardship has been shaky at times. Show me how I can be a better steward. Am I pleasing You with my use of what You have lent me. Help me to give all of my heart to You."

Jesus is the gift that moths and rust can't destroy, and thieves can't break in and steal. Without Jesus, all your treasures mean nothing. You might as well burn them in your old mattress!

¹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Bridger for more information about Jim Bridger.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture texts are taken from the New King James Version of the Holy Scriptures.

² <https://app.box.com/s/sikpbs94y84tduggy3rvqu0s1mv74sr8>.

³ Adapted from <http://www.family-times.net/illustration/Promises/201980>.