

Title: Treasure is the Heart's Lodestone

Text: Luke 12:13-34

Introduction:

Have you heard of a “lodestone”? A lodestone is a magnetic piece of iron that has been hit by lightning, giving it a powerful magnetic field. 1000 years ago, a Chinese emperor discovered that thin metal over which a lodestone had been rubbed when placed on a float in water would point toward the stone. Once the stone was removed, the needle would always point south, thus leading to the invention of the magnetic compass. But whenever the lodestone was present, the compass needle is always attracted to it.

Transition:

Jesus, in tonight's passage in Luke 12, teaches us that our hearts too are like compass needles, and that there is a lodestone which will either draw our hearts toward heaven or away from it. Please turn with me to Luke 12:13-34.

Proposition:

In this passage, our Lord and Creator will teach us that our heart will go wherever our treasure is, so we must ensure our treasure is not on earth but in heaven.

This passage begins with Jesus being asked to help a man gain his part of his inheritance. This request sounds peculiar to us, but it was not uncommon in those days to ask a rabbi to judge such cases. However Jesus, who is not an official rabbi, uses the opportunity to teach the people and his disciples this important principle, that your heart will go wherever your treasure is. So, we must ensure that our treasure is in heaven so that our hearts will be there too.

First, he speaks to this man and to the crowd around him. Verse 15:

And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

He tells them plainly to guard against covetousness, because life is not in owning things. Which leads to our first point, that:

[Main point 1] Because our heart will follow our treasure, we must guard against coveting earthly treasure.

Verse 15: “take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness.” Take care that you do not desire having more than your due; guard yourself against greediness. Why? Because “one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Things don't give you life. Your life is not made up of what you own!

Advertisers will tell you the opposite. They'll encourage you to “imagine the freedom” that winning millions would bring you, because you could buy more stuff. They'll tell you that you would be more popular, or successful, or happier if you just had a nicer car, or a bigger home, or better vacations. Jesus stands in opposition to these statements, and says “your life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions.” We must Guard ourselves! Let us not treasure earthly things, because if we do, our hearts too will be bound to earthly things.

To drive this point home, he tells a parable about a farmer who has a bumper crop. My family and I went blueberry picking last weekend. Kids, have you ever picked wild blueberries in the woods, around a cottage or campsite? How big were the bushes? Little teeny things, like this high right? And little bitty though tasty berries?

Well, when we got there, the blueberry bushes were 5 feet high, and just covered with huge, juicy blueberries. The farmer's wife said they had received two “million dollar rains” this year, where just the right amount of rain fell at the right time, and many of the bushes had more fruit than leaves. That's what we're talking about in this parable, a great huge harvest for the farmer. He has so much coming in that he doesn't know where to store it! So he chooses to tear down his barns and build larger ones, large enough to hold all his grain and his goods, his stuff. This man, Jesus says, was already a “rich farmer” (see that in v. 16?), but notice where his treasure is. “my crops, my barns, my grain, my goods.” And he tells himself that he can now relax, take it easy for a few years, or many years, eat, drink and be merry.

But what is God's response? God calls him a “fool”! The man does not have many years to relax, but that very night his life on earth was over. And all that he had accumulated on earth, lost! And Jesus drives his point home, saying “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

What did the man do wrong? He was treasuring earthly things, and clearly his heart was on earth also. My crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, my relaxation, my eating and drinking, my many years! When Jesus refers to our “heart,” he is referring to the center of our being ... the center of our intellect, our emotions, and our will. The rich man's heart was on earth, because his treasure was on earth. What occupied the rich man's thoughts, stirred his desires, and drove his decisions were all earthly things! And God calls him a “fool”.

So Jesus warns us to take care, to continually guard ourselves against falling into greed, into coveting. If our treasure is on earth, it will keep our heart here also.

A very practical way to help guard yourself against greed is to limit your exposure to those influences that encourage coveting: namely, advertising. Evelyn and I receive a weekly newspaper, which is simply full of flyers and sales announcements. We used to flip through these things regularly, just to see what good sales were on, what sort of neat tools Canadian Tire was selling this week. But as our kids grew, they started the same habit. We quickly learned that what we saw as a harmless habit had a significant influence on our children, as they began to find toys that they suddenly just had to have, dolls that they really, really needed. They modeled clearly for us the influence that this advertising was having on them and more insidiously on us. Just before I started reading that Canadian Tire flyer, I didn't have any specific need. But now I really, really needed that new cordless drill, or realized how old and decrepit my barbeque had become and needed to be replaced, or any number of other new “needs” that I didn't have 2 minutes before. Now, we only look through flyers when we are shopping for specific things we have already identified as needs. It's amazing how fewer needs we have now then we did then.

The same idea applies to any sort of exposure to advertising that we can avoid. Unnecessary trips to the mall just to have a look around can have the same influence as flipping through those flyers can. So the principle is, look for ways to reduce your exposure to advertising, because most advertising is designed to make you discontent with what you have and

to stir up acquisitiveness within you.

So Jesus teaches that earthly wealth can become an earthly treasure that will draw our hearts away from heaven to focus on earthly concerns. So take care, guard yourself!

But what about those without much earthly wealth? Jesus goes on to teach that not having money can be as much a distraction as having it. Verse 22....

So Jesus changes his focus from the entire crowd to speaking just to his disciples, so that this next section applies specifically to believers. And here the focus is not the piling up of wealth, but of the anxiety that can arise from not knowing where our next meal is coming from. Just as possessions can become an earthly treasure, fretful worrying too can betray that we are treasuring earthly things above heavenly things. Jesus' answer to this problem is found in verse 31...

[Main point 2] So our next point is that because our heart will follow our treasure, we must concentrate on his kingdom.

Jesus outlines how God enables us to be freed from earthly concerns in order to follow this command. He shows us first how God frees us from merely pursuing life's necessities, and thus he frees us from our own worries and anxieties about the basics of life. Then he calls us to use this freedom from seeking our basic needs to seeking his kingdom.

Verse 22...

Don't be anxious. Why not? Because "life is more than food, the body more than clothing." He talks about how God provides for the ravens. Remember that the raven is not just any bird, but it was an unclean bird for the Jews. So Jesus is, as one commentator expressed it, "scraping the bottom of the barrel" to say that even this ugly, detestable bird is fed and provided for by God. And we are worth much more than the birds!

He then speaks of how God clothes the plants, whether lilies or grass. He reflects on the abundance of God's provision for the lilies, which are more beautifully dressed than the richest king of Israel, Solomon. And arguing from the lesser to the greater, he says that if God provides for grass, which is here one day and gone the next, will he not much more clothe believers?! He looks after every blade of grass! He'll look after us!

I love the grace of Christ in gently repeating and reassuring us of these promises, knowing that we may struggle to accept them.

Verse 22, “do not be anxious about your life ... about your body.”

Verse 24, “how much more value are you than the birds!”.

Verse 26, “why are you anxious about the rest?”.

Verse 28, “how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!”.

Verse 29, “do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried.”

Verse 30, “your Father knows that you need them.”

Six times in nine verses he is guiding, reassuring.

These are the unbreakable, unshakeable, absolutely reliable promises of our faithful, sovereign God. So what are we to apply our energies to, if not to pursuing the so-called necessities of life? Jesus answers that in verse 31...

Seek his kingdom. Pursue the goals of his kingdom. Commit yourself to participating in his kingdom. Don't treasure the things of earth, whether it's the possessions that we have or the things we worry about not having. God will provide. Let us set our mind on heavenly things, and seek kingdom priorities.

How do we practically live out this principle? It's a broad principle with many ramifications, but one key application we can draw from it is the importance of a regular time alone with God. Daily, we need to orient ourselves away from earthly things, which will easily consume all of our energies, to focus on Christ and his kingdom. Was it two weeks ago that Paul was talking about reading the biography of George Mueller? Mueller testified to the importance of spending time in prayer and in the Word every morning, seeking food for the inner man. Mueller said such a practice had enabled him to go through even great trials – often including not knowing where his next meal, or that of the children in his orphanage – was going to come from. So we too need to make daily time in prayer and in the Word part of our lives. How will we resist anxiety about earthly concerns? How will we focus on Kingdom priorities? By seeking

the will of God, and the grace of God, through that regular meeting with him in his Word!

So we must guard against covetousness, lest our treasure and thus our heart become bound to earthly possessions which will perish. And we must trust God to provide for our earthly needs, that we may be freed to seek his kingdom and find our treasure and our heart there.

Jesus finishes this particular lesson with his disciples by drawing our attention to our fantastic inheritance in him. Verses 32 to 34...

“Provide yourselves with moneybags” ... yes. But ones “that do not grow old, with a treasure” that does not fail, a treasure in the heavens. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

[Main point 3]. Because our heart will follow our treasure, we must seek our treasure in heaven.

Jesus teaches that it our Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. What need to we have of storing up earthly possessions? We will not find life in them. And we will one day be removed from them. But our Father has given to us his kingdom! When you have received a 10 billion dollar inheritance, whatever you owned before will seem of little importance. We have received the 10 billion dollar inheritance of the kingdom of God! We, as believers, are his children, forgiven of our sins, reconciled to his holiness, born again to eternal life, adopted into his family and John 14:2-3 says he is preparing a place for us in his Father's house that we may live with him forever!

How should we respond to our knowledge of God's fantastic gift to us and his unshakeable promises to us? We should respond by freely turning away from our earthly possessions to focus on the kingdom. “Sell your possessions,” Jesus says, “and give to the needy.” Be generous in giving, be sacrificial in giving, if we need to, sell some of our stuff to be able to give, knowing that what we've been given is far greater than anything we'll ever own.

I'm not saying that owning possessions is wrong. Jesus had many followers who owned houses and land, some of whom were wealthy. But we need to take care, and guard against desiring possessions, lest our treasures and hearts be entangled on earth. We need to recognize that we have a heavenly inheritance far beyond any earthly wealth, and God's promise of

provision while we are here on this planet, so we may be free! Free from having too much, and free from having too little, free to focus on glorifying God and his kingdom!

Should Christians sell everything and give all the money away? No, because that would make us part of the needy and unable to help. But our attitude should be one of freedom from having to have, freedom from having to keep and to buy more, and freedom to give, especially to those in need. As we guard ourselves against covetousness and the desire for more, and as we rest in God's promise to provide for our needs, we are freed up to give cheerfully and generously to those in need around us.

How do we make this practical? A great place to start is to become aware of the needs of others in the Kingdom. Our church is adopting Charles Woodrow and his family as our missionaries in Mozambique. As Paul noted a few weeks ago, when he asked Dr. Woodrow what needs his ministry has, Charles said that in a place like Mozambique he could fill a page with important requests. As a church, we've decided to focus on a single need – purchasing the bookstore – which we are seeking to provide for his ministry. As we learn more about this over the next few months, we each should prayerfully consider how God would have us provide for these needy brothers and sisters in Mozambique. And as we may become aware of other needs, perhaps personal needs of individuals within the congregation, or other worthy Christian ministries, let us make our first impulse to ask how we can help, and with discernment in choosing and faith in God's provision, seek sacrificially to provide for the needy.

Jesus says that as we do this, we are storing up moneybags. We are adding to an unending, unaging treasure in heaven. And we have his marvelous promise that as we do this, our hearts too will be drawn to that lodestone; our hearts will be drawn to focus on heaven. This is what it means to be rich towards God.

But I must emphasize that the only ones who can have any treasure in heaven are those who have God as their Father, who are part of God's "little flock," Jesus tenderly refers to Christians in verse 32. If you're here this evening and you're not a Christian, then the very first step you need to do is to be reconciled to God. Right now, you are not storing up treasure in heaven, but the Bible teaches that in fact you are storing up wrath for yourself! Romans 2:5 says "But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day

of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.” If you remain hardened against God, refusing to repent, then one day God's wrath will break out against you and that will be a dreadful day, a day leading to another day of eternal suffering!

But the verse right before that says that “God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance.” Jesus says that all who come will be accepted. Repent of your sin and turn to him! Believe that Jesus is who he says he is, the Son of God, and that he died in your place on the cross. If you will come and repent and believe, then all that stored wrath will be gone, having been poured out on Christ on the cross, and you will be covered with his perfect righteousness. Then you too, certain of God's promises to you, can lead a life focused on the glory of heaven, treasuring his kingdom, with your heart drawn to that heavenly lodestone! As Julian said, the day of decision is the day you hear the gospel. Don't delay! Repent and believe the gospel!

Conclusion:

Our Lord and Creator has taught us that wherever our treasure is, it will act as a lodestone draws a compass, and our heart will be drawn after our treasure. He warns us not to treasure earthly possessions, but to be rich towards God. He reassures us that he will provide our earthly needs, freeing us to treasure his Kingdom. And he tells us of our Father's good pleasure in giving us the kingdom, that we may be freed to give sacrificially, live generously, abandon earthly possessions for unfailing, eternal treasure in heaven.

And as an example of a heart full of longing for heavenly treasure, let me read to you a brief extract from a letter written by Samuel Rutherford to encourage a suffering friend in the early 1600's. May this be an encouragement to how we too want our hearts to desire heaven.

When we shall come home, and enter into the possession of our Brother's fair kingdom, and when our heads shall find the weight of the eternal crown of glory, then we shall look back to pains and sufferings and then we will see life and sorrow to be less than one step or stride from a prison to glory. Our little inch of time -- suffering is not worthy of our first night's welcome-home to heaven. Oh, what then shall be the weight of every one of Christ's kisses! Oh, how weighty, and of what worth shall be every one of Christ's love-smiles be! ... the poor soul will think one kiss of Christ has fully paid him back for forty or fifty years' wet feet, and all its sore hearts...

Oh, thrice blinded souls, whose hearts are charmed and bewitched with dreams, shadows, ... vanities ... of a miserable life of sin! Shame on us who sit still, fettered with the love and fondness of a loan of a piece of dead clay! ... O for a sight of eternity's glory, and a little tasting of the Lamb's marriage supper! Half a swallow, even a drop of the wine of consolation, that is up at our banqueting-house, out of Christ's own hand, would make our stomachs loath the brown bread and the sour drink of a miserable life. Oh, how witless we are, to grow restless, and chase, and run, till our souls be out of breath, after a condemned happiness of our own making!

If we would fall out of love with all our false loves, then Christ would win and conquer to Himself a lodging in the inmost chamber of our heart. Then Christ would be our night-song and morning-song; then the very whisper of our Well-beloved's feet, when He comes, and His first knock or rap at the door, would be as news of two heavens to us. Oh, let some [part] of us die to smell the fragrance of Him; and let my part of this ... world be forfeited and sold for ever, provided I may anchor my tottering soul upon Christ!

May God grant us the zeal and desire to see our treasure in heaven, that our hearts may be drawn there as was this man's!!