

Of Hearts and Treasures (Part 2)

Introduction

The Text

³² Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Luke 12:32–34)

The Comfort, the Call, and the Capacity

A. This is our second week now looking at these three verses.

1. Last time we looked first at what I called (1) The Comfort (v. 32)—where Jesus comforts us with the fact that we have both a Good Shepherd and a Prodigal Father.
2. And then we looked at (2) The Call (v. 33a)—where Jesus, in light of this comfort challenges us: “If your Shepherd and Father has your back, stop worrying about yourself, release your stuff in love for Him and others.”

B. Well now this morning we come to the third point which we shall spend the whole morning on—what I would call (3) The Capacity.

1. I am sure that you don't yet have any idea what I mean by this, but I trust by the end you will. The focus now in particular will be on this idea of reward in heaven. It is this subject that we see next in the flow of Jesus' thought in our text.
 - a. Look again at v. 33 and you'll see it: “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. [Why? For what reason? Well, that is the sort of thing He goes on to explain . . .] Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.”
 - i. In other words: As you rest in and experience the comfort of God, and as you answer and obey this call of God to give all away in love, you will, in fact, be securing for yourself treasure in heaven, heavenly reward, we might say.

C. Now, if you're anything like me, this idea of reward in heaven can often feel too distant, too far off, too confusing and foggy, really, to make any impact on you. What does it actually mean? How does it work?

1. Jesus is implying here that this idea of heavenly reward is a fundamental motivation for the Christian ethic, self-sacrificial love. But if we don't understand it, we certainly won't be ready to live in light of it. And hence, I thought a whole Sunday devoted to the subject would serve us well.

Jesus Is Loving Us Well

- A. Now before we really dive into this, as we transition from (2) The Call to (3) The Capacity, let me make an observation here that might otherwise go unnoticed: namely, Jesus is loving us well. When He calls us to sell everything we have and give to the needy He is loving us well.
- B. We are not prone to receive such instruction as love. It sounds threatening, it sounds disturbing. But I'm not so sure it sounds loving. O sure it is loving for the needy, the people who are getting all of my stuff, but what about me? Well, it would seem at first that Jesus is intending to leave me out in the cold with nothing.
 - 1. At least that is how we are prone to read these sorts of things, but when we stop and really investigate here we find it is true: He has our best in mind. He is loving us well.
- C. Simply put: He is aiming to keep us from the disaster of [v. 21](#)—that we would not be like the one who wastes his life “[laying] up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” To let us carry on in such vain pursuits would not be loving us well. He wants to move us from vain and vulnerable treasure to true and lasting treasure.
 - 1. That's really the point of His discussion here concerning thieves and moths. If all of your energy is spent trying to secure treasure here and now on this earth, well you have a big problem. Thieves can come and take it away at any moment. Moths can corrupt it.
- D. Let me just tell you something. I always wondered about moths, you know. Thieves I get. That's scary. They have masks. They have muscles. They have guns. They can steal my stuff and disappear into the night. But moths? They're tiny, kind of cute, fluttering little insects. If you really don't want one in your house, you can just smack it out of the air. They aren't even fast. And if you hit them hard enough they just turn into a cloud of dust. Like, where did that thing go? Moths? I'm sorry, I just don't think I had any real respect for moths . . .
 - 1. And then we got some, in our house, in our pantry. At first we just saw a couple and we're like okay I'll just vacuum those up or whatever. Maybe, if you're feeling extra courteous, you softly kind of scoop the thing in your hand and release it outside. “Go little buddy. Be free. We'll miss you!” But then they just kept coming, laying eggs, eating stuff, and they're everywhere. We finally had to throw away half the food in our pantry just to get them out of there.
 - 2. And then, I kid you not, we discovered that they'd moved to our coat closet. It's ridiculous. I almost gave up. “Okay fine. You can have the coat closet, just let me have the house.” I thought about maybe trying to charge them rent. At least we'll get something out of the deal. That's when you know it's bad. I actually started bartering with these bugs. The only reason I mounted the courage and strength to make one last counter-attack was because my parents were coming for Thanksgiving and having a coat closet full of moths is embarrassing. I washed and sprayed and threw stuff away. I put stuff in sacks to heat up and hopefully kill any eggs. I think we're finally moth free, but it was a war.

3. And now I'm pretty much traumatized. It's hard for me to even see a moth fluttering by the light outside my window now without imagining the thing has sinister intent. It's coming after my stuff. If I leave so much as a crack in that door, it's going to whistle for its buddies and come after my food or my clothes or who knows what else.
- E. So yeah, moths are a legitimate threat. And I think this is really the point. The fact that even these silly little insects can succeed in getting at my earthly treasure ought to tell me something about the stability of that treasure. What kind of a fool would build his life around something that even moths can get at and destroy?
1. And yet so many are doing just that. And so Jesus, because He loves us, is saying: "Let's put our treasure and our hearts somewhere else."

(3) The Capacity

- A. Okay, so let's talk about this idea of treasure or reward in heaven now. I've got four basic propositions that I want to give you regarding this, and I'll build each of them out with biblical support as we go.

Proposition #1: There Will Be Reward Given in Heaven

- A. This first proposition is the simplest. This is the clear implication of Jesus' words in our text. His whole logic turns on this idea. Sell and give now, because you will be rewarded then.
- B. I suppose another text I could hold out that more generally makes this point is [2 Tim 4:6-8](#). [2 Tim](#) seems to be the last epistle the Apostle Paul wrote and he is now readily aware that the end for him is near. Listen to what he writes: "[6 I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.](#)"
1. The simple idea here is this: The Christian shall be rewarded. Indeed, all who are in Christ, "[all who have loved His appearing](#)" ([v. 8b](#))—not just the "super-Christians" like the apostle Paul—shall be rewarded on the last day.
- C. It is a most critical point. You will not be able to sustain a life of abandon to the kingdom, of generosity to the poor and lowly, of love for neighbor and enemy alike, if you do not see this reward as a certain and impending reality. This is the only way Paul could be sustained in pouring his life out "[as a drink offering](#)" ([v. 6a](#)).
1. Nobody lives their life like this here and now, unless they are aware that there is something even greater coming for them there and then.
- D. One might also think of Moses as he is described in [Heb 11](#): "[24 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward](#)" ([vv. 24-26](#)).

- E. If you have no power in your Christianity, if you have little love for the poor and broken, the orphan and the widow, if you find your fingers wrapped tightly around your stuff, if you are overly concerned for your own comfort, security, reputation, and so forth, it is likely that, unlike Paul and Moses, you are not looking to the reward, but instead have all but forgotten about it.

- 1. You've neglected this very first proposition: There Will Be Reward Given in Heaven.

Proposition #2: This Reward Will Vary in Degree

- A. All who are in Christ will be rewarded on the day of judgment, but not all will be rewarded in quite the same way or to quite same degree.
- B. Again, I would say that this is clearly implied in the words of our text. Jesus is telling us to store up treasure for ourselves in heaven by releasing our treasures on earth in love for Him and others. Certainly we cannot take this to mean that the Christian who gives a bit here or there but is often prone to more of a closed hand shall be rewarded in quite the same way as the one who took Jesus up on this call in radical ways.
 - 1. There is motivation in this because there is difference in distribution, in what one can expect in the end.
- C. We live in a day and age, in a culture, that likes to give trophies out to everyone—winner and loser alike—just for participating. You've heard of these things, right—the now infamous participation trophies? They hand you a metal or something with a sweet little inscription on it like: "If you had fun, you won!" We can't bear the thought of telling someone that another did better than them.
 - 1. Now, the competitor in me—who spent ten years of my life traveling the country competing in tennis tournaments—despises the notion of such a trophy. If I get the snot kicked out of me on the court, and afterward you hand me a participation trophy, I'm not feeling encouraged, I'm feeling ridiculous, I'm feeling mocked. "I lost. Don't coddle me. Don't just hand me a trophy. Let me earn the thing."
- D. I suppose, in my more charitable moments, though, I can understand the heart behind this. We want people to know that they are valuable and significant regardless of how they performed.
 - 1. As a gospel believer, I can support that. I base my life on that—that on the day of judgment I'm not going to be accepted by God ultimately on the basis of my own merit, on my religious performance, on my ability to perfectly execute the biblical ethic. No! I am justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
 - a. So, in one sense, yes all who are in Christ, on the day of judgment, will receive a trophy—on the basis of His work, not their own. Just for "participating" . . . in Him! But this does not contradict the biblical teaching that runs parallel to this saying that, while all in Christ will be saved and rewarded on that day, not all will be rewarded to the same degree.

- i. Eternal salvation and heavenly reward, it seems to me, while certainly related, are often conceived of as two separate categories in the Scriptures.

- E. Perhaps the clearest place to see this is 1 Cor 3:10-15: “¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”
 - 1. You see it there, right? When you come to faith in Christ there is a foundation laid—and that foundation is the perfect righteousness of Christ. There is no other foundation. Here is justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Here is your eternal salvation.
 - 2. But then the discussion shifts to the subject of heavenly reward. And for this, the issue is not Christ’s obedience, but your own. Now we’re not talking about the bedrock foundation of Jesus, but what you choose to build upon that foundation—particularly, in Paul’s metaphor here, what you choose to build with.
 - a. If, in Christ, you are fighting to walk by faith and giving your life away in love for God and others, well then on the last day it will be shown that you have built much with gold, silver, and precious stones.
 - b. But if you are regularly caving in with selfish concern and living only with regard for your own needs and comforts, well then on the last day it will be shown that you have built much with wood, hay, and straw.
 - i. And Paul is asking: “Which one is it going to be for you?” Assuming that both are Christian, the foundation is still there—“he himself will be saved” (v. 15)—but the rewards on the last day shall be quite different.

- F. And this idea that there will be various degrees of reward in heaven really is the clear teaching all over the Scriptures:
 - 1. We saw this earlier in Luke 6:32-35a: “³² If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. ^{35a} But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great . . .”
 - a. The logic of this text is: The greater extent you go in loving your enemies, in doing good to those who hurt you, in lending to those who only take from you . . . the greater your reward will be in heaven.

2. And we shall see this again later in Luke as well: “^{12b} When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:12b–14).

a. Such an idea taps into that marvelous proverb: “Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed” (Prov 19:17). What an image! When you give to the poor man who in no way will be able to pay you back, you don’t ultimately give to the poor man, you give to the Lord, and you better believe He is able make good on what you lend Him and will do so in the end with unimaginable interest.

G. And, of course, there are countless more statements on the matter:

1. “And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward” (Matt 10:42).
2. “[T]he Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done” (Matt 16:27).
3. “[W]hoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor 9:6).
4. “Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward” (2 John 1:8).

Proposition #3: The Ultimate Reward Is God Himself

A. This is perhaps the most important of my propositions and it is least likely to be seen on the surface of our text back in Luke. A quick reading there would seem to indicate that, not God, but stuff will be our reward. That’s the kind of language Jesus uses. Look at v. 33a once more: “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail . . .”

1. You can’t read “moneybags” around Christmas time and not think of Uncle Scrooge from A Christmas Carol, right? For him, life is all about money, the bottom line, the profit margins or whatever. For him it’s all about the moneybags.
 - a. Is that what the Christian life is? O sure, maybe we sell some stuff now to give to the poor, but we will see major return on our investment in heaven. We’ll be rich. We’ll be sitting on mounds of cash. Maybe we hitchhiked on earth but we’ll be rolling in a Tesla in heaven. Is that what this is all about? No!

B. While there is more I wish I could say on this point, the simple fact is this: Pursuing this heavenly reward is not so much about getting more of God’s stuff as much as it is about getting more of God’s heart. God Himself. He is our ultimate reward!

1. This is why we read of the 24 elders around the throne of heaven casting their crowns down before Him (Rev 4:10). “Whatever authority, whatever material stuff we have, the only reason it means anything is because we have You!”

2. This is why Jesus Himself speaks of what the last day will be like for Christians, where God will say: “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the [what?] joy of your master” (Matt 25:21). It’s the Master’s joy that ultimately is our reward.
 3. This is why the Psalmist would cry out: “²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psa 73:25–26).
 4. And it’s why Paul would say: “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of [what?!] knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain [what?!] Christ” (Phil 3:8).
Knowing Him, gaining Him—Jesus is the ultimate reward.
- C. But now we must ask: How does Proposition #3 relate back to Proposition #2? If knowing God is the ultimate reward, what does it mean that this reward will vary in degree? Here we finally come to what I mean by “The Capacity”.
1. I think if you wrestle and fight by faith to live a life of obedience now—even selling what you have and giving to the needy, trusting your Father to care and provide for you—you will find that you are actually enlarging your capacity for future joy in Him when you see Him face to face. On that day, because of your faithful obedience now, you will have the capacity for deeper experience and appreciation of His love and joy and pleasure.
- D. Jonathan Edwards, who’s just brilliant on this, in his sermon on [Rom 2:10](#) makes the point that all in heaven will be full and satisfied in God. We should have no doubt about that. But some will have capacity for more of Him. All will be full, but some will have more. Here’s how Edwards put it: “Every vessel that is cast into this ocean of happiness is full, though there are some vessels far larger than others . . .” (Works, Vol. 2, p. 902).
- E. Now, to help you understand this, let me try to illustrate it for you. Imagine the young man who’s fought through years of temptation to remain sexually pure for his bride, saving himself for the wedding night, for the one who would be his wife.
1. Who do you think will have greater capacity for joy in the marital union, this man or the guy who, it seems, (forgive my language) sampled every flavor in town in high school and college and then decided to settle down finally with this girl. There’s something cheaper, something lesser about this. Sure that night will still be special, but it could’ve been so much more.
- F. I think that’s what Jesus is saying here. Trust that your Father will provide for and protect you. Don’t give in to self-concern and greed or anxiety. Don’t make your life all about the here and now. Love with abandon. Give to a fault. Let yourself be burdened with compassion for the poor and the lost.
1. And when your time comes to stand before God and you see Him face to face, you will be able to say: “I knew it! I knew you would be there for me in the end. I knew you wouldn’t forsake me. I knew counting all as loss to know you would be gain.” And your joy, your pleasure, in God, in that relationship, will be so much greater in those moments than if you

had simply capitulated time and again to self-indulgence and concern for the cares of this world.

- G. So what this means, brothers and sisters, is that when you open your hand in love for the poor and needy, when you give a glass of water to the thirsty, when you do the dishes in your house with the heart of a servant, you are at the same time enlarging your capacity for future joy in God! You are, as it were, picking up shovel and digging out a little bit more dirt from the well that will be filled to overflowing on the last day!

Proposition #4: Something of the Future Reward Can Be Enjoyed Even Now

- A. But there is one more thing we should say. And here we come to the fourth proposition. Though, up to this point, I've been speaking of this reward as if it's something confined only to the future, we must say that there really is something of this future reward that breaks into our present experience even now.
 - 1. Jesus isn't saying: "Listen, if you can put up with a horrible time on earth, you will get something awesome in heaven. It's going to be miserable, but joy is on the other side."
- B. That's not the biblical teaching. I mean for goodness sake, two of the fruits of the Spirit are "joy" and "peace" (Gal 5:22)! In Christ, through the Spirit, you and I, today, on this side of heaven, are given access to a joy and peace of which the world knows nothing about.
- C. Isn't that your experience? As you open your hand to the poor, though it's hard at first, you sense something of God's pleasure in it, even in those moments. When you resolve to serve a person, even though it hurts, in reliance on Jesus, isn't there something strangely satisfying in that? You're following after, trusting in the One who gave it all for you on the cross, and a door for deeper fellowship with Him opens in those moments.
- D. At the end of the day, I suppose what we come to find is that following hard after Jesus is a win-win. When we lay down our lives in love for others, not only are we enlarging our capacity for future joy in God, we are also granted access to some of that joy here and now. When we lay down our lives in love for others, we are not merely digging out the well which shall be filled someday, we are drinking from it and being filled even today!