

## Laying Up for Yourselves Treasure

Matthew 13:44, and 6:19-24

Just about 10 years ago, on the website Christianity.com, Dr. Ray Pritchard asked a very important question. A question you may think has an obvious answer, but it doesn't. The question was

### **What is a Christian?**

Dr. Pritchard went on to explain that, not surprisingly, it depends on who you ask. He noted that 83% of Americans typically call themselves "Christian" for the following reasons:

- Of course I'm a Christian; I was born in America.
- Of course I'm a Christian; I was raised in a Christian home.
- I'm a baptized Catholic.
- I'm a Methodist.
- I go to a Baptist church.
- I read my Bible every day.
- I walked an aisle; said a prayer, signed a card, raised my hand.

What's behind most of these answers, Dr. Pritchard contended, was that it's very American to say, "I'm a Christian IF I SAY that I am."

Interestingly, the name "Christian" was not invented by early believers, but a name given by others. Originally, a term of contempt/derision. It took time to become a positive designation.

So what is a Christian? Let me offer an answer from what the New Testament teaches.

A Christian is someone whose trust in the good news about Jesus  
the Savior, who died for sins and was raised from the dead,  
has changed her/his life today and destiny tomorrow.

Trusting in the Gospel, a Christian is someone  
born into God's family by grace through faith.

The result = a Christian lives to please God the Father  
by obeying God the Son  
in the power of God the Holy Spirit.

You are likely saying, "Yep...that's me. Not perfect at it, but I'm swinging the bat."

- I believe the good news about Jesus. I've been born by faith into God's family.
- I'm all about pleasing God by obeying Jesus in the power of God's Spirit.

Now, if you're a Christian in Christ Community Church, you know we ask these questions to size up if we are living in a way that pleases God --

#1 Is the Spirit flowing through me? (power)

- #2 Does God make my day? (word/prayer)
- #3 Who shares my tough stuff? (accountability)
- #4 How worn is my welcome mat? (witness)  
Who? How? How often?
- #5 With whom am I fishing? (team serving)

Today, we come to...

- #6 How are my investments doing? (stewardship)

That's the question we'll ask for the next 7 weeks. Am I pleasing God **with the resources that the Master** (the owner of the resources) **has placed in my hands?** As we start this important discipleship series, let's invite the Lord himself to take over.

## PRAYER

Randy Alcorn begins his priceless small book *The Treasure Principle* like this:

*A first century Hebrew walks alone on a hot afternoon, staff in hand. His shoulders stooped, sandals covered with dirt, tunic stained with sweat. But he doesn't stop to rest. He has pressing business in the city.*

*He veers off the road into a field, seeking a short cut. The owner won't mind—travelers are permitted this courtesy. The field is uneven. To keep his balance he thrusts his staff into the dirt.*

*THUNK. His staff strikes something hard. He stops, wipes his brow, and pokes again.*

*THUNK. Something's under there, and it's not a rock.*

*The weary traveler tells himself that he can't afford to linger. But his curiosity won't let him go. He jabs at the ground. Something reflects a sliver of sunlight. He drops to his knees and starts digging.*

*Five minutes later he's discovered it—a case fringed in gold. By the looks of it, it's been there for decades. Heart racing he pries off the rusty lock and opens the lid.*

*Gold coins! Jewelry! Precious stones of every color! A treasure more valuable than anything he's ever imagined.*

*Hands shaking, the traveler inspects the coins, issued in Rome over 70 years ago. Some wealthy man must have buried the case and died suddenly, the secret of his treasure's location dying with him. There's no homestead nearby. Surely the current landowner has no clue the treasure's there.*

*The traveler closes the lid, reburies the chest, and marks the spot. He turns around, heading home—only now he's not plodding. He's skipping like a little boy, smiling broadly.*

*What a find! Unbelievable! I've got to have that treasure! But I can't just take it—that would be stealing. Whoever owns the field owns what's in it. But how can I afford to buy it? I'll sell my farm...and crops...all my tools...my prize oxen. Yes, if I sell everything, that should be enough!*

*From the moment of his discovery, the traveler's life changes. The treasure captures his imagination, becomes the stuff of his dreams. It's his reference point, his new center of gravity. The traveler takes every new step with this treasure in mind. He experiences a radical paradigm shift.<sup>i</sup>*

Then, Alcorn reminds us who first told this story. It was Jesus, who captured it in a single verse:

Matthew 13:34

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field.  
When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy  
he went and sold all that he had and bought that field.

Think carefully, will you (?), about the point Jesus is making to his disciples. The treasure box buried in the field – which the man found -- is **THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN**. Not our present life now on a fallen, frustrated planet, but our FUTURE LIFE in the kingdom God has promised to bring. This future kingdom is “like a treasure” that is hidden. But it is so valuable, so important, so priceless, that when anyone finds it and understands its worth...the only fitting response is to go and sell all you have in order to buy the field in which the treasure can be found. In fact Jesus repeats this point with a 2<sup>nd</sup> verse.

Matthew 13:35

Again, the Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search  
of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value  
went and sold all that he has and bought it.

You see, the core issue when it comes to answering the Life Question (#6) *How are my investments doing?* is “**Where am I investing** because I value the Kingdom of Heaven a treasure more than anything else in my life?” Do I value what’s ahead MORE than I value what is now?

Do we? Have we truly discovered that investing for the life to come is far more important than investing to secure our life here?

For a few moments, let’s again listen to Jesus, as he teaches in Matthew’s gospel chapter 6.

**Matthew 6:19** “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

<sup>22</sup> “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

<sup>24</sup> “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

As many of you know, this teaching from Jesus is part of a longer sermon found in Matthew 5,6,7, often called “the sermon on the mount.” Thousands and thousands of people were following Jesus around every day, ‘great crowds’ from everywhere.

Matthew 5:1, “Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them...”

The teaching – perhaps the greatest sermon every recorded – was for his disciples, and it answered this question:

**Because the Kingdom of Heaven is coming,  
how shall disciples live?**

You have a Father in Heaven.  
He has sent the Messiah-King.  
There is a coming, eternal kingdom you will enter.  
In light of that – there is a way to live  
today to prepare for what's coming next.

So what does a disciple do with the assets, the treasures, God puts in their hands? What does Jesus teach? Please notice, first

**The King's Directive: Invest in what lasts**

**Matthew 6:19** "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The King's words here could hardly be clearer, but they assume that we understand something. That we understand that everything each one of us have has actually been *given* by God.

**The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,  
the world and those who dwell therein (Psalm 24:1)**

The truth is that in His grace, God allows us through the days and years of our lives to use what is actually His:

- the **life and breath** He gives us,
- the **abilities and talents** He bestows us,
- the **strength** He gives us to work,
- the **opportunities and relationships** He creates for us, and
- the **assets** (the currency/money) spent and saved to live and experience and have joy

Every human being – each of us – is a steward of what God has placed in our hands.

But these assets God gives us during our brief lifetime – what Jesus here calls “treasures” – can either be selfishly and foolishly hoarded, or they can be spiritually and wisely invested. In fact, here's how Jesus put it. They can be “laid up for yourself on earth” as DEPRECIATING treasures, or they can be “laid up for yourself in HEAVEN” as APPRECIATING treasures. “You will make a decision” Jesus says, “about the assets you lay up. And the decision will be about WHERE.” Be smart, the King directs. Invest where it will last.

The classic story Christ told about this – <sup>Luke 12:13</sup> Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” <sup>14</sup> But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” <sup>15</sup> 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.”

<sup>16</sup> And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, <sup>17</sup> and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have no where to store my crops?’ <sup>18</sup> And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ <sup>21</sup> **So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”**

The king's directive – if the coming, eternal Kingdom of Heaven is your treasure, invest in what is appreciating, in what is going to last. Secondly, let's hear

### **The King's Warning: See this clearly**

<sup>Matthew 6:22</sup> “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

May I ask you what I'm asking myself. Do you think you are seeing clearly this issue? Are you and I really looking at this with the light of God's perspective...or are we living and spending treasure merely with the darkness of the world's perspective? Am I investing aggressively in heaven, or just laying up for myself for a life here that will all-too-soon come to an end?

The truth is that the world's magic pill for happiness is materialism, the accumulation of depreciating experiences and assets. Alcorn writes,

You'll never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul. Why? Because you can't take it with you. “Do not be overawed when a man grows rich (Psalm 49:16-17), when the splendor of his house increases, for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him.

John D. Rockefeller was one of the wealthiest men who ever lived. After he died, someone asked his accountant, “How much money did John D. leave?” The reply was classic: “He left...*all* of it.”<sup>ii</sup>

Alcorn adds: You cannot take it with you, but you can send it on ahead. Jesus' directive: Invest in what lasts. His warning: See this critical matter clearly.

### **The King's Challenge: No middle ground**

<sup>Matthew 6:24</sup> “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

One very insightful Bible commentator explains:

In verse 24, Jesus reaffirms in the language of slavery the truth that heavenly treasure and earthly possessions cannot be ‘laid up’ by people at the same time. “You cannot *serve* (lit. be slaves of ) God and money at once, for single ownership and full-time service are of the essence of slavery.

The accumulation of wealth is so absorbing an occupation that sooner or later money enslaves its victims, and leads them to despise the god to whom they may have imagined they could render a limited obedience. The Scottish reformer John Knox translated vs. 24 “You must serve God or money. You cannot serve both. As McNeil points out, ‘The Lord states he principle without compromise or limitation.’<sup>iii</sup>

SO what happens when you take the Lord’s challenge seriously. Mark, a lawyer practicing in Kentucky, now invests in heaven ½ of his income each year. But he explains: “My pursuit of money drove me away from God. But since I’ve been giving it to Him, everything’s changed. In fact, giving has brought be closer to God than anything else.”

Wow...I guess its true. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

#### FINISHING UP

So what shall we do with this important discipleship question – how are my investments doing? Perhaps the first step is to ask, “WHERE am I laying up my treasure?” Will I listen to the King’s Directive? Will I take seriously His warning about the importance of my eye, my perspective, being full of God’s light? Will I evaluate the King’s challenge about who am I serving with my treasure?

Here’s my suggestion – have the courage to have a conversation with God, and with your spouse, and perhaps even with your children about coming Kingdom of Heaven. Talk honestly and openly about these 3 questions:

- #1 How important to us is our future life in God’s kingdom of heaven?
- #2 Any chance we are “laying up for ourselves” treasures on earth (like the rich man who was a fool)?
- #3 How can we improve in “laying up for ourselves” treasures in heaven?

Go ahead...have the conversation. The Holy Spirit will be in it, and it might bring you closer to God than anything else.

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<sup>i</sup> Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle: Discovering the Secret of Joyful Giving* (Multnomah Publishers, 2001 by Eternal Perspective Ministries), 6-8.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>iii</sup> R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1961, 1977), 76.