

Life Improvements --- Mountaintop Makeover --- Lasting Treasures
Exodus 19:1-8 & Matthew 6:19-24
“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21

Exodus 19:1-8

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ² They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. ³ Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: ⁴ You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶ but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites. ⁷ So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸ The people all answered as one: “Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do.” Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after.”

We have been working our way through the Sermon on the Mount during the past several months. We’ve taken a two-week break to celebrate Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Easter and the empty tomb! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! What a wonderful Easter we had ---- thank you to all of you for everything that was done to glorify God and to make this Easter Season so joyous!

Over the past several months, we have listened to what Jesus said to those that he gathered on that hillside. Jesus must have liked mountains—for here he gave his most famous sermon. While dissecting the Sermon on the Mount, we have wrestled with some powerful statements and challenges. The words of Christ from this sermon are a call to us for a new, moral mandate. This is a cry for a new way of life for us. Over and over again, Jesus begins with what the Pharisees and the teachers of the law had been teaching the people. Jesus would say, “You have heard it was said to the people long ago --- but I say to you...” Jesus challenged those on the hillside--and challenges us today--to be the salt and the light to our world. He taught then the meaning of the law and the kingdom of God. His teachings in Matthew five are difficult and call each of us to a new way of life. His teachings about anger, lust, divorce, marriage, vows, retaliation, resentment, revenge and loving your enemies were radical then and are still radical today. If we would allow it, this teaching would truly become a mountaintop makeover for us.

Our reading this morning comes from the sixth chapter of Matthew. It is situated in the middle of Christ’s great teaching. The teaching this morning challenges us to examine our lives and to pinpoint what our true treasure are. Let us listen for God’s word to us today.

Matthew 6:19-24

¹⁹ *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; ²³ but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth!”*

After Easter, I was able to get a way for a while—Jac and I were able to visit and enjoy six of our 8 Grand Children! (here is a picture of them --- holding up a photo of six of my grandchildren) I also attended a conference that I have had the joy of attending for the past seven years--the West Coast Presbyterian Pastor’s Conference. It is held annually, eight days after Easter every year. In the life of a pastor—you start your year in the fall and kick off all the programs, that is followed by the Stewardship Program, then Advent, Christmas, the Congregational Meeting, Lent and Easter! By this time of the year, 8 days after Easter is the perfect time for two hundred Presbyterian Pastors to gather for worship and Bible teaching for one solid week. I can tell you this much: my wife went with me one year and said that was enough for her --- having two hundred, bleary-eyed pastors together in the same room for a week was way too much for her. We meet at Mt. Hermon—a little mountaintop located just outside of Santa Cruz in Northern California, up the coastal mountain range.

I sat up there in the mountains this past week, and heard some powerful teaching on the Gospel of John every morning. In the evenings, we had a professor from Fuller Theological Seminary teach on the history of worship and the challenges of offering worship services in our churches today. One thing that struck me from the teachings on worship is that one of my tasks as pastor/worship leader is to help you come into the presence of the living God every Sunday! Every Sunday, before we begin the services, I pray that each and every one of us comes into the presence of our Living God in a real and personal way. Part of my prayer is that you will experience a little touch of heaven as we worship together.

The Israelites were gathered at a mountaintop called Sinai. They were three new moons from escaping from Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, and receiving the Ten Commandments and the instructions for building the tabernacle--the center of their worship. Listen again to the words that Moses spoke to the people from the mountain --- *“Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: ⁴ You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶ but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites. ⁷ So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸ The people all answered as one: “Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do.” Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after.”*

Did you hear it? ***“YOU SHALL BE MY TREASURED POSSESSION!”*** What would you do if you heard those words being spoken to you—about you? We are God’s treasured possession! Think of it—of all that God created...the oceans, the mountains, the sun, moon and stars, animals, lakes and forests ... God’s favorite possession in all of the Universe is....YOU!

Some 1400 years before Christ was born, Moses was up on another mountain with God and God gave Moses a wonderful “now” and “then” statement. God said, *“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.”* God says, now--obey and keep. The Hebrew word for obey is “shama” which can be translated as “hear, listen or obey.” God was giving the people a promise. All they had to do was hear, listen, obey God’s laws and out of all nations they would be His treasured possession. Did you hear that? Out of “all” ---not some, not a few, not one --- but ALL! All they had to do was listen, hear and obey God’s law!

The Hebrew word for “treasured” is a wonderful word, it is [*câgullah/seg·ool·law/*]. It is a deep guttural word with the sound of law in it. It can be translated “treasured,” “special,” “peculiar,” or “precious.” You are God’s precious treasure.

Fourteen hundred years came and went—sort of like 25 years have come and gone here in this church. I tried to calculate what 1400 years of sermons looked like and I finally gave up. For 1400 years, the people were reminded over and over again to obey all that God had commanded them and to keep His covenant ...and the promise was: they would be GOD’s treasured – precious possession.

Next, God visits planet Earth in the form of Jesus and gathers a crowd of followers on another mountaintop and teaches them all about the law. Jesus says, “You have heard it said about this law or that law --- but I tell you...” God visits Planet Earth by appearing to Moses and saying, “Tell the people if they keep and obey my Law—they will be my treasured possession.” And God revisits Planet Earth in His only Son, and says, “I have gathered you here on this mountaintop to tell you how I complete the law and that if you will listen and obey my teachings—YOU will be my treasured possession.”

Listen again to what Jesus says about treasures: *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.”*

This is a prohibition Jesus is giving. It is not a suggestion, “Well you might not want to store up your treasure on earth.” This is a command! “Don’t do it. Don’t store up earthly treasures...store up heavenly treasure!”

What are your treasures that you treasure? What do you call your treasure: your house, your car, your promotion, your job, your IRA or retirement fund, your cash or jewels? Exactly what is it that you are investing in and gathering up and storing?

Back in the days of Jesus, clothes were a sign of wealth. Jesus is saying, “Don’t put all your money into your clothes where moths can come in and destroy.”

In the time that Jesus lived they didn't have FDIC or Banks or Savings and Loans. If you had some precious jewels, stones or coins—you would have buried them in the floor of the house or in the wall. It's why Jesus refers to the robber coming into their home and stealing their treasure. The Greek word for thief is "kleptos" from which we get a "kleptomaniac." The thief would enter your home, tear up your walls and floors and walk away with your earthly treasures.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal."

So what are the treasures that you treasure? Where are they being stored?

There is a story told of a very rich miser who was about to die. Right before he was to die, he gathered his pastor, his doctor and his lawyer together and gave them his final wishes. He told them that he was going to give each of them an envelope filled with \$30,000 cash. He told them that when the casket was lowered into the grave he wanted them to throw the envelopes in on top of him. This guy was going to take his treasure with him. The day came for his burial and they lowered the casket into the ground. The pastor went up and threw his envelope in, then the doctor and finally the lawyer. As the three were walking away from the gravesite, the pastor said, "I need to confess, our church was really short this past month and I kept \$10,000 and threw in the other \$20,000." The doctor took a deep breath and said, "I confess, we needed some extra money for the clinic that we are building. It will really help a lot of people. So I kept \$20,000 and threw in \$10,000." The lawyer looked at his two friends and said, "I kept the cash and wrote the guy a check!" Talk about a thief coming in to steal and rob!

Jesus is playing for real on the mountaintop. After he addresses storing up treasures in heaven, Jesus adds the image of light and darkness. Jesus uses the image of the eye "being a lamp to the body. The eye can be light and the whole body is light or the eye can be dark and the whole body is dark." Jesus is not trying to give them a lesson on optics. The English translation of the word is translated "generous." So if our eye is generous--our whole body is generous. But if our eye is "unhealthy --- stingy or evil," the whole body is stingy, evil or unhealthy. I think Jesus is trying to help us understand that if our eyes are generous, then we will know how to store up treasures in heaven...but if our eyes are dark—stingy, unhealthy or evil—then rust, and moths, and thieves will eat away our bad investing.

"No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth!"

Moses' job was to remind the people to obey God's laws and keep His covenant. If they did, they would be a treasured --- peculiar --- precious, possession. Jesus came to remind us that the love of money can ruin us. Love God and store up your treasure in heaven—where nothing can take it away from you.

SO WHAT?

Bertha Adams was seventy-one years old when she died alone in West Palm Beach, Florida on Easter Sunday, 1976. The coroner signed the death certificate, “cause of death --- malnutrition.” After wasting away to fifty pounds, Bertha could no longer sustain life. Bertha was known to go to her neighbors to beg food. She bought her clothes from the second-hand stores. When the state came in to clean out her house, the inspector said that he had never seen such a pigpen. Bertha had kept everything: magazines, paper, clothes, and boxes and boxes of junk. From all appearances, Bertha was a penniless widow. That was not the case. The inspectors found two keys buried among all the junk. The keys were to two different safety deposit boxes in two separate banks. In one safety deposit box they found over 700 shares of AT&T stock, plus hundreds of valuable notes, bonds and \$200,000 in cash. In the other safety deposit box, they found \$600,000 in cash. Bertha died a penny-pinching millionairess!

Think of all the good Bertha could have done with her million dollars. Think of all the people she could have helped. Think of what her portfolio could have represented.

Not long after our oldest daughter was married, I framed her wedding picture with this saying; *“Priorities --- A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove But the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child.”*

Jesus came to the mountaintop to open our hearts, minds and eyes. Jesus wants to do a makeover in our hearts. Where our treasure is—there our heart is. This is the “so what” for us today.

If we—you and I—are God’s most treasured possession...then that’s the “so what” for us today. If I am God’s most treasured possession—then where is my heart, what do I really value and treasure, and how can I serve God and store up this treasure in heaven?

The Gospel of Jesus Christ has transformed my life—and that is the greatest treasure of all to me. Every Sunday I pray that somehow—whether through the music, the liturgy, the prayers, the sacraments, the message—I pray that somehow....that each one of us will be touched with the presence of the living God. I pray that as we gather—on the mountaintop of Round Rock—that we hear the soft sound of sandalled feet and that we hear the words of the Living Word and that we—keep and obey them...for we surely are God’s most treasured possession.

Let us pray

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ⁱ*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version. 1996, c1989 . Nashville: Thomas Nelson.*