

Treasure in Scripture Treasure in the Gospels

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Croesus is credited as issuing the first genuine gold coins. His wealth was legendary as he ruled over the Greeks around 600 B.C. His name is synonymous with great wealth, much as Bill Gates or Jeff Bezos is today. Of course, few of us are ever likely to attain to great wealth. However, most of us will secretly hope that one day we may find great treasure. Today, we continue our series on 'Treasure in the Bible' with a look at 'Treasure in the Gospels.' The word itself is found about 13 times – in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Interestingly, it is Matthew, who portrays Jesus as the King of the Jews, who speaks most about treasure, with eight of those references. There appear to be five independent references to treasure and we will look at these in the order in which they appear in Matthew's Gospel.

“And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense and myrrh” Matthew 2:11.

How often we may have read or heard this verse as a part of the Christmas story. However, to limit its impact to just a few days a year would be a mistake. These wise men had their priorities right. As they approached the child Jesus, they realised that they were in the presence of One who deserved respect and so they fell down and worshipped Him. This is a right and proper action for all of us. As we go to church, as we say our prayers at home or as we work on His behalf, we really need to have a sense in our hearts of the uniquely special nature of the Lord Jesus. He deserves our respect. Though in so many ways He became so like us, He is not one of us. Before the wise men introduce anything of their giving, they first give themselves in worship to Him. Sometimes we may think that there is so much that we can do for Him, or that we can give to Him. In all this, we need to remember that first of all we are to give ourselves and worship is the right response from all our hearts.

Now it is important to carefully note the language that Matthew uses. These wise men present to the child Jesus their treasures. The gold, frankincense and myrrh would have been expensive, costly gifts to the wise men! They were “their” treasures. They were not Jesus' treasures. The point I want to make here is that whilst the giving of these gifts would have left the wise men financially poorer, it would be wrong to think that they made Jesus appreciably richer financially. He is the God who could say:

“[Are not the cattle on a thousand hills Mine?]" (Psalm 50:10).

In other words, the resources of God are infinite – beyond counting – so the addition of a few extra gold coins or spices would make little material difference. The money and possessions of the wise men had an attraction to them but were of little intrinsic value to Jesus – the owner of all things. That is not to say that He did not appreciate their gift, nor that He does not appreciate anything

that we may give to Him. What Jesus really values is a heart that loves Him more than any treasure that this world can amass.

We see a similar thing in John chapter 12, although the word 'treasure' is not explicitly mentioned there, where Mary comes and breaks her alabaster jar of ointment over Jesus in a beautiful act of worship. The disciples complain about the cost of the lost perfume. Jesus rightly values the spiritual act of giving, linking it to His burial. We see the same thought in Luke 21, where Jesus commended the widow who gave her two coins to the treasury. Jesus values this more highly than all the other larger donations that had been made. The real message we need to understand is that it is not so much the monetary value of what we give but the heart cost to us. Where we love Him more, that what we give there is real value. If we only have a little, but gladly give it to Him because we love Him more, then we, like the wise men, are truly giving a gift to Him.

Now let us consider the second set of treasure verses:

“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 nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” Matthew 6:19 – 21.

“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” Luke 12: 32-34.

In these verses the challenge to us is really about where our treasure is. Jesus makes the point of the difference between treasure on earth and treasure in heaven. Whilst we have the principle in Matthew’s Gospel – urging us to view heavenly treasure as more important than earthly treasure, Luke goes further and encourages us to take action now in converting our earthly treasure into a heavenly one! Having good principles is necessary for life. Taking actions to enact those principles is better!

Imagine that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was to stand up on budget day and announce that on December the 31st of this year he was going to abolish the pound sterling and adopt, for example, the euro. After this date you could not spend or even exchange your old sterling currency. What would you do? Somebody who was a millionaire now could become a beggar overnight if all they had was pounds in their bank account. However, it would be similarly foolish to convert all your pounds now to euros. How would you pay for the newspaper on Saturday or the take away for tea tomorrow? The prudent thing to do would be to make a start now in converting some of your pounds to euros and increase that conversion the closer we got to the end of the year.

That really is the challenge we face as believers. We live on this earth, and nowhere does the Bible say that we are not to earn money or spend it on the good things that life can offer. After all, every good and perfect gift can be traced back to God. I do not want to spiritually blackmail you into giving away all your money, like some quack prosperity Gospel preacher. However, upon our death bed our money can do us no good, whether we have left a will or not! Therefore, we do need to take serious thought as to using our earthly treasure, however much or little that may be, to further the cause of Christ on earth, and in so doing lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven. Money and time given to others, or supporting Christian ministries is a great way of converting our pounds sterling into a heavenly currency. Using our homes and our possessions for the Lord’s work in hospitality or as a place to share the Gospel is another. Giving our time to study His word or getting involved in Christian service is a third great way of using what we have now to eternal benefit.

Of course, the difficulty in all this is that we do not have a date given to us. I suspect that if we did, I would leave it to December 30th to take action. My treasure would still be my treasure rather than just something I have when He should be my real treasure. Because we do not have a date we are, rightly, left to depend upon the Holy Spirit to guide our every action. This is the way it should be. It is not right for me to tell you what to do. You are responsible to your Master, as I am to mine. But let us jointly resolve together to strive to lay up for ourselves a heavenly treasure. After all, you can't take it with you and there will be plenty of time to rest in heaven!

Now to our third reference to treasure:

“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things” Matthew 12:35.

“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” Luke 6:45.

Perhaps, like me, you have had the experience of eating your way through a box of chocolates. Sometimes, you bite into one and the filling is a real disappointment. The chocolate on the outside made it look so tempting but the final product was distinctly iffy. On the other hand, the filling may really enhance the flavour and leave you wishing the whole box was full of just that variety. What is inside really matters so far as chocolates are concerned. What is inside our hearts matters infinitely more. Jesus spoke about this in the verses we have just read. They certainly challenge me as to whether what I say betrays the image that I try to project of myself. I want others to think that I am a nice kind of guy. Many people might feel the same way. When we keep quiet we may be able to carry that off but when we open our mouths, the true inner self is revealed.

Let us consider just a couple of examples of how this might work out in practice in the lives of many of us. As we come to worship the Lord Jesus, as we meet together to remember Him, have we prepared our hearts to worship Him, whether silently or out loud? As we sit and view the bread and the wine are our hearts outpouring in praise and thanksgiving to Him for all that He has done for us? I have experienced times in my own life when I sit there and the inner silence is deafening! I have nothing to say to Him and that is deeply shameful. It really is something that should challenge us and cause us to spend some time in preparation so that when we meet together, we have a contribution to make – ready and prepared.

As a second example, I have experienced times when someone has asked me about my faith and to my shame, I have fluffed the opportunity to clearly and boldly present the Gospel. I may not have denied my faith entirely, but I certainly have not commended the Gospel. As I search my heart, I think this is because I do not rate sharing my faith all that highly and so have not prepared myself as to what I might say in differing scenarios. Well, a good man brings forth good things, so perhaps I have some work to do after this broadcast ends!

Of course, the opposite is also true. My words may be hateful, rude and unkind. When I go through times of spiritual barrenness and when I little appreciate the wonderful grace of God, my words will soon evidence that. When someone makes me angry or hurts me, I might lash out verbally and seek to get my own back. That bad man in me is all too happy to make his voice heard.

Luke adds the detail that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. I love that statement as it is such a lovely goal to aim for – an abundant heart. It is not a difficult thing to aim for either. If I eat too much, I will soon get an abundant waistline. That is probably not a good thing! However, if I eat a lot of spiritual food, then I will get an abundant heart, and that is definitely a good thing. Regular, daily Bible reading, fellowship with other believers, time spent in prayer and consideration of the many wonderful ways of God all make for a healthy spiritual diet. These are

things that do not cost a lot in financial terms but do cost a lot in terms of time and discipline. They are things that really do reveal what we truly want in life!

Now let us consider our fourth treasure:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like 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.... Then He said to them, “Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old”” Matthew 13:44, 52.

This chapter, with the seven parables of the kingdom, is really the key to our understanding the ways of God in working in this world. Time does not allow a discussion of it now. However, in this parable we see that Jesus is the man who had found a treasure and has left it in the world. To lawfully gain that treasure He has given all that He has, even unto death on a cross, to purchase the field, so that the treasure might be His. That treasure is the nation of Israel. It may not appear to be much at the moment. The world may look at that nation in scorn and think they are deluded and weak. But there is a day to come when the nation will truly be on glorious display - a real treasure belonging to Christ, the rightful owner. What a wonderful thing it is to belong to Christ. It really must challenge us as to how we view the nation of Israel. We wouldn't toss a bar of gold into the back of the cupboard and forget about it. We ought not to treat the nation of Israel with similar contempt.

Jesus adds the detail that a well taught scribe is able to share his treasure store of knowledge and share it with others. Here is a real encouragement to each one of us to really study the Bible – not just for our own benefit but to be a help to others! It is my experience that all of us have someone who looks up to us – whom we influence for better or worse. What a great thing it would be if we all took our responsibility to others seriously enough to want to study the Bible so that we can enrich others. We dare not leave this job to “the guy at the front”.

Our final treasure is referred to in all three synoptic gospels.

“Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me”” Matthew 19:21.

“Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me”” Mark 10:21.

“So, when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me”” Luke 18:22.

Jesus had been speaking to a rich, young ruler. Perhaps he thought that his money could buy him a place in heaven. With a real love for him, Jesus had to put His finger on a real stumbling block in the young man's life. It was not the fact that he was rich, per se, but rather that his money held his heart more than anyone or anything. God will never settle for anything less than true devotion. Jesus urges him to get rid of his money and possessions and use them for good. In that way he would have real treasure in heaven. This ties in with our second point . It is only heavenly treasure that really matters.

We may look back on the society in which Jesus lived and view them as old fashioned, primitive even. However, they experienced the same problems and choices that we do. We need to recognise that the society in which we live is so focused on material things and those things that are entirely related to this life and this world. We may not be overtly rich and consumer driven in

our outlook but nevertheless we are bombarded daily by advertising and what others have that it is impossible not to be subtly influenced to focus on the material.

Jesus would cut right across this pattern of thought and call us all to put Him first in our lives. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He does not call us to His way as a killjoy, or to spoil life. Rather, He calls us to the Christ centred life knowing that it is the only life that will truly satisfy us. It is a life that may not be comfortable. It is certainly a life that is counter cultural today but in the final analysis, it is also a life that is supremely worthwhile. However, it does not happen automatically but arises out of a myriad of little choices that we make each day, and sometimes a few big ones!

We may think that when we retire, we will give our free time to Christian service. Jesus would call us to serve now. We may think that when we die, we will leave an inheritance to worthy Christian causes. Jesus would call us to give our money away now to support those causes. We may think that when we have learnt more, we will start to share our faith. Jesus would call us to do so now. Whatever holds our hearts affections now, more than the Lord does, Jesus would call us to give it up and to follow Him.

He is not saying that we should not use our common sense. I do need enough time to spend with my children so that I can parent them properly. I do need enough money so that I can pay all my bills on time. I do need to progress in my Christian understanding so that I can better explain my faith. In our hearts we know when we are clinging on to things rather than allowing Christ to have His rightful first place. We may be able to deceive ourselves but we can be certain that He clearly reads our hearts and understands our motives. For the young ruler we read that he went away sad. If we are expecting the material things of this world to bring us lasting happiness, then we are truly deluded. We do not know what happened to the young man. Did he ever come back? Will he for eternity regret that fateful decision. Let us resolve to follow Christ today and to make Him the real treasure of our hearts.

It is striking that John does not refer to treasure in his Gospel! Certainly, to the way my mind works that raises the question as to why! I would like to suggest that in his Gospel, John presents Jesus as the Son of God. Having, spent three years with Him, he was uniquely qualified to write of the many wonderful things that he had seen and heard first hand. So, there is treasure hidden in plain sight all through the Gospel.

When Howard Carter discovered the tomb of King Tutankhamun, his patron, Lord Carnarvon, asked him if he could see anything. "Yes", came the reply. "Wonderful things." That is rather how we should feel and think when we read through the Gospel of John. In every chapter we see the glory of the only begotten Son of God. He is so precious, so wonderful that it would be churlish to speak of tawdry earthly treasure in the same breath. It would be like Howard Carter remarking that he could see a tenner in the tomb as well as all the many genuine treasures! So, whilst John may not use the word, there really is treasure in his Gospel – in every chapter and on every page.

The Gospels really do challenge us as to how we view things - what really holds our hearts and matters to us. We started with the wise men. My prayer would be that we would all go away as wise people – ready to present our treasures to Him, ready to present ourselves to Him.

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