

## The King's Speech: treasure *The Treasure* (pt 1)

Matthew 6:19-24

April 27, 2014

Dan Hoffman

On May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1994 George Swanson of Hempfield County Pennsylvania was buried in the middle of the 12 burial plots he had purchased from the county cemetery. Why so many? While he only actually needed four plots, he wanted to ensure he had purchased enough room to be buried inside his spotless, white, virtually mint-condition 1984 Corvette with only 27,000 miles on the odometer. The Washington Observer-Reporter opened its story with the words "If there is a highway to heaven George Swanson is driving it in style."<sup>1</sup>

...

Today we are returning to our series through The King's Speech, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. And we will be picking up where we left off in Matthew chapter 6 verse 19. As we turn to God's word today I would encourage don't take my word for it, open your Bibles and follow along, and if you didn't bring your Bible, grab one from the pew in front of you. We are on page 685 today.

Would you pray with me?

[Pray]

...

Matthew chapter 6 verses 19 to 34 is really one section with two parts to it, and so we are going to give it two sermons. Today we are going to look at verses 19-24 and next week we will look at the rest.

But in the larger section we get three commands from Jesus, one main command and two smaller commands that help us keep the main command. The main command comes in verse 33 where Jesus says.

[Read Matthew 6:33a]

That's Jesus' main command in this section. Seek God's kingdom and God's righteousness before anything else. Make God and His kingdom the most important thing in your life. Center your entire life on this. Everything you do, everything you think, everything you want to accomplish needs to be directed and controlled and influenced by the fact that you are seeking God first.

Now, the obvious question that jumps into my mind when I come across something like this is "how do I do this?" What does it even mean to seek God and His kingdom and His righteousness first? What does a life that is centered on God's kingdom look like? How do I obey this command practically?

---

<sup>1</sup> Washington Observer-Reporter, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1994.

These are the same questions I ask when I read Jesus' greatest commandment:  
 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul  
 and with all your mind and with all your strength. (Mark 12:30)

Commands like this hit us as great ideas, but very difficult things to make practical. I mean have you ever wondered what it looks like to love God. I can't make Him breakfast in bed, I can't mow His lawn, I can't give Him a hug. What does it look like to love God?

...

As I've studied this I have grown absolutely convinced that there is a very practical answer to this question. And it is an answer that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount makes clear.

Here it is in a sentence: We love God by loving our neighbours with God's love. We love God by loving our neighbours with love we have received from God.

...

Here's how I get this. And this is going to be a bit of review. The King's Speech starts with the Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes are 9 descriptions of what a Jesus follower looks like, and they are like a Christian exercise regime. The first three Beatitudes are about receiving grace from God in spite of being unworthy. In these three Beatitudes the Christian is on their knees recognizing the poverty of their own spirit and realizing that they don't deserve anything good from God, and yet their experience is that God is pouring out His grace. Have you been there?

This is the vertical relationship between a person and God. Grace starts with God and comes down to fill us and begins transforming us in spite of the fact we have done nothing to deserve it. Paul says

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

The next four Beatitudes build on this posture as the Jesus follower gets off their knees and begins to turn what they have received vertically outward to their horizontal relationships.

The most amazing thing about God's grace is that when He fills us we start looking like Jesus. Now that doesn't mean we all start walking around wearing togas and sandals, but it does mean that we start doing what Jesus did. Jesus told His disciples:

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in Me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. (John 14:12)

And the work that Jesus had been doing was bringing salvation to humanity, and that is the work Jesus says those people who believe in Him will continue to do – that’s amazing! Jesus believed you would bring His salvation to the people He situated you in the middle of. Was He right?

The Beatitudes end with two that talk about suffering. And this just makes it absolutely clear that to look like Jesus to our neighbours means experienced what Jesus experienced from His. Jesus said:

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.  
(John 15:19)

So Jesus started His sermon with an exercise regime: Christians start on their knees receiving grace, raise to turn that grace outwards, even when that means suffering like Jesus.

...

In the rest of chapter five then Jesus goes on to outline what it looks like to love our horizontal relationships with love we have received vertically. And what Jesus describes is intense! The standard is incredibly high. Some might say it is impossibly high, at least for people to do by themselves.

Jesus says His disciples don’t just avoid sins like murder or adultery or dishonesty, they actively let go of anger and forgive people when they are wronged. They go to extreme lengths to purge lust from their lives and never give in to divorce. They are so full of integrity that their yes means yes and they even love their enemies in tangible ways.

Friends, nobody can live that way unless God is alive and active within them. But the good news is that when we fail here it drives us back to our knees in need of grace – and that is Jesus’ point.

But then in chapter 6 Jesus puts something on top of this. He says it isn’t just the physical things we do on the horizontal that matter, but the heart behind those actions. He says that we can actually live in incredibly loving ways and fail to get any lasting reward for our efforts all because our motivation was in the wrong place.

Now we touched on this before, but if the idea of seeking a reward for our good actions sounds a bit funny its because we have been influenced by guys like Immanuel Kant who said if we do anything to get a reward then we haven’t done anything good. He said “virtue is its own reward.” You’ve heard that right?

But Jesus, who created us, says something a little different. He says there is no such thing as altruism, people are designed to seek rewards and there is nothing wrong with that. But He says what matters is who we are seeking our reward from.

And so Jesus talks about giving and praying and spiritual disciplines like fasting and says that when we do these things we need to do them in a way that seeks God's reward. If we let people see us doing these things then people will think we are spiritual and that is the reward we get, but if we hide our good actions from people so that only our Father sees then He will reward us. And Jesus says "true joy comes when you get the Father's reward. Seek this reward!"

And that brings us up to where we are in the King's Speech. That is the context and today Jesus tells us what we need to focus on in order to get the Father's reward.

So here's my thesis: **Lasting joy comes when we seek Christ and His Kingdom first by treasuring The Treasure.**

...

Look with me at Matthew 6:19.

[Read Matthew 6:19-21]

You've probably seen those pictures pasted on the wall behind the cashier at the convenience store that say "We sold a winner." Seen that? Did you ever notice that all those people wear the same expression? They are all beaming 1000 watts with a huge toothy smile.

Now these smiles are different from the smiles you see in family pictures. In family pictures there is usually some tension in the room but everyone is pretending to be happy – have you been in a picture like that? But in the pictures behind the cashier, the people look different, they look really happy. And of course that is because someone has just given them a million dollars. I'd smile too!

In this section of Matthew 6 Jesus talks about treasure. And treasure makes people smile. Treasure brings people joy. And that is what Jesus is talking about – Jesus wants His disciples to have joy.

Friends, God wants you to be happy – really happy. Do you believe that?

Here is the qualifier: God wants you to be really happy long term. And Jesus says our long term happiness is depended on what treasure we treasure.

In the Greek, verse 19 literally says "Do not treasure to yourself the treasures of earth."

Jesus says it is a bad idea to let the things we care most about, the things we treasure be the treasures of this world. That might be cars or clothes or bank accounts or relationships, whatever. Jesus says don't treasure these things.

And the reason He gives for why we shouldn't do this is a natural reason not a theological one.

He says all this stuff is going to disintegrate. It is going to get eaten by moths or destroyed by vermin – some other translations say rust. All of the treasures of earth are going to be tomorrow's garbage.

Let me ask you, how many of you have a cell phone on you right now? Don't be shy, just put your hand up.... Some of you are embarrassed to admit that you have a cell phone and you want to tell me that you never use it, that's ok, you still have one.

Now how many of your cell phones are old or out dated?... Come on, everyone who has a cell phone should still have their hand up. Even if you bought your phone yesterday Jakob will tell you that you could have spent half the money and got twice the phone if you bought your phone today. That's the way it goes with stuff.

All our toys are on their way to the trash heap. And Jesus says if you didn't get the opportunity to throw your treasure in the trash it is probably because someone stole it. That's the only other alternative.

...

Now on paper we all agree. We all know everything we can see with our eyes is temporary. But even though we know this we have to be really careful here because new stuff is intoxicating.

You've probably heard of a "buyer's high." This is a psychological phenomena that has been scientifically documented. Basically the idea is that when we buy new things endorphins get released in our body which makes us feel good.

So when you buy a new car or some new clothes or a new cell phone you actually feel like a better person. And so this is what we do. We don't buy clothes because our old ones wear out and fall off; we buy new clothes when our craving for this endorphin rush kicks in. We don't buy a new car when our old car stops working or the seats rust through the floor boards, we *upgrade* to a new car when we need an endorphin fix. This is Canada.

One of the big lies of our culture is that we become worthwhile people when we contribute to the economy by getting new stuff. And so we are encouraged to treasure earthly treasure. But Jesus says that's ridiculous. Don't buy into the lie that without new toys you'll die.

In place of this Jesus says treasure the treasures of heaven. Jesus doesn't say don't treasure anything. That is the Buddhist position. They try not to want anything at all. That's not what Jesus says. Jesus says treasure the Treasures that bring lasting joy. Treasure the treasures of heaven.

...

Now what are these “treasures of heaven?” Is Jesus talking about us working to get jeweled crowns and bigger mansions in glory with gold paved driveways? No, that’s not the context here.

The treasures Jesus is talking about in Matthew 6 are the rewards of the previous section. In Chapter six verse 1 Jesus said:

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.  
(Matthew 6:1)

And then three times Jesus says do your good deeds in secret so that your Father who is unseen and sees what is done in secret will reward you. In other words Jesus says seek recognition from God not people. Your reward is God’s recognition. Your reward is God saying ‘That’s my kind of person, I’m going to give Myself to her. Ultimately the treasures of heaven are not things we get from God; ultimately God Himself is The Treasure of Heaven. God isn’t just the giver, God is the gift.

So let me ask you, do you want God to say “well done my good and faithful servant?” How badly do you want this? And how does this desire play out in your day to day life?

It is one thing to say you have this desire and another thing to actually live this way. Are you ready for the test?

Does your pursuit of God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, does your desire to be recognized by God mean that you can’t do some things here on earth you would otherwise like to do because you are too busy seeking God? Does that make sense?

For example, perhaps you want to go on a big vacation, but you can’t afford to go on the vacation you would love to go on because you are secretly giving a large portion of your money to the poor – you are seeking God’s kingdom first.

Or would you would really like to give yourself to a particular hobby but you don’t have enough time to do it as well as you would like because you spend a lot of your free time volunteering – you are seeking God’s kingdom first. When Jesus says treasure the treasures of Heaven He means seek these things at the expense of other things in your life.

Now I’m not saying it is bad to do things we like or to use some of what we have been given to get nice things – I’m not saying that. But if you can do everything you like because you are investing all your resources towards it then probably you are seeking first your own comfort and your own pleasure not Christ and His

kingdom. And Jesus says the treasure you treasure is where your heart is. And only one Treasure brings lasting joy.

Now I'm not going to ask you if you like that, because I don't like that. But does that make sense? Nod at me or say amen or something.

Now look at verse 22.

[Read Matthew 6:22-23]

Now in these verses Jesus, at first, seems to be totally changing the subject. One minute we are talking about treasuring the treasures of heaven, the next we are talking about eyes and then we flip back serving God or money which seems to fit with the first section, but what's up with verse 22 and 23?

Whenever you come across a section of text like this it is very important not to assume it stands by itself. Instead unpack it inside its context. And the context here is very strong.

So, while Jesus is shifting the metaphor from treasure to eyes, Jesus is continuing to warn His followers not to focus their worship on anything other than God.

To treasure something is to worship it. And here Jesus says the eye is the lamp of the body. In other words the thing we focus our attention on is what we worship. And because the eye is the gateway for the entire body, the health of the eye doesn't just affect the eye, it affects everything.

If our eyes are healthy, if our focus is singularly on God, meaning we worship Him with all our resources and all our time and all our energy, then our whole body will be full of light.

Notice again that Jesus is not telling us to kill our desire for reward. He is telling us to focus our eye on the right treasure. He says when we treasure God and His glory and the expanse of His kingdom then our whole life fills with light.

And a life of light is a life of true joy. Real life is found when we give ourselves with a single focus to pursuing the Treasure of Heaven. So don't treasure God's stuff, don't treasure the things He made, don't treasure what you can get from Him, treasure God. Jesus says when we pursue God we find ourselves most fulfilled and most joyful because this is what we were created to do.

...

But this is not the default position. Our eyes can easily become unhealthy. If we give ourselves to anything else no matter how good it is, if we focus our eyes on our spouse or our education or serving at church or raising our kids Jesus says the result will be that our whole body will be full of darkness.

So let me ask you where is your focus? What are your eyes trained on?

The test for this is what gets you most excited?

When you talk with your friends what do you get passionate about? Are you excited about your family? Do you find yourself always talking about what your kids are doing? Are you excited about what you are doing at work, or the hobbies you are involved in? Are you excited about travel and the time you get to spend with your spouse?

All of these things are good, and there is nothing wrong with giving energy to these pursuits. In fact in order to raise children they require attention. And the Bible tells us we need to work so our jobs require our attention. And the marriage relationship is the most important human relationship that exists so it requires our attention. But these are secondary attentions, they can't become our focus. Jesus says no matter how good these secondary things are if they become our focus our whole body fills with darkness. And then Jesus tells us why in verse 24 and 25.

[Read Matthew 6:24-25] (anything)

Friends, the reality is that every human worships something. All of us have something that consumes most of our resources and most of our time and brings us most of our pleasure. But the law of worship is that there is only room for one god in each of our lives. And Jesus tells us that only one God will actually bring us lasting joy and happiness.

...

C.S. Lewis, the writer of the Chronicles of Narnia and one of my favorite authors wrote an essay called "First and Second things". In it he argues that when people elevate something in their lives, whether that is art or music or relationships or wealth, to the first place they end up losing both that thing and everything else.

If you make your dog the centre of your life, in the end, you lose not only your human dignity but even the proper pleasure of dog keeping because a dog can't possibly satisfy all your needs. And the same is true if you look to another person, whether that is a friend or a spouse or a child, to be the one who gives you meaning in life. In other words if you make them the focus of your eye, then you lose the ability to see them for who they actually are and you project all sorts of unrealistic expectations on them. The result is you end up losing not only that relationship but everything else as well.

But when God who created us is our focus, when we treasure Him and His kingdom we find ourselves lined up with the very grain of reality. With Christ at

our center, we can experience true joy as everything in our lives can then take its right place.

The mystery of the Gospel, Lewis says, is that when we pour our energy into seeking the first Thing first, the secondary things get thrown in as well. But if we seek the secondary things first we not only miss out of God, but we don't find joy in these secondary things either.<sup>2</sup>

...

As I read a few articles about George Swanson, the Corvette man, I learned that he was an upstanding citizen, a loving husband and a regular church attendee. And I will not presume to make a judgment on his soul because God is the only one who truly knows, but his funeral raised questions in my mind. The Bible clearly says we come into this world naked and we don't take anything out of it, and I assume that since George was a church attending man he knew this and wasn't hoping to spend eternity driving his favorite car.

But I just wonder if all the effort put into this burial doesn't show a shift in focus away from a single eyed desire to get Christ and His Kingdom at any cost

...

I doubt any of us have crazy burial plans like George Swanson, but we all run the same risk of losing our singular focus. Do you feel that pull? I do. What are you willing to invest to avoid it?

Jesus says our hearts are tied to the treasure we treasure. So the choice is up to us. Our hearts can rust with our treasures in the cemetery or, if we pour more and more of our time and our energy and our resources into pursuing the Treasure of Heaven Jesus promises we will get the Father's reward and our hearts will reside with what we Treasure, in lasting joy, forever.

---

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis "First and Second Things" (Great Britain: Fount Paperbacks), 1985. pg 22