

Over the past few weeks we have marched through much of the Sermon on the Mount, learning many things about our relationship to the Lord and one another. This week we'll continue this march, exploring what it means to lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven and what this has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

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

Jesus said, "**Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven.**" Perhaps you've been a Christian for a longtime, and you take for granted that putting your "**treasures**" in Heaven is a sound investment.

Indeed, Jesus did not say these words in a vacuum. He assumed his listeners knew Heaven was that place where angels sing; that it's filled with peace and joy; that lion and lamb repose side-by-side in serene meadows; that in Heaven there are no tears, nor disease, and anger and hatred have melted away.

"Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven": What are those treasures? Fortunately, the Lord gave us a couple of hints. He said our treasures cannot be eaten by moths or destroyed by rust. That eliminates wool garments and things made of iron. He also said our treasures cannot be stolen. So that pretty much eliminates all physical things and money except maybe an elephant, which is hard to steal and hide.

But the Lord did give us another hint. He said, "**where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**"

I once lived across the street from a guy who had an insatiable appetite for toys, big toys, as in fast cars, big trucks, and jet skis. He loved these things so much he succeeded in bankrupting his family—a wife and two daughters, 6 and 10 years old—and one day I watched the police descend on his home and escort out. This man's heart was misdirected.

Jesus began this sermon by talking about where our hearts are. Remember the Beatitudes? That's what those are about, our hearts. There've been many things written about how to build and grow a church, but nothing holds a candle to the Beatitudes as a starting point. Being transformed from the inside-out, beginning in our hearts, is the only way to build a spiritual, godly, Christ-centered institution. Let's review the Beatitudes from **Matthew 5:3-10**:

- ³"Blessed are **the poor in spirit**"; that is, let us have a humble heart before God and one another;
- ⁴"Blessed are **those who mourn**"; let our hearts be filled with compassion for the lost and brokenhearted;
- ⁵"Blessed are **the meek**"; let us be filled with affection for and cooperation with one another;
- ⁶"Blessed are **those who hunger and thirst for righteousness**"; let our hearts be centered on the will of God;
- ⁷"Blessed are **the merciful**"; may our hearts be filled with empathy for other people;
- ⁸"Blessed are **the pure in heart**"; may we be filled with integrity in our words and deeds;
- ⁹"Blessed are **the peacemakers**"; may we be willing to sacrifice our rights for the sake of making peace with even our enemies;
- ¹⁰"Blessed are **those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake**"; may our hearts be filled with so much love for Jesus that we can bear our crosses with courage and confidence.

Let us purposefully pray about, meditate on, talk about, and study the Beatitudes. For they describe the hearts of people who belong to Jesus.

I want to belong to Jesus for I'm a poor, miserable sinner who needs his help. The Cross and Resurrection; Baptism and the Lord's Supper: Jesus provided for us, and he continues his ministry among us that our hearts might become like his.

After the Beatitudes, Jesus explained how our hearts may touch the world. He told us we should be "**salt**" in the world, adding flavor, giving life to the lives of the people around us. And he told us we should be "**light**" to the world, giving hope and providing direction to the next generation.

But the Lord didn't stop there. He continued, giving us detailed instructions about how to live. He said we should not murder or commit adultery or make false promises in our transformed hearts. He said, "**Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,**" as in go the 2nd mile, and turn the other cheek. He instructed us about our motives, and he illustrated how we can truly devote our hearts to God through alms-giving, prayer, and fasting.

When Jesus said, "**Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven,**" he was talking to a people who were already citizens of Heaven; he was talking to you and me. We have an eternal home with God and the angels, and now the Lord is encouraging us to furnish it with our hearts, that place which is filled with his love, joy, and peace.

Those are the treasures which God in his grace and mercy has poured down onto you and me. Love, joy, and peace: Those are the things we'll take with us into Heaven.

This past week our country buried Aretha Franklin and John McCain—this will be one of those times in our history which we'll always remember—the last week of August 2018 when the whole country grieved the loss of a music icon and a war hero. As I listened to the people speak about these two persons, a single theme began to emerge. It was the theme of both of their lives. It was their love, their love for their families and friends, their love for their country, and their love for their fellowman.

McCain's daughter, Meghan, told the story about how when she was 10-years old, her dad took her out on her horse, and she fell and broke her collarbone. She said he made her get back on the horse, which she resented at the time and

didn't understand why that was so important until years later. But she did hear his voice, and she remembered what he told her. He said, "Nothing is going to break you."

This is a human example of the kind of wisdom, the kind of love, the Lord has for you and me, a love which saves us, redeems us, transforms our own hearts, hearts made whole for our families, our church, indeed, for a world that longs to be loved.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this week may the transformation of our hearts continue to blossom as they are nurtured by God's Word, being filled to overflowing with treasures for heaven.

This week may we recognize and resist the traps and snares of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature which would lead our hearts astray.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.