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FCW -October 22, 2017  
Matthew 6:1-6

“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. “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

### Treasure sermon series week 3

Today is week 3 of our church-wide focus on *Treasure*, a series is based on the words of Jesus in Matthew 6 – “Store your treasure in heaven, for where your treasure is there your heart will be also.”

I hope that throughout this series you’ve been thinking and praying about two questions

1. Where do I *want* to invest my time, money, and energy?
2. Where am I *really* investing my time, money, and energy?

My bet is that if you & I have answered those questions honestly, we’ve found some level of discrepancy between our answers. My hope is that during this series we can do some spiritual work together that will help us close the gap between our answers.

Speaking for myself: I’ve done a lot of thinking about how I use *my* time and energy, and I’ve made the decision to drop some things, in order to have time for things that are more important. Travis and I have looked at our finances in 2018– our spending, our saving, and our giving. We’ve made some prayerful decisions about how we can give more generously & live more faithfully in 2019.

I hope as we move towards Commitment Sunday next week, each and every one of us can pray that prayer – to uphold our church faithfully in 2019.

Today’s Scripture begins with this warning: “*Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*”

Here's a question I've been struggling with throughout this series: What does Jesus mean by rewards?? 4 times in this chapter Jesus talks about being rewarded by God. If you count the stuff about treasures in heaven, then it's 5 times. So what is the "reward?"

Is it like the story of a taxi driver and a preacher who got to heaven at the same time? An angel met them at the gate and said, "Welcome to heaven! Here is your reward." The taxi driver was given a silk robe and a golden staff and a crown full of stars. But the preacher only received a cotton robe and a wooden staff and a crown with only a few stars. The preacher said, "Hey! Why is his reward so much greater than mine?" And the angel replied, "Because here in heaven we look at results. And the truth is, when you preached people slept. But when this guy drove his taxi, people *prayed* like never before!" ☺

Or is it like the story about three men who got to heaven at the same time? The angel met them at the gate and said, "Welcome to heaven! You will each receive a car to drive based on how faithful you were to your wife." To the first man he said, "You never once cheated on your wife. Your reward is a Rolls Royce!" To the second man he said, "You never acted upon them, but had many adulterous thoughts. You get a Honda CRV." To the third man he said, "You were unfaithful for most of your marriage. You must drive an old beat up Volkswagen for all eternity."

The next day the second two guys came across the first fellow sitting in his Rolls Royce crying his eyes out. "What's the matter?" they said, "You got the best car." "Yes," he blubbered. "But I just saw my wife go by on a roller skate!"

Or, is it like this (and this is a more serious story). A very wealthy man who professed to be a Christian, but lived life focused on himself and never did much for others, died and went to heaven. The angel met him at the gate and said, "Follow me and I will take you to your eternal dwelling." Along the way the angel pointed to a huge mansion and said, "That's where your maid lives." They passed another grand estate, and the angel said, "That's where your chauffeur lives." Finally they came to a tarpaper shack. The angel said, "Here. This is your eternal dwelling place." The rich man was upset and asked why his house was so sparse. And the angel replied, "I'm sorry, sir, but we build each person's house out of the materials you send up here during your lifetime. And this is all you sent us to work with."

My friends, you will learn that I am not a Biblical literalist - I don't think Heaven is a place with gold streets and giant McMansions. So what is the reward Jesus is offering to us?

I think the reward we receive for faithfulness is not a fancy house in the sky, but the gift of Everlasting Life — and that life starts not when we die, but today! The gift we receive every day when we choose to follow Jesus Christ is abundant life - a life where every day matters.

Where every *thing* matters. Every word we speak, every action we take. Every choice we make matters, makes a difference, and carries consequences. Every person in our life, every relationship, every moment matters. There is nothing that does not matter.

And so what if we looked at this text in a new way today? I think a misstep of the church is always focusing on what's wrong with people. I want us to look for and reclaim what's right. I want us to re-treasure the things of our life that are of ultimate importance, the people and things that are of infinite value, worth more than money, prestige, position, power, or stuff. Maybe failing to *treasure* is what lies behind the pain, brokenness, dysfunction, and violence that too often fill our lives and world? Maybe failing to treasure this life is the sin from which we need to turn away. What if this Stewardship season is a time of recognizing that everything matters?? What if it's about remembering and reclaiming our treasures? What if it's about re-treasuring the things and people we've forgotten, taken for granted, ignored, devalued, set to the side?

I know that's not how we usually think of Stewardship (or hear today's gospel lesson!) More often than not we focus on what's wrong and how we've taken hold of the wrong treasures and our heart is in the wrong place. So tell me this: What are the treasures that hold your heart? What are the values, hopes, and dreams to which you give yourself? What is of ultimate importance in your life?

Maybe it's the practices that have taken you deeper into the life of Christ.  
Maybe it's the values that help you to live from your truest and best self.  
Maybe it's the qualities that brought wholeness and integrity to your life.  
Maybe it's the things that keep you showing up day after day.  
Maybe it's what nourishes your life, and strengthens your relationships.  
Maybe it's your marriage, your children, your friendships.

What if the result of our Stewardship campaign this year was to reclaim and re-treasure that which is of ultimate importance and infinite value? What would it be like to reclaim those treasures in your life? How might that change your life and relationships? Most importantly, how might it transform your church life and your relationship with Jesus Christ?

I don't know what your treasures are, but I know you have them. And I also know this: Our treasures do not exist apart from but in the midst of the uncertainty of life. Jesus says the one thing that is certain for us is that where our treasure lies, there our heart will go also.

Hear once more with me the rest of our scripture for today:

*Whenever you give to the poor, don't blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that you may give to the poor in secret. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.*

*When you pray, don't be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.*

These verses go together. Order and context in scripture is important. So the verses about giving and the verses about prayer are not accidentally placed together.

Jesus links giving to the poor and spending time with God. If we truly want to be generous givers and experience life more fully, we have to be people of prayer. We will never give in extravagant and sacrificial ways if we are not abiding with God. We need secret places where God can speak to our hearts. No one gives in amazing ways just because there is a great need; extravagant, sacrificial givers do so because their hearts have been *changed* by spending time with God. Finally, if we want to experience life more fully, we must respond to ALL that God has done for us by seeking to participate in what God is doing in the world.

Jesus uses the word “*whenever*” on purpose in this text. Jesus says “Whenever you give... Whenever you pray...” Because Jesus expects us to GIVE. Giving is part and parcel of the Christian life. Stewardship is not about the church's need to receive – it's about your and my need to give. Also, Jesus expects us to PRAY. Prayer is part and parcel of the Christian life As Phillip Ryken said, “Prayer does not simply *maintain* the Christian life; it *is* the Christian life.”

My friends - are you living the Christian life????

For three weeks now, we have been considering how we are investing our lives. Our goal should be to invest our time, money, and energy in the things of God — things that are so much bigger than what one or two of us can do on our own. That is the amazing gift of a faithful life -- We get to be a part of things that only God can do!! I can think of no better reward here on earth than that – to participate in the work of God.

I want to close today with a story that Pastor Jacob Armstrong told in the video that goes along with our Thursday evening bible study. I hope none of our Bible Study participants will mind hearing this again.

Pastor Jacob tells of a truly extravagant gift that he received. Growing up, Jacob collected baseball cards. As is often the case for 10-year-old boys, Jacob yearned for that one, special card to complete his extensive collection. For Jacob, it was the 1989 Upper Deck Ken Griffey, Jr rookie card.

Jacob found out that the coolest kid he knew, his 15-year-old neighbor Nathan, had THE CARD. Jacob offered to trade his whole collection for that one card -- without success. He then pleaded with Santa Claus for the 1989 Upper Deck Ken Griffey, Jr rookie card for Christmas, but Jacob did not receive it in his stocking, and it was not among the wrapped gifts under the tree.

But as the family was gathering at the dinner table Christmas night, Jacob heard the unmistakable sound of a 4-wheeler pull into his driveway. His friend Nathan had come to visit! And when they greeted each other, Nathan gave Jacob a white envelope. I'm sure you've guessed what was in it -- the 1989 Upper Deck Ken Griffey, Jr Rookie Card!

Nathan must have somehow realized the power of giving away our treasure. Nathan must have learned at his young age the reward that comes in giving away what is most precious to us.

My friends what is most precious to you? Is it your faith? It is for me.  
When I pray and give, my faith is increased. The reward is that I get closer to God.  
I think the answer to the question of rewards, when you get right down to it, is that the Relationship is the Reward!

My friends hear the Good News: when you pray and give, you get closer to God,  
and you participate in building up the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.  
And when you do these things, the reward is a stronger relationship with God —  
And that has value for all eternity. May it be so. AMEN

LET US PRAY: God of amazing grace, we humbly lay our lives before you today. We come to you a people weighed down with so much stuff. And we bring it all to you. You know us, you know our hearts. And so we pray that you would lead us this week as we seek to reclaim and re-treasure what's most important in our lives — that we might find ourselves made right with you. Embrace us as we seek to live abundantly. Amen.