

Sunday, August 12, 2007 The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Dean Keith Joyce

"What do you want?" Luke 12:32-40

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³² 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

³⁵ 'Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶ be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. ³⁷ Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸ If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

³⁹ 'But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he* would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.' [NRSV]

Jesus promises his followers good things which will come from God the Father. They will not be wrung out of him; they will be freely and happily given. He tells them, as the New American Standard Bible version puts it, that "*your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.*" It's not an accident; it didn't just happen. God actually intentionally chooses to give, and to give happily, with delight. It's a gift they do not have to earn, that gift of his presence at all times and of the loving rule of his purposes. It is for his "*little flock,*" for those who turn to Jesus in faith. Such a tender term for his followers shows us the attitude Jesus has towards those who follow him, and tells us of the kind of treatment they can expect at his hands.

Out of his care for his people, Jesus warns them – and us, of what can jeopardize enjoyment of such gifts from the Father. He makes a comparison of earthly and heavenly riches. He wants his followers to concentrate on the

real riches, those which speak of heaven, that environment of the direct presence of God and where God's will is perfectly carried out. Jesus lays the issue on the line by saying, this time according to the English Standard Version of the Bible, "³³ *Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.* ³⁴ *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

To enjoy the gift of the kingdom can involve selling of things we own, and giving the proceeds to the needy. It is not a matter of only selling things, but it also includes the positive act of helping others who don't have enough. Sometimes we may have too much and could do well with turning that excess into help for those in need. It is not a matter of **all** Christians selling **all** they have and giving the money away. The point here is that the Christian disciple is not to be **dominated** by his or her possessions; he or she is not to value possessions so that they become an unhealthy preoccupation in the disciple's life. An end result can be that one learns to trust those things as essential for living. To trust in earthly riches prevents trust in God.

And that is the key – what do we trust? What do we value more than God, more than the God who gives us the kingdom, who makes us truly rich in the things of the kingdom and which cannot be stolen or destroyed? Do we trust what we own, what we accomplish, what social status we may have, what things we may seek after, the money we have in the bank, to give us substance of character, to make us feel we are worthy people, to make us feel fulfilled?

Again, to trust in such riches prevents trust in God. In and through Jesus Christ God gives us value, substance, sense of worth, the knowledge of being truly loved, of belonging to God's family. Trust in what we own can become a barrier to life because these things, all of them, will fade away

some time or other. Real riches are *"a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys."*

It doesn't mean that a follower of Christ is not meant to own things or even enjoy what one has whether it be material possession or the fruit of one's accomplishments. God has made so much which is wonderful and beautiful. He has given people gifts and capabilities which are meant to be used and enjoyed. It does not mean we cannot own beautiful things. It does not mean we cannot have things.

It's a matter of where we place our commitment in what we value and trust. God is not meant to take second place, not because God does not want us to enjoy things or have a good time, but because **having God as the first and foremost object of our trust and substance of our values is best for us**. He alone gives us what is eternal, what is of true worth.

When Jesus says, *"for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"* he knows that the heart and the treasure go together. A person's heart, that concentration of one's energies and interests, is always with the treasure, the treasure being what he or she values most.

So where is your heart today? What's its treasure? And if you notice that your treasure is something other than God and his ways, what do you want to do about it? You see, it is a matter of the will. We have to think about this. And how we think about this can very much govern what we do. We need to talk to God about this because prayer can very much influence what we think and what we do. It's very hard ask God to help us place him and his purposes first in our lives and then put all our energies and affections into things, even good things, other than God. Just remember, *"little flock,"* the way Jesus Christ calls us to go is always the best way, it's the way of his truth, of his love and of his freedom.

The upstate NY man was rich in almost every way. His estate was worth millions. He owned houses, land, antiques and cattle. But though he had it all, he was very unhappy. His wife was getting older, and the couple was childless. He had always wanted a little boy to carry on the family legacy.

Miraculously, his wife became pregnant in her later years, and she gave birth to a son. The boy was severely handicapped, but the man loved him with his whole heart. When the boy was five, the boy's mother died. The dad drew closer to his special son. At age 13, the boy's birth defects cost him his life and then his father died soon after from a broken heart.

The estate was auctioned before hundreds of bidders. The first item offered, though, was a painting of the boy. No one wanted it. They were all waiting for the truly valuable items. Finally, the housemaid, who had helped raise the boy, offered \$5.00 for the picture and easily took the bid. But to every-one's dismay, the auctioneer ripped a hand-written will from the back of the picture. This is what it said: "To the person who thinks enough of my son to buy this painting, to this person I give my entire estate."

The auction was over. The crowd walked away in shock.

Have we sought what we thought was truly valuable only to find out that our heavenly Father was prepared to give us His entire kingdom if we had only sought His Son and his ways alone?