

Treasure in Heaven

by Lynn Andrew

"Your love is fashioning a crown for me in the life to come."

John Chrysostom (c. 347 - 407), archbishop of Constantinople

Lay not up for yourselves treasure on earth where moth and rust corrupt and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven

Matt 6:19

Does "lay up yourselves treasure in heaven" refer to some particular effort, or is the phrase a metaphor covering any and all worthy efforts ranging from personal sanctification to helping the poor to preaching the word and making disciples? And is "treasure in heaven" literally an asset we can conceive of in heaven, or does it simply refer to whatever is pleasing to God and qualifying for reward?

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

John 15:15

The disciples were rich beyond measure in receiving these words from the Son of God. Though unable to fully appreciate their overwhelming privilege at that time, they must have been aware that friendship on earth would carry over into the future Kingdom ...

They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.

Mark 10:37

One can only guess what motivated James and John to make this request. To their (or perhaps their mother's) credit they were thinking ahead, seeing a treasure beyond this world's order in the eternal Kingdom of heaven.

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

Matthew 19:21

Spoken to a rich man, this advise turned him away. He chose to keep his treasure here and now rather than lay some up in heaven. Notice that the promise depended on him following Jesus. The significant thing is that he declined the offer to become a disciple. Had he accepted, he would have been numbered among the friends of Jesus, which would have extended to a privileged friendship in heaven. And it would have been a sure thing: "Jesus loved him." (Mark 10:21) Which of us, knowing what we know now, would not have eagerly taken Jesus' advice in order to become endeared to the Son of God forever in this special way? Forget the thrones on his right and left, Mrs. Zebedee!—to own such a companion is treasure enough. But let us take care to examine our motives and make sure prestige and honor would have no part in our desire to be his disciple—which self-glorification would corrupt the treasure.

But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.

Luke 11:41

Spoken while denouncing the practices of prominent Pharisees, the earthly treasure in this case was prestige and honor. They were not being faulted for being outwardly worldly; but they loved the recognition that came with the outward show of law-keeping. As the rich man loved material comfort, so these Pharisees loved the carnal comfort of external religion. "Such things as ye have" is better translated "those things that are within." They were being advised to let their piety flow from inner wisdom, not external formulas. Not only would this free them from depending on regulations to instruct them about what was clean and unclean, they would instinctively avoid what is unclean. However, there is no indication here that treasure in heaven accrues from personal holiness.

Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

Luke 12:33

It would not make sense for everyone to literally sell everything they have and give the money to the poor so that the poor may enjoy abundance while the benefactors are left with nothing. The lesson is about the wisdom of looking beyond this life. The motivation in giving alms is not simply compassion for the poor; it is about changing one's focus in order to secure something of eternal value (bags which wax not old = money-bags that do not grow old). What could that metaphor refer to? Surely not permanent money purses in paradise. What sort of reward would one want to hoard in heaven? Look at it this way: in heaven, the one who received the alms could well be in a position to repay the earthly debt with unending gratitude and fellowship. Is there any treasure greater than friendship? Or would we rather not count such people as friends even in heaven, preferring only Jesus? "There are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last." (Luke 13:30) We may find their friendship very desirable there, and even need them.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Luke 12:34

The casual alms-giver has no attachment to his beneficiaries other than that they enable him to be doing something that he feels is good (or something that makes him feel good). Clearly this is not laying up treasure either in earth or heaven. Significant giving from heaven's point of view is almost insignificant to the giver because his primary concern is for the welfare for the recipient. The obvious example is parents raising children. The ones we freely share our earthly treasure with, who cannot repay us here and now, are naturally the ones we become endeared to.

But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he

that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Luke 12:20-21

This verse and the ones that follow it reinforce the fact that wealth in this world does not transfer to one's account in heaven. However, if one is "rich toward God" one's retirement plan naturally seeks to invest beyond this world.

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

2 Cor 4:6-7

This "treasure," which is the knowledge of the glory of God, sounds like being "rich toward God." Such is the fruit of salvation and a requirement for entrance to heaven. But the treasure you lay up for yourself is a different kind of treasure, admitting of degrees, a variable blessing on top of salvation: not a gift from God, not a reward determined by the Judge, but an investment made deliberately by one who is wise toward heaven.

Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

James 5:3

This treasure is worse than useless in heaven: it has negative value leading to condemnation in the last days. It was accumulated for self but becomes a liability in the end because it was obtained fraudulently.

For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure.

Psalm 135:4

So what does the Lord count as his treasure? People, yes, but not everyone in the same way, and some are more treasured than others.

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Matthew 25:40

So much does Jesus value certain people that he counts service to them as service to himself. Befriending them now is both intrinsically pleasing to God and potentially building eternal friendship with highly-favored people. We are on the right track.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

Matthew 13:44

The man in this parable is the Lord. The field is the world. The treasure is people who will believe in him. He gave his all to buy the field. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

Luke 16:9

Jesus recommends that we make friends by means of the currency of the world, so that when we die, those we benefited may welcome us into their eternal homes. Thus the parable of the unjust steward yields it meaning.

There is no thought more fitted than that of this parable, on the one hand to undermine the idea of merit belonging to alms-giving (what merit could be got out of that which is another's? and is not all money, are not all goods out of which we bestow our alms, God's?); and on the other, to encourage us in the practice of that virtue which assures us of friends and protectors for the grave moment of our passing into the

world to come. - Frederic Louis Godet, cited in *Pulpit Commentary*.

Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.

Philippians 4:1

This is the heart cry of every father who fears the Lord and everyone who prays on behalf of friends who seem insufficiently aware of the heights of joy which reward richness toward God and the depths of despair which his neglect invites. For these people are our investments in heaven, and we hoard and guard them with passion.

He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

Proverbs 19:17

There is no mystery about it: here is the Lord's bank in which we deposit treasure to be redeemed in heaven.

Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.

Ecclesiastes 11:1

As one would expect, investments that yield returns on the other side are not entirely predictable. Solomon recommends a diversified portfolio.

For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you.

2 Corinthians 9:12-14

In case the Corinthians were not aware of the effect their gift had, Paul explains that it goes beyond helping brothers through a difficult time: it enhances their relationship to God. What reward could be better than that? Why, the return already flows back in their prayers. But best of all, they "long after you" and so become an enduring treasure of friends.

