

Get the Treasure!

Matthew 6:19-21
Posted 12 September 2011

The reality that moth and rust destroy and thieves take the things we treasure is so obvious, we can easily miss the point of what Jesus is saying in Matthew 6:19-21. The bottom line is we can only have treasure in one place: earth or heaven. You cannot serve both God and stuff. (Matthew 6:24)

Jesus showed the disciples how hard it is for anyone who has stuff to enter God's kingdom. One young man asked Jesus how he could get eternal life. We would be quick to tell him, "Believe in Jesus", but Jesus told him to sell everything he had and give it to the poor.

Had Jesus lost the plot? The disciples thought so. But watching the man go sadly away without gaining eternal life, Jesus said, "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Matthew 19:24) Jesus hadn't lost the plot, this is the plot!

Yes, to have eternal life you must believe in Jesus, but if you believe in Jesus you can't believe in stuff. If you love your stuff you can't love Jesus. To believe in Jesus is to make him and his gift of eternal life more important than anything you have. And the test isn't what you say about your stuff, but what you do with it.

What Jesus told the rich young man to do was not exceptional. It is a standard by which every claim to faith Jesus is measured:

If you do not give up everything, you cannot be Jesus' disciple. Luke 14:33

If you have more than you need give it to someone who hasn't got it. Luke 3:11

If you have a surplus sell it so that the poor can have what they need. Luke 12:33

If you have stuff share it with brothers and sisters who haven't got it. James 2:14-16

If you have stuff for yourself you are a fool who in the end will have nothing. Luke 12:20,21

Believing in Jesus means we have a very loose hold on stuff that won't last. It means we don't worry if it goes or we haven't got as much as seems desirable (Matthew 6:25-34). It means we value what is stored up in heaven.

What treasure is stored up in heaven? Heaven isn't a place where we get stuff that lasts to replace stuff that doesn't last. Heaven isn't where we get an eternal house, car, boat, ipad, designer clothing and a gold-filled bank account. It is where we get life.

We all know the problem we have with stuff: we lust for it. We love it. Our hearts fail us. Jesus has a remarkably basic solution. Make eternal life what you treasure and your heart will follow: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21)

Jesus doesn't say, "Love me more, and your love of stuff will fade." He says, "Treasure eternal life, and your heart will learn to love me more." Make a choice to seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness: life and love will follow. (Matthew 6:33)

Beyond any doubt you cannot treasure eternal life without God's help. You cannot choose life instead of stuff without God's grace. The starting point is always belief in Jesus and a constant dependence on him to cause you to make the right choices. You cannot change what you treasure without faith in Jesus.

But you haven't got faith in Jesus if you don't change what you treasure and what you do with your stuff.

How can we teach our children to choose life instead of stuff? We can't if we haven't given up on stuff. If our children see us yearning for stuff, earning for stuff, getting stuff, boasting in stuff, treasuring stuff, not sharing stuff, not giving stuff away, they will copy us. To teach our children to give up everything and be Jesus' disciples, we have to give up everything and be Jesus' disciples.

What about school? What do you treasure in your children's schooling? You can be certain that what you really treasure is what they will treasure (despite the superficial disputes older children will engage parents in!).

If you value success and prominence (which aren't even "stuff" come to think of it) they will treasure that – and lose life. If you want them to have the fading glory of wealth, status and recognition, they will get their reward (cf Matthew 6:2) but it won't be eternal life.

If you treasure academic achievement and qualifications as a pathway to more success, to good employment, to financial security, to status and stuff, you condemn them to treasure on earth. In fact, if you see school as primarily about preparing or equipping them for adult life, you have replaced heaven's treasure with earth's. What a sad gift to bestow on your children.

Just as we are called to serve Christ with all our heart, soul and mind *now* (Matthew 22:37), our children are called to make serving Christ with heart, soul and mind their primary goal in every lesson, course and examination. Of course that will mean diligence, perseverance, application and the pursuit of excellence and achievement. But for children to store up treasure in heaven at school, those things will take second place to choosing to study and work for the lasting treasure of God's glory and the life he gives.

Hard work and faithful scholarship will be one way children honour God at school, but neither they nor the recognition or opportunities they result in can be safely treasured.

Only getting and living life in Christ and giving him glory are worth studying for, working for, living for. But what a treasure that is! Choose it for yourself and for your children.