

Sunday 8th August 2021 – Luke 12:22-34 ‘The Secret of the Heart’

On Friday 14th September 2007, news broadcasts were dominated by the sight of long queues of people outside branches of Northern Rock bank. Two days earlier, the bank had sought an emergency loan from the Bank of England and suddenly a million customers began to worry that their money wasn't safe. On that Friday 5% of Northern Rock's total assets were withdrawn in one day, triggering a large-scale financial crisis whose effects were felt for years to come. Among other things, it remains a poignant reminder of what it feels like to discover unexpectedly that your investments are in the wrong place.

What do you invest your life in? That question lies at the heart of Jesus' teaching in this chapter, which we're looking at over three Sundays. Last week we reflected on the powerful story of the rich fool who invested only in himself, and only in the luxuries of this life – and this illustration prompts Jesus to broaden the subject out to think about our whole attitude to life. We only have one life, and we only have a finite amount of resources, including money – what do we invest it in?

And as Jesus opens up this big question, he reminds us that what we do with our resources reveals what we really think is important about life. In what has become one of his most famous and profound sayings, he concludes like this: 'Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is.' (v34) In other words, **you know what a person thinks is important by where they spend their money**, and also how they invest their time, energies and talents.

As Jesus lays out this provocative challenge, he draws a contrast between what he calls 'treasures on earth' – which are pretty self-explanatory – and treasures in heaven, which perhaps need a bit more explanation. How do we accumulate heavenly treasure? Jesus makes it clear that we store up heavenly treasure whenever we use our resources to bless other people.

And we need to be clear that first and foremost Jesus is talking about giving away our *financial* resources. We sometimes like to generalise the idea of 'treasure' as things like time, energy or compassion, and that is true up to a point – it's obviously a good thing to give of ourselves to others in lots of ways. But that's not the primary meaning here – in this passage *Jesus is very clearly talking about money and material goods.* That's clear from v33: 'Sell your possessions and give to the poor.'

At this point we need to clarify that in the culture of Jesus' day, 'possessions' is shorthand for surplus stuff – things we don't absolutely need. But when we consider the relative levels of poverty in first century society compared to today, this is still a very challenging passage. The average person then had much less of a safety net than we do now, and Jesus still doesn't mince his words.

So the conclusion is clear: if we want to accumulate treasures in heaven, we have to be generous with our money and possessions – it's non-negotiable. The fact that Jesus praises the widow at the temple treasury removes any opt-out on this! And yes, we *also* give ourselves to others in terms of compassion, time, care, energy, little acts of kindness, and so on. But Jesus stresses that what we do with our money is absolutely a big part of how we are to bless other people.

The application of this passage is obvious! But before we jump to that, we need to go back a stage. Because what's easy to miss here is that Jesus is teaching primarily – as he always does – about our **hearts**. Your treasure, Jesus says, shows you (and others) where your heart is. And Jesus has something very precious to offer our hearts....

We are called to be generous, because our God is generous to us – it is in his nature to give: ‘Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.’ (v32) The unlimited resources of the Almighty – manifested through the kingdom growing and flourishing here on earth – have been put at our disposal.

The lovely illustrations of birds and flowers are designed to remind us that God provides even for animals and plants who apparently do nothing either productive or accumulative. If God cares for a flower, then how much more does he care about us!

We have a lily in our garden – just one in a pot, and we don’t really look after it. When we got back from holiday last week, the lily was flowering – it looks absolutely stunning (SEE PICTURE). I didn’t plan for this passage to be on the exact week our lily was in full bloom, but it was a lovely divine reminder of what Jesus is teaching here. Money causes us to worry – last week the presenting issue was the power of money if we have too *much*; this week Jesus refers to worries that we might have too *little*. And many people either now or at some point in their life will experience the pain and worry of struggling to make ends meet. And Jesus’ answer is either crazy or divinely brilliant – keep being generous regardless, and trust me to provide. I will take care of you.

I was going to say: it’s easy to be generous when you’re wealthy – actually it isn’t, as we saw last week. But you might say it’s even harder to be generous when you’re skint. However, this is where the kingdom of God turns our human systems upside down. Whether you have too much or too little, it’s tempting to live as if God doesn’t exist. The root of worry in this case is a deep-rooted doubt that God can provide all that we need. But Jesus says, you have a good heavenly Father, who loves to provide. He’s given you the kingdom already – if you trust this good and generous God, and keep living generously, God will always provide for you. ‘Seek first God’s kingdom, and God will take care of the rest.’

It is a step of faith – but that’s the point, isn’t it? By living like this, **we choose to live as if God is real**, we choose to believe the words of the Lord’s Prayer that most of us pray every day: ‘Give us this day our daily bread’ – in other words everything we need for today.

I’d like to finish by saying that this passage is not so much a challenge but an invitation. **It is invitation to live in the life-giving stream of the kingdom of God**, an invitation to experience the joy of blessing other people by your generosity, an invitation to know the peace that passes understanding given to those who surrender their worries to a Heavenly Father who has already given us the kingdom. Seek first the kingdom of God, and all you need will be given to you as well.

I have a dream, which I’ll share with you as we close. Imagine what it will be like in heaven meeting all the people you’ve blessed during your life. All those gifts you’ve given to charities where you never meet the people who you’ve helped. Or the people who came to faith through someone you shared your faith with or prayed for – and who passed that blessing on. Wouldn’t that be an amazing way to spend eternity – alongside worshipping our Lord, meeting all the people who found their way into this community of divine blessing!

Friends, let’s not grow weary of being generous – how can you invest for heavenly treasure today?