

Of Hearts and Treasures (Part 1)

Introduction

The Text

³² “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 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. (Luke 12:32–34)

Recalling the Larger Context

- A. I hesitated to simply abstract these three verses from their larger context in what’s come before in [vv. 13-31](#), but for the sake of time and focus it seemed best to do so.
- B. That said, we must at least recall briefly that, to this point in Jesus’ discussion, we have seen Him deal both with avarice ([vv. 13-21](#)) and with anxiety ([vv. 22-31](#)).
 - 1. In the former we were given the parable concerning the rich fool who amassed more and more for himself, but when it came time to die and face God he found he was truly poor before God. Self-love leaves you utterly impoverished in the end.
 - 2. Then in [vv. 22-31](#) it’s as if Jesus turns the coin over as it were and looks at the same general idea of covetousness and greed but from the opposite side. So He begins to talk about anxiety and how our pursuit of the world’s goods, comforts, approval, and so forth will ultimately fester into an anxious and burdened existence. He calls us back towards the Father’s heart and invites us into the freedom of the children of God, where we can live for His kingdom and know that what we need our Dad will provide.
- C. In our text ([vv. 32-34](#)) now Jesus is kind of wrapping up this discussion and, in doing so, He gives us quite a lot to think about together.
 - 1. I’m going to organize my thoughts under three headings (but we’re actually going to save the third one for next time, where I anticipate spending the whole time trying to figure out what the idea of storing up treasure and pursuing reward in heaven actually means.) But the three headings are: (1) The Comfort; (2) The Call; and (3) The Capacity.

(1) The Comfort

My Anxiety about Anxiety

- A. In [v. 22](#) Jesus tells His disciples: “[D]o not be anxious about your life.” Last week I mentioned that anxiety—understood here as excessive concern for the things of this world—because it is not of faith, because it is going dark to God and bending inward with self-concern and self-reliance,

because it acts as if God is neither present nor concerned nor able to help with the matter at hand—yes, because anxiety is all of these things, it is, at the bottom of it, sin.

1. There is often a covetousness or idolatry there. In our anxious moments, we can be pretty sure that, in one way or another, the things of this world have become too important to us. They have crowded out God from our hearts and minds.
 - a. And beneath even this covetousness and idolatry, we said, is pride.
- B. 1 Pet 5:6-7 says: “⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God . . . ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” If this is true, then when we hold onto our anxieties, when we nurse our anxieties, we are saying: “God cannot be trusted with this. I’m not sure He has a mighty hand, and I’m not sure He cares about what I’m going through. No, no, this is on me.”
 1. For whatever reason, we don’t, we won’t, humble ourselves beneath Him and, hence, however weak and lowly we may feel, we are, in fact, truly exalting ourselves above Him.
- C. Now, truth be told, I was, when I considered how such a word might be taken by you all, well, I suppose you could say . . . anxious. I know that some of you even now are in the throes of anxiety. I know that for some of you this is a deep and abiding issue. And the last thing I want you to feel is condemnation—more crushing weight.
 1. I know some of us deal with anxiety because we’ve been abused, or severely wounded, or mocked. I know anxiety often emerges in the midst of horrifying situations.
 - a. And I in no way want to downplay those circumstances. Jesus would weep with you in those moments. Jesus would sit with you in those places. He would. And I want a church full of people that would do the same.
- D. But you know something, Jesus is not content to just sit and weep with us there. His goal always is to walk with us out of it . . . towards “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Phil 4:7).
 1. Earthly circumstances—whether we’re talking about poverty, persecution, physical illness, or whatever else—are not bigger than God. We are not left alone to face them. He has a sovereign plan, even a good purpose for us in them. And, hence, anxiety is not a final destination for the Christian, it is not a campsite for the children of God, we are not permitted to set up tent and get comfortable there. O sure, we will pass through it, no doubt. But we dare not stay there.
 - a. If allowed to settle in, if nursed into our new norm, anxiety will fester into all manner of sin: bitterness, anger, addiction, self-coddling, wall-building, bridge-burning, lot-burying, and so forth.
 - i. O how Jesus loves you in your anxiety, but O how He loves you too much to let you stay there.

- E. If anxiety is going dark to God, the things of this world crowding out God from my heart and mind, well, then Jesus' mission is to move us in the exact opposite direction. His aim is to turn back on the lights, to open our eyes to a universe over and in which God is reigning and ruling for His glory and our good. He wants the things of God to so fill our hearts and minds that they crowd out the things of this world.
1. Like that old hymn: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, / Look full in His wonderful face, / And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, / In the light of His glory and grace." That's what Jesus is after in your life!

Fear Not

- A. And all of this, I think, is what Jesus is doing with us here in v. 32 of our text: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Fear is anxiety's closest kin. So, again, the command comes in: "Do not be anxious . . .", or now: "Fear not . . ."
1. Such things have no place in the child of God's heart. Though, in the face of trial, such things may be understandable, according to Jesus, they are not permissible. But why?

Reason #1: You Have a Good Shepherd

- A. Well, the first reason He brings to our attention is hinted at in what He calls us there: "little flock". It's a beautiful, unusual, even stunning form of address. He is, of course, evoking the pastoral image of sheep and shepherds.
- B. What's brilliant and profoundly comforting about this image is that it captures both the smallness of man and the bigness of God at one and the same time.
1. On the one hand, my smallness is really what anxiety and fear are all about right? I'm small, I can't face this. I need these things to feel secure and I don't have them. What now. I'm in trouble. Jesus is saying here: "Yes, you are small! Yes, ultimately, you do very little about your shrinking bank account, or your cancer diagnosis, or your crumbling relationship. You are like sheep, you're just a 'little flock'."
 - a. There is no hint of the exaggerated self-talk so many are taught today: "I am the master of my own destiny. If I can dream it, I can do it." No you can't. You know that. Such words may feel good on the surface but something is still unsettling about them down below. You know deep down such things are not the antidote to your anxiety and fear. They actually end up adding to it!
 2. No! What you need is what Jesus is implying on the other side of this image: you need a Shepherd. You need Someone bigger than you, watching over you, caring for you, leading you forward when things get disorienting, picking you up when things get too much. Little flock, we need a Shepherd. And we have one in God!
- C. This idea of sheep and shepherd hearkens back to many OT texts, but one of my favorites is [Isa 40:9-11](#): " ⁹Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!' ¹⁰

Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”

1. You caught it right? The might and sovereign power of this Shepherd, and yet the tenderness!
 - a. And, of course, Jesus Himself is the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11), the very manifestation of Isaiah’s prophecy. Stronger than the grave and yet soft and compassionate.

Reason #2: You Have a Prodigal Father

- A. But there is more. The verse goes on: “. . . for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”
 1. Jesus shifts the imagery from sheep and Shepherd to children and Father. Here we have two of the most delightful images in all the Scriptures brought together into one place: God as our Shepherd and God as our Father. Never do we get closer to the tender heart of our God for us than here.
- B. And we’re told what our Father is like. That it’s His “good pleasure to give . . .”.
 1. I thought here of a book by Tim Keller I’ve not read, but the title alone is worth reflection. It’s entitled: *The Prodigal God*. The whole book, as far as I know, is an exposition of what’s traditionally been referred to as The Parable of the Prodigal Son. I love the twist in this title.
 - a. In the dictionary “prodigal” is defined as “spending money or resources freely and recklessly.” And, again, traditionally we have applied that term to the son—the one who takes his inheritance, leaves his father’s house, and squanders it all on luxury and indulgence. But Keller is saying, “Hold on a minute. If I’m reading this parable correctly, there is another prodigal here, an even greater prodigal we might say. It’s God. For when the son returns home with his tail tucked between his legs, the Father doesn’t make him pay him back or put him out in the doghouse. He throws a party. He celebrates. He gives more. He’s a prodigal God. He gives lavishly, even recklessly, irresponsibly, we could say.”
- C. This is what Christmas is all about, is it not? It’s not about Santa Claus and if you’re naughty or nice you get coal or a toy train. It’s about the whole world is on the naughty list, caught up in rebellion and sin, and God so loved the world anyway that He gave His only Son.
 1. And it “pleased” the Lord to crush Him (Isa 53:10). Crucifying His Son as an offering for sinful man brought Him pleasure. It should not, therefore, surprise us when Jesus tells His disciples that “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”
- D. So now, I hope, the lights are coming back on. You can see God and who He is for you in Christ. This is what grounds His opening command: “Fear not.” But there is more . . .

(2) The Call

Sell and Give

- A. The Christian life is to be marked not only by the absence of fear but also by the presence of freedom. True freedom. A freedom from slavery to the things of this world so that we can finally live for the things of God!
- B. It is in light of our prodigal Father's lavish giving to us, that Jesus now instructs us to give lavishly to others. From out of the comfort of the gospel comes the call: "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" (v. 33).
 - 1. The man in the parable back up in [Luke 12:16-20](#) was called a "fool" (v. 20) because he was rich towards this world but poor towards God: "So is the one [Jesus says] who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (v. 21).
 - 2. Well, here now in [v. 33](#) we see what a wise person is like, how a person becomes rich towards God: You don't amass things in love for yourself, you release things in love for God and neighbor.
- C. But now, for those of us who take God's word seriously, if we read [v. 33](#) there carefully, we've got a lot of questions at this point, don't we?
 - 1. The one that immediately presses to the forefront, of course, is this: Is Jesus here literally saying that we are to sell whatever we have and give to the needy? Is He saying we should have no personal property, that it's wrong to have a savings account, that we should all be living in a van down by the river? (Actually, no, I suppose we'd have to sell the van too!)
 - a. But again: Is Jesus here literally saying that we are to sell whatever we have and give to the needy? Well, in short: Yes . . . and No.

(1) Yes

- A. Yes, we must let the full weight of these words land on us and settle in. I don't think Jesus wants us to immediately look for loopholes. If that's what we're doing, that's probably already an indication of a problem, of a heart too attached to material things.
- B. On the side of Yes, we first have to reckon with Jesus Himself, Whom, we might say, quite literally does just as He asks of us in this verse:
 - 1. Consider [2 Cor 8:9](#). I read this verse to you a few weeks back but it is especially relevant again here: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."
 - 2. Related to this is what He says in [John 17:5](#), near the end of His earthly ministry: "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world

- existed.” The clear implication here is that He left glory—He sold all His possessions, we could say—to come down after us. He traded riches for poverty, glory for shame.
3. And describing His life here on earth, Jesus Himself puts it this way: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58).
 4. And we watch as He gives up even His own life for the sake of poor, wretched sinners at the cross.
- C. And then (and now here it starts to get personal) we must consider the call of Jesus on every Christian everywhere: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).
1. This is entry-level discipleship. Take up your cross. It’s an invitation into His way of life, a way which most certainly involves laying down everything one has—indeed, laying down even one’s own life, in love for God and poor, needy people.
- D. I could give many more examples of Jesus calling us to this sort of thing throughout the Scriptures, but perhaps the most poignant of all is that scene in Luke 21:1-4. Jesus and His boys are in the temple complex together, and we read this: “¹ Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, ² and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³ And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. ⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”
1. And now here’s what I want you to get: This woman puts in all that she had to live on. It’s gone. And He commends her for this!
 - a. Honestly, honestly, if you are not sitting with Jesus at that moment and given His interpretation on the matter, aren’t you thinking this woman is a fool? Irresponsible? A poor steward? An idealist? A radical? Well-intentioned, perhaps, but ill-informed. But Jesus commends her! He holds her out and says: “Finally, someone who gets it!”
- E. And lest you think that this is a one-off, Paul says virtually the same thing to the Corinthians when he’s trying to encourage them to take part in giving to the suffering saints in Jerusalem: “¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us” (2 Cor 8:1–5).
1. It’s all on the table for these saints. Their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity. This is insanity! This is foolishness!
 - a. But when you factor in eternity, and all that you’ve been given freely in Christ, and all that God pledges to be for you now and forever, and the possibility you have today to become rich towards God, to store up treasure in heaven by giving lavishly to needy neighbor—this is wisdom!

(2) No

- A. Now, balanced, holistic, biblical interpretation brings in not only the Yes here, but also the No.
- B. On the side of No, let me simply read to you a few words from a trustworthy commentator: “The categorical nature of this command is at least mild hyperbole, for no human being can live without possessions. Like many Jewish teachers, Jesus was no stranger to hyperbole, and he employs it here to good effect. The import of v. 33 is not to define discipleship in terms of deprivation or asceticism, but to warn disciples of the confining and restricting nature of possessions, freedom from which ushers them into an unimaginably greater existence. . . .”

That Luke does not understand Jesus’ teaching literally, or in terms of absolute asceticism, is [evidenced] by the fact that numerous people in the gospel narrative possess capital or real estate without censure—women with possessions (8:3) [‘¹ Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him,² and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,³ and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means’ (vv. 1–3)]; Zacchaeus (19:8) [‘⁸ And Zacchaeus [a chief tax collector who we are told was “rich”] stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”^{9a} And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house . . . (vv. 8–9a)]; Joseph of Arimathea (23:50–53) [This was the guy who gave up his newly hewn tomb to be used for the burial of Jesus’ body. Luke tells us that this Joseph was ‘^{50b} a good and righteous man,^{51b} . . . and he was looking for the kingdom of God’ (vv. 50b, 51b). But Matthew tells us that he was a “rich man” (Matt 27:57). Indeed, tombs were very expensive in this day.]. . . “ (PNTC).

Bringing the Yes and No Together

- A. So what are we to make of this? How do we bring the Yes and the No together?
1. Well, I think it’s actually quite plain. The fundamental issue that Jesus is driving at back in v. 33 of our text is not so much whether a person has stuff or not, it’s whether the stuff has them. Are you with me on that? The fundamental concern is that of the heart and its treasure.
- B. You see, in the three examples this commentator gives us, these people have stuff, but in every case, it’s all on the table. Everything is held loosely. They’re ready to use whatever they have, however big or small, for the cause of the kingdom. If Jesus is your supreme treasure, then all other earthly treasure is marshalled to advance His purposes in the world. No questions asked. No hesitation. There’s an open-handedness to the whole thing:
1. These women say: “We love what You’re doing Jesus, we want to use our wealth to support your ministry.”
 2. Zacchaeus says: “Man, I have lived like a felon. But You have welcomed me. You have loved me. I want divide half of my wealth with the poor. And if I defrauded anyone, I’m not just going to pay them back, I’m going to give them four times as much. Why? Because I want them to see you! And how much more valuable You are than money.”

3. Joseph of Arimathea says: “O sure, was that tomb for me? Yes. But, without hesitation, if I have a chance to use my possessions to serve Jesus, by all means. It’s His. It would be my honor!”
- C. So this is how the Yes and No are held together. Yes, it’s all on the table, even my own life is on the table. I have taken up my cross. But no it doesn’t mean that having a home, or a savings account, or fun hobbies, or whatever are wrong in and of themselves.
1. It just means, if I, for example, have a house, it’s not just about me and my comforts. I want to use it to serve Him. I want to invite in the broken and the outcast. I want it to be a place of fellowship and mission. And if God tells me to sell my house, I sell it. It’s not really mine anyways. And this place isn’t my home.
- D. Let me leave you with an exhortation that comes in at the very end of the book of Hebrews. I think it wraps all this up nicely: “¹² Jesus . . . suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. ¹³ Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. ¹⁴ For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. ¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Heb 13:12–16).
1. Come on church. Let’s use our stuff to show the world our Savior!