

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday, August 28, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

**MATTHEW 6:19-24**

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

24 “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

**THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF GOD'S KINGDOM #27**  
**TREASURE HUNTERS**

The 2004 film National Treasure, and it's 2007 sequel National Treasure: Book of Secrets were box office gold, earning over \$567 million at the box office. The films center around the character Benjamin Gates, a treasure hunter who in the first National Treasure film was thought to be crazy until he discovered the world's greatest treasure. That discovery shut the critics up, and Gates lived in a beautiful mansion with beautiful sports cars by the time the movie was finished.

Americans love treasure hunters. Harrison Ford has done quite well portraying Treasure Hunter Indiana Jones with four films that have grossed close to \$1 billion combined.

**Have you ever met a real treasure hunter?** I have. In fact, he was one of my relatives. Bill was born the son of missionaries who served in Pakistan. He loved reading stories about buried treasure as a young boy. The older he became, the more he read. Bill was obsessed with reading about Incan treasures hidden in South American mountains. This obsession led Bill to raise thousands of dollars so that he could lead an expedition of his own to find a treasure that had been lost years before. He searched and he searched but never found it. By the time all was said and done, investors had given Bill thousands of dollars that they would never recoup. In his final expedition Bill and his South American guide became lost in the fog in the Andes Mountains. Bill's guide lost his life. When the fog eventually lifted a rescue team found Bill clinging to his own life. That would be his last hunt for treasure. He never found what he was looking for. Talk about discouraging!

So, why is it that people become treasure hunters? The odds are squarely stacked against them. The chances of truly finding a treasure that has been hidden for centuries are so slim. People do it for a few reasons. The first is the adventure. Some people live for

adventure. They are thrilled at the prospects of the unknown. Another reason is significance. Find a world renowned treasure, and you instantly become someone that history will remember. But, the overriding agenda that drives most treasure hunters is the prospect of becoming rich beyond their wildest imagination.

**So, what if I told you that God wanted you to be a treasure hunter; that He wanted you to be as obsessed as Indiana Jones or Benjamin Gates when it came to pursuing treasure? And, what if I told you that He guaranteed that if you search for it, you will find it?**

The Bible speaks often about treasure. Throughout it, you'll find the word used no fewer than 78 times. But, it isn't the type of treasure that we typically equate with treasure hunts. The treasure that Jesus speaks of is a lasting wealth that will never fade away. One example of the treasure that He speaks of is found in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. Here we find the revolutionary yet simple truth that **if you want lasting wealth, you must invest in eternity.**

Now, people in Jesus' day weren't much different than us. They wanted many of the same things out of life that we search for. They wanted love. They searched for significance. They wanted financial security. They wanted satisfaction in life. And, they wanted understanding. When Jesus came on the scene He offered them insight into truth like they had never been exposed to before. In the person of Jesus Christ was fulfilled everything that the Jewish people had been looking for in the Messiah. Unfortunately, so many of them missed it. And like those who walked with Jesus and missed who He was, I'm afraid that so many of us miss what it is that Jesus Christ wants to offer us.

In Matthew 6:19-21, Jesus said: 19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

It couldn't be more clear. If we want lasting wealth, Jesus shows us in this passage, then we must invest in eternity. He begins by showing us the futility of storing up treasure on earth. After all, in the end, you can't take it with you.

How many people do you know that live their lives climbing the corporate ladder of success? It is as if by living this way they believe that they will find significance and security. In this passage Jesus is passionately telling his listeners that storing up treasure on earth is the wrong way to live. Earthly treasures are temporary. They are like phantoms that appear in our lives for a while and then disappear forever.

Not long ago my family and I were driving back to the Twin Cities from a visit to my sister-in-law's farm in Des Moines. As we drove up Interstate 35 I noticed that our gas gauge had moved from 1/4 of a tank to below the E line in less than one minute. Feeling a bit nervous, I told my wife that I was going to have to pull over at the next available exit in order to get gas. When the next exit appeared, we arrived in the town of Dows, Iowa.

Dows is a tiny town in the middle of nowhere. It has a gas station, a mercantile exchange/restaurant, some historic sites, and a visitor center. Like the Wall Drug signs that you see all over the Midwest, this town had signs that pointed the way to the visitor center. They were kind of hokey with words like "You are" "Almost there" "Stop 4" "The Kids," you get the picture.

We decided since we were already in town we'd stop by this Visitor Center. We were the second set of visitors that the center had that day. And, it was 3:30 in the afternoon! The Center was located in an old railroad station. The attendant was a man who had lived in Dows for his entire 82 years of life. He loved his town. And, he was so excited to have a family of six come into his town. He wanted to tell us all about Dows. I didn't have the heart to tell him that we really just wanted to use the restroom and leave. Our restroom stop became a two-hour tour of everything Dows. The tour guide proudly pulled out a photo and memorabilia album chronicling all of the high points in Dows, Iowa history. As he showed me pictures of beautiful buildings that once stood proudly in the town of Dows, he would say, "And you know what happened to that building?"

"No," I would reply.

"It burned to the ground," he'd say with a chuckle.

After telling me about four such buildings, he came to one final picture. He talked about a beautiful hotel and boarding house that once stood in the town. It was the jewel of all the buildings in Dows. Then he said, "Guess what happened to that one?"

I answered, "It burned?"

He laughed and said, "Yep, it sure did."

The town of Dows once had 8,000 inhabitants, a busy train depot, and a bustling economy. Today, only about 675 people live there. And, on most days only a few people make the stop off Interstate 35 to see the blacksmith shop, one-room schoolhouse, train depot and two-room home that mark what the town used to look like. Very few people care about Dows. And, it demonstrates the biblical truth that Jesus expresses in this section of Scripture. Earthly treasure will fade away. Like the burned landmarks in the town of Dows, are our earthly endeavors for accumulating wealth.

Perhaps you think that what happened in Dows could never happen in the Twin Cities. And, while it would certainly look different, history is full of examples of empires that once stood proud, eventually reduced to ruins. I used to take high school students to Central America on a yearly basis. We would often times visit some of the ancient ruins of the Mayan Empire. We would stand in awe of a civilization that was clearly advanced in so many ways and yet reduced to ruins. The ruins were lost for centuries. They were forgotten about. Empires in Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome basked in their glory, only to be humbled, with people all but forgotten.

We can't take it with us. It wasn't just the people of thousands of years ago that dealt with these issues. It's us! Just like moth and rust would eventually destroy their treasure, leaving it all but forgotten, our treasure, if it is only for this lifetime, will eventually be forgotten too. The point is, if we want lasting wealth we need to invest in eternity. Why? Because, Jesus revealed that, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Our hearts chase after that which we are most passionate about. And Jesus wants our treasure to be God.

Gary Haugen understood what it meant to climb the corporate ladder. A magna cum laude graduate with a degree in Social Studies, from Harvard University; he then went on to earn his J.D. from the University of Chicago, cum laude. Needless to say, he is one smart man. He's also a Christian. Haugen has always had an interest in human rights and served for several years as an attorney with the State Department. While there, he came face-to-face with the brutality of modern day slavery. As a Christian, he felt compelled that he could no longer stand by and do nothing about it. Slavery, which is illegal in every country in the world, is something that disgusted Haugen.

So, Haugen founded the International Justice Mission. He feels that it is the church's responsibility to speak up on behalf of those that no one else will speak up for. Haugen left a lucrative career to give his life to freeing slaves. Is he making a difference? Yes. But today there are more than 27,000,000 people who are owned by someone else. Every year there are over 1,000,000 children that are trafficked into the sex trade. With a team of former attorneys and detectives, Haugen's International Justice Mission runs sting operations with local law enforcement in countries all over the world. The net result is that thousands of children and women have been set free from the trade and are now receiving love, care and an education. Haugen understands the principle that Jesus teaches in Matthew 6. People are more valuable than money. If you want lasting wealth, invest in eternity.

So, am I saying that all attorneys should quit their jobs, pack up their families, move to Washington D.C. and join the International Justice Mission? No! That was what God was calling Haugen to do. But, I am saying that we need to invest in that which is eternal. We will never find permanent satisfaction by putting anything ahead of God and his desires.

In verses 22-24, Jesus went on to say:

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus talked about the danger of loving money. In Mark 10:23 we read:

23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

Why? One of the reasons is because wealth, or money, can become our master. We will work outrageous hours, take outrageous risks, and push our bodies to the brink just to acquire more of it. Jesus wasn't against having wealth. He was against wealth having us. And, he knew that those who were blessed with wealth could easily be overtaken by it. But he also knew that those who didn't have wealth could be overtaken by the consuming desire for wealth.

Another reason it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven is that we can begin to believe that we have all that we need. The financial security that wealth brings can create in us a false sense that everything in life is okay. God wants our dependence to be on Him, not on our wealth, comfort or health.

So, how do you store up treasure in heaven? How do you invest in eternity?

It begins with investing time getting to know and love God.

In Matthew 22:34-40 we find Jesus being tested by a group of religious leaders. Listen to what they did. 34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” 37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Jesus wants us to love Him more than anything else in the world. He wants to be our master. That cannot happen until we spend time getting to know Him. If you are married today, think about how it is that you fell in love with your spouse. Maybe it's been awhile since you've thought about those days. How did you fall in love? Maybe it was love at first sight. But, more than likely, it was a love that developed and grew as you spent time together. We invest in eternity when we spend time with God. Spending time with Him brings with it the lasting wealth of intimacy with our Savior. We know and understand the voice of God as we spend time with Him. Knowing God helps us make decisions that honor Him.

Many of you have made New Year's resolutions in the past. We're not starting a new year, but in the next couple of weeks many of our kids will begin a new school year. For some of you, this *has* to be the year that you put your relationship with God front and center on your list of resolutions. This is the year where you say, ***“I am going to spend time with God!”*** Many of you made a commitment at the beginning of this year to read through the

Bible this year through a program that we call The Challenge. How are you doing on that? It's not too late to join. We have reading plans available and if you've struggled with it, go ahead and begin with today's date and see if you can make it to December. Maybe you need to take it smaller and try to read through one verse a day, meditating upon that verse.

God doesn't just want us to invest in our relationship with Him. He also wants us to invest in others. In fact he is absolutely passionate about it. Jesus told the religious leaders that the second greatest commandment was to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Our family regularly prays for our neighbors. We earnestly want to see God use us to be a catalyst in their lives towards drawing them closer to him. When my daughter Breanna was convinced that we weren't doing enough to reach our neighbors across the street with the life changing message of the Gospel, she suggested that we begin praying for a specific way to enter into their lives in a deeper way. Within a week, these neighbors who had never reached out for help in the past phoned asking if we would consider letting our 12-year-old son mow their lawn. We said, "Yes." And lawn mowing became an opportunity to show our neighbors the love of Christ. Toward the end of the summer, my neighbor called me over to tell me how much they love our son. They couldn't get over what a fine young man that he was. And, I couldn't help but think, "That's because you are seeing Christ in Him." We make eternal investments every time we show love to our neighbors.

What would you attempt to do with God if you knew that you couldn't fail? Jim Elliott, one of the five missionaries martyred by the Auca Indians in the 1950's wrote in his journal that, "He is no fool, who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Elliott understood life from an eternal perspective. If you want lasting wealth, invest in eternity.

So, how do we as people surrounded by such great wealth satisfy ourselves with less? The answer is, "We don't!" Don't satisfy yourself with less wealth. In fact, pursue wealth like never before! Let it become an obsession! Just make sure that the wealth you are pursuing is eternal wealth! Remember, we treasure that which our heart truly desires. Desire the things that God desires. How? Well, God has a passion for us knowing and loving our neighbors. Our neighbors are not just the people that live next to us. They are everyone that we come in contact with.

If you want lasting wealth, invest in eternity.

The first church that I served as a youth pastor was located in Alexandria, Virginia, in the suburbs of Washington D.C. I loved living there because we had a constant stream of visitors from all over the country who wanted to vacation and see the sights of D.C.

Anyone who has spent time in our nation's capitol knows that it is a place of contrasts. Perhaps the most striking of those contrasts is that between the rich and the poor. Fairfax County, Virginia, located just outside of D.C. is the wealthiest county in America. And, the city of Washington D.C. has some of the nation's poorest and most dangerous

neighborhoods. The homeless population in D.C. is higher than anywhere else in America. When I lived in Virginia, you couldn't drive into the city without being met by panhandlers on almost every street, begging for money. The signs that they held were testimonies of their desperation.

"Homeless – Will work for Food"

"Single Mother – My Children Are Hungry"

"Starving Artist"

I'm sure you've all seen the type of people that I'm talking about. And, I have to admit that when I pass people like that on the street my skepticism immediately comes to the surface. I start thinking that all that these people really want is money so that they can purchase drugs or alcohol. And then, I'm struck with the ugliness of my judgmental heart.

Our family was involved with a ministry in D.C. that was started by a couple in our church. He worked at the Pentagon and she worked downtown. Every day after work, she would drive into the Pentagon to pick up her husband. And, every day, she would drive by the panhandlers. She eventually became so convicted about those God placed in her way, that she told her husband, "We either need to find a new way to get you to and from work, or we need to do something practical to help these people."

They chose to help. This couple was involved in a Bible Study with three other military couples. Each couple attended a different church. They agreed that their Bible Study would provide a nice meal for the homeless population of Washington D.C. once a week. Each family would be responsible to recruit a team of volunteers from their church. They would set up a couple of tables in one of the parks where the homeless population gathered, and they would feed as many as they could.

The ministry took off. Four churches rallied around the cause. And, every Tuesday, the homeless population of D.C., who could always get a bowl of soup from the soup kitchens, would have available to them a home cooked meal. Lasagna with garlic bread, vegetables, dessert and a hot chocolate on a cold night seemed to be the favorite.

Our family became involved in ministry when our daughter was a toddler. She would join us, and a strange combination of prostitutes, drug addicts and paranoid delusional women would ask if they could hold her while we served food. My wife would excuse herself from serving food and talk with the women as they held our Breanna. And something beautiful happened. The homeless men and women of our city became our friends.

I'll never forget when Tanya and Thomas came to us and asked for prayer. They had been living in an abandoned home, but were kicked out when drug lords came in and turned the home into a crack house. They lived in desperation on the streets of the city. One night, Thomas said, "Would you pray for me, pastor? I don't want to live on the streets anymore. I need an honest job. Tanya is pregnant and we need a home real bad. Please pray." I prayed with Thomas right there. I didn't see Thomas the next month. But, the following

month he was back. And he had a huge smile on his face. Thomas ran up to me and said, "Pastor, you prayed for me a couple months ago. I've got to tell you what happened. The week you prayed, the Los Angeles Times came to do an article on homelessness in Washington D.C. They asked if they could interview us and do a feature story on us. In return for an interview they said they would give us our first month's rent, final month's rent and a security deposit towards an apartment! We did the article and look!" He showed me the front page of the Los Angeles Times with his story in it. Then he said, "I got a job at Kentucky Fried Chicken. It pays real good and I get to bring home the leftover chicken. God answered your prayer."

The couple who started that ministry to the homeless in Washington D.C. understood what it means to be a treasure hunters. And, I believe that you can do too!

God has brought the world to the Twin Cities. From the Somali population in Minneapolis, to the Hmong population in St. Paul, the world is moving to our doorsteps. And someday, Jesus is going to ask what we did about those He brought our way.

Are you a college student? Consider how you can use your studies and your time on campus to make an eternal investment in the economy of heaven.

Are you a person who has made plenty of money and could retire today and live comfortably? Maybe you ought to consider an early retirement, and use these years to make an even greater investment in the Kingdom of Heaven. There are so many ways that you can use your skills in ministry.

Maybe you are a business owner. Investing in eternity could mean investing part of your profits to make a difference in the lives of the poor and oppressed around the world.

Live in a neighborhood? Investing in eternity could mean getting to know your neighbors and praying for them every day. Just imagine what could happen if everybody at WCC invested time in this new school year asking one neighbor how we could pray for them. Imagine what would happen if that initial question led to deeper spiritual conversation that resulted in a life being changed forever because of the impact of Christ on a life! That is lasting wealth. That is investing in eternity. That is an investment that will never fade away.

Okay, maybe reading through the Bible in a year, or praying for your neighbors, or getting to know immigrants, or helping homeless people isn't your thing. These are just four ways to invest in eternity; four ways to find eternal treasure. God will teach you your way, if such investing becomes your goal.

My relative almost lost his life and had his hopes dashed by searching for a treasure that he could never find. God is not like that. If you search for treasure with Him, you always find it. If you want lasting wealth, invest in eternity. Become a treasure hunter today!