

WHAT YOU VALUE = WHO YOU ARE**LUKE 12:32-34**

INTRO: *When I became your pastor fifteen years ago, one of the great people I got to meet was Barb Clay who has since gone on to be with the Lord. I'm sure those of you who have been here a while remember Barb. She was having serious health issues at the time. I recall she had to go into the hospital the weekend before Christmas because she was finding it very hard to breathe. The doctors discovered her lungs were filled with fluid. Her prognosis was pretty grim. They suggested either hospice or putting her in a medically induced coma where she would be ventilated in order to give her lungs an opportunity to rest and heal. Barb and her family decided on the ventilation route even though there were no guarantees the procedure would prolong her life or that she would come out of the medically induced coma. I visited Barb in the ICU unit the day after Christmas. She was sitting up in bed, struggling for breath, an uncomfortable oxygen mask attached to her face, knowing full well later that day she would be put in a coma and a machine would breathe for her, not knowing if she would ever wake up again, and not knowing if she would see the faces of her family ever again in this life. Do you know what Barb wanted to talk with me about there and then? She wanted to make sure I knew that her offering envelopes for the church were filled out, at home, and ready to go. She was concerned I got them so I could put them in the offering on her behalf. Later that week when I went back to visit Barb, her daughter gave those offering envelopes to me while Barb lay in the bed in a coma.*

Now Barb Clay survived and lived another couple of years. But I want to ask you a question. If you were facing a similar health challenge in your life, would you be that concerned about your financial giving to the Lord's work? I got to observe a great deal about Barb Clay's heart, about what mattered to her, and what she valued. When the Bible refers to your heart, it's not about that organ beating in the middle of your chest this morning. Your heart is the innermost part of your being – the core of who you are. It's that part of your mind or your soul that includes your will, emotions, desires, passions, and motivations. What you are in your heart is who you really are.

We're in the midst of a message series I'm calling *The Genius of Generosity*. Chip Ingram put it like this: "If you want to be smart, spend carefully. If you want to be wise, save regularly. If you want to be a genius, give generously." The last two weeks we've seen that giving 10% of our income to the Lord's work – the tithe – is the biblical starting point when it comes to financial giving. But giving to the Lord's work is really about your heart. Jesus knew that. Let's consider something He said. **READ, p. 1031-2.** Jesus mentioned "treasure" in those verses. What's that? "Treasure" was Jesus' word for whatever you value the most in this life.

According to Jesus in a very similar passage to the one we just read, there are two kinds of treasures. "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal." (Mt. 6:19-20 NLT) What's earthly treasure? Money, houses, cars, investments,

retirement accounts – material stuff. It also can include what having lots of money can lead to: power, prestige, fame, and luxury. What's heavenly treasure? Those are spiritual realities Jesus' followers should value above all else – grace, a love relationship with our Heavenly Father, the forgiveness of our sins, the Holy Spirit's presence and power in our lives, eternal life in Heaven, and a heart of compassion for those who don't know Jesus yet personally.

Jesus said, “Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.” (Lk. 12:34 NLT) Your treasure is what you value. Your heart is who you are. Jesus brings those two together. He said what you value determines who you are. What you value shapes who you are. What you value molds who you are. What you value equals who you are. Today, I'd like us to compare the heart set on earthly treasure with the heart set on heavenly treasure. If what we value (our treasure) determines who we are (our hearts), then what happens to the person who is set on earthly treasure? And what happens to the person who is set on heavenly treasure?

THE HEART SET ON EARTHLY TREASURE

It is, first of all, an anxious heart. If we took the time to look at the rest of Luke 12, we'd read how Jesus warned us against becoming worried and anxious about having enough food, clothing, and shelter. By implication, Jesus included the whole realm of human experience that has anything to do with money and the things money can buy. You already know we live in a culture that worships money and whatever money can buy. We value it more than anything else. Isn't it ironic, however, that even though we have more money and more of whatever money can buy than most people in the world, we're perhaps the most anxious and stressed-out culture on the face of the earth? The more we have the more anxious we become. The more we possess the more we worry about still not having quite enough. Several years ago, I saw a cartoon featuring two well-dressed businessmen sitting at the bar in a posh restaurant. With a terrified look on his face, one man turned to the other man and said, “I had the most awful dream last night. I dreamt the value of the dollar had slipped so low it was no longer worth worshipping!” The heart set on earthly treasure is anxious.

Why does it become anxious? Earthly treasure can't provide real security. That's what Jesus reminded us of in our text today. “Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it.” (Lk. 12:33 NLT) Earthly treasure wears out, runs out, or can be taken from us. Think about your own money today. Your possessions. Your job. Your investments and retirement accounts. Are any of them - beyond any shadow of a doubt – absolutely secure? Aren't all of them – truth be told – insecure? When I set my heart on anything that has no real or lasting security, my heart – the real inner me – knows it. When I put ultimate value on something that's not ultimately or eternally valuable, I will become anxious. It's inevitable because my heart knows the truth better than my head.

The heart set on earthly treasure is a discontented heart. It never has enough because it never has what's ultimately worth possessing. Here's something funny about money and the things money can buy. When you set your heart on that kind of treasure – when you make it the be and end all of life - there's just no such thing as having enough money or having too many possessions. The discontented heart refuses to be satisfied. It continually looks around at what others have and evaluates it's own worth on that basis. Oddly enough, the discontented heart is likely to become proud over time. It measures the worth of people on the basis of what each of us possess in terms of our earthly treasure. It feels superior to people who have less earthly treasure.

The heart set on earthly treasure is a selfish heart. Your heart and mine, by nature, is very possessive. It wants to control, to possess, to hold on to, and to protect whatever it accumulates. It finds any challenge to be generous to be very threatening. When it hears a call to be give your time, talents, and tithe to the Lord and His work generously, the selfish heart feels uncomfortable and gets irritated. "Oh, the church is always asking for my money. And I'm such a busy person, I just don't have time to do all that church stuff." The selfish heart always feels like it's being squeezed, put upon, or asked to do something that just feels unfair and overly demanding.

ILLUS: *Some years ago, a Methodist bishop from the African country of Angola, visited our country. His name was Emilio de Carvalho. At that time there was a lot of political turmoil and persecution against Christians in Angola. While in the city of Evanston, Illinois – a suburb of Chicago - he was asked many questions about what it was like to be a Christian in a country where Christians were persecuted. For example, someone asked, "What is it like to be a Christian in that kind of environment. Is the new government in Angola supportive of Christians?" The bishop answered, "No, but we don't ask the government to be supportive." Someone else asked, "Has it been a tense situation?" De Carvalho said, "Yes. Not long ago the government decreed that we must disband all women's organizations in the churches throughout Angola." The reaction was, "Oh, my, what did you do?" The bishop responded, "Oh, the women kept meeting. The government is not yet strong enough to do much about it."*

Someone else asked, "Yes, but what will you do when the government does become stronger? What then?" I so appreciated the bishop's matter-of-fact answer. "Well, we shall keep meeting. The government does what it needs to do. The church does what it needs to do. If we go to jail for being the church, we shall go to jail. Jail is a wonderful place for evangelism. Our church made some of its most dramatic gains during the revolution in Angola when so many of us were in jail. Why, in jail, you have everyone in one place! You have lots of time to preach and teach. Sure, twenty of our Methodist pastors were killed during the revolution, but we came out of jail a much larger and stronger church." Discerning the drift of these questions he was getting, Bishop Carvalho added, "Don't worry about the church in Angola. God is doing fine by us. Frankly, I would find it much more difficult to be a pastor in Evanston, Illinois. Here, there is so much, so many things. It must be hard to be the church here."

Indeed, it is, Bishop. It's very hard to be an authentic follower of Jesus in most of central Ohio. Why? Because there's so much, so many things. A friend of mine who lived in our community once observed, "Do people living here realize we have more stuff than 99% of the people who have ever lived?" The heart set on earthly treasure is anxious, discontent, and selfish. And when so much earthly treasure is available to you, it's very hard to keep your heart focused on heavenly treasure. Let's talk about that.

THE HEART SET UPON HEAVENLY TREASURE.

It is, first of all, a changed heart. There's a major problem with your heart and mine left all to itself. By nature, it's deceitful and inclined toward evil. The Bible says, "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" (Jer. 17:9 NLT) Our hearts avoid the truth and get hardened by pride to the things of God. God said we need a new heart. "And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart." (Jer. 36:26 NLT) You and I need changed hearts – new hearts, essentially – focused on heavenly treasure. Getting a new heart begins the moment you put your trust in who Jesus is and what He did for you. But then, God continues to work on your heart for the rest of your life. Gradually, God changes it. Tithing is one demonstration of a heart being transformed by the Holy Spirit. God is working into your heart and mine new attitudes, new desires, and a new willingness to do life God's way. If we keep our hearts open to the Holy Spirit, God gradually gives us new and changed hearts with new desires, new passions, and new motivations.

The heart set on heavenly treasure is a peaceful heart. Jesus was talking about money and the things money can buy there in Luke 12. Sometimes when we read what Jesus said about money, it sounds impractical and unrealistic. You might conclude Jesus wanted us to live irresponsibly when it comes to our finances. Don't worry about where you're going to sleep tomorrow night. Don't be anxious about your next meal. Don't sweat over saving money for the future. Like that song from a few years back: "Don't worry. Be happy." Jesus even sounded kind of reckless when it came to money. Be prepared to give it all away to those less fortunate than you! But nothing could be further from the truth that Jesus was impractical, unrealistic, or irresponsible. Jesus wants you to provide an adequate life for your family and yourself. Jesus wants you to spend carefully and save regularly. But He also wants you to give generously with the utmost discretion and wisdom. In other words, He wants you to be a wise steward.

What's the real point of Jesus' words there in Luke 12? As His followers, we should do the best we can do financially and then leave the rest with God. He asked us to bend the focus of our lives toward obeying His Father and His will above all else and to find our contentment there. He warned us against setting our hearts on things which by their very nature can't and won't last or making the mission of our lives all about increasing the size of the pile of stuff we own. As Jesus' follower, you already possess what really matters both in this life and for eternity. You already have heavenly treasure – God's grace, His love, His peace, forgiveness, purpose for living, everlasting life in an

eternal home when we die. Even when your stash of earthly treasure seems small, you know you have all that really matters. Heavenly treasure never wears out, runs out, or gets taken away. As a result, your heart is at peace. Now, I can't prove my next statement empirically, but I know it's true. What's that. People who tithe or give beyond the tithe are less anxious than people who don't. Why is that? Because when you tithe, you're starting to handle money and live with money the way God does. Materialistic stuff finds its proper place. You're starting to value what's truly important, what truly matters, and your heart will be less anxious.

The heart set on heavenly treasure is thankful. What did Jesus say? "So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom." (Lk. 12:32 NLT) The Kingdom is another word for heavenly treasure. It referred to our entire relationship with God and all He has given to us and called us into through Jesus. What's God been pleased to give you and me? Everything He knows is worth having! Not what we think is worth having, but instead what He knows is worth having both in this life and for all eternity. When you have the Kingdom, you have everything of any true value. When you realize what you've been given in and through Jesus, you live from a place of gratitude, not discontent.

Again, I know this is true, although I can't prove it. People who tithe their income to the Lord are just more content than those who don't. Why? Tithing is a demonstration of contentment. When you tithe, you say, "Lord, here's the tenth that belongs to You. I could use it to get more stuff, but what I have today is apparently Your will for me. Because I trust you with all of my life including my finances, here's my tithe. When you decide not to tithe, you say, "Lord, You're simply not providing me with enough. I must have more than 90% for myself." When the church encourages you to be a good steward of all God's given to you – to tithe your income, or to give a generous, sacrificial slice of your time and talents to ministry here, it strikes a deep chord in the heart set on heavenly treasure. You find yourself saying, "Yes, I want to thank God for giving me the His Kingdom. Yes, I want, and I will do what I can to help build His Kingdom in other people." A discontented heart will always see a call to generous giving and living as an irritating burden to be avoided. But the thankful heart sees it as a wonderful invitation.

The heart set on heavenly treasure is a generous heart. The heart set on earthly treasure gets annoyed by all these calls to give my time, my talent, and my tithe to the Lord. Enough already! But the generous heart is attracted to worthwhile opportunities to give time, talent, and tithe. People who tithe are less selfish than those who don't. I'm not claiming it's always easy to part with 10% of your income regularly and faithfully. Many times, it's not easy. Many times, it's a real step of faith. But when you tithe, what is getting denied, disciplined, and put in its proper place? Self! That heart so eager to pursue earthly treasure. But the heart that's leaning into generosity is always looking for new ways to give more. The generous heart gives joyfully to the Lord because you realize whatever gets done for the Lord lasts for all eternity. I love this verse: "Be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that

nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless." (1 Cor. 15:58 NLT) Nothing? Nothing! How you spend your money and where you spend it. How you give your time and where you give it. How you put your talents to use and where you put them to use – that's who you really are, my friend. What do you value? That's who you are!

ILLUS: *Oseola McCarty was born into the world in 1908. It was a raw start. She was conceived when her mother was raped on a wooded path in rural Mississippi as she returned from tending a sick relative. Oseola was raised by her grandmother and aunt, who cleaned houses, cooked, and took in laundry. As a child, Oseola would come home from elementary school and iron clothes, stashing the money she earned in her doll buggy. Oseola dropped out of school in the sixth grade so she could take care of her aunt who was by then unable to walk. Oseola took up her aunt's work as a washerwoman. She never returned to school.*

For decades, Oseola earned 50 cents per load doing laundry for the well-to-do families of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, preferring a washboard over an electric washing machine. Every week, she put a little bit in a savings account. When she finally retired back in 1995, her hands were painfully swollen with arthritis. She went to her bank and asked the banker how much money she had socked away. "\$280,000," was his reply. She was in shock. She said, "I had more than I could use in the bank. I can't carry anything away from here with me, so I thought it was best to give it to some child to get an education."

Oseola McCarty - a shy, never-married laundry woman - gave \$150,000 to the nearby University of Southern Mississippi to help worthy but needy African American students attend college and get the education she never had. When they found out what she had done, over 600 men and women in Hattiesburg and beyond made donations that more than tripled her original endowment. Today, the university presents several full-tuition Oseola McCarty scholarships every year. Oseola liked to tell reporters, "It's more blessed to give than to receive. I've tried it."

CONCL: To be smart, spend carefully. To be wise, save regularly. But if you want to be a genius, give generously. God will take your gifts and multiply their impact beyond your wildest dreams.