

Joyful Generosity 3

October 1, 2017

Luke 12:27-34 (EHV) – ²⁷Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. But I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory was dressed like one of these. ²⁸If this is how God clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith? ²⁹Do not constantly chase after what you will eat or what you will drink. Do not be worried about it. ³⁰To be sure, the nations of the world chase after all of these things, but your Father knows that you need them. ³¹Instead, continue to seek the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you. ³²Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not become old, a treasure in the heavens that will not fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Sermon

“Where your treasure is, there your heart shall be.” That’s a pretty well-known phrase. And we just sang it ten times, so I bet you’ve got it stuck in head! It doesn’t seem all that hard to understand, does it? Put your heart in the right place, and then your treasure will follow. If your heart is with God, naturally your treasure will follow. Simple.

Except that’s not what the words are saying. Listen again: **“Where your treasure is, there your heart shall be.”** What follows what? According to Jesus, your treasure doesn’t follow your heart; your heart follows your treasure. One more time: **“Where your treasure is, there your heart shall be.”** Jesus isn’t telling us, “Put your heart in the right place, then everything else will follow.” Jesus is telling us to look at where we put our money, because that’s how you tell what’s really in your heart. We can say what we want about what we believe and value, but what you spend your money on is a clear indication of where your heart really is. Your heart follows the money. **“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

That contradicts the way we talk today. We like to think that we have control over our hearts. When we mess up, we say things like, “Well, at least my heart is in the right place.” Of course, every single person in the whole world thinks they have their heart in the right place! The problem is that you can’t entirely control your heart. You can’t always choose what or whom you love. You can’t put your heart exactly where you want it to be. God knows that! But you can control your treasure, and controlling your treasure is one way to control your heart. Regardless of where you think your heart is, it will be wherever your treasure is.

So where is your treasure? You don’t want me to ask you that question. I don’t want me to ask me that question. Why? That’s proof right there of how closely tied our treasure is to our hearts! We love money and we love things and we love the things we do with money. And we like to think that my money is separate from my relationship with God. “Don’t talk about money at church!” Except Jesus tells us that the opposite is true. My use of God’s money tells a lot about my relationship with God. **“Where your treasure is, there your heart shall be.”** Jesus is right!

So where is your treasure? Of course, there are some things that everyone has to buy. If you picked up toilet paper at Walmart yesterday, I’m not going to accuse you of making T.P. your heart’s home. You know that’s not what God is talking about. It’s not wrong to spend money. I want you to imagine, though, that if someone from the outside would look at your life and your finances, what would they think that you care most about? Would they guess sports? Or alcohol? Or your house? Or your cars? Or your cottage? If what Jesus says really is true – **“Where your treasure is, there your heart shall be”** – then where is your heart?

This is hard to think about, isn't it? But Jesus wants us to know that the way we use our earthly treasures has a direct impact on our hearts – on our faith! It's not a good sign if we don't bat an eye at spending money on sports tickets, vacations, or restaurants, but our faces cringe when it comes to giving back to God. To Jesus this is one area that's very black and white. **“Where your treasure is, there your heart shall be.”** If your treasure is with Jesus, then your heart is going to be there too. If your treasure isn't with Jesus, then don't fool yourself. Because your heart isn't with Jesus either.

Here's what's amazing: God is very clear about where *his* treasure is. It's with you! To our worried hearts torn in too many different directions, Jesus says, **“Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.”** That's really shocking to hear: **“Your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.”** Imagine if the president would call you up on the phone and say, “Fellow American, don't be afraid, I'm going to give you the country!” What? That's exactly what God has done! God has this enormous chest of treasures – love, grace, forgiveness, the kingdom of heaven... What has he done with them? He's given them to us through Jesus our Savior. God's given you his treasure, and where God's treasure is, there his heart is also – with you! Isn't that cool? What more could God do? What more could God give?

Daniel got it. His treasure was in heaven. Daniel was a believer in God who rose to power in Persia, just below the king. But then the king decreed that anyone who prayed to anyone other than the king himself would be thrown to the lions. Daniel had a lot to lose: his position, his life. Did he worry? No! His treasure wasn't his position or his life. It was in heaven. So, he kept praying, even when he got thrown to the lions. That night we're told that the king with all his power and might was tossing and turning in bed, while Daniel was at peace. **“Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.”** Daniel's treasure was in heaven.

The apostle Paul got it. His treasure was in heaven. Paul didn't just have a lot to lose. He actually lost everything. When he believed in Jesus, he went from being one of the most highly respected Pharisees to being an outlaw. He lost everything, but with no regrets. He said, **“Whatever things were a profit for me, these things I have come to consider a loss because of Christ.”** Do you think he was cringing or smiling as he said that? **“But even more than that, I consider everything to be a loss because of what is worth far more: knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have lost all things.”** (Php 3:7,8) Do you know where Paul was when he wrote those words? In jail! Paul's treasure was in heaven.

Martin Luther got it. His treasure was in heaven. It was quite a long struggle for him. His dad wanted him to be a lawyer, so that he could have a secure life financially. So, Luther looked for his treasure in money. He never found what he was looking for. Then, after almost being killed in a thunderstorm, he decided to become a monk. His dad was irate. Luther looked for his treasure in the Catholic Church and its rules. He never found it. Then, by God's grace, something amazing happened. He looked for his treasure in God and his Word, and he found God's grace. **“Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.”**

It all comes down to one word: **“Give.”** **“Your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.”** God's love and forgiveness – his kingdom – is free. That's what “give” means, right? There's no fighting. No earning. No worrying. It doesn't depend on you. Grace is God's gift! That's what makes Christianity different from every religion in the world. Every other religion points you to you. “Do this.” “Wear this.” “Don't eat this.” “Pull your share.” Even Christian churches have adopted that sort of thinking. “If you don't drink, smoke, or dance, you're in!” Except, **“your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.”** Martin Luther found peace in the fact that all of God's gifts are free.

I hope you have too. Here are five phrases that define what it means to be a Lutheran. I want you to remember them. Grace alone. Faith alone. Scripture alone. Christ alone. To God alone be the glory. That doesn't sound hard, does it? You can remember that. This is important!

- † Grace alone: **“Indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”** (Eph 2:8,9) God loves you, no matter what you’ve done. Grace alone.
- † Faith alone: **“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all and over all who believe.”** (Rom 3:22) Faith in Jesus is what saves. Faith alone.
- † Scripture alone: **“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”** (Rom 1:16) God’s Word is true and powerful. Scripture alone.
- † Christ alone: **“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.”** (Jn 14:6) Jesus is the only Way. Christ alone.
- † To God alone be the glory: **“So whether you eat or drink, or do anything else, do everything to the glory of God.”** (1Co 10:31). To God alone be the glory!

Got it? Grace alone. Faith alone. Scripture alone. Christ alone. To God alone be the glory.

There’s a difference between religions, even between churches that call themselves Christian. That difference does matter. That difference is as big as the difference between you and God. You’re only as strong as the one on whom you depend. So, trusting in yourself and your works or trusting in Jesus and his grace is as big a difference as you and God. Grace alone. Faith alone. Scripture alone. Christ alone. To God alone be the glory. God our dear Father has given us his kingdom by grace through faith in Christ, and our treasure is in heaven with Jesus. **“Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.”**

If you believe that, here’s what it means for you: **“Do not constantly chase after what you will eat or what you will drink. Do not be worried about it. To be sure, the nations of the world chase after all of these things, but your Father knows that you need them. Instead, continue to seek the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you.”** Do you know what the key is to a worry-free life? Trusting the phrase, **“Your Father knows.”** Your treasure is in heaven! Whatever it is that you need on earth, your Father knows! If God is willing to take you to heaven, how much more won’t he certainly care for you here! Jesus doesn’t want you to live worried and anxious! Focus on God. God will focus on you.

In fact, Jesus says, **“Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not become old, a treasure in the heavens that will not fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** Here’s a truth about life: The more your focus is on earth and its stuff, the more worry and anxiety you will have. You know that’s true! So why not give away what you’re going to leave behind anyway? Joyful generosity lives in people whose treasure is in heaven. Because **“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

Even Martin Luther needed to be reminded of that. His wife’s name was Katie. Luther went through a particularly difficult time in life. The pope kept threatening him. People didn’t want to hear God’s Word. Worries tormented him. And his wife noticed. So, one day when Martin Luther came home, Katie met him at the door dressed in black. “What are you doing?” Luther asked. Katie solemnly said, “God died.” “That’s foolish!” Luther said. “No, it’s true,” Katie said. “God must have died, or Dr. Luther would not be so sad!” God hadn’t died. Luther had just been putting his treasure in the wrong place! In fact, every worry and every doubt and every disappointment is a sign that our treasure is in the wrong place. Because here’s the truth. God is not dead. Jesus lives. And **“your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.”** Grace alone. Faith alone. Scripture alone. Christ alone. To God alone be the glory. Amen.