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ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD
Matthew 6

When I was young I was surprised one time when we were at the beach on a sunny day and I noticed in the shallow water, flecks of gold, lots of them. I was excited because I had found gold! I couldn't imagine why no one else had noticed this and come up with a way to collect that gold and get rich. I was anxious to tell my parents about this and to find a way for us to start prospecting. I was disappointed to learn that what I was seeing was pyrite, not gold at all. As it turns out there is gold in seawater, but according to two scientists at MIT there is one gram of gold for every 100 million tons of seawater. In other words, way too little to make it worth anyone's while to try to recover it. That hasn't stopped people from trying.

Prescott Ford Jernegan was a Baptist pastor in New England at the end of the 19th century. He and childhood friend, Charles Fisher, went to a local businessman with an investment opportunity. They had discovered a process, they claimed, that would recover gold from seawater. The skeptical prospective investor knew there is indeed gold in seawater, but also knew no one had come up with a way to recover it. He insisted on proof, so a demonstration was arranged. The invention, which Jernegan called the Gold Accumulator, was a wooden box with holes on the sides that allowed seawater to pass through. Inside was a pan of mercury mixed with a secret element, and a wire with an electric current running through it. They would put this box in ocean water and in a few hours they would find gold had collected in it. Jernegan agreed that he and Fisher would not even be present at the demonstration so there would be no room for tricks. As the would-be investor and a number of others observed, the Gold Accumulator was lowered from a pier into the water and left on the ocean bottom for the night. They waited all night, then in the morning raised the box. Inside the box, the mercury in the pan was now clearly laced with gold! It was determined there was \$4.50 worth of gold, more than \$100 in today's currency.

Excitement was high as it was apparent the process worked. The investor put in \$350,000 and they formed the Electrolyte Marine Salts Company. A plant with 240 Gold Accumulators was built in Lubec, Maine. Within months the machines were producing \$145 worth of gold, about \$3000 in today's money, every day. Plans were made to build a much larger plant with 5000 Accumulators that would literally be a gold mine. Stock in the company was floated at an initial price of \$33

per share, but in a matter of weeks it was up to \$150 per share. An estimated \$1 million was raised. Then Charles Fisher disappeared, and immediately the Accumulators stopped producing gold. Angry investors confronted Jernegan. He agreed to track down Fisher. He went to Europe under an assumed name taking considerable sums of money with him and never came back. It turned out that Fisher wasn't really an inventor, but he was a professional diver. It was eventually learned that at the original demonstration he had entered the water a ways up the beach from the initial demonstration, swam under water in the dark, found the Accumulator and planted the gold. Once money had been raised he used it to buy more gold to make it look like the plant in Maine was producing gold. Fisher was never heard from again. Jernegan would eventually turn up in the Philippines where he became a teacher and wrote several books. He did return some of the investors' money. His wife divorced him because he had abandoned her. He married two more times with both of those marriages ending in divorce. Beware of pastors bearing gold.

There's gold, and then there's Fool's Gold. Unfortunately it is both easy and common for us to get so enamored of Fool's Gold that we pursue it rather than true gold. Jesus taught us to pursue real treasure, and we will see that in Matthew 6.

MAJOR IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, NOT THEATER

We saw last week that Jesus made some radical claims in the opening words of this speech. He said that real blessing consisted of being in the kingdom of God, not having the good stuff of this world right now. Even more astounding he said that the people who would gain that blessing were those who were "poor in spirit." It was not the elites, the wealthy, the most respected and most religious people, but humble people who admitted their need and threw themselves solely on the grace of God who would be blessed.

In the rest of chapter 5 Jesus revealed the real problem. The Pharisees and others of their ilk weren't righteous at all, because they weren't really obeying the rules. They *looked like* they were obeying them, but they weren't living by the real intent of them. Sure, they might not kill anyone or have mistresses and they might talk about love. But they weren't keeping the real meaning of the law, which was to be so loving that they never even got angry at anyone, never even looked at a woman with lust, and loved even those who were enemies.

The objection to that would be, "But the Pharisees are so devout. Look how much money they give to the poor, listen to their inspiring prayers, see how often they show how serious they are about God by fasting." In chapter 6 Jesus proceeds to

skewer that idea. He says in 6:1, “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.” In other words, God will see your “righteousness” as a sham and you won’t receive the blessing of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus implied that the supposed righteousness of the Pharisees was just that kind of phony sham. Wait a minute. In 5:16 Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” So it sounds like he was saying we should practice our righteousness to be seen by others. Now he criticizes the Pharisees for practicing their righteousness in front of people. He says we shouldn’t do that. This is confusing. Which is it Jesus?

Matthew gives us two clues to help us solve this puzzle. There are two key words in verses 1-2 that help us understand what the problem was with the Pharisees. The first word is translated “to be seen” in verse 1. In 5:16 when Jesus talked about people “seeing” our good deeds, the word he used was *horao*, the usual word for just seeing. It means to see, observe, perceive. But in 6:1 the word translated “seen” is *theaomai*, which was derived from the noun *theatron*. It can mean merely “to behold,” but notice the noun is the source of our word “theater.” The idea of that word is to make a spectacle, to play out a drama to impress people.

Matthew reinforced that image in verse 2 when he referred to the acceptable religious people as hypocrites. We know what that word means, but there was some important cultural coloring to it. It literally meant, “one who pretends to be other than what he is.” It was used of actors on stage. By using these two words Matthew is telling us the righteousness of these supposedly religious people was all theater. It was an act, with the specific purpose of impressing other people with the supposed “righteousness” of the actor. It was all for show.

Jesus then proved this assertion. The Pharisees may give to the poor, but when they do they make sure everyone knows about it. They blow trumpets to announce their generous donation. It isn’t about helping people, it’s about impressing people with how generous they are. When they pray they go into a very public place and pray very impressive prayers with the goal of blowing people away with how theologically deep and how holy they are. When they fast they make sure it’s obvious. Look at how long I’ve gone without eating. I’m fainting from hunger. I’m doing this because I’m so holy, you know.

The point Jesus was making was, yes, the Pharisees *look* very devout. But the whole thing is an act. It’s all about “look at me, look at how much more righteous I am than you are. Don’t you wish you were me?” Their act was all about status,

approval and position in this world. In their society the religious leaders were the rock stars, the celebrities, the beautiful people. Their “religion” was about becoming a rock star. It had little to do with real righteousness or with the kingdom of God.

Many years ago in another ministry there was a guy on our staff who resigned because of issues in his marriage. That was his decision. It came as a surprise to me and others. We didn’t even know about the marriage issues. He wasn’t asked to resign, he did it of his own volition in an effort to restore his relationship with his wife. Later he came in to see me. I was glad to see him until he began unloading on me. He criticized me severely, blaming me for things I had nothing to do with. I had done nothing but support him and his wife and try to be a friend and a help, but listening to him you’d have thought I was Satan. It was utterly unfair, and it really hurt. It also was completely irrational. Months later he showed up in my office again and I braced for another session of broadsides aimed at me. But this time it was completely different. He apologized for all that he had said in our previous meeting, admitted it was unfair and wrong and asked me to forgive him. I did so eagerly and told him that I greatly appreciated his willingness to see me and set things right. A few weeks later I received a call from a person I didn’t know. It was a person who was checking out our former staff member because he had applied for a job. So this person was calling his former employers. I realized what that second visit had been about. My friend knew they were going to call me and was afraid after he had previously raked me over the coals that I would return the favor and torpedo his chances of getting the job. So he came and tried to mend fences in the hopes that I would give him a positive review. How sincere was his apology? I felt like I had witnessed some theater. Maybe he was sincere about his apology, but there was an ulterior motive at work. He probably meant the apology, but it happened because he wanted a good reference, not because he felt bad about what he had done. Everyone saw theater when they observed the supposed righteousness of the Pharisees. There may have been some real desire in them to do what was right, but there was an ulterior motive underneath everything they did. That motive was to win the approval of people and gain the status that came with it. That was the driving force behind it all. In John 12:43 John said of the Pharisees, “they loved human praise more than praise from God.” In Matthew 23:5 Jesus said of them, “Everything they do is done for people to see.” Everything they do. Every single thing was driven by the desire to be noticed and praised! It was all about being a rock star.

To this day religion is plagued by the idea that righteousness is theater. It’s all about acting, about looking good, looking righteous. Jesus’ point is that true

righteousness starts on the inside, in the heart, and that was missing in the Pharisees and their approach to life.

MINE FOR TRUE GOLD

In verses 19-20 Jesus seems to switch gears when he says, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” He started the sermon with startling news about the blessed life and the shocking way we can get it. Now he starts talking about what we treasure, which seems like a new topic. However, I submit to you that it actually is directly related to what he has been saying since the sermon began.

First, we need to realize that we all treasure something. There is something that matters most to all of us. That’s part of being human. We all want something. If we didn’t we would never get out of bed in the morning. What do you treasure?

Jesus makes a profound statement at the end of verse 20. “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Our hearts will go right where the things we treasure are. In other words, our treasure will occupy our attention and our passion. It will be the thing we dream about, the thing that we wake up thinking about, the thing we obsess over. It will be the thing that rules our priorities and has the biggest impact on our choices and our behavior.

Think back, guys, to when you were a young single man. Do you remember what it was like when that one special young woman came along? Maybe I was an unusually sad case, but I remember those days when I finally realized that I was hopelessly in love with Laurie but didn’t know how that was going to turn out. She was the sun that blanked out all the other stars in the sky. She mattered more than anything else. Just getting to see her even for a few minutes between classes was the highlight of my day. A day that I didn’t get to see her or talk to her was cause for near despair. Seeing her came pretty much before anything else. I remember a time when we weren’t going to be able to be together one day, but when I got to my car I found she had left a note on it for me, just telling me how her day went and letting me know she was thinking about me. It was like the clouds clearing and the sun coming out after a storm. It was cause for great joy.

There were a lot of other things going on in my life at that time. I was in school. I had a job and a ministry. I was near the end of my grad school and was thinking about what I would do with myself when I graduated. I had friends to spend time with. But Laurie ruled over all of it. Where my treasure was, there my heart was

also. By the way, she still does rule over all of it, maybe more than ever. The point here is that what I treasured occupied first place in my mind and heart. It was the biggest factor in how I felt and it determined choices I made. That's what happens with the things we treasure.

What does this have to do with the topic Jesus had been discussing? The issue is what is the real blessed life, and how do you get it? The assumption in ancient Israel was that the most respected religious leaders, who also were generally quite successful financially, had the blessing of God and would inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, because of their supposed righteousness they had gained God's blessing, both now and in the future. Jesus has made glaringly clear that those men treasured something. What did they treasure? Remember his words in Matthew 23: 5. Everything they do is for people to see. It was all about getting praise from people. In other words, what they treasure most is approval, acclaim, respect, and the position that goes with it. That's where their hearts were, and that's what drove everything they did. That was why they would be so opposed to Jesus and would eventually seek to kill him, because he was a threat to all of it. This sermon announced in no uncertain terms that Jesus was an opponent and a clear and present danger to their approval ratings and their position. Let me ask you. After hearing this sermon, what would your opinion of the Pharisees have been? Mine would have been, what a bunch of pompous hypocrites. They've misled and pulled the wool over the eyes of all of us!

Is approval from people and position a treasure that exists here on earth right now, or does it exist primarily in God's kingdom? It is clearly something of this age. Jesus said making something of this age your treasure is a big mistake. That's because everything in this age is subject to change and corruption. It gets old, it falls apart, it breaks, it gets taken away somehow. Everything. Only things that have to do with the kingdom of God will be truly lasting. That means that everything you treasure in this world will eventually let you down.

One problem is this treasure thing is binary. It is a one or a zero, it is on or off, it can't be a both and kind of thing. In verse 24 Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters." You have to choose either to serve God and live for his kingdom or to serve some treasure in this age. If you serve one, you're not serving the other.

So Jesus said in verse 25, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear." Here's the simple truth: when we worry we are treasuring something in this world. The things of God's kingdom cannot be damaged, corrupted or taken away from us. So we don't

worry about them. I never worry about God's kingdom, because I know he's got that totally under control. We only worry about the things of this world.

The point of that is that worry is an unmistakable sign that we are treasuring something of this age rather than the kingdom of God. Do you think the Pharisees worried about the approval of people and maintaining their status and their position? They obsessed about it! The reason they went to the unfathomable extreme of seeking the execution of the blameless Son of God, their own Messiah, is they were worried about those very things. If it took killing him to protect their status, then so be it. At this point Jesus has clearly demonstrated how desperately far they were from the kingdom of God.

APPLICATION

The big application of this entire sermon of course, is rejoice you poor in spirit for yours is the kingdom of heaven. But unfortunately we have a seemingly irresistible tendency to slip back into the old ways of thinking and living. Specifically, we don't really believe the most blessed life is life in the kingdom of God. We start treasuring things in this world more than that, and when we do that we begin obsessing about them, to the point we worry about them and we compromise God's kingdom in order to get them. What can we do to break that unfortunate cycle? How can we do what Jesus said and just not worry? Somehow just saying "don't worry" tends not to help us very much. But Jesus has some crucial truths that will help us.

REMEMBER THIS WORLD'S TREASURES LET US DOWN

Jesus has reminded us that the world's treasures will let us down in two ways in this sermon. First we see in these verses that the world's treasures are painfully transient. They rust, they break, they get old and worn out, they are taken away somehow. That very uncertainty means we can never truly relax with them because there is always the chance that we might lose them. So they inherently introduce a lack of peace into our lives. If we don't have peace we do not have the blessed life we long for because peace is absolutely essential to it.

When Laurie and I first lived in this area we had no money and were faced with exorbitant housing costs. It didn't take us long to figure out that the only way we could ever control that terrible cost was to buy a house of our own. But that was a pipe dream. Every year as prices of homes skyrocketed we got further and further from being able to afford something. After 11 years, through the incredible grace and generosity of several people we actually were able to buy a home. It was a dream come true. We had our own house, something we never thought could

happen. Having that house has been and continues to be wonderful. It has been a real treasure. But our house is now more than 27 years old. We know our furnace is going to need to be replaced at some point. We have a few cracks in walls. The floor in our bedroom has lots of squeaky boards. We need to remodel the bathrooms because there are issues there. The flooring is in need. I could go on, but the point is that as wonderful as the house is, this is a place where stuff falls apart and breaks. Our house now is a sizable list of maintenance items. That's how things are in this world. They don't last.

Second, Jesus pointed out the failures of this world's treasures by making clear that the real blessing we all need and seek even if we don't know it, is to live in the kingdom of God. That will give what our souls are desperate for, and there is no substitute. When Ella was only a year old and she took naps at our house she had to sleep with a stuffed animal, a little dog we called Husky. Husky has been replaced. Toby and Anna took her to Disneyland and there they bought her a stuffed Mickey Mouse. He became her treasure. That's the problem with all our earthly treasures. At some point we realize they're not really what we need, so we replace them with some other treasure. Our life becomes a constant pursuit of treasures that have to be replaced because they're never enough. What we need is the kingdom of God.

I want to take you back to that illustration I used at the very beginning about seeing what I thought was gold in the ocean. Imagine that I had come up with some way to sift that shiny stuff out of the water. Suppose I somehow managed to recover enormous amounts of it. What would I have had? Nothing. It would have profited me zero because it wasn't what I thought it was. It never could have given me the riches I was sure were going to be mine because it wasn't actually worth anything. And that's what happens to us when we pursue whatever it is we treasure in this world. It turns out to be fool's gold. The next time you find yourself getting tied in knots over something, worrying about it, remind yourself you are stressing over fool's gold. You are like a kid throwing a fit over the need to collect those shiny flecks from the ocean water. Hey, fine if you want to try to get them, I guess, but don't stress over it. Don't worry if you don't get it, because you will have lost nothing of real value.

REMEMBER THAT GOD CARES FOR YOU

This is crucial. Jesus makes the point that you never see birds working their feathers off to pile up massive stores of worms and bugs. You don't see them stressing over it. You don't see them so worried about it that they have to take

anxiety medication because of it. They just do what God has created them to do, and each day there's food for them.

Jesus said, "Don't you think the Heavenly Father cares at least as much about you as he does about those birds?" Here's a question to consider: did Jesus die on a cross to save the finches, crows and sparrows in our back yard? If you need assistance, the answer is no. Jesus died on the cross to save you and me. God cares infinitely more about us than he does those birds. Since he clearly does care about those birds enough to provide for them don't you think it reasonable to conclude that will also care for you?

If he really cares about you, don't you think he is going to provide what you need? What kind of Father would watch his children lack food and do nothing? Not a good one. Our Father is a holy, good, loving Father who is not limited in his resources. So we can trust him to provide what we need at every moment of our lives.

LIVE A DAY AT A TIME

I was watching an interview with a player in the NFL back in December as the football season was near an end. This guy was on a team that was in the thick of the race for the playoffs. With 2 games remaining they were on the cusp of securing a playoff position, but they also could lose out. The reporter referred to all the possible outcomes that could happen, from missing the playoffs to getting home field advantage and mentioned how what other teams did would affect his team. Then he asked the player what the team was thinking about all that and how they were dealing with it. The player said, "We are only thinking about our next game. We don't control what other teams do and how all that works out. We leave to you media people to debate and discuss all the possibilities. The only thing we control is preparing for this next game and playing the best we possibly can. So that's what we focus on. We don't get caught up in all the other stuff because that would just distract us."

I've heard that or something like it a million times from coaches and players in every sport. But as I listened it occurred to me that it is both brilliant and biblical. Jesus said, "Don't worry about tomorrow. Each day has enough troubles of its own." In other words, you don't control what will happen tomorrow. So don't think about and stress about that. Just do what you are supposed to do today and let God handle the rest.

Worry is always about what might happen in the future. Sometimes I think our problem is we are superstitious. I admit I have on more than one occasion had some sort of superstitious thoughts. I turn on the TV to watch a game involving a team I want to win and am happy to learn they are doing great. They are comfortably ahead and controlling the game. But as I watch it starts to unravel. They start making mistakes. The other team gets momentum and suddenly seems unstoppable, where my team suddenly can't seem to get out of their own way. Do you know what happens? I think, "I should turn this off. They were fine when I wasn't watching, but as soon as I start watching it all falls apart. The only way I can help the team is by not watching so they could start doing better again."

How dumb is that? It's as dumb as dumb can possibly get. There is no connection whatsoever between whether I watch or not and the way the game goes. But don't judge me. You've thought it too. Here's the really dumb part. I do something similar when it comes to worry. I have this weird, unspoken idea that if I don't worry about a thing I am anxious about then the bad thing might happen. Somehow my worrying will stop it. You and I both know that's idiotic. Worrying doesn't do anything except cause problems for us.

I was annoyed because I got called to do jury duty in federal court after doing jury in superior court just about 7 months go. Federal court meant going all the way down town. It was really inconvenient and had the possibility of creating some real problems for us. I got a bit stressed about it. My jury duty in the end consisted of calling each night and being told I shouldn't report the next day, but call again the next night. I never did have to go in and the things I stressed over never happened.

So Jesus said, "Just take one day at a time. Deal with what is on your plate today and leave tomorrow's issues for tomorrow." I like the idea of thinking about what's on your plate. I can't eat tomorrow's dinner this afternoon. All I can eat at lunch today is what is on my plate today. And there is no point worrying about what will happen tomorrow. Just focus on what you have to do today.

SEEK GOD'S KINGDOM

In verse 33 Jesus spoke those profound words, "Seek first his (God's) kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." What does it mean to seek God's kingdom first?

In a few weeks the Winter Olympics will take place and the games will be on TV. There are some pretty weird competitions that will take place. For instance, there will be curling. I'm going to reveal a bias here, but if it involves the use of a

broom, does it really need to be in the Olympics? Games with cleaning tools? What's next, Olympic vacuuming? For sure it doesn't need to be on television. I saw a little bit recently of a luge competition. Those people go crazy fast on a little sled down an icy track. Yes, it's a little dangerous, but they're just riding downhill on a sled. That's what we did when we went to the snow when we were kids. So we're making a big deal out of things kids do in the snow? Coming up next, the Snow Angel finals. After that we will have the Snowball Fight preliminaries. Whatever you think about those sports, for the people competing in the Olympics, these games are huge. Their sport has ordered their life. They have worked and trained with this one goal, to make it to the Olympics and if their dreams come true to at least win a medal. Meanwhile, Laurie and I will likely watch at least some of it. We will hope if there's an American in the competition they can do better than finish 68th. But whatever the outcome, we will go on with what our lives are really about. We might be mildly interested, but it won't affect the choices we make, nor how we feel about life and what's happening. Those competitors are seeking first to win in their competition. We are seeking first something else entirely.

Seeking God's kingdom begins with living with our greatest treasure being to have God rule over every thought, word and action in our lives. It is to make our heart his kingdom, to have a heart that explodes with passion for his rule in us. We will make that our treasure if we believe living in the kingdom of God truly is the blessed life.

Seeking God's kingdom means wanting his rule to expand in this world. So I will pray fervently to that end and what I will seek with all my heart is to be a light to others, an island of God's grace in a graceless world, so God might use me to draw others to him.

Does this mean that we must all quit our jobs, forget any hobbies, concentrate on seeking the kingdom of God alone? No, notice that Jesus said "seek *first* the kingdom of God." If there's a first, there must be a second. He knows we must seek other things. We need to seek to work to support ourselves, to build healthy marriages and raise children. But God's kingdom comes first. It is to be the ruling pursuit that determines all else. It directs how we do our jobs and what place they have in our lives. It is the goal in the way we relate in marriage and how we raise our kids. It is the goal in everything we do.

What, outside of you, can threaten that? Nothing. No matter what people do to you, you can live for God's kingdom. You can do that in every circumstance, be it good or bad. No one can stop that. Which means you never have to worry about it.

What Jesus calls us to pursue, to have as our treasure, to obsess about, to dream about, to let rule our choices and our behavior, is his kingdom. What becomes the driving motivation in everything is that Jesus would rule in my life in the way I speak to others, in my priorities, in the way I think about others, in the way I use my resources.