

Sermon Manuscript: Luke 12:22-34

Treasure Your Heavenly Treasure

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – August 7, 2022

Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?”

“Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you— you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. [NIV 11]

Do you know what a “goat prairie” is? Back before the coulee region was logged and cultivated, much of the land was covered by oak prairie. The ground grew prairie grasses and flowers with occasional oak trees dotting the landscape. Now most of our area is covered by second growth forests and farm fields. Some prairie landscape still exists. One of the places that it can be found is on the sides of some of the steep bluffs. This is why such prairies are called “goat prairies.” It’s because they are most accessible to goats.

There is one such prairie at the end of one of the hikes I often take. At the top of a bluff there is a spreading oak tree with a bench under it. Below that bench spreads a goat prairie and the wooded hollow of the coulee below. It is a very peaceful place. It is a place to do what Jesus suggests in our lesson today. It is a place to consider the ravens and the wild flowers.

Throughout the spring, summer and fall, there different flowers and plants that bloom. I have often observed ravens as well as vultures, hawks and eagles soaring above the prairie and the coulee. It is a picture of the beauty of nature as ravens play on the breeze and flowers provide their nectar to the bees and butterflies at work in their fields. But there is no worry there. There is just the pattern of life that is provided for by our wise and loving Creator. Jesus points us to such examples of nature to help us find what is the true treasure he wants for our hearts. His lesson is to **TREASURE YOUR HEAVENLY TREASURE.**

1. Under Pressure

The human world is for the most part very different than the picture that Jesus points us to. Jesus talks about the “pagan world.” This is the world of unbelievers who don’t truly know God

and don't have the heavenly treasure that he wants us to enjoy. Jesus says that the pagan world runs after things like what we eat and what we drink. Here Jesus shows us a world that is filled with worry over the pursuit of food and clothes. Last week we heard him speak of the worry over money and possessions. The world chases after all kinds of things. People are in a mad dash after so many things that they think are valuable – perceived treasures. How much time and effort and anxiety goes into the pursuit of pleasure, success, acceptance, the world's definition of love, security, health or a long life?

All of this chasing puts the people of the world under a lot of pressure. There is the pressure to survive. If we survive there is the pressure to succeed. If we succeed there is the pressure to acquire more of what we value. After we acquire there is the pressure to enjoy it before time runs out. And even when we have enjoyment it doesn't last. There is the pressure to feel fulfilled.

There is the pressure to be right. Am I doing it right? Will I get it done? Am I doing enough? Am I going to make it? Will I make it to the end of this life? Will I have a happy life? Is there something more? Will I make it to whatever is coming next?

This all leads to either hopelessness or self-delusion. In our study of other religions earlier this year, we learned about how hopeless these attempts are to find the things that human beings truly are searching for. False religions leave only the hopelessness of never being sure of success or an endless repetition of the unhappiness of this world. Those without God fair no better. If life in this world is all there is, human beings have a few decades of struggle and then annihilation. It's no wonder people are unhappy. It's no wonder we see evidence of desperation everywhere. There are all kinds of foolish attempts to relieve the pressure but none truly succeed. People simply end up abusing God's blessings or obsessing over them. All desire to find freedom and peace. We see the pagan world chasing every perceived freedom but avoiding or neglecting the one thing that truly makes people free. The unbelieving world spends tremendous effort grabbing everything of this world as treasure when it will all dissolve away and none of it will make anybody truly rich.

2. Don't Be Left Hanging

On the prairie, the ravens find their food. The flowers blossom. The butterflies, bees and bugs keep busy. The oaks make leaves and acorns. None of them worry if these things will happen. It's simply what they do. This is Jesus' point here.

Jesus uses an interesting choice of words when he talks about worry here. The word for worry at the beginning simply means to care about things. There's nothing wrong with taking care. Birds and flowers are made to carefully do what they do so God can provide for them. The problem with caring is that when it becomes too much then it twists into worry. Worry is when we forget that living is what we are here to do in this world. We forget that God directs that living as he chooses. We forget that he is guiding and providing to bring his chosen ones to himself for eternity. Caring gone too far is worry. Jesus says, "Do not worry."

The second word that Jesus uses for worry is found in verse 29 where Jesus says, *“Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; DO NOT WORRY ABOUT IT.”* This word means to be lifted up above the ground. It can mean to be lifted high as in pride or arrogance. We do this when we think that we can provide for ourselves without relying on God. But the image can also mean to be hanging in the air and not knowing where or how we will land. It’s like our expression to be “left hanging.”

We do this to ourselves when worry hangs us between earthly and heavenly treasures. The “pagan world” of unbelief “runs after” – pursues and chases – earthly treasure. That’s all the kinds of things we talked about before. We are tempted to be like the unbelieving world around us. We worry about whether we will have enough. We worry about whether we are doing enough. We worry about other people – what we think about them and what they think about us. We worry about the sins in our past. We worry about the uncertainty of the future. We put ourselves under the same pressure as the world. When the simple concerns of living that stand before us become worry, this will leave us hanging in doubt and fear – in unhappiness and uncertainty. We end up like frightened animals. We let ourselves run in panic like the rest of the herd. We run mindlessly. We run sinfully. We run as if God wasn’t there. We run as if we were unbelievers. At such times Jesus would call us “you of little faith” – “little-faithed ones.” It doesn’t have to be this way!

3. Heirs of a Better Kingdom

There are two milestones this week in my life. This past Tuesday my dad turned 88. This coming Tuesday I will celebrate the 35th anniversary of my ordination into the ministry. What both of these things bring to mind is that there is more of life that is behind me than is ahead. But my Jesus tells me here: *“Do not be afraid, little flock.”* [v32] I don’t need to be afraid. My father knows Jesus is his Savior and so do I. Even though our time in this world may be closer to the end than the beginning, our life is going to go on forever in heaven. We truly do not need to fear.

Think of all that we have as Jesus’ little flock and citizens of our Father’s kingdom. Here in our lesson, Jesus shows us clearly that there is no reason to worry about food or clothes. In the Garden, we see God’s plan where we would eat the fruit from all the trees and live without the shame or fear of sin. (Jesus was in on that design!) As sheep and citizens we have not need to worry about possessions – God will provide according to his will. We have no need to worry about what others might think of us – what matters is what God thinks. We have no need to worry about our past sins because Jesus has washed them away. We have no need to worry about our future because it is in the hands of our gracious God. We have no need to worry even about death because through Christ’s resurrection it is not the end but the doorway to the next life. We have no need to worry about what comes after death because our place is prepared there already.

Think of what life in the Garden of Eden would have been like. It would be like life on the goat prairie. Birds and flowers going about the business of living as God intended. A peaceful kingdom under the gracious rule of our living Father. That’s what our life can be like even now.

Jesus is showing us that we don't need to worry. This doesn't mean that all uncertainty will be removed from life. But it does mean that God takes the need to worry out of it. Life will still have its struggle and work. It will require faith and faithful service. But the thing is, there is no pressure. It's like life on the goat prairie.

This is the treasure that has been put into our hands. Jesus tells us the amazing truth: *"Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."* [v32] We are citizens of God's kingdom where Jesus rules our hearts by faith in him as our Savior. We are children of our heavenly Father who loves us dearly. We are lambs in our Good Shepherd's fold. We have nothing to worry about. Our Father knows all our needs and will provide them as he wills. Our past with all its sins has been washed clean in our Savior's blood. Our life is secure because Jesus has made us his own. We are safe in the hands of the God who redeemed us with his own Son to be his precious ones. Our future is guaranteed for eternity in paradise. We're going to live forever in heaven. Our worry can't add a single hour to our life in this world. And why would we want to? Our Father has given us his kingdom instead. It is a boundless treasure compared to anything in this world that is fading away.

4. Appreciate It!

How different it is knowing that we will live forever. I was struck recently by the thought of how hectic and frantic the people of this world are in how they live compared to the peace and calm of knowing eternal life is mine. We have an invulnerable treasure kept in heaven for us. How different it is to know that we will live forever and that God is with us every day! Worry thinks treasure is gone or will soon be taken away. Our treasure is safe in a purse that will never wear out. It is secure in a vault that no thief can enter. It is preserved like a precious robe stored in a cedar chest. Our treasure is in all the heavenly gifts that God has bestowed on us.

Appreciate what you have by taking it out and using it often. Money squirreled away in a mattress doesn't do any good. Take out the riches of God's heavenly treasure to admire it and put it to use.

As long as we live in this world, we will still have troubles. We will be tempted and often fall into the sin of worry. That's when we need our heavenly treasure. Go regularly and make withdrawals. It can never run out because it is God's unending grace. It can never fail because it lasts for eternity. It is made certain because it rests on Christ who has completed all that is necessary for us to be heirs of our Father's kingdom.

Be like the goat prairie. Be busy with faithful living like the bees and flowers. We can be like birds on the wing. Play in the breeze and soar on the updrafts of God's goodness. Wear the royal robe of Christ's righteousness that is better than anything glorious Solomon ever wore or even the most beautiful display of verdant wildflowers. Remember the treasure that is yours. Keep it always in your heart. Let it fill you with all the riches of God's grace.

Take the time to consider the ravens and the wildflowers. Consider the goat meadow. Consider the life that God has given you in his kingdom. Not just for this world but forever. That's your true treasure. Set your heart on it and treasure your heavenly treasure. Amen.