

## MATTHEW 6:19-21

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Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 15-17, 2018

Smith

### HAVE A HEART FOR GODLY VALUES

**<sup>19</sup> “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

What do you treasure? Let me ask that another way: What do you *value*? Godly values and earthly values are not the same thing. In our verses, Jesus is teaching Godly values in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon, which we find in Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7, begins with our Lord denouncing a false interpretation of the Ten Commandments that was prevalent in his time and still is today. After this, Jesus talks about good works in their true sense—works that flow from faith to thank God for his blessings. After this, he describes the correct understanding of the Ten Commandments, and with the passage before us, he warns against the temptations that get in our way as we strive to live a life that’s pleasing to God. He begins here with greed, which isn’t always about money or power, as we will see. Jesus encourages us to have a heart for Godly values.

If you jump into the car to take a trip, what do you value on that trip? Let’s get some more context: It’s a trip to Grandma’s house for Thanksgiving Dinner. You want to see people there that you love, people you haven’t seen for a long time. Now, what will you value as you make the journey? Will you make sure that you have enough gas to get there? Will you decide to stop along the way and see the sights, or do you focus all your attention on making it to the dinner? What would you think of someone who planned to go to grandma’s but found some hotdogs at a gas station along the way and thought, “This is enough, let’s not go the rest of the way.” Would you stop along the way and sell your car? Would you care about making sure that everybody traveling with you made it all the way there?

Now, how do you feel about the trip through life that you’re making right now? Do you have your journey planned out, with your goal in sight? Jesus tells us to value our destination more than our road, more than our journey. The destination is heaven. Eternal life in heaven.

The implication is that things we treasure and value here will not necessarily help us to get there, but if we resist the temptation to value earthly things and let go of them in our hearts, we will have things in heaven that are so much better, so much more valuable, that we will never miss what we said “no” to, here on the journey, here as we made our way to heaven.

Think about things in your life that might count as “treasures on earth.” Keep in mind: You’re already a Christian; you’ve probably already thought about this from time to time, so some of the things you truly value are really Godly things and not necessarily earthly things. It’s no sin to value your family, your faith, the word of God, and the fellowship of the church.

But what about all those other things we begin to value, to treasure, that get in the way or sidetrack us from our true goal, which is eternal life with Jesus. Martin Luther said that “there are two most dangerous and corrupting forces in Christendom: spiritually, it is false teaching that corrupts faith; physically, it is greed that corrupts the fruit of faith.”<sup>a</sup>

When our values veer off the road of faith, they lead us into dead ends and impossible routes the way a GPS gets confused by road construction and pretends that the orange cones don’t exist, and when our computers and phones constantly tempt us to do things that are illegal. Has your phone ever told you to make a U-Turn exactly where there is a sign that says, “No U-Turn”? Your phone’s whims cannot re-write the law any more than you or I can. Telling the Policeman, “My phone told me to turn here” doesn’t mean you won’t get a ticket. Telling God, “My sinful human nature told me to sin this way,” doesn’t mean God doesn’t condemn that sin.

It is God’s law that governs our souls. We want our values to correspond with God’s values.

To teach us, Jesus uses an illustration of bugs and thieves. He could just as easily have said, “rats and mice.” There is even a translation question here as to whether the Greek word **βρῶσις** (*brōsis*) means “rust” or “vermin.” It simply means an “eating” or an “eater,” and whether that’s the metallic infection of rust or an infestation of vermin, the picture is the same. Some things destroy by eating away from the outside in—like moths, rats, or mice. Other things destroy by eating away from the inside out—like rust or vermin. There are other infestations in the world, more human and far more destructive.

Not all thieves wear masks and fear superheroes. A business owner might have a thief for an employee. A worker somewhere else might have a thief for an employer, or a manager. Some thieves hide behind a desk in government, using the political system and its loopholes or unguarded funds to line his own pockets. Some thieves are ordinary citizens who abuse the political system and well-meaning government officials to get rich. Some thieves avoid paying taxes and brag about it as if doing one’s duty is something to be avoided, like getting out of jury duty without good cause, or dodging the draft.

What do you value?

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<sup>a</sup> *Luther’s Works* volume 21; sermon on this passage.

I hope we realize that when Jesus' words make us squirm because we've piled all kinds of things into our journey toward heaven that just don't need to be there, and where many of those things actually tempt us to sin and lose our way, he knows what the result will be in our hearts.

We grieve over the junk and the clutter that's in our hearts. And a lot of it should rightly frighten us. We don't want this to be what God sees when he looks into our hearts. And do you know what? The very solution to our frightened repentance is the very thing God wants us to value most of all: The forgiveness we have in Jesus. That's the priceless treasure that's only one of many laid up for us in heaven.

Now: Let's be clear. It isn't sinful to own earthly treasure. In fact, God blesses us with many treasures, large and small, that are not really Godly things at all. Why does God do this? This goes back to the First Article of the Creed. Not only is God the Father responsible for the original creation, but also taking care of us day by day in all of our needs. This is why we say in the explanation of the First Article:

“He still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life.”

God will provide for you. The Christian couple who find that they are unexpectedly pregnant should never doubt that God will provide for them and their children. The Christian church that wonders whether they can afford to call a new pastor should not doubt that God will give them the means to pay their pastor so that he can focus all his energy on caring for their souls.

And if we have set our goal on expanding our school because God is blessing us with more and more children, we should not doubt that God will give us the means—and the personal values—to carry out that godly task.

Think about what you value the most. Pray about it. Talk about it at the dinner table, or even as you drive to Grandma's house. Remember that “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” And as you keep your eyes on the road, keep your heart set on eternal life.

And the peace of God, etc. Amen.