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Treasure

Matthew 6:16-24

March 9, 2003

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We've been preaching through the Sermon on the Mount, and our text for today is Matthew 6:16-24:

"And when you fast"

It appears that Jesus assumes His disciples will fast. There are different types of fasts.

There are religious fasts.

There may be fasting from carbohydrates to lose weight.

In much of the world there are people fasting because they have nothing to eat.

Perhaps we Americans ought to do some thinking about fasting, for we're suffering from a national obsession with food, which takes the form of weight gain, even bulimia and anorexia. And remember, you really can't judge others on this topic very well, because you don't know their story and you don't know their body chemistry.

Yet it does seem strange to me that the Church in America has made such a big deal out of smoking and drinking, while at the very same time some churches actually serve *donuts* to people with *heart disease* on *Sunday morning*, no less!

Well, in Jesus' day, fasting wasn't about health issues. It was about focusing on God. But many of you aren't thinking about God. You're thinking about donuts. Just my talking about fasting makes you think about food—*forbidden* food!

Isn't it ironic that the growth of the American weight problem is directly parallel to the growth of the American diet industry? So that the more we try to diet, the bigger we get? The more we think about not eating, the more we do! The more I think, "No donuts, no donuts, no donuts, no! No sweet donuts! No sweet, warm, fresh, Krispy Kreme donuts!" the hungrier I get for donuts.

It's almost like "I find it a law that when I want to do good, evil lies close at hand. And I don't understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

You know, the diet industry and the religion industry have a lot in common . . .

Well, the New Testament seems to be really ambivalent about diets and fasting. Colossians 2:20:

Why do you submit to regulations, “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh.

That’s the bad dieter’s life verse! And we’re all bad dieters. If you won’t admit it, you’re the worst.

You know, Paul taught that there’s, like, this power in a diet or law to inspire not doing it. Law produces disobedience, shame, and addiction.

Well, folks do fast in the New Testament, but never as a law. Usually when *I* fast, I mostly just think about *food . . .* or worse, *myself*.

“And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

I *really* like donuts, but I have a far more dangerous addiction than that. I’m addicted to approval. Some folks treasure food, and some treasure approval. If you beat your addiction to food with your addiction to approval, you’re even more addicted.

Most people diet in order to look good, which is exactly why the Pharisees fasted: to look good (not physically, but religiously).

And we all fast, if not voluntarily, involuntarily. We all suffer loss. We all do without at times, so we’re all tempted to use our fasting to get power over others and feed our ego. That is, we use suffering in order to get sympathy and respect. It’s a sweet treasure, but soon it rots and turns sour.

The problem with acting miserable is that you become miserable. The sympathy is sweet, but you can’t dance, because it’s not in the act. And besides — you’re too aware of yourself to hear the music.

If you’re religious like the Pharisees, it can really be sweet to let others know how much you suffer for Jesus.

“Oh, I’ll bear my cross . . .”

“Oh, I’ll just do without . . .”

“Oh, I suffer for Jesus . . .”

But then you're not really suffering for Jesus, you're suffering for your *self* and making Jesus look like a drag. Your treasure is your *self* — your egotistical, religious, suffering *self*. And you need to fast from *that*, not food.

A few weeks ago a friend shared with me a vision he had during one of our worship services. It was quite involved, but suffice it to say that in the vision he saw Jesus dancing through our congregation taking people down off of crosses. (To be a Christian is to be crucified with Christ.)

He watched Jesus take people down, and then they would begin dancing with Jesus in the sanctuary. But then my friend said, "Peter, there were some who wouldn't let Jesus take them down. They wouldn't dance."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Guilt is an idol." I imagine those people had made an idol of their guilt, shame, sufferings, and discipline . . . like their treasure is themselves. So they "glory in their shame."

Philippians 3:19: "Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."

- Some people make a treasure of food.
- Some people make a treasure of not eating food.
- Some people make a treasure of feeling bad for eating food.
- Many people make a treasure of all of the above, a cycle of addiction.

And all are poor dancers.

Here's the problem: If I say, "Don't think about food," you think about food. And if I say, "Don't think about your miserable self," you think about your miserable self. Then you think, "Gosh, I really *am* miserable . . . so miserable I can't stop thinking about my miserable self!"

Right now some of you can't stop thinking about your new car or your bank account, because you sat down and read the bulletin title — "Treasure" — and realized I was preaching from the Sermon on the Mount. And your flesh cried, "Oh, baby! I'm toast! I better hang on to my treasure!"

Verse 19 . . .

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

The word "treasure" here is "thesauros." Jesus says don't "thesaurizo thesauros" to yourself. "Don't treasure treasure to yourself." "Thesauros" is also translated "storehouse." "Thesauros" is the treasury and the treasure. The treasure is whatever you treasure in the treasury . . . could be food, clothes, your image, your money . . .

When the average Jew heard “treasure,” I imagine he thought of the gold and silver treasure in the treasury in the temple. When the Israelites entered the promised land and when kings like David conquered enemies, much of the booty (gold and silver booty) was “dedicated” or “devoted” to the Lord and put in the treasury. When Solomon built the temple, all that devoted treasure was put in the temple treasury. Nobody seemed to understand *why* you put the treasure in the temple; they just knew the treasure was in the temple.

Well, the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., just like Jesus said it would be. So where’s the treasury now? What’s the treasure? Jesus says, “Don’t treasure to yourself treasure on earth. Treasure to yourself treasure in heaven.” Is that earthly treasure just the same as heavenly treasure? If so, then being godly is just good business; prudent selfishness. And Heaven isn’t full of new people but just smart, selfish people. “Treasure to yourself treasure in Heaven.” Where’s Heaven?

Matthew 3: John the Baptist came preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 4: Jesus came preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 10: Jesus told the twelve to preach, “The kingdom is at hand.”

Luke 17:20: Jesus says, “Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you,” or in the King James Version, “within you.” (“Wo oh oh oh oh oh . . . Heaven is in my heart . . .”)

Matthew 12: Jesus refers to the human heart as a treasury.

Your heart is a treasury.

Next verse . . .

“The eye is the lamp of the body.”

KJV: “the light of the body”

New Living: “lamp for your body”

The Message: “Your eyes are windows into your body”

“So, if your eye is sound . . .”

Literally: “single” or “pure”

Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see . . .” something . . .

“. . . your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

You could be totally blind!

Maybe the problem isn’t so much, like, our will power but that we’re blind. So it’s not a matter of saying no to bad food but saying yes to good food (*really* good food, not tofu and bran muffins). It’s not saying no to self as much as yes to somebody else.

Maybe the problem isn't so much saying no to earthly treasure but saying yes to heavenly treasure. Once you see it, you can drop earthly treasure like you drop a bag of poop! Like Paul said, "I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse [crap, expletive, "skubula"] for the surpassing worth of knowing . . ." something else.

When Jesus fasted forty days and nights, and Satan tempted Him with bread, how did Jesus resist? "Bad, bad donut! I'm watching my figure." No! He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." *Every word*. Jesus had better comfort food than Satan.

Disciples come to Jesus in John 4. They say, "Rabbi, eat."

"Jesus, you need to eat something."

Jesus didn't say, "I'm a spiritual stud and I don't need to eat." He said, "I have some food you don't know about. My food is to do the will of my Father" . . . like He really could feast on heavenly food and see heavenly treasure *right here*.

So maybe when He loved Mary of Magdalene, lepers, Matthew the tax collector, the thief on the cross, and you and me, maybe it wasn't a discipline for Him. He could see *treasure* . . . treasure we can't see . . . hidden treasure. And maybe *all of life* is like the Highlights Hidden Picture picture [exhibit A].

When I was a kid and my mom would take me to Dr. Shugart's office, the first thing I'd look for in the waiting room was the Highlights magazine, *not* because of Tommy Timber Toes, but because of the Hidden Picture picture page.

The hidden pictures are *treasure*, and you get to find it!

It didn't even matter what the picture page was:

- It could be kids in a yard
- It could be animals in a jungle
- It could be someone sick or in prison
- It could even be the last and the least of these

It really didn't matter, because Highlights magazine revealed that there were hidden pictures—hidden meanings—treasure—in whatever picture happened to be on that page. The joy was in finding them.

Some of you wonder why God doesn't give all the answers in life up front. I'm not sure, but I do know that if I turned to the Hidden Picture page and someone had already circled the pictures, I felt totally violated! The joy is in finding the treasure. And it's not just *kids* who love this . . .

Admit it: How many of you, when you take your kids to the doctor, see a Highlights, and the first thing you turn to is the Hidden Picture page? Admit it! Don't lie! The Hidden Picture page totally rocks! It's a treasure hunt!

Humans were made to hunt treasure . . . to be hunters. (Monte Swan is writing a book on that.) We're made to seek. In the next paragraph Jesus says that we're to seek something. "Seek ye first . . ." something.

What if life is a Highlights Hidden Picture picture? You know, if you just have a Highlights Hidden Picture picture, and you don't have a key, then you don't know what the treasure is that you're looking for. The picture will get really boring really quickly.

This picture [Exhibit A] happens to be that of a Teddy Bear Factory. Lots of religious people think the Church is all about being a Teddy Bear Factory: manufacturing happy, polyurethane-stuffed teddy bears.

Well, you see, if you think that's the meaning of the picture—the surface meaning—the picture will get boring pretty quickly. But because you're born a treasure hunter, you might try to find meaning and treasure in the picture anyway, until you end up bored, angry, and addicted, trying to suck life out of a meaningless Teddy Bear Factory . . . an old Pharisee.

But if someone comes along and shows you the key, then manufacturing teddy bears isn't the point. Finding treasure is the point.

Here's the irony: Although the picture is no longer the point, the picture is far more interesting and valuable because it hides the point. The food is better, the gold is shinier, the sex is better, and the church is more fun . . . because it's all about something else.

It's like "losing your life and finding your life,"
dying to one world and rising to another.
It's like finding a treasure in some old field,
and joyfully selling everything to get it.

Last week in a seminar, Henry Cloud shared about a businessman he was counseling. He was a developer, and he said, "Dr. Cloud, all I do is build buildings, and it's all about money. I've got so much money, and I'm so depressed. Maybe I should quit my job and go into the ministry . . . to find some meaning." (Let's hope he doesn't!)

Soon after that Dr. Cloud counseled another man, a businessman, a developer. He said, "Dr. Cloud, the only thing that keeps me going is my work. I find it so meaningful. I fly over an empty field, and do you know what I see? I see kids playing on playgrounds and families having picnics in the park I'm going to build! I really don't care about the money, but when I design a house, I can picture Mom and Dad on the living room sofa. I care about getting all the angles just right, so they can see their daughter coming down the stairs dressed for her first prom. That's what keeps me going."

Treasure.

Jesus said, “Treasure to yourself treasure in Heaven.” The kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Our hearts are a treasury. In fact, we are the temple. So what’s the treasure?

Colossians 2:3: “In Christ [the guy preaching the Sermon on the Mount] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

What greater treasure could there be?
Was there ever a more devoted, dedicated treasure than Jesus?

In Matthew 13 Jesus says, “The kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field” — in dirt and ashes, like an earthen vessel.

Listen very closely to II Corinthians 4:3:

And even if our gospel is hidden, it is hidden only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. And we have this treasure [this light] in earthen vessels

Jesus said, “I am the light.”
The light is in earthen vessels.

Can you see the treasure? If the eyes of your heart are pure, if the windows of your treasury are clear, the light shines in you. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Jesus the Christ,
Perfect image of the Father,
Revelation of the Father,
The Light of the World,
was sitting on the mount in front of the crowd.

And they could not yet see Him,
for they were not pure in heart;
they were blind;
they had not yet been cleansed by the blood;
they had not yet seen the key.

What’s the key?

Well, if all creation is a Highlights Hidden Picture picture, then God is like the treasure, and our hearts are the treasury, and Jesus is hiding in *all things* (“filling all things” — Ephesians 1).

So wherever we looked, the key to finding God wouldn't be our discipline; the key would be the cross of Christ. The *cross* would be the key to treasure. It would be the shape on the side of the paper, the shape that gave meaning to the whole picture, the shape that enlightened all things and revealed God, the Treasure . . . almost as if God would “reconcile to himself all things, making peace by the blood of the cross, and this was the plan for the fulness of time” (Ephesians 1), ever since He drew the picture, creating all things through Him and for Him (Jesus) — the Word, the Meaning, the Key.

Well then, all life would be a treasure hunt. “To live would be Christ,” and “all things would be ours in Christ.” Yet He (Jesus Christ and Him crucified) would be our treasure. We'd seek first Him, and “all things would be added unto us.” And we could *love* all things without becoming addicted.

Robin Gunn writes:

We went to Open House tonight at the public elementary school. When Rachel's teacher met us, her eyebrows seemed to elevate slightly. She spoke kindly of our first grader but said she had some concerns. She then invited us to look at the artwork; we would see what she meant.

Dozens of brown paper treasure chests were tacked to the bulletin board. Each had a barreled top attached with a brad. On the front was printed, “A Real Treasure Would Be . . .” We walked over and began opening the lids to find Rachel's treasure and see why it so concerned the teacher.

As we peeked into each chest, we saw TVs and Nintendos, a few genies, heaps of gold coins, and a unicorn. Rachel's chest was in the very bottom corner. We had to stoop to open it. Inside, our daughter had drawn Christ, hanging on a cross with red drops of blood shaped like hearts dripping from his hands. She had completed the sentence, “A Real Treasure Would Be . . . Jesus.”

“Do you see my concern?” the teacher asked, her arms folded across her chest.

“Yes,” my husband agreed, “I see what you mean. The J is backwards, isn't it?”

Seeing Jesus and Him crucified turns the world upside down, turns the picture on its head. For the better you see Him, the less important become TV's, Nintendo's, heaps of gold coins, and even unicorns; the less important is food, yourself, and every other treasure in creation . . . less important yet even more interesting, because they hide Him who already lives in your heart.

But, now, you know that even with the key it's sometimes hard to find the treasure in the Hidden Picture picture. Well, my mom was a genius at the Highlights Hidden Picture picture. She'd always say, “Peter, when you can't find all the hidden pictures, turn the picture upside down.”

When you turn the world upside down, it's not so easy to make out the old picture and old meanings. New meanings appear. So . . .

- Instead of eating so much, try not eating.
- Instead of exalting yourself, humble yourself.
- Instead of upward mobility, go for downward mobility.
- Instead of taking, start giving.
- Instead of rich in spirit, try poor in spirit. Maybe they're blessed.
- Instead of the pursuit of happiness, try mourning. Maybe blessed are those who mourn.
- Instead of power, go for meekness.
- Instead of saving your life, try to lose it.

Pick up a cross. What could be more upside down than that? But maybe there you'll see Him. Maybe that's what the Christian disciplines are all about.

But remember: The treasure isn't an upside down world. There are no points for just giving, praying, and fasting. There are a lot of old Pharisees, missionaries, do-gooders, and pastors who are cold and angry with God, because they thought they got points for just turning their world upside down. But that's not the point. The point is seeing Jesus, the love of God poured out. That's the treasure. And that's the judgment.

What's your treasure?

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

A few years ago in Somalia, Jack Kelly, a reporter for USA Today, gave a starving boy a piece of grapefruit. Dead bodies lay all around. The boy was ravaged by worms, his belly distended, his skin wrinkled . . . he could barely stand. He was desperately hungry. They watched as he took the fruit and appeared to say thanks. He did not eat but began to walk toward his village. (They followed him in a way he couldn't see.)

When he entered his village, there on the ground was a little boy. They figured he was dead. His eyes were completely glazed over. It turned out that this was the boy's younger brother. The older brother knelt down, bit off a piece of grapefruit, chewed it, then opened up his brother's mouth, put the grapefruit in, and worked his brother's jaw up and down.

They learned the older brother had been doing this for two weeks. A couple days later the older brother died of malnutrition, and the younger brother lived.

Do you want to turn the channel?

Are you saying, “That's sick! It has no meaning . . .
I can't look!”?

Hold on. Take a look at the key.

Do you see treasure?

If you really see treasure . . . not just in your mind, but the Light shines deep into your treasury—your heart . . . you just might sell everything and go for it! Go for *Him*.

For on the night He was betrayed, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, our Big Brother took bread. And having given thanks, he broke it saying, “This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” After supper He took the cup saying, “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me.”

So if you want Jesus as your treasure, receive Him.

“Father, we thank you that our world is full of hidden treasure because, Father, you’ve sent Jesus. And through Him, by Him, and in Him everything was made. He fills all things. ‘Every good and perfect gift comes from you,’ and Jesus is hiding behind them all. Father, open our eyes.”

Let me ask you: How’s your picture? Boring? Bland? If you come in faith, wanting Jesus as your treasure, you have the key! You’re a treasure hunter!

Some of you are thinking, “I hate my picture. It feels like everything in my world has been turned upside down.” Well, sometimes my mom would take the Highlights Hidden Picture picture page out of my hand, turn it upside down, and say, “See?”

God is very willing to turn your world upside down to help you see, because He wants you to have the treasure. And the day will come when you receive everything back in Him. I believe Jesus was all over that boy in Somalia . . . in him, around him, through him . . . and they are dancing in eternity, because they know each other. They know the treasure.

The treasure is Jesus.

And if by chance you’re standing in the darkest of all places, at the foot of a cross or even nailed to a cross, don’t shut down. Keep looking. There is treasure! You are about to see the heart of the living God.

There will come a day when God will finally and ultimately turn your world upside down entirely and thoroughly. You will die, and then you’ll see Him, right side up.

You’re a treasure hunter only because Jesus was a treasure hunter first. He’s treasuring treasure in Heaven, and the treasure is *you*. He sold everything to get you.

So, “may the eyes of your heart be enlightened, and may you know the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints.” And the saints are us.

Amen.

Further Reading

And Joram brought with him articles of silver, of gold, and of bronze; these also King David dedicated to the LORD, together with the silver and gold which he dedicated from all the nations he subdued, from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek, and from the spoil of Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

2 Samuel 8:10b-12

Thus all the work that King Solomon did on the house of the LORD was finished. And Solomon brought in the things which David his father had dedicated, the silver, the gold, and the vessels, and stored them in the treasuries of the house of the LORD.

1 Kings 7:51

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

Matthew 27:39-40

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it

Revelation 21:23-24

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." . . . From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." . . . These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Matthew 3:1-2, 4:17, 10:5-7

Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

Matthew 19:21

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

Luke 17:20-21

For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Colossians 2:1-3

Because of the great, eternal love that God has for all humankind, he makes no distinction in the love between the blessed soul of Christ and the least soul that shall be saved. It is very easy to

believe and to trust that the blessed soul of Christ has a place of honour within the glorious Godhead. But it is also true, as I have understood from what our Lord has shown me, that where the blessed soul of Christ is, there too is the essence of all the souls that shall be saved by Him.

Julian of Norwich

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints

Ephesians 1:16-18

No one is blinder than he who will not see.

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"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Luke 12:32-34

"Is such the fast that I choose,
a day for a man to humble himself?
Is it to bow down his head like a rush,
and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?
Will you call this a fast,
and a day acceptable to the LORD?"

"Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?"

"Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

Isaiah 58:5-7

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