

Parable Of The Treasure

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People love to be with a rich man while he can give, but they have no use for him when his riches disappear. The world follows the beautiful and bubbly actress, yet, when her beauty has faded, it unceremoniously dumps her for the next starlet. The world has nothing permanent to give but is always active in taking what we have.

Jesus teaches that this world's importance is not in itself but in where it leads. Since this world is not the end of life but a stage on the way, we should never lose our hearts to it or any worldly thing. In his *Commentary on Matthew*, Richard Glover says, "He builds too low who builds beneath the skies." Our eyes should be fixed on the goal of the Kingdom of God beyond this life. Jesus' parable in Matthew 6:19-21 illustrates this lesson using three metaphors: moths, rust, and thieves.

1. What "treasures on earth" is Jesus admonishing us to de-emphasize? Matthew 6:19; Job 20:28; Proverbs 27:24; I Timothy 6:7.

Comment: Among the ancients, treasures, riches, or wealth consisted of clothing as well as gold, silver, gems, wine, lands, and oil. An abundance of anything conducive to the ornamentation or comfort of life was considered treasure. Like then, most people today are thrilled with splendid display of expensive garments and accessories. Our treasure, in fact, often consists of beautiful and richly ornamented articles of apparel. In a society like ours, an unlimited number of things could become our treasure—clothing and jewelry, cars and boats, or CDs and DVDs, to name a few.

2. What do moths signify? Genesis 45:22; Joshua 7:21; Job 13:28; Isaiah 50:9; 51:8; James 5:1-2.

Comment: To us, wealth is money, land, houses, and cars, but in biblical times, clothing was a key part of a man's wealth. For example, Joseph gave his brothers "changes of garments," and Achan coveted "a beautiful Babylonian garment." Part of clothing's appeal to them was its ability to make a "display," so the garments of the rich were impressively colorful and opulent. Moths were the most destructive force against such treasures. Although a moth is small, its power to destroy clothing is great.

3. What does rust symbolize? Proverbs 23:4-5; James 5:3.

Comment: "Rust" represents anything that "eats into" and destroys things more durable than clothing. In this parable, it has a wider application than mere iron oxide. Rusting or oxidation will eventually corrode all metal, including silver and gold; all of our physical treasure will deteriorate in time. Once moths and rust settle on an object, they gradually eat their way from the exterior to the interior. Thus, beyond their ability to destroy physical objects, moths and rust represent the decay of a person's life.

4. What do thieves represent? Isaiah 56:10-12; Luke 10:30; John 10:1, 8, 10.

Comment: Houses in the ancient Middle East were frequently made of sun-baked clay or loose stones. Because of this, thieves found it comparatively easy to dig through the wall to enter and steal. Thieves represent the ungodly world that continually seeks to take everything we have and return to us nothing but trouble. Moths and rust attack consumable things, but thieves look to steal enduring treasures for themselves.

All three metaphors, moth, rust and thieves, merge into one lesson: the futility of an earth-centered life. Taken together, these three stealthy destroyers demonstrate the folly of amassing earthly goods for their own sake. If no other destroyers come against us, old age is like a moth that ruins our beauty and wholeness, disease is like rust that corrodes our bodies, and death is like a thief that breaks in and steals everything we possess. A grim Spanish proverb says, "There are no pockets in a shroud." We can take nothing with us but the character we have built (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Job 32:8).

5. What treasures are we to lay up for ourselves in heaven? Matthew 6:20-21; Isaiah 55:2; Romans 2:5-11; I Peter 1:4.

Comment: Laying up—saving or storing—is not in itself sinful; Paul enjoins honest industry and wise enterprise (II Corinthians 12:14). If wealth comes our way, we should use it, not only for our ease and profit, but also for the good of others. Treasures on earth, if distributed for God's glory, become tools for laying up treasures in heaven.

It is natural for the human heart, mind, affection, and interest to be fixed on treasure. To regulate this fixation, it is important that the treasure be proper. We must be seeking the right goal—not physical riches but spiritually sound treasures in the form of deeds of kindness: good works (Luke 12:33) and the character formed by them (Revelation 14:13). Paul urges us to "be rich in good works" (I Timothy 6:18), partakers of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" and "the riches of His glory" (Ephesians 3:8, 16), and James advises us to be "rich in faith" (James 2:5).

The treasure of the converted is to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, to attain an incorruptible, undefiled inheritance that does not fade away. In the Kingdom of God, nothing corrupts, nothing dies away, and no enemies plunder or destroy. What a tremendous potential we have!