

July 26, 2026

St. Matthew 13:44:

“Which Will It Be: Treasure - Or Junk”

- I. Junk
- II. Treasure in the Field
- III. Understand

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St. Matthew 13:44

Dear Friends in Christ,

As I thought about our text I was reminded of several epitaphs from tombstones I've kept from various readings. One was from Ogden Nash, the American poet who died in 1971. He suggested: Nash's Ashes. And then a man by the name of Thorpe has this inscription: Thorp's Corpse. Just three more: first, One Way...Do Not Enter – second, I'd Rather Be Reading This – third, If You're Reading This Please Clear My Internet History. All of this has its humor - on this side of the grave.

It's without humor if you've ever had to walk into an Emergency Room and on the bed is a day old baby girl hooked up to a life support system, being cared for by a doctor and 2 nurses, with the mother and a friend of the mother standing there with tears streaming down their faces. And then, minutes later, the baby dies. The reality hits; the absolute uncertainty and brevity of life.

We like it here, don't we? Or do we? We have witnessed it here; lives plagued by one disappointment after another, one upheaval after another, then the cry, "I've had enough, I want out of here!" And then comes the medical diagnosis: "Time's up!" Suddenly, death isn't wanted. The words of Jesus invade our earthly wants: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Mt.6:11)." So, where are our hearts?

WHICH WILL IT BE: TREASURE - OR JUNK?

I. Junk

If you were to ask the average person what it is he or she wants out of life you would probably get an answer something like this: "I want a secure, happy, untroubled life." And if you can get under that answer, you'll find that many are saying, "I want a life that focuses on me." That type of thinking could be called "egocentrism" – focusing on yourself – or "Stoic detachment", focusing on what you can control.

I'm telling you all this because several months ago I came across an article I had placed in an old file. The source of the article was not noted but I had written on it the year 1987, 39 years ago. It was about a Professor, Carl B. Lovell, a former sociologist at George Washington University, who took the top student of the class on a fishing trip. This was a straight "A" student, president of his class, popular, preparing to enter medicine. Here it is...

While they were sitting in the boat fishing the Professor asked why he had chosen medicine as a career. The student said, "Because medicine looks most lucrative right now." The Professor asked, "What do you want to do as a doctor?" The student replied, "Get into a specialty that has the shortest hours and the biggest fees." The Professor asked if he didn't owe something to the community? The student said, "No, I'm just like everyone else. I want to make the most of what's in it for me in the shortest time possible, so I can retire and do what I really want to do." Lavelle asked, "What do you want to do?" Oh, I don't know. Travel, go fishing, take it easy." [Sad, but it fits with the time.]

Listen to this thought: "When someone says that the dominant interest in our day is not religion but science, he speaks the truth. The realm of science is more and more protective of the means by which we live. But let's get this through our thick skulls, that no scientist ever pretended to provide an END life." END life is a term used for the final stage in the lifecycle of a person. Science does not address this.

Jesus wasn't giving a little Sunday school lesson for children when He said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." He was telling us, adults and children, that the only true treasure is Christ and the eternal life He won for us! Oh, sure, there's a lot of "stuff" that's exciting to have, makes you feel good, and impresses others, but in time, the stuff becomes junk.

Most of us will probably go through a process of leaving this world. I like the thought of a fellow by the name of George E. Failing: "The true measure of life's worth is the ability to worthily suffer and die. Good health and good housing are not salvation; they may only be narcotics that help poor souls to exist, even though they are 'dead'." Our text...

II. Treasure in the Field

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." The field has been described this way: "The field brings out the thought that God did not hide his treasure far off in the heavens where no human being could even come near to it but in a common, lowly place, where it could, indeed, be found, but certainly not by the earthly wise, proud, and self-sufficient."

The field? It's the Word of God, the Scripture; all of it and not just your favorite passages! In one way it's common, ordinary words on paper. However, if you move from just reading your favorite parts to studying and applying it you will discover the treasure, the most precious treasure that will never fade in its value.

Of course, the treasure is Jesus, the Word made flesh. His word, the Scripture, and not just bits and pieces if it, guides us through all life and lifts us to eternal life. I'll put it to you this way: When we die, we're going to go to heaven, but not because we deserve it. On the contrary, we must confess the words of David:

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered... For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long, for day and night your hand was heavy upon me; My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin (Ps.32:1,3-5).

How could we ever get tired of hearing about God's love in Christ that assures us of eternal Life? Of this world Jesus said, "For then there will be great tribulation such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be (Mt.24:21)." Beloved brothers and sisters, we are deep into the "the great tribulation". God help us to never be like someone who says, "Well, I go to church a lot and read my Bible every now and then. I believe in God. Isn't that enough? Besides, I want to do this and that and go here and there!" The questions are, "What do you believe and understand about God? What have you harvested from the field that will guide and direct you during the bad times, when you enter your END life?"

III. Understand

Around 40 years ago a member of this congregation, a widower and a long-time, consistent, supportive, joyful worshipper, was taken to St. Mary's Hospital. I went to see him. Based on what we were talking about, I asked him, "Are you going to heaven when you die?" His expression dramatically changed. He looked at me and said, "You know, I've always wondered about that." I thought to myself, all these years of being confronted by the Word of God in the church and you didn't know! Well, we had a long talk and the next time I saw him he had a huge smile and said, "I see! I understand!"

Understand this: the field is not given to the worldly wise, proud, and self-sufficient but to those who finally humble themselves before God and stop swimming in their self-righteousness but turn to our Lord, Jesus Christ. God speaks to each of us from Scripture: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn.1:9)." And as David wrote, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, oh God, you will not despise (Ps.

51:17)." With this, we carry with us each day this word of God, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rm. 6:23)."

You know, we have a lot of things to live with in this world. I'm not necessarily putting that down, you understand? The questions are, "Has it given meaning to my life, and will it prepare me for death?" Or, as the woman said to her pastor, "I have everything to live with, and yet I'm not happy. What's wrong with me?" And the pastor replied, "Madam, you made a small but tragic mistake. You have not everything to live for, but you've got a bunch of junk to live with."

And I cannot leave the sermon without reminding us that we have family, friends, acquaintances who don't know Christ. What's going to happen to them when they die? Jesus said, "...whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (Jn.3:18b)." Let's not kid ourselves, Christ gave you and me an assignment and purpose for being on this earth: to share the treasure; to encourage, invite.

Paul wrote, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Phi. 1:21)." Do you believe that? Jesus said, "The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

Treasure – or Junk? Which will it be? Truly.

Pastor Bill Abbott