

What do you value the most? What is your treasure? Because Jesus tells us in our Gospel lesson for today that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Wherever your heart is, Christians, is where you're going to focus all of your attention, all of your desires. Every thought, every action, every word will be trying to get that thing. And the question that we have to ask ourselves this evening is, is that thing God, or is it something else? Because the things of this world, Christians, will crumble into nothing. It will turn into dust. But the things of God will last forever. But you also notice a little bit later in our reading that Jesus tells us that you cannot serve two masters, because either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. Your heart cannot be in two places. You cannot have two things that you treasure the most. So the question I ask you as we begin this season of Lent is, what is your desire? What is your treasure?

Because Jesus in our Gospel lesson gives us several examples of what it means to desire something other than God. In verse sixteen, Jesus says this, "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly I say to you they have received their reward." Even using the things of God to serve their own passions. The hypocrites that Jesus is talking about are not interested in what God cares about. They're not interested in pleasing God. They're really only interested in pleasing other people. They don't care about what God thinks. They care about what their neighbor thinks. That's why they're so focused on what they look like, because if people notice them and pay attention to what they're doing, then they'll think that they are godly. Then they'll think that they're really something, and they will praise them for what they see. And that's what they really want all along. Their treasure is not God. Their treasure is what other people think about them. Because if they didn't get noticed, if nobody saw what they did, then they wouldn't do it. And if people were opposed to what they were doing, they would stop doing it. They care more about what someone else thinks. And that is their treasure.

But Christians, examine yourselves! Do we do the same thing? Do we seek the opinion of our neighbor more than the opinion of God? Do we come to church, for example, looking around at who's here or who might notice us, so that we could gather the praise of someone else? Or maybe even better, do we come to church so that people don't start talking, so that people don't start to wonder what's going on with them, and we become the subject of gossip? It's very easy, Christians, to care about what other people think. But their opinion ultimately doesn't matter, does it? Because gossip changes. The opinions of men will crumble into dust. But what God thinks about us lasts forever. Because consider what Jesus says here, in verse seventeen. "But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face that your fasting may not be seen by others, but by your father who is in secret, and your father who sees in secret will reward you." Go home! Do the things of God when no one else can see you, when no one else is around, and then you will know the truth of your hearts.

Because dear Christians, God's opinion of us is ultimately the only thing that matters. Let the world think what it wants. Let them do whatever they want. Let it all go. Do these things so that your Father sees you. Do these things so that you please God, because when you please God with what you do, then it doesn't matter what the world thinks. So Christians, let us not care about what the world has to say about us. But let us seek to do our Father's will.

But on the other side of that here, too, when talking about something like fasting, I think it brings up another important question. Fasting is never an easy thing, is it? Neither is prayer. Neither is reading the Bible. These are all things that require work. They're all things that require a certain amount of suffering. Are we willing to suffer for the sake of the kingdom? Or if it becomes uncomfortable, do we set these things aside, even though God wants us to do them, because, well, it's just too difficult? Because Christians, are we making ourselves, our own pleasures, our own comforts, the highest

treasure, the thing that we value the most? Because if we do that, we might very well be tempted to just let these things go. To not pray because it takes too much time. To not read the Bible because, well, it's just hard to understand anyway. To not do any of the things that God wants us to do because, well, it hurts. It involves a certain amount of suffering.

But Christians, Jesus never said that being a Christian was going to be easy. Jesus never promised comfort. He promised a cross. Being a Christian might very well be the most difficult thing that we have to do. And if we are not willing to suffer for the sake of the kingdom, well, where's that going to leave us in the end, but with a comfort that crumbles into dust? So Christians, let us not seek after the things of this world and the pleasures that it might provide, because ultimately they come to nothing too. But let us seek after the true and lasting pleasure that is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus continues in verse nineteen, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." Christians, is your highest treasure literal treasures, physical possessions, the things of this life, the things that we acquire for ourselves, trying to get more and more and more stuff? Because if we have enough stuff, we think, then we'd be okay. We'd be comfortable. We'd be happy. We wouldn't have a care in the world. But is that really true? Do we not care about the things of this world? Are we not more concerned with losing things or having things break or having things be stolen sometimes than we are with the things of God? And the other thing to remember about physical possessions too, Christians, is that they don't last. Nothing in this world lasts. It will all come to an end. Think of it this way. You all probably remember the school buildings that used to stand over here. Many of you probably went to that school. Maybe you thought your own kids would go to that school. But where is it now? It is gone. What seemed so certain, what seemed so firm and unchanging is no longer there. There's not even a building to remember it by. Christians, everything in this life comes to nothing. It crumbles into dust. So don't put your trust and your hope in the physical things of this life. They won't help you. But put your trust in the Lord, the Lord who is truly eternal, the Lord who will never pass away.

Because Christians, we have here in our text a perfect example in Jesus Christ of what it means to treasure up things in heaven. Because Jesus did not care what other people thought. Many times he just made them mad. They tried to kill him on more than one occasion because of the things he said. He didn't care what they thought. And Jesus didn't care about physical possessions. He was poor. He didn't have anything to his name, not even a bed to sleep on. And Jesus didn't care about suffering, because he suffered the worst thing of all, that is, the cross, so that we might live. What he cared about the most, Christians, was pleasing his Father, our Father who is in heaven, and following his will above all else, so that his treasure was truly in heaven. And because his treasure was in heaven, and because he has obeyed the father on our behalf, we are now set free, a new creation in him. He has forgiven us, because he valued the things above, the things in heaven, more than anything else.

So Christians, let us not care about what other people have to say. The only opinion that matters is God's. Let us not care about our physical possessions. They'll come to nothing anyway, but the word of God will go on forever. Let us not care if we have to suffer because we are Christians, because ultimately, suffering with Jesus, we will enter into a joy which will know no end. We will be comforted in heaven because of what Jesus has done for us.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.