

◆ Have you ever played the gift exchange game? The basic idea is that everyone brings a gift to the party or gathering. Next, everyone draws a number to see in what order you pick your gift. Then, starting with the second person's turn, the player may elect either; (1) to steal the first person's gift, or (2) choose to open a gift without the option of trading it after he or she has opened it.

At one such gift opening, an individual carefully unwrapped and opened a box, but sat there peering into the box with a bit of embarrassment. As you can imagine, everyone wanted to know what was in it. As you may have guessed, the box was empty.

I think we feel that way sometimes, like we opened up our gift box from God and it seems to be empty or, at least not filled with the gifts we wanted. But I wonder if in our disappointment there is also a bit of discontent or even a bit of dissatisfaction. This can bubble up when we find ourselves treasuring the temporary stuff of this world instead of the treasures of heaven.

◆ As we continue our Building blocks of Worship series, we focus today on the block called ◆ Gifts. We all have been given gifts from the Lord's gracious hand. But as we live our lives as *spiritual acts of worship* do we recognize his gifts for what they are, or are we looking for something else? Is our heart to be found longing for possessions, or valuing true treasure?

Today Jesus delights us with his gentle whispers of encouragement and Gospel-empowered strength from his sermon on the mount. He calls on us to make his priorities our own - to believe them, to be blessed by them, to enjoy them, to practice them, to share them. For *where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*. Let's pray ◆

◆ Two everyday problems plague us as users of earthly possessions; things like cars, cash, media collections and the like. The first and obvious set of problems is that earthly possessions are ◆ corruptible (*they break*), vulnerable (*they can be lost or stolen or deleted*), and exhaustible (*they run out,*

wear out, or go out of style). While Best Buy knows this all too well and makes millions off this stuff (along with extended warranties), Jesus knows it even better and reminds us that *“moth and rust destroy”* and *“thieves break in and steal.”*

◆ The second and more damaging problem with earthly possessions is that we don't believe for two seconds that the first problem is real! We treat the natural resources of this earth as if they'll last forever. We spend our income as if it will multiply enough to catch up with our credit card bills. We put our trust in personal property as if it can save us from a meaningless existence. Best Buy, iTunes, Home Depot and Old Navy don't want us to correct this distorted and self-deceived view of possessions, but Jesus does.

Jesus condemns such a view by mentioning our eyes (*how we see things*) and judging us for setting our hearts on the corruptible, the vulnerable, and the exhaustible. *“If your eyes are bad (that is, if your view of possessions is distorted and deceived) ◆, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”* (*that is, your whole life will be based on a lie and you'll be in the dark not only with matters such as happiness and relationships with others, but you'll be in the dark with the only thing that truly matters: being right with God*). And the darkness of God is not something to take lightly. Darkness was a plague that God sent to suffocate the uncooperative Egyptians. Darkness was a punishment God awarded his enemies when he blinded them on several occasions. Darkness was a curse that covered the land like a shroud of death while Jesus gasped his last breaths of life. Darkness casts its gloomy shadow over anyone whose priorities differ from God's.

Where Is Your Heart? How often have you treated the earthly possessions in your life as treasures to be clutched? Oh, *how great is that darkness*, huh? We're forgetting God's command that we keep him #1 in our list of priorities. Let's be honest. We have money. And we love having money. We may not have as much as we'd like, but for most of us there's enough to take care of the mortgage

or rent, put food on the table, enjoy a vacation or two a year, and pay the cable and cell phone bill each month...and still have some left.

◆ Let's be honest again. We love God. And in an effort to practice his priorities we've tried to make him as important in our checkbook as those other expenses - but God isn't happy being co-chairman of your life! ***"No one can serve two masters ... You cannot serve both God and Money." Where Is Your Heart?***

A billboard for a certain hospital once pictured a smiling couple in their mid-fifties and it said, "At age 25 she stole his heart. At age 55 we fixed it." He had a problem with his heart that neither he nor she could fix. The message: sometimes you need somebody else's skill to fix your problem.

Jesus speaks these disturbing words to us today not to discourage us but to remind us that ◆ we have a heart problem. It's been darkened and divided, and we can't fix it ourselves. Our hearts that consume too many earthly possessions need to be fixed by more than just head knowledge that can recite God's top ten priorities for our lives or list seven new goals for a better me. We need somebody else's skill. And in God's love, he's given us Jesus, who ***"heals the brokenhearted"*** (Psalm 147:3). ◆

Jesus, the Chief Surgeon, ◆ has healed your heart. He's healed it by reaching into it and pulling out ◆ all the disease of sin and taking it to the cross with him. He then took all that sin of yours deep into the grave with him. And then he rose to life, leaving your sins buried forever. That's life-changing spiritual surgery!

But Jesus, the Chief Surgeon, knew that after removing all that damage he'd have to fill that hole in your heart with something if you were going to live. So he filled that hole ◆ with heavenly treasures: forgiven guilt, peaceful promises, strength to do God's will, skills to serve, and resources to support. He's filled your heart with treasures like faith, gentleness, humility, generosity, kindness, love, patience. And those heavenly treasures, unlike earthly possessions, are not corruptible, vulnerable, or exhaustible. Yes, Jesus truly ***heals the brokenhearted*** (Psalm 147:3)

But what else is amazing, is that in fixing your heart, Jesus has also fixed your eyes. ***"If your eyes are good,"*** Jesus says, ***"your whole body will be full of light."*** This means that you can now see the gifts he's given to you. You can recognize what is *truly* treasure. You can identify and prioritize opportunities to use your gifts for this heavenly treasure: digging in the Word, gathering for worship, sharing your gifts, carrying out ministry, praying for others and so much more. Because of the heavenly treasures Jesus has deposited in your heart, it changes your heart, your eyes, your whole life into a ***spiritual act of worship***.

◆ Remember the empty box in the gift exchange? It was a source of embarrassment for the gift giver (as you can imagine). In the haste of wrapping (was the explanation) a hand-crocheted angel ornament had been left at home. But do you know what? Guess which gift became the most popular to steal. Even though none but the giver of the gift knew what it really looked like, the loving care of a hand-made gift and the promise that the gift would be given, motivated hearts to seek, yes, even an empty box.

I know that as you look at the inventory of gifts the Lord has given you, it may sometimes seem like you've been given an empty box, but remember that he has given you an empty tomb. Then, listen closely to what the giver of your gifts promises and value those heavenly treasures so highly that you'd sell all your earthly possessions rather than part with just one of them: The man who found a treasure in a field so he went back and sold everything he had to buy that field. The merchant who came across a very valuable pearl on the market and sold everything he had to buy that pearl. The shepherd who left the ninety-nine sheep to search for the one. ***Where Is Your Heart? ...[right] where your treasure is. So "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"***. There you will find your treasure. There you will find your heart. There you will find opportunity to let all of God's gifts be used in your life of worship. **Amen.** ◆