

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

³⁵ “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. ³⁷ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. ³⁸ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. ³⁹ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” (Luke 12:32-40)

Your Father has Given You a Kingdom

What did you get from your parents? Most of us can point to something. Some parents help their kids make a down payment on a house. Some parents leave some treasured family heirloom to their kids. Some parents pay for college. Yet I think that most of us would agree there are gifts that are more precious than that. I was at a pastor’s anniversary once and his son wrote this letter about how much he treasured the fact that his father had taught him to understand God’s Word. It made me feel guilty in comparison as a pastor-father. Certainly, a lifetime of love and memories are precious gifts that most of us get from our parents. In fact sometimes, children would gladly trade whatever inheritance they’ve received for one more day with mom and dad. This morning, Jesus challenges us to think more deeply about the inheritance that our Father in heaven is giving us. It’s so much more than wealth or treasures here. But if you were going to try to compare it to a gift in this life, you’d have to come up with something greater than any of us will ever receive here. Jesus does that. He puts God’s gift in perspective of this life when he tells us: **Your Father has given you a kingdom.**

I.

A couple of weeks ago, Prince George, the great-grandson of Queen Elizabeth, celebrated his third birthday. There were cute pictures of him all over the internet. But then some British bureaucrat attacked him, using profanity, for being the face of “white privilege.” Of course, in all likelihood, Prince George’s father, Prince William, will truly give him a kingdom someday. But he still won’t be doing better than you and me. Jesus says, **Your father has given you a kingdom. It’s worth more than any treasure here.**

Jesus says it like this: **“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”** In the verses right before this, Jesus told us not to worry about what we will eat or drink or wear. Our Father knows we need those things. Instead, Jesus tells us to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all those things will be added. So, even when we’re in need, Jesus promises to take care of us in this life. But then he points us to something greater than all the hurts and sorrows and worries here. Our Father has given us a kingdom. That kingdom will be worth all that we suffer here. What is that kingdom? Eternal life. We will live and reign with Jesus. He has overcome all our sin and guilt and taken it away. And he has also overcome all the damage we do to our own lives, all our stupid selfishness and all its consequences here. He has conquered all our failures and all our disappointments. He has beaten the devil and all our enemies. He did that when he died and rose. And it’s just a matter of time until we get that kingdom.

So Jesus tells us, **“Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** Is he really telling us to get rid of all that we own? To sell everything and give it all to the poor? That is not exactly what he said – he did not say all. But he does tell us to make sacrifices to help people who have less than we do. He does mean for us to give more than just our leftovers. He does mean that giving to the poor and giving to the Lord should come off the top, before we even decide if we have enough money to go to Disney World or to buy a third car. Jesus is telling us that there is a greater treasure than the wealth and luxuries of this life.

He calls the kingdom “**a purse that doesn’t wear out**” and “**a treasure that will not be exhausted,**” a treasure no thief can steal and no moth can eat. In Jesus’ day, people didn’t have credit cards or even paper money. They carried coins in bags. If your bag had a hole in it, you might walk down the road dropping your wealth behind you. Every treasure we can get in this life can be lost. Our jobs could disappear. Our houses could become worthless. Our life’s savings could be stolen. But the kingdom our Father in heaven has given us cannot be lost or taken from us. And it’s worth so much more than what we have here today. Now that we have the kingdom of heaven, a kingdom like England would be nothing. To put even something as rich as that ahead of our faith and our eternal life would be like moving from a palace into a slum and thinking we’ve moved up.

Jesus calls us to put his kingdom first. If we do, then we are prepared to sacrifice what we have here for the good of the gospel. We are prepared to share what God gives us with those who are in need. Jesus said, “**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**” If the thing we treasure most is living with Jesus forever, then our hearts will show the love Jesus showed.

Is that where our hearts are, my friends? We all want to say yes. But are we generous with the Lord and with other people? Or are we careful never to make eye contact with someone begging on the street? Do we tell ourselves that it’s their own fault that they’re in that situation so that we feel better about doing nothing? Do we ask what we would have to give up before we share what we have? The truth is, my friends, there will always be a part of our sinful hearts that has its treasure here on earth. Where you treasure is, there your heart will be also. It’s just too easy for us sinners to make something other than Christ our treasure. That sin is the devil’s chief tool against us. That sin deserves God’s wrath forever.

But Jesus died and he paid even for what’s wrong with our hearts. He paid because it is so hard for us sinners to treasure eternal life. He paid for all the times that wealth or anything else from this life came first and we refused to make sacrifices for the poor or to spread the gospel. Jesus died and he paid for it all. Then he rose and announced that we are forgiven. He rose and announced that God has wiped away all record of our twisted priorities. He rose and sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts to give us faith, to comfort us when we feel guilty, and to grow our faith so that we truly can treasure the kingdom that is coming. You have that Spirit now, my friends. Treasure God’s kingdom – your eternal life – above everything that you have here and now.

II.

Last week, I got an email from Pastor Gibbons telling me about a sale on tickets for the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario. My wife and I were interested. But the email said that the sale started at midnight. So I was going to stay up and see what was available when the time came. Now, staying up until midnight is probably not quite as late for me as it is for some of you, because you have to be at work much earlier than I do and I bet my commute is shorter than it is for most of you. But I was so tired that night that I completely forgot about that sale and went to bed. Only the next day did I realize what had happened. **Your Father has given you a kingdom. It’s worth staying up and watching for.**

Jesus tells us to be dressed and ready for service, with our lamps burning like servants who are waiting for their master to come home from a wedding reception in the middle of the night. In those days, if the owner went to a wedding reception, the servants would lock the house up tight. When the owner came home, they would have to let him in. He really wouldn’t like it if he had stand outside in the dark at two or three in the morning pounding and yelling so that someone would come and open the door. Some servant would have the job of waiting up so that he could let the owner in as soon as he arrived.

Jesus tells us to be awake and watching, waiting for him to return. That’s when we’re finally going to receive the kingdom in all its fullness. The dead will be raised. The world will be renewed. We will live with Jesus in joy forever. But we don’t know when that’s going to happen. Many times, the Bible tells us Jesus is coming soon. But at the same time, there are verses like these that make it clear that from our perspective, it might not seem like he’s coming soon. To God, a thousand years are like a day, so even though two thousand years have passed since Jesus left, it does not seem to God like he’s being slow. But for us, a thousand years is ten times as long as we could hope to live.

So there’s a danger for us: that treasure in heaven can seem unreal and far away. We get up every morning and go to work. We come home and fix dinner and do laundry. We watch our kids grow up and graduate from college and get married. Yes, all the time we do believe that Jesus could come back today. But for two thousand years’ worth of todays, Jesus hasn’t shown up. It can start to feel like we’re staying up really,

really late for no reason. I imagine that in the ancient world, sometimes those servants were tempted to take little cat naps, just to refresh themselves. They were only going to sleep for a few minutes. And sometimes, they fell dead asleep and had to deal with an angry master waiting outside. We can start to drift off spiritually, because all our lives we've been waiting, and Jesus hasn't shown up yet.

But remember who we're waiting for. Jesus says that it will be good for the servants whose master finds them watching, even if it's almost dawn. He says that master will have the servants recline at the table and the master will serve them. Jesus is telling us something incredible about eternity. God made us to be his servants. In heaven and after the resurrection, we are going to serve him. The Bible says that many times. We are going to sing his praises forever. Yet, at the same time, the Bible tells us that God, the King, is going to serve us. He's going to provide all that we need. He's going to wipe away all the hurts and sorrows and even all the scars that go with living here. He's going to make us perfectly content, even filled with joy for all eternity. He's going to move us into his house as his dear children and care for us forever.

That's what we're waiting for. The danger that comes from falling asleep spiritually is letting our faith die. We need to be awake. We need to watch and pray. We need to be dressed and ready to serve with our lamps burning. What does all that mean? It means that we take our faith seriously. It means that we focus on the gospel every day. We come to church. We read our Bibles. We come to communion. We confess our sins and hear that we are forgiven. And through all that gospel, the Holy Spirit renews our faith. He dresses us to serve. Then renewed in his love, we do serve – we commit ourselves to that daily life of giving and sacrificing to God and to our neighbor. We do it not to win points with God. We do it because we have everything and more. And we're just waiting for Jesus to come back and give it all to us. We stay awake spiritually because we are truly excited about what is coming.

When my children were in grade school, they were really into the Harry Potter books. Toward the end of that craze, whenever a new book would come out, the bookstores would stay open until midnight when they could start selling those books. I took my daughter to one of those late night parties and we waited for hours for that chance to buy that book. There were lots of other people there. It was fun and exciting even though when midnight came, we had to stand in line even longer to buy the book. But we didn't go to sleep while we were there because we were waiting for something that we wanted. My friends, every day that we live on this earth, we are waiting for the kingdom of God. Every day, the devil tries to get us to drift off to sleep in hopes that our faith will die. But that kingdom is worth waiting for. It's worth staying up, even when it's spiritually late, even when your faith is challenged, even when it seems like you could focus on Jesus tomorrow. It's worth coming again today and hearing about him and renewing your zeal. It's worth it, because your Father has given you a kingdom. And you are going to be rich there forever. Amen.