**Imperishable Treasure**

Based on [Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt6.1-6)

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Ash Wednesday

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A man propositioned a woman asking her if she would lay with him if he gave her a million dollars. She agrees, immediately. Then he says, “How about for five dollars?”, and she replies, “What kind of a woman do you think I am?” He amswers, “We’ve already established that. Now we’re just haggling over the price."

What kind of a man or woman do you think you are? You have your integrity, your standards. You would never lie, would you? You would never steal. You would never take another person's life. You wouldn’t cheat. A pastor was once getting an earful from a member of the congregation for letting a man who had once been caught in adultery be an elder in the church. The pastor said, “**Yes it's true, and he repented he was forgiven by his wife and by God; besides it was long ago. Do you think he is a greater sinner than you are**?” The Parishioner said, “Well, I’ve never committed adultery.” The Pastor said, “You know, maybe you just haven’t found the right woman.”

What kind of a person are you? You would never lie; or cheat or steal or murder? Well, maybe you just haven’t found the right circumstance. **Because what the season of lent does is to remind you that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.** There is nothing in you that comes from you that is good. That’s what it means to confess that you are a sinner. Not that simply that you have done wrong, it’s that you are wrong by nature. You are dust. Your greatest good works are filthy rags, because by nature, your treasure is on earth, and that’s where your heart is. By nature you are an idolater, that means you fear, love and trust in something, anything more than God.

Jesus preaches that we ought to beware of practicing our righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them. Now at first you may be thinking, “**How can this be? Surely as Christians we are supposed to let other see our good works so that they praise God in heaven on account of them,** how will anybody ever see Jesus working through us if we practice our righteousness in secret, if we give alms in secret, if we pray in secret?”

Our lord is not concerned here with our actions. He is concerned with our heart. Our hearts are by nature sinful, and striving after perishable things. **And so for the person who is unaware of his own corrupt nature, who refuses to look into the mirror and repent will forever be striving to justify themselves.** People who practice their righteousness before others in order to be seen by them are in the business of hypocrisy. They think that they become righteous by doing righteous things; and that they are righteous if they can convince other people they are.

The season of lent is intended to remind us of the need for repentance. Repentance is the centre of the Christian life. With it, we have everything; without it we have nothing. Repentance is not simply saying you’re sorry when you've done wrong. Hypocrites can do that. Repentance is not simply resolving not to sin. Repentance is not getting ashes on your head and feeling all dour. Repentance is not an act or a feeling or an attitude. Repentance comes from a word that means to "know differently." Repentance is living in the knowledge that apart from God, you can do no good thing; and faith is living in the knowledge that through Christ God is with you to accomplish all good things.

There are really only two types of religion in the world, they are Christianity, and everything else. All religions strive for union with God and there are only two ways this can happen. Either we come to God, or God comes to us. Christianity is the only religion that teaches that God does it all because we can do nothing. He does everything to bring us to him. As Romans 3:26 says, "He is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith."

And this sets Christianity at odds with the world and it's religions. All other religions, all other teachings about how man can reach union and peace with God are self-justifying. They teach that there is something you have to do, something you have to figure out, something you have to feel before you can find God. But the problem is, of course, that truth about humanity, that we are sinful and can do nothing without God. And so all of our works apart from him cannot bring us closer to him. All our works apart from him, though they might earn an earthly treasure, are worthless to God.

This leads to mankind living under the law. **Because, it is thought by the world, that God is so far off and so distant and it's up to us to find him, to woo him back into our life, to please him with the things we do apart from him, we end up building up treasures on earth.** Like the builders of Babel we try and build our own hollow and hypocritical righteousness. We think that God is an angry God and we have to figure out the right way to please him, and if we don't do enough, he will stay angry and we are damned.

So it goes that people find their own ways to god, and that's what Jesus means by building up treasures on earth where moth and rust decay. Whatever you do or accomplish apart from God, is an amassing of earthly treasure, and as the old saying goes, you bring none of it with you when you die.

But there are treasures that you do take with you to heaven, where moth and rust do not decay. You did not earn them. They are freely given to you. You could not earn them, because you have nothing to offer god in exchange for heavenly treasure. He doesn't accept your earthly currency. You are by nature sinful and cannot please God, your works are dead works, your treasures earthly treasures, your ideas worldly wisdom and these things do not please him.

But there are treasures in heaven. There are treasures that are valid currency on the other side of the pearly gates. There are treasures that redeem you, buy you back into God's gracious presence. And you don't have to climb to heaven to get them; God delivered them to earth for you. Peter tells us what they are when he says, "**For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot**" (1 Peter 1:18-19). What are such heavenly treasures on earth? The holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death of Jesus Christ our Lord. Unlike your earthly treasures--your money, your pride, your empty prayers and ostentatious almsgiving--there are heavenly treasures that God accepts and values--the sacrifice of his Son on behalf of the whole world.

Psalm 51 says, "**For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart O God, you will not despise**."

Remember you are dust. Remember that you are sinful. Remember that you have nothing to offer God except what he offers you, and rejoice because the Lord Provides. You are in need of help, and rejoice, your help is in the name of the Lord. He gives you the heavenly treasure of Baptism, where you are given a new life in Christ clothed in his righteousness; He gives you his own life-giving body and blood which are given and shed for your forgiveness. He gives you his very Word that--though heaven and earth shall pass away--this word that is near you, on your lips and in your heart will not pass away. Receive it, believe it. Repent and rejoice. Where your treasure is the crucified Christ, there your broken and contrite heart will be also...united with God and under the shelter of his wings.