

**Do You Feel Wealthy?**  
**Psalm 63:3-7, Matthew 6:19-24**  
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If you had ten million dollars, would you feel wealthy? Let's increase it five-fold. If you called the bank to get your balance and the automated voice replied, "your balance as of November 15 is fifty million dollars," would you feel wealthy?

On December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Zsa Zsa Gabor felt wealthy. She had a minimum of ten million dollars socked away in high yielding investments. Ms. Gabor, however, was a pauper compared to power couple Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgwick. They had enough excess income to place fifty million dollars in the hands of an expert who promised to triple their investment.

Things changed on December 30, however. That was the day it became painfully clear that Bernie Madoff had committed fraud against Zsa Zsa, actors Bacon and Sedgwick and hundreds of others. Over night, the millions evaporated. Kevin and Kyra went to bed with a net worth exceeding fifty million; they awakened with an empty bank account. Zsa Zsa enjoyed her supper with the knowledge she had ten million reasons to feel safe and secure, by breakfast, it was all gone.

Monday, I was waiting at the intersection of Wells Parkway and Adelphi Road when I saw a person pull up to the light in a silver Nissan 370Z. I looked in the window and saw a young man and woman inside who looked happy. I believe they felt wealthy in their fine new automobile. Five seconds later, however, they entered the intersection a heartbeat too early as a large SUV entered a few seconds too late. Horns sounded, tires swerved and brakes squealed as the two vehicles narrowly missed one another. I thought, had they wrecked, the owners of the premier sports car would not have felt so wealthy.

Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

To us, the heart usually represents our sentiments, emotional attachments, and romantic feelings. If I give you my heart, it means I love you. In Jesus' day, however, the heart stood more for the center of life. Because the ancients understood that when the heart quit beating, life ended, they thought of the heart as the very essence of life.

With that understanding, we can more nearly capture the meaning of this teaching. Jesus taught that we anchor our hearts, the essence of our existence, in whatever we treasure. If that treasure is sound, we will feel safe and secure. If that treasure is bountiful, we will feel wealthy. On the other hand, if that treasure is rickety and creaky, we will feel insecure and off balance. Our sense of well being, our sense of true wealth, in other words, will be based upon the strength and dependability of whatever we treasure most.

I am continually amazed at how one person's treasure can be seen as almost worthless to someone else. Somewhere through the years as your pastor, I might have mentioned that I am a Yankee fan. Those of you who pay attention to sports are no doubt aware that the Yankees won this year's World Series. That was a big deal at our house. We watched and rooted for our team in every game and celebrated their mighty triumph.

The day after the world series victory, I was waiting to see my primary care physician when an man. who appeared to be at least eighty, hobbled into the office. He went up to the front desk and asked to see the doctor. The administrative assistant recognized the man and tried to explain to him that he couldn't just show up and see the doctor but needed to make an appointment.

One of the reasons I noticed the man was because he was wearing a Yankee baseball cap. As he and the administrative assistant argued over office policy, I could tell that English was not his only language. He had a pronounced accent that I would guess derived from Germany or possibly some Eastern European nation. Their conversation grew louder until the doctor came out of an examining room. When the gentleman in the Yankee cap saw the physician, he called to him with such persistence, the doctor stepped out into the office. In an attempt to calm the man a bit, the doctor said, "Well you must be celebrating your team's victory today." "What victory?" the man said. "Your baseball team won the World Series." "What baseball, I don't understand baseball," the patient insisted. "But you're wearing a Yankee cap" the doctor continued. "What Yankee, I don't know what this Yankee mean." At this point the Administrative Assistant intervened and said, "Mr. So and So, where did you get your cap?" "Rummage sale" he said.

I had to smile. Here this man was wearing an emblem that could make my heart race, it could literally bring me to my feet to cheer. But to him, the emblem had no value at all. He didn't understand it, it was just a cap he bought in a rummage sale.

Many in this world cannot possibly comprehend why a person would not treasure money and material possessions. They devote their lives to making it, storing it and investing it. The opportunity to collect more money is what gets them out of bed in the morning and keeps them up all hours of the night. They'd sacrifice almost anything to secure enough cash to make themselves feel wealthy.

Why are they so driven to accumulate as much money as possible? Because their heart is based upon that treasure and down deep they know how undependable money really is. They know their treasure can be stolen, devalued, consumed by inflation, taken by fraud or drained through a plummeting stock market. Therefore, they strive to amass more and more of it so they can convince themselves that their hearts, their very lives, are safe and recession-proof. They keep grasping for more and more because it takes more and more to make them feel wealthy.

Such folks are befuddled by people whose treasure is in something other than money. They can't understand how anyone could act as if their constant search for more financial resources was unimportant. The emblem of the dollar sign makes their heart race, they can't fathom how others could treat it apathetically.

Jesus did not teach that money was worthless, he simply said it was not the kind of treasure on which we should base our hearts. He said money was not a sturdy enough treasure for a heart because there are too many ways that treasure can be lost. Later in the passage, Jesus said, if we base our hearts on that kind of treasure, we develop an evil eye.

The New Revised Version of Matthew translates the Greek word as "unhealthy eye" but the literal meaning is evil eye. We have to go to the Old Testament to get a clear understanding of the word. And in this case, the King James Version of the Bible comes closer to the original meaning. We find the concept in Proverbs 23:6-7: "Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats: For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee." Then again in Proverbs 28:22 we find the term again: "He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him."

What is an evil eye? It is the eye of one who is constantly having to watch his friends and his fortune to make sure one doesn't steal the other from him. In the purest form of the word, it means one with a twitching eye, one who

has to keep watching left and right, front and back to make sure that nothing is happening to his treasure.

Jesus said when money is our treasure, our eye, the lamp of our body is constantly twitching from one item to another, one person to another, always on guard to keep our money in place, for our whole heart is based upon it, our only sense of wealth is tied to it. People whose treasure is money live with twitching eyes. They read down the columns of the stock market report and their eyes twitch. They sit glued to the evening reports as they scroll across the bottom of their t.v. screens and their eyes twitch.

It can get to any of us. This year, when you opened the statement of your retirement earnings and saw the direction of your investments, didn't your eyes twitch a bit? Last year when you drove by the gasoline pumps, didn't your eyes twitch a bit? When you hear news in your office that folks are going to be laid off, furloughed or given salary cuts, don't your eyes twitch a bit?

Some days it seems like everybody's eyes are twitching. My mother-in-law sent me two ads out of their local paper that indicate some unlikely places are feeling a little nervous. One ad is from Dignity Memorial Gardens in Tequesta, Florida. With great dignity, they are offering \$500 off a "Tandem Mausoleum for 2." The other ad was placed by Temple Beth David in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. "Join Temple Beth David now" it reads, "and get your first two years of membership for the price of one. Offer good only until October 15." When the cemetery and the synagogue start twitching, the economy is in trouble.

Jesus did not want us to go through life, nervous and jumpy and twitchy over every economic rise and fall and so he said, don't put your heart in financial treasure.

Instead, Christ said, put your heart in God. Treasure God. Trust God. Serve God. Love God. Base your life upon God and all the twitching will come to an end.

The 63<sup>rd</sup> Psalm tells us why. With complete assurance King David sings to God, "Your steadfast love is better than all of life, my lips will praise you. I will bless you as long as I live. . . my soul is satisfied with a rich feast and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help."

Did you hear that? David lay awake at night, not fretting over his financial condition, but praising God for the many ways the Lord had blessed him and helped him through life. In fact, this Psalm says God has been so trustworthy, David can't keep from singing of his goodness, shouting for joy about the treasure to which he has given his heart." Then David ends the Psalm with one of the great images in Scripture. He proclaims, "in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy."

My mother's husband has a favorite joke. It's not hilarious but it's cute and makes an important point. What did the flea say to the elephant after she rode his back across the suspension bridge . . .? "We really made that thing shake didn't we?"

The flea felt she had made the impression in life, when in fact it was the elephant that shook the bridge. Any time we believe that our treasure lies in something we accomplish or accumulate, we are thinking like the flea in the story. We don't shake the bridge and we can't amass the treasure on which our lives should be based. If we conclude that it is up to us to get the treasure that will make us feel wealthy, we'll end up with a twitching eye.

Instead, the Psalmist is telling us our true treasure is in the one who carries us through all of life. He says we live out entire lives in the shadow of God's wings. The image comes from the ways birds protect their young. They shelter them beneath their wings and, when necessary, pick them up and fly them to safety.

Our treasure consists in God's love for us. God stands by us, the Psalmist says, with such enormous love and power, we can see the shadow of his wings hanging over us at all times. Imagine this for a moment. We wake up in the morning and see the shadow of God's wings outside our window. We get in the car to go to work or school and see the shadow of God's wings towering over us. All day long, wherever we go, we are reassured to see the shadow of his wings. In fact, the shadow of his wings becomes such a constant presence, we can relax and play, knowing our treasure is secure.

When we understand that our small lives are supported and guided by the mammoth force of God's power and love, then we feel wealthy beyond words. Do you feel wealthy? It all depends upon where your treasure is. Let us place our hearts on the unchangeable wings of God's love and know that because our treasure is unshakable, our lives are secure.