

Do you know who Jim Elliot is? **(picture)** He is one of the missionaries who lost his life trying to reach a remote tribe of people in South America. He is famous as a modern Christian martyr. He once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose."



I'm going to speak today about preparing for heaven. I am speaking about something the only applies to Christians, but I think will be of interest to everyone. There is a danger when you hear a message like this to get the wrong idea about heaven.

You cannot buy your way into heaven. You cannot earn your way into heaven by doing good things. You are not automatically bound for heaven because you attend church, or are a generally nice person. Entry into heaven is something that only God can give you. He does it through Jesus Christ.

Though I'm going to talk about heaven and reward there, don't confuse this with earning God's favor or salvation. These He freely gives to whom he will. But this message about reward in heaven is for us who are Christian, who are already in God's family. If you are not a Christian I invite you to listen, perhaps you will become one.

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-21 **(scripture passage slide)**

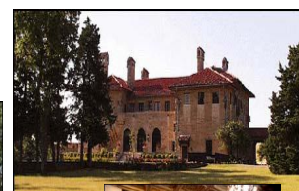
"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Jesus said a lot about money, even more than He said about heaven and hell. He knew that it is important to us. With it we can buy good things for ourselves and for those we love. With it we can help spread the glory of God. We can plant it like seeds and reap rewards. It is important. But it is important that we don't let it be more important to us than God himself. He will be second to none in your life. Not second to money, nor family, nor work or pleasure. Second to none. He demands first place.

"How do you put God in first place?" you may ask. I'm glad you asked. That is what I want to get at a little bit this morning.

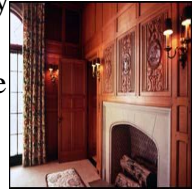
The first point is, don't lay up treasures for yourselves on earth. If you do, know that it won't last. Moths will eat it, rust will destroy it, or thieves will steal it, including the greatest thief - death. You can't take it with you. Have you ever seen a hearse being followed by a moving truck? John D. Rockefeller was one of the wealthiest men who ever lived. When he died someone asked his accountant, how much money he had left. His accountant said, "he left all of it." (Translator note: This is a play on words. When a person dies he/she leaves a will behind to give away his/her money and belongings. How much he left means, how much money did he have? But the accountant took another meaning as in how much did he leave behind and not take with him into death.)

I saw a mansion in Ponca City, Oklahoma that had



been built by a rich oil man named Marland. **(gate picture)** It took three years to construct, and contains 43,561 square feet distributed over four levels. That's about 60 times the size of an average 3 LDK here in Japan. **(outside mansion picture)** There are 55 rooms, including 10 bedrooms, 12 bathrooms, 7 fireplaces, and 3 kitchens. It takes 861 light bulbs to light the mansion. It has gold inlaid ceilings, marble floors, a grand ballroom for parties with a fireplace two meters wide and almost as high. **(ballroom picture)** It would cost over 2 million dollars today just for the ceiling and chandelier in the ballroom.

**(bedroom fireplace picture)** The bedrooms were nicer than any living room in any home I've lived in. They had their own fireplaces. **(bed picture)** They had mahogany rooms off of each bedroom that were used as closets. Those closets were as big as bedrooms in some places I've lived. There was a huge swimming pool behind the house with a horse stable beyond that. It looked like a palace from outside because as Marland was growing up he'd dreamed of living in a palace. It was beautiful. I toured it and thought, wow, I'd love to live in a place like this. Maybe I should try to get rich. But then I heard something that put it in perspective. Marland himself only lived there for 9 months. His business interests went bad and he had to leave... Today it is owned by the city and used to raise money by selling tours. Treasures on earth do not last long. Even if you manage to hang on to it throughout your life, you still leave it behind in the end.



The second point is do lay up treasure in heaven. Jesus isn't saying don't store up treasure. He's saying do store up treasure, in heaven! It will last there! Our first treasure is knowing Jesus. Our relationship with him, the creator of all that is. The lover of our soul. The one who gave it all up for us. Do you want to be loved unconditionally, eternally, and selflessly. It's Jesus! Our second treasure is admittance into heaven. It is the greatest place. Don't let comic book images of someone sitting bored on a cloud trying to play a harp fool you. That is nothing like the real thing. The Bible does tell us a lot about heaven too. No more tears, pain or sorrow. Joy! Feasting with God and others! Celebrating! Creating! Ruling! Living in mansions, and walking streets of gold.

And it's not wrong to look forward to it. In fact Jesus said that we should look forward to it. It helps us persevere when things get tough here. Let me ask you a question. Why did Jesus endure the cross? So that you and I could have eternal life, yes. But it tells us in **Hebrews 12:2 (slide of Hebrews 12:2-3)** that He did it for the joy set before him. There is a song that says, "I was on his mind when He was on the cross." That is a touching thought, but really, here it says that heaven was on his mind. He was enduring it because He knew what was coming next. In the following verse it tells us to consider this so we don't get weary and lose heart. It is good to look forward to heaven and the rewards there.

How do we lay up treasure in heaven? First, realize that God owns everything anyway, You're just taking care of it for him. When we were all poor seminary students, our neighbors wife worked for a lawyer. The lawyer loaned them his Jaguar car for a weekend. That was as big step up from the little old economy car they usually drove. They enjoyed driving it around, but you can be sure they took extra good care of it too. They knew it wasn't theirs. **(slides as quoted)**

- The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. **(Psalm 24:1)**
- **But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant**, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. **(Deuteronomy 8:18)**

- You are not your own; you were bought at a price. (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**)

It all belongs to God. You don't have worry about it. It is his. Just do with it as wisely as you can asking him for guidance.

Should we expect a reward from God for doing good? Isn't that kind of selfish? Bad motivation?

Growing up I was told that I shouldn't do good to receive a reward. I should do good, because it is the right thing to do. That is very true, but in my thinking I somehow morphed that into the idea that I shouldn't do good to receive a reward from God.

Also, we know that you can't do anything good enough to earn God's love or forgiveness. He gives it completely free and without strings. From these two concepts I thought it was sort of selfish, or self seeking to think about possible reward from God in heaven for good deeds done here. But like so many of these little assumptions that we absorb without thinking, when you look at what the Bible says it turns out to be not completely accurate.

(slides with these points written)

- You will be rewarded for the good that you do. **Ephesians 6:8**
- You will be rewarded for being faithful to Jesus, especially when others are against you. **Luke 6:22-23**
- You will be rewarded for giving to people in need. **Luke 14:13-14**
- You will be rewarded for loving and doing good to your enemies. **Luke 6:35**
- You will be rewarded for generous giving. **Matthew 19:21**
- You will be rewarded for even small acts of kindness. **Matthew 10:42**
- God is keeping a record, a book of remembrance which He will look at when He judges. **Malachi 3:16**

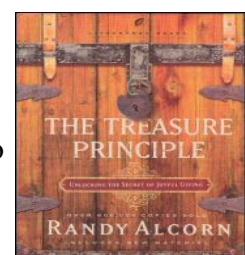
Can you imagine everything you do being written down in a book for God to see later? When you helped that child that was lost, it's there. When you loaned the money to the guy that needed to get home immediately, knowing you would probably not get it back, it's there. The money you put in the offering, it's there. The child in Uganda that you support so he can eat and go to school, it's there. The money you send to help that missionary translating the Bible for that remote tribe, it's there.

Can we really expect a reward for good deeds? Will it make a difference when we get to heaven? Is this real? Well, is it written clearly in the Bible? Yes. Do we base our belief about God and heaven on the Bible? Yes. Then this is real. Paul, a missionary, was writing to some supporters of his. (**slide Philippians 4:17-18**) "Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account." He describes the gift as a sacrifice to God, fragrant and pleasing to him.

This is Biblical. If it were wrong to be motivated to give for the reward we will get, Jesus wouldn't have presented it that way, would he? The reward is his idea, not ours.

The third and final point today is that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In his little book, "The Treasure Principle", Randy Alcorn wrote about talking with a woman named LaVerne. LaVerne was dying from cancer. Alcorn writes, "she was crying - not because she was going to die, but because I asked her to talk about giving. Through tears she said, 'Giving melts me. It blows me away to know that God's chosen me to give. It won't be long before I see Him face-to-face. I just want to hear Him say, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant.'"



Suddenly, LaVerne laughed. 'I mean, what else matters?' she said. 'Why should I care about anything else?'"

Later Alcorn wrote, "He who lays up treasures on earth spends his life backing away from his treasures. To him, death is loss. He who lays up treasures in heaven looks forward to eternity; he's moving daily toward his treasures. To him, death is gain."

Why did I preach this message today?

Is it to get you to work harder in order to get God to love you more? Absolutely not. You couldn't, even if you tried. He already loves you so much.

Is it to get you to give more money to this church? No, though that's not a bad thing.

Is it to get you to give more money to missionaries so that more people hear about Jesus? No, though that also is a good thing.

I preached this message today for you, so that you could benefit. I didn't want you to miss out on the joy of giving here and now, and especially the reward in heaven. When you get to the end of your life, what will you have to show for it? What do you want to have to show for it? Randy Alcorn said it well, "You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead."

We're all getting closer day by day to when we meet the Lord. Are you looking forward to it? I hope you are. If you aren't, don't you want to be able to look forward to it? **(picture of dot and arrow)** Imagine this life is the dot, and eternity is the arrow extending out from it. The dot is a set time, maybe 70 years, give or take. The line is eternity. When we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we will have only just begun. This life is just the a dot compared to eternity. But what you do in this little time here, will carry over forever and ever.



Let's pray.