

How to Strike it “Rich”
“Reaching Up—Reaching Out”
Matthew 6:19-24

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An elderly man was critically ill when he asked to see his doctor, his minister, and his closest business associate. As the three of them gathered around the man’s bed, he said to them, “I know they say you can’t take it with you, but who knows for sure? So, I’m giving each of you an envelope with a \$100,000 in cash, in case I need a little spending money on the other side.” A few days later the old man died. On the day of the funeral, the doctor, the minister and the business man all slipped an envelope in the deceased man’s pocket. A few days later the three got together for coffee to reminisce about their friend. The doctor said, “I’ve got a confession to make. I treat so many people without health insurance that I took \$20,000 from that envelope before I put it in the casket.” The minister, with a guilty look, said, “You know, we’re trying to open this homeless shelter and I took \$50,000 from my envelope before I put it in the casket.” The business man, with a grin on his face, spoke up and said, “I can’t believe you fellows would do a thing like that. I took the whole \$100,000 and wrote the old man a personal check.”

When Jesus gave us the Sermon on the Mount, he left us little wiggle room concerning the ethics of the Kingdom. We live in the light or darkness. We store up for ourselves treasures on earth or heaven and we choose to serve God or money. At the heart of this teaching is one of the most quoted and misunderstood scriptures in the New Testament. *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* That’s what I’d like us to think about today.

HOW IS YOUR HEART?

Is it warm or cold, tough or tender, touchable or troubled?

The Bible is as concerned about the condition of your heart—the seat of your emotions, the center of your being— as your cardiologist is concerned about the heart muscle in your body. So the Bible says:

1. *“Love God with all your heart.”*
2. *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart.”*
3. *“Set your heart on things above.”*

Prayer is one exercise that will keep our hearts in tune. Prayer for me is not about a Christmas list of requests or a grocery list of complaints. Prayer is a way of seeing, a communion of understanding, a vital connection with the Divine. It is a way to be enlightened and to walk in the light. If your spiritual eyes are good, the whole body will be full of light.

A little over three years ago, I began pondering ways for this congregation to deepen its prayer life. Little did I know then God would use my illness to bring us all to our knees. To God be the glory for the prayers of this congregation, especially the prayers of youth and children. You are God’s instruments of healing grace. All I can say to you today is, “Keep praying.”

Presence is another way to keep our hearts in tune. Presence is not so much an exercise of doing as the practice of being. Being present with another is perhaps the finest gift we have to offer. According to George Barna, forty percent of Americans say their favorite weekly activity is attending church. Worship attendance in this congregation has increased fifty-two percent over the last five years. More people attend worship on an average weekend than all the sporting events combined.

More important than numbers is this e-mail I received from a young man who attends the Loop every Monday night. It went in part something like this: "I came to Nashville two years ago knowing only one person in this city. It was easy for me to party at bars to meet people, but being a Christian since I was nine, I knew there had to be a better way to make new friends. Riding home from work one day on I-65, I was praying for the Lord to lead me to some Christian friends. Not ten minutes later a commercial for the Loop came on the radio. The following Monday I showed up at BUMC only to find some of the best people in the world. Thank you BUMC for what you are doing for so many young adults just like me."

Would you give God and others some quality time for worship?

WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE?

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." For years I've read this text wrong. I've preached whole sermons about getting your heart right so your treasure will follow. That's not what it says. Jesus said the opposite. *"If we get our treasure right, our hearts will follow."* Find someone's treasure and you will have located their hearts. So, *"Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal"* (Verse 20).

John Wesley, in a sermon on this text suggests some things Jesus does not say: Jesus did not say treasures are evil; it is not a sin to make money. Go out and "earn all you can." Jesus did not say everyone should take the vow of poverty. When He told the rich young ruler to sell all that he had and give it to the poor, He was talking to the rich young ruler, not offering a general rule. Jesus did not say for you to neglect your family, close your savings account or cash in all your stocks. If you are in some kind of financial crisis we will do our best to help you; just tell us you cannot make a commitment.

Jesus did say that possessions won't guarantee HEALTH. Isn't that the greatest struggle of the affluent with illness? What do you mean we cannot buy our way back to health? Somebody needs to fix it. Get some medicine. Say some prayers. Hurry up and get things back to normal.

Possessions won't guarantee HAPPINESS. How is it George Strait puts it when a man's wife leaves him?

I've got a furnished house, a diamond ring
And a lonely heart full of love

And I can't even give it away!

Possessions won't guarantee HOPE. Jesus said, "*What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?*" (Mark 8:36). Make a financial declaration today. We need the discipline more than the church needs the money. The church needs to know, so we can plan wisely.

Maybe the finest treasure we hold is not only our funds, but our time, our talent, our spiritual gifts that can be used in service to others. William Booth was a Methodist minister who left the church and founded the Salvation Army out of his passion for the poor of London. One day a reporter asked General Booth the "secret to his success." This soldier of the Lord replied, "There are people more intelligent than I. Many people have more money and greater opportunity than I, but from the day I got the poor of London on my heart and caught a vision of what Jesus Christ would do for them, I made up my mind that God should have all of William Booth there was."

Thirty-six years ago this past June, I was ordained an elder in the United Methodist Church. The presiding bishop was Roy H. Short. Bishop Short had a unique style of preaching. He knew how to tell stories before story-telling was an art. He seamed his sermons together with gospel songs and jingles that he collected or made up. He said something in a sermon all those years also, I have never been able to get off my mind. He put it in a little jingle that goes like this: "Some want to live beside a church and hear the sound of bells. I want to build a rescue shop within a yard of hell." I'm deeply concerned today about those left behind, not only those who might be left behind at the rapture, but those who are left behind day-after-day by the most affluent nation of the world.

Now that we know the government can't solve our social problems, and even the best of humanitarian efforts tend to burn out and crumble, I want to join the growing band of believers in this country who are taking a message of hope to the "hell holes" of our cities. I want to say to the drug lords and prostitution pimps, "You can't have our children." I want to say to single mothers struggling to survive, "You are not alone." I want to say to teenagers and hope-deprived adults, "There are tons of things I don't understand, but of this I am certain, Jesus loves you, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

When it has all been said and done, I think there are a lot of things that won't matter. I don't think the Lord is going to ask, "How big is your church? How much money did you make?" I think the only questions will be "Do I love God? Did I serve His children?"

I don't know about you, but I'm running out of time. Whatever God wants me to do, I need to do it now. Will you join me in making a commitment of your prayers, your presence, your gifts and your service?

Amen.