

Treasure in the Old Testament

[New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Today is the first in a series of talks about treasure. This first talk is in respect of treasure found in the Old Testament. Treasure conjures up many different things in our minds; piles of gold and silver when a pirate opens the big padlock on the wooden chest that he has found is the first thing that always comes to my mind. How many of us as children would play with a map that was to show us where to find the treasure chest hidden in the back garden or on the beach. I never ever found it, did you? Yet how many of us still spend our adult lives looking for treasure? The idea of what that treasure is may be slightly different and the map to find it may vary but the thought behind it is still the same; if only I can find this “treasure”, my life would be complete. Very often, not only do we not know what the treasure is we are looking for but also we have no idea what we will do with it once we find it. I recently heard something that I thought summed things up; we spend money we don't have, to buy things we don't need to impress people we don't know!

Treasure is talked about a lot in Scripture but I want to look at it in three different ways today. All three have the same thing in common. That is, just like a child trying to follow the treasure map in the garden, it is not found easily and often we have to dig for it. I want to think firstly about some mentions of treasure and the importance people placed on it in the Old Testament. Secondly, I want to think about what God views as treasure. Then finally we will dig up some “treasure” by way of types in the Old Testament that point us to fundamental Christian principles, values and truths that we should all value as “treasure.”

Here's a verse from the New Testament to get us started. The Lord Jesus, during the wonderful discourse commonly referred to as “the Sermon on the mount”, reminds us in Matthew chapter 6 verse 21:

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Having spent my career in financial services, I know that for many people if our “treasure” is up in value they feel good and positive but if it is down then they feel down as well. I trust we will be challenged by the Lord today to know which type of treasure to be occupied with so that our hearts are encouraged, edified and blessed day after day, irrespective of the ups and downs of world stock markets.

The Chambers dictionary gives the meaning of the noun “treasure” as “wealth stored up: riches: anything much valued.” The verb is described as “to hoard up: to collect for future use.” I am sure it is easy to see how both these descriptions can be applied to the things of God that we are occupied with today. So, what do we see as treasure or what do we think is worth storing up? A very early mention of the word “treasure” in our Bible is found in Deuteronomy chapter 28. As Moses is laying out in great detail the way the Lord will bless His chosen people, Israel, if they obey Him and His statutes, he uses the term “good treasure” in verse 12 in respect of the rain that falls in order to bless their labours on the land. Do we recognise and thank God every day for the very basics of life? Moses describes them here as coming from the LORD opening His good treasure upon us.

I now would like to talk about the impact that actual treasure had upon the people of God, both good and bad. Firstly, in a positive sense there are many examples of where the people of God used their earthly riches for the things of God. If we go right back to the instructions given by God to Moses, regarding the building of the tabernacle, we can see how God expected that the treasures that His people had should be given up in order to build the place where He would meet with them while in the wilderness. The tabernacle was a mobile pre-cursor to the temple that would be built in the days of King Solomon. In Exodus chapter 25, we get some of the detail of what God commanded Moses to ask from the people. In chapter 31 we get the instruction as to the skilled craftsmen who were to fashion those “treasures” into the various things required for the tabernacle. Only the very best was suitable for that place where God would meet with them. Today, God meets with His people on the basis of the finished work of Christ and it is not required for grandeur and riches to be on display. We are told very clearly in Acts chapters 7 and 17 that God does not dwell in temples made by hands. Our worship is now spiritual but God still requires our very best, indeed all that we have. The temple is spoken about in great deal in the Gospels but when Jesus died, the huge, thick curtain that stood in the way, where God showed Himself to the High Priest, was torn in two from the top to the bottom. This was a sign that God’s dealings with mankind had now changed and He came out symbolically to us and allowed us to go in to Him. Surely something we should “treasure” in our hearts!

It was not long before the people of Israel used their treasure in another way. In Exodus chapter 32 we read that the people, in their impatience at waiting for Moses to come down from Mount Sinai after his meeting with God, asked his brother, Aaron, to make them “other” gods. So Aaron asked them to give up their gold earrings and melted them down to make a golden calf. They turned this into something to be worshipped and even said it was this image that had brought them out of Egypt. I always find this staggering that in such a small space of time they had gone from witnessing the delivering power of the living God into worshipping an inanimate idol. Yet, perhaps I should challenge myself as to whether I can forget the Lord for my salvation, daily sustenance, protection and eternal destiny and rely on my own resources or strength. After all, they were just using what they had and what Aaron, the High Priest, had allowed them to do! God accepted their repentance but there was a huge cost to them and all that gold used for the calf that could have been used in God’s service was destroyed.

I would now like to move forward in history by quite some time to the days of King David. He is described as a man after God’s heart but he made some terrible mistakes in his life. He did, however, have a huge desire for a permanent place of worship to be built, a temple not just a mobile tabernacle. Under the guidance of God, he made the plans and arranged the finance but he was not allowed to finish the project. His son and heir, King Solomon, had the marvellous privilege of bringing the magnificent temple at Jerusalem to fruition. King Solomon was known for great wealth and wisdom but he too had his face turned from the true things of God. Things really went wrong among God’s earthly people when King Solomon died and his son, Rehoboam, took over. There was then a great dissent among the people of Israel and it ended up with the kingdom being split. King Rehoboam continued as king over the tribes in the south and they were known as Judah while Jeroboam was made king over the tribes in the north and they retained the name Israel. This had a huge impact on the “treasures” of God for many years later and I would like to make some points about this.

The dissension that happened had the impact of weakening the people of God. We then read in 1 Kings chapter 14 that King Rehoboam allowed his kingdom to fall into gross sin and idolatry and they fell back into the things that God had previously removed from them. Then, after reigning for 5 years, the King of Egypt came up to Jerusalem and took away all the treasures that had been in the House of the LORD and the King’s house. I wonder if the King of Egypt would have been able to prevail against a combined people of Israel? Had their division caused the house of God to be desecrated? Had they not fallen into sin and idolatry would they have been more eager to protect the things that rightly belonged to God? Many things are done in the name of Christianity and

many things are taken away from the true things of God and I wonder if these things are happening because we are so divided and have lost sight of what God wants us to stand up against.

Then in the very next chapter of 1 Kings we read of King Asa, who is Rehoboam's grandson. We are told that Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and he sought to clean up the mistakes and sins that his father and grandfather had allowed. He did a good job in general, even when it meant making difficult decisions that affected his own family as we can see in verses 11 to 15 of chapter 15. Again, treasure comes into play and Asa brought into the house of God things that had been dedicated to God. Yet, in the next few verses he uses these very "treasures" in order to make a deal with the King of Syria to protect Judah from the advancing army. So even all these years later, the division of Rehoboam and Jeroboam was having a negative impact on the things of God. Let us make sure that we are always very aware that the things we do and say, especially in our relationships with each other, can have far reaching and long lasting impact.

The final point I would like to draw your attention to in regards to the treasures of God's house we can see in 2 Kings chapter 24. Another king had come to power in Jerusalem, his name was Jehoiachin. He was only 18 years old when he came to power and our chapter tells us he did evil in the sight of the LORD. How sad when the errors of a young person can have such a profound affect on the people of God! Then Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, overthrows Jerusalem and carries the people away captive into Babylon. What struck me though was that again the treasures of the house of the LORD and the King's house are taken, and worse than this, we are told in verse 13 that Nebuchadnezzar destroys the sacred pieces that Solomon had made. Some of these articles are then brought to the party that Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar, was throwing in Daniel chapter 5. They are used to drink wine from as they praised the false gods of gold, silver, iron, bronze, wood and stone. This reminds me that we should never expect the world outside of Christ to have the same regard and respect for the things of God that we do. The things we hold as precious and that we treasure are often considered worthless in the world but we should never let this lessen our appreciation of them. Again the Lord's words in the sermon on the mount come to my mind here. In Matthew chapter 7 verse 6 we read:

"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."

The party in Daniel chapter 5 comes to an abrupt end when the fingers of a man's hand appear and write on the wall, warning the king about his impending overthrow. He had been weighed in the balances by God and had been found wanting and yet only minutes before he had seen fit to bring the sacred treasures that had been stolen from God's House and desecrate them. They not only drank wine from these vessels but at the same time praised the gods made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone. The king was so afraid that his knees knocked together but then Daniel, the man of God, is brought into the situation and he is able to explain the sad judgements that the writing displayed. It is important to note that Daniel is not present at the party when the "treasures" of God's house are being treated with such contempt, and neither should we.

When the king's false gods come up short, Daniel is able and willing to come and share God's word on the situation. How many unbelievers would treat with contempt the spiritual "treasures" of God while life is good but look for help when things go wrong. We should always as Christians be prepared, able and willing to come close to help and be used as God's servants.

I now would like to talk about our second point, what does God see as treasure in the Old Testament? I would like to take you to Exodus chapter 19. We see here that God looks on His people as not just a treasure but a special treasure. The Authorised King James version translates this word 'special' as 'peculiar' and I think this brings a different angle to it. This term is perhaps today taken to mean something that is odd but the sense here is more in line with the very first

explanation of this word in my dictionary which is “of one’s own; belonging exclusively; privately owned.” What a wonderful term to be used about people, especially by the God of creation who, as Psalm 50 reminds us, owns every beast of the forest and the cattle on a thousand hills. This naming of ‘peculiar’ is specifically addressed to the house of Jacob and the children of Israel. This is, of course, one group of people but just referred to by 2 names. In Genesis chapter 32 we are told the story how that Jacob as an old man after a very colourful life wrestles with God until he is broken down and is then renamed by God as Israel. The name Jacob literally means “he clutches” as he was born holding the heel of his twin Esau but this has been nuanced as “clutches in order to get ahead” and referred to as meaning “supplanter.” If anyone ever lives up to his name it was Jacob! Now as an old man after all his scheming is past, God renames him Israel which means “prince before God.”

God had promised to Abraham that his seed would be blessed and all those descended from Abraham through Isaac and then through Jacob and all the children that would follow after his name was changed to Israel had a special place in God’s heart. In Exodus chapter 19, God reminds them through Moses how He had brought them out of Egypt, destroyed the Egyptian armies and borne them up on eagles’ wings. It is worth noting that the blessing of God upon them was never to be conditional upon them doing something; it was all about God’s grace. In verse 5 of Exodus chapter 19, He tells them to obey His voice and keep His covenant. His voice and His covenant referred to here were not the things that Moses was about to hear as he went up Mount Sinai. Jehovah’s voice had not been heard as a severe lawgiver before but as the voice that brought them out of captivity, provided refuge from the Egyptian armies as the Red Sea was parted and gave them manna from heaven to eat each morning. Then Jehovah’s covenant with Abraham was not on the basis of do this or not do that. When Moses told them this they all responded, in verse 9, that they would do it. There was no sense of trying or their own humility, they will do it! They had missed the point of God’s unconditional grace. So from that moment Jehovah appears to Moses in a thick cloud and the ten commandments are soon given just to show them how far short they actually were in their own “doings.”

This then brings in the first aspect of the third part of my talk today, the treasure that is spiritual but hidden in the Old Testament which is unfolded in New Testament Christian teaching. The children of Israel were a special treasure to God because of God’s grace, not their own works, and in Romans chapter 4 the apostle explains that this is indeed a type, or figure, of the Christian church. We are now brought into the blessing and favour of God not because of our own righteousness but by God’s grace. Just like in Exodus chapter 19, we should not try to equate God’s favour with our own righteousness; none of us would ever meet the grade! In 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 9, this same thought of a people set aside and special to God is used to describe the Christian church. The children of Israel rejected their promised Messiah and, for the time being, the favour, blessing and focus of God is now on His church who are redeemed by the blood of Christ.

This then brings me to the second “treasure” hidden in the Old Testament, that is substitution. As Abraham told his son Isaac in Genesis chapter 22,

“God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering”

and as we see the passover lamb in Exodus chapter 12, we can see a figure of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ at Calvary as that which met every claim of a holy and righteous God against sin. This is what we know as substitution, the just for the unjust. He took my place and therefore my own efforts, irrespective of how poor or great they may be, must surely shrink away in the shadow of Calvary’s cross.

In Micah chapter 5 verse 2 we get another hidden treasure, that of the incarnation. The prophet foretells that Bethlehem would be the place where the Messiah would be born and he uses those wonderful words,

“whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”

Finally, I would like to mention one more story in respect of Jacob. In Genesis chapters 31 to 33 we see how he wants to be reconciled to his brother Esau but believes that his brother will be angry and needs to be placated with gifts before they can move forward. He was very wrong and Esau was not as ill-disposed to him as he perhaps was justified to be. Many people think the same about their approach to God. Perhaps you have heard people say, “I am too bad for God”, or “what can I do to pay for the wrong things I have done.” They are thinking the same as Jacob in respect of his brother, but the great news is that God loves us just as we are and is not ill-disposed to us but wants to bless us and this is our final hidden treasure, “propitiation.” The apostle John in his first epistle chapter 4 and verse 10 describes it very clearly like this,

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

I trust these considerations today will give us “treasures” worth pursuing because they certainly will not corrupt or fade away but will have an eternal relevance.

Thank you for listening to talk number 1201 Treasure in the Old Testament and I trust the message will be a real encouragement and a challenge to us all.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.

