

God is our Greatest Treasure

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Today, we are beginning a 5 week series on our heart statements. It's been a long time (too long) since we've taken the time as a church family to remind ourselves of what we are doing here together. What matters most; what's most important about our life together. I want to do this now for several reasons. First of all, for those of you who are newer to FBC, I want to help you get a clearer sense of who we are as a church family. Maybe you're new and you're like, "Hey, I love what I've been hearing; I'm thankful for the family atmosphere and the opportunities for children" or whatever God has used in your life. I'm thankful to God for that. I'm hoping that formally introducing you to our heart statements will help you be more connected with the community and mission of FBC. I want to give you a foundation of understanding all the things you are currently being blessed by.

But this isn't just for the new people among us. All of us who've been around for awhile need this, too. It's so easy to forget what's most important about our communal life together. Remembering clearly who we are in relation to God, who we are in relation to each other and our community keeps us focused on what matters most. And this is especially important as we think about our Reaching Beyond campaign. As many of you know, the wheels are in motion to start constructing a new ministry facility. This has been and is a massive project. There's an enormous amount of money pledged and given for this project (thank you, again, for your commitment to see the name of Jesus proclaimed to more people here in the Taylor County area). The construction of this building, which we hope will begin sometime next year (we are working right now on setting up some church meetings so you are informed with the latest information). This is important work. But you know, it's possible to proceed in this important work and forget why we're doing it in the first place. Or, it's quite possible to put the cart in front of the horse and start thinking and acting like building a building is our top priority when ministry should always be our top priority. Revisiting the heart statements and how they make an impact in our daily lives individually and our lives together as a church family, I pray, will keep us grounded. So, consider this sermon series a helpful reminder to us of who we are, what we're supposed to be about in the midst of some exciting changes happening here among us.

If you've visited different churches in the last 10 to 20 years, or maybe have belonged to different churches I'm guessing you've seen or heard various mission statements or vision statements. We see this in schools and businesses, too. The point, of course, of a mission statement is to give a community or organization some direction. But back in 2005 and 2006 when we put these heart statements together, we were convinced that any kind of mission we adopted needed to come from somewhere. Everything we do always has a source, an origin. In fact, the most important thing isn't really the mission, but it's the place where the mission is born and the place that keeps pursuing that mission. The Bible often talks about this source, this place of origin as our heart. Jesus really makes this clear in Matthew 15 so let's turn there together. Here's what's happening. Jesus is teaching his disciples after a dispute with the

Pharisees. The Pharisees, these religious leaders, were bothered that Jesus' disciples weren't following certain purification laws when they sat down for dinner; to fail at purifying yourself before supper makes you unclean, they said. But Jesus corrects this misunderstanding for his disciples. He says we're not dirty because we have dirty hands or clean because we have clean hands. Look what he says in vs. 19-20 (READ).

This one of the most important things you need to learn from the word of God: we all do what we do because of what's going on inside of our heart. You can fake it for a while, but not for long. Our actions, our words, our thoughts come from inside of us; the Bible calls that our heart. The good that we do is because God has changed our heart to be a certain way; when we do what's wrong or evil, it's because that's what our heart is like. Obviously, then, to have good, helpful, loving actions we need our hearts to be changed by God to be an spring of help, love and sacrifice. Every time I've preached on our heart statements, this being the third time, I've quoted this paragraph by Dallas Willard from his book *Renovation of the Heart* (pg. 39).

We must clearly understand that there is a rigorous consistency in the human self and its actions. This is one of the things we are most inclined to deceive ourselves about. If I do evil, I am the kind of person who does evil; if I do good, I am the kind of person who does good. Actions are not impositions on who we are, but are expressions of who we are. They come out of our heart and the inner realities it supervises and interacts with.

This is why we have heart statements instead of mission or vision statements: we want God to change our hearts to be a certain kind of people. We don't want to just be people who tell others about Jesus and sacrifice for others and pray a lot and do works of service for each other. Because in reality, we can't just do those things; we first need to be this kind of people. We want to experience a change of a heart so our love for God and others explodes in worship to God and acts of service to our neighbor. We want a change of heart where we know and believe how inadequate we are and how good and powerful our God is that we can't help but pray and ask God to do amazing work in our midst. We don't just want have a mission, we want to be a changed people who want to do the mission. And if that's the case, we need a change of heart that believes in and is conformed around these statements.

- God is our greatest treasure
- Loving people is our greatest expression of our love for God
- Prayer is our greatest work
- Living and speaking the message of Jesus is our greatest service
- Dwelling together according to the kingdom of God is our greatest aspiration

These are our heart statements. These are the things that, we pray, God would change our hearts to believe and obey. We are going to dig into each one of these for the next 5 weeks and it all starts with seeing that God is our greatest treasure.

There are two very important aspects to embracing God as our greatest treasure. The first thing that needs to happen is that we have to see and acknowledge that God is truly great.

He truly is amazing and awesome. That when you stack up God against all that is beautiful, powerful, splendid, super (throw in your favorite adjectives) that he shines the brightest.

The people of Israel got a vision of that when they left Egypt by the mighty and powerful hand of the Lord. Egypt, the people of Egypt, and the gods of Egypt stood tall as mightiest and the grandest. And even though the (so called) gods of the Egyptians stood against the people of God, they loved them. That's what's so sinister and sad about our sinfulness; we love our sin even though it rules over us with a ruthless, iron fist.

But God remembered his promise to his people and came down to rescue them. We don't have time to recount the story, but God delivered his people in a glorious and mighty way. He crushed the gods of the Egyptians through the plagues. He destroyed the army of Egypt in the Red Sea. God proved he is the greatest. What must have it been like to see it? What would you do if you were the one saved and rescued? I can tell you what the people of Israel; they sang a song. They were filled with so much joy a victory song came out of their mouth. And here's one of my favorite stanzas of that song (Ex. 15:11), "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"

Do you hear the recognition of the superiority of our God? They are really not asking the question, "Who is like our God?" They are saying, "There is no one like our God! None!" Friends, that's the first step of you and I making God our treasure; it's seeing and recognizing the superiority of God over everything. Stack him up, friends, with everything you have and everything you love. Compare him to everything we are told we need. And he stands out as the greatest.

But that's not only thing we need to see, know and believe. There's something else. We have to believe that God is also desirable to have in one's life. Because something can be great and destructive, great and terrifying. The Zika virus is great, but I don't want to have it in my community. The king of the jungle, the African Lion, is great and majestic, but if one crosses my path, I'm going to head for the hills. Remember those old Godzilla movies? Godzilla was great and powerful, too. But everyone ran away from him in fear.

Thankfully, Jesus came to give us a picture of a great and awesome God that is desirable and good. There are all kinds of images in the Bible the show us that God is good. He's a good father who knows how to give good gifts to his children. He is the bright morning star that lights up the darkness of our lives. He's the protective hen who watches out for her flock. And most of all, he's the gracious God who forgives sinners like you and me by sending Jesus to die on the cross so we can have a relationship of peace with him. God is good; he is desirable. Romans 8 tells us that God is so good to us in Christ that he will graciously give us everything that is good for us. Ps. 42:1-2 says, "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" He's great, and I want him. I want you to want him. He's our greatest treasure.

So, what does this mean, though, practically? How do we translate this biblical truth into a daily reality? Or to say it another way: how will you and I live differently if God truly is our greatest treasure? To answer that question, turn with me to Matthew 13 (READ vs. 44).

I'm guessing most of you are familiar with the game show *Let's Make a Deal!* (PIC) It started in the 60s and was a fixture on TV for about 25 years. It's reemerged in 2009 with the new updated show. The whole premise of the show is deal making. Do you want envelope #1 or envelope #2. In one of these envelopes is an awesome prize (car, trip, cash). But in the other envelope is a *zonk!* Have you ever felt bad for contestants who pick the *zonk!*? I do, to be honest with you. Do you know why? Because they get nothing. They don't get a parting gift; they don't get half the prize. They just get nothing. So, what's it going to be? Envelope #1 or envelope #2.

There's a little *Let's Make a Deal* going on in Matthew 13. As Jesus teaches, a man has found a treasure in a field. It must be a pretty amazing treasure. It must be a treasure worth more than the accumulation of all that this man has? Why do I say that? Because look what that man does. He goes and sells all of his possessions. He has a yard sale; he has an estate sale. Why? Because possessing the treasure is worth giving it all up.

The kingdom of heaven is like that. What does that mean, the kingdom of heaven? That kingdom of heaven is the summation or accumulation of the treasures of God. And the scriptures locate these divine and heavenly treasures in the presence and being of God himself. His kingdom is a representation of him. He's the treasure. And this parable from Jesus is a trumpet call for all of us to see the treasure that God is and do whatever is necessary to take possession of him. And unlike *Let's Make a Deal* when you don't know what's in envelope #1 or #2, you don't have to guess what is more valuable; it's there for all of us to see. The question is, do we believe it? Do we believe the treasure of knowing God is worth giving it all up? Do we believe Psalm 63:3, "The steadfast love of the Lord is better than life." If it is, then you'll give it up, right?

In all 5 of our heart statements, we have stated implications. So, it's not just that we state our heart statements. We also express what it means to believe them. Let me share with you how this heart statement reads. Since God is our greatest treasure, we will value things of the earth only in relation to Him and make God our most precious prize. This means that we hold onto things of the world loosely, that we use things of this earth knowing they are God's, and we move past anything that keeps us from God.

Allow me to highlight some important words and phrases from this statement. First, we *value things of the earth only in relation to him*. Your treasure is lens by which you look at the rest of life. If your family is your treasure, you're always analyzing and wondering how the rest of your life (vacation time, money, holidays) fits and relates to your family. If hunting is your treasure, what you wear, what you buy, when you take vacations is all determined by the big

hunt (or should I say *hunts*.) It's the same with God. It's like our treasure is the star that our life revolves around. When God is our treasure, everything we value on earth orbits around him.

Secondly, *we hold onto the things of the world loosely*. That's what the man does, right? He just lets it go. What word in vs. 44 would give you the impression that this guy had no problem letting his stuff go? Joy! In his *joy* he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Why would he be joyful in selling all his earthly possessions? Is that how you would feel? You love your house; you might have a favorite pet. Some of you young people might love your new automobile you worked so hard to buy. Would you be glad to let it go? You will only hold onto the things of this earth loosely, even be glad in letting them go, if you believe the treasure of the kingdom of God you get in return is better. You know God is becoming your treasure more and more if you stop clinging to the things of the earth so much. So, how do you hold onto the things of the earth? Tightly, where you can't let go? Or loosely knowing that God is your greatest treasure, not the things of in the world?

Finally, *we move past anything that keeps us from God*. It's a journey, my brothers and sisters. The sincerity of our faith is revealed over time when God places tests in front of us. And these tests reveal our heart; it reveals areas and ways we don't treasure God like we should. When God is your greatest treasure, you humbly confess these sins, trust that Jesus still loves you and died for your sins and then move past them.

I'm hoping this first heart statement is something you can embrace personally; God is *my* greatest treasure. But it's our heart statement; it shapes our church life. What we do here at FBC is largely shaped by this belief. Our time of worship together, our times in study of God's word, our ministry to children and teens, the food pantry, and so much more is all shaped by our absolute conviction that God is our greatest treasure. And I want to encourage you that as you serve in ministry areas (so many of you do) and as some of you give leadership to ministry areas, keep this in the forefront of your mind. Think, "How can we show God as glorious, how can we show God is our greatest treasure in this Christmas Tea, in nursery, at the youth center?" Let this be a guiding principle of your ministry.

Let's close this morning with a song of praise and a prayer; that God would impress upon us with greater conviction and clarity that there is no one like our God; he is our greatest treasure.

Key vs. Matthew 13:44

Questions for the week

- Is it hard to believe that the things we do originate from our hearts and are expressions of our true selves? What tempts us not to believe this?
- What helps remind you that there is nothing that compares with God? What should change in your weekly routine to see this more regularly?

- What's something you know you're holding onto that's keeping you from experiencing God as your greatest treasure.