# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

**“Treasure Christ”**

**Matthew 6:19-24**

**October 18, 2020**

One of the most well-known and beloved pieces of twentieth-century English literature is J. R. R. Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings.” The focal point of the story is the ring of power, which was lost and has been recovered, not by its creator who would use it to dominate the world, but by a humble hobbit named Frodo, who comes to understand that the only way to save Middle Earth from the ring’s power is to destroy it.

The power of the ring is such that it eventually twists to itself the will of whoever has it. Throughout the story, as goodhearted individuals learn of the ring, they are tempted to believe that if they possess the ring they could control its power and use it for good. In the end, the power of the ring is too great even for Frodo and he wills to keep it, imaging himself as Frodo the Great. Only the last minute intervention of his closest friend, Sam, keeps Middle Earth from succumbing to evil.

One of the lies we like to believe is that we can control powerful things, and money is one of the most powerful things on earth. We say to ourselves, “I’m sure that if God were to bless me with a lot of money, I would handle it well. I know that it ruins some people’s lives, and it is easy to get distracted by the things money can buy, but surely I can handle it. I would use my money for good!” To us, Jesus would say, “You’re kidding yourself if you think you can control the powerful things of this world. They will end up controlling you.” I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 6:19-24 where Jesus says to us:

“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. But when your eye is unhealthy, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is! No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.”

In this passages Jesus uses three pairs of metaphors: two treasures, two visions and two masters. I want to begin with the two masters. The word “master” implies singleness of loyalty or allegiance. Allegiance to two masters doesn’t work. The two masters will each issue orders, orders which can’t both be followed at the same time, and the one trying to serve both masters will be torn between them. The only way to solve the dilemma is to follow one and dismiss the other.

You and I can serve God, or we can serve money, but we can’t serve both. We can serve God and have money, obeying God when he tells us how to use our money in such a way that it promotes his agenda and brings him glory. Or, we can serve money which means we obey money when it commands us what to do with God, which in turn means that we will try to dismiss God’s agenda about money. In fact, serving money we will become resentful of God and what he asks of us with regard to our money. So, what does God ask of us with regard to our money? He asks us to use it to store treasure in heaven.

What qualifies as heavenly treasure is what our heavenly Father values. More than anything else, he values his Son. “This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased,” God declared at Jesus’ baptism, and the apostle Peter wrote in his letter that the Son “is precious in God’s sight.” In order to lay up treasure in heaven, we must treasure Christ more than anything else. His will must be our will, his priorities must be our priorities, and his teaching on all things, including the use of money, must be the teaching that we are willing to follow. Otherwise, our money will be used for earthly treasure where, as he says, its worth will slowly dissipate until there’s nothing left – moths, rust and thieves will have done their worst.

What, then, is the meaning of the two visions? The good eye, spiritually speaking, is the eye that is able to see what God desires. It perceives how something, like money, can be used for heavenly purposes, informing the heart that is treasuring Christ how to put that perception into practice. The bad eye, on the other hand, is focused not on what God desires but on what the self desires, and it perceives how something like money can be used for earthly purposes to build up earthy treasure. As such, the bad eye brings darkness to one’s life, while the good eye brings God’s light to bear.

As I close this message, I have a few words to speak directly to those who are a part of our church family, those who regularly participate in the life and ministry of this congregation. We have begun our Stewardship season as a church, the time of year when we encourage one another to consider how we can financially support our church in the coming year. While doing so, we must always be aware that this church does not belong to us. It does not belong to the members, or to the pastors, or to the church Board. Jesus Christ is Lord of this church. It is his church and he treasures it. He wants it to reflect his love and grace, to share the good news of his salvation, and to encourage the spiritual growth of all who follow him. As each one of us considers what we will do to financially support our church in the coming year, let us be committed to taking good care of it, treasuring Christ’s church as much as Christ treasures us.