

## Treasure in Scripture Treasure in the Epistles

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

### Introduction

We have come to the third and final talk in the series “Treasure in Scripture.” The previous talks have considered treasure in the Old Testament and treasure in the Gospels. We are now going to consider the Epistles for this final talk. Treasure means different things to different people. Probably the commonest thought in relation to treasure would be precious jewels, gold, and silver. To an archaeologist, an old worn copper coin found at the site of an ancient settlement might be considered a treasure. We could go on with various scenarios, an oil painting, an untampered Egyptian tomb full of various artifacts, the “Terracotta” army in China and so on.

What we will consider from the Epistles will be the difference between perishable treasure and that which is imperishable. All the above types of treasure would fall into the category of perishable. You might ask why, is not gold imperishable? Gold is certainly a material that does not corrode very quickly, but if you look at a wedding ring that has been worn for say 60 years you will notice that it has become a lot thinner than when the ring was originally purchased. Gold does eventually wear away!

We will look at five occasions in the Epistles where treasure is mentioned and seek to learn lessons. All Scripture quotations will be from the ‘English Standard Version’ unless otherwise stated.

### 1. The wrong kind of treasure

“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts” (James 5:1-4).

James in his letter to believers from the nation of Israel has very stern words for ‘rich men.’ In chapter 2, James contrasts those who are rich in this world’s goods with those who are rich in faith. Additionally, it is the rich men who have oppressed believers and blaspheme the name of Christ. It would appear that ‘rich men’ are coming into the assembly and the believers were giving preference to them over poor believers and not treating everyone equally. The principle in Scripture being among believers that we are all one in Christ. From the behaviour of the ‘rich men’ we may draw the conclusion that they were not believers at all.

The wording he uses, James paints a poor picture of these 'rich men', accusing them of fraud. In biblical times labourers were often paid daily, living almost from hand to mouth. This is still true in some countries today, workers depending upon payment at the end of each working day. During 2020 this was shown on news reports in many countries. But James warns the unscrupulous rich men that the labourers had a resource, they cried to the Lord of Hosts so that the wrongs can be put right. These men were looking to the wrong kind of treasure and James was saying that even their gold and silver will corrode, it will lose its value and their very garments will become moth-eaten. The tables will be overturned, and poverty will be their portion whereas the Lord of hosts will listen to the labourers who have been cheated by fraud.

This Scripture reminds me of a hymn by M. W. Biggs (1875-1941)

Lord, we treasure with affection,  
All Thy path of sorrow here,  
And those closing scenes of anguish  
To our hearts Thyself endear.

Deep Thy sorrow then, Lord Jesus,  
Deeper far than thought can reach,  
Grief intense and sufferings holy,  
Far beyond all tongues to teach.

None could follow there, blest Saviour,  
When Thou didst for sins atone;  
For those sufferings, deep, unfathomed,  
Were, Lord Jesus, Thine alone.

Thou didst measure then sin's distance;  
Darkness, wrath and curse were Thine;  
Man-betrayed, by God forsaken;  
Thus we learn Thy love divine.

Believer's will suffer hardship in this world, but our Saviour suffered much more which we cannot fully grasp.

## 2. Seeking heavenly treasure

"Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being

baptized?” And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:26-39).

In our first Scripture there were those who were seeking earthly treasure. We will now consider someone who was seeking a different type of treasure. Philip, known as the evangelist, was on a successful gospel campaign when the Spirit of God calls him to go off on a different mission altogether. Philip is directed out into a desert and as we have read it was to meet one man. This person had the responsibility for the security of all the treasure of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. We are not told whether his journey to Jerusalem had met his expectations or not, but he was returning home with a copy of the book of Isaiah. And as he journeyed, the Ethiopian was reading the book of Isaiah and had just reached chapter 53. At the same time Philip arrives on the scene and runs towards the chariot, as directed by the Holy Spirit. Philip immediately enters into conversation with a question. An important question, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The Ethiopian confesses his inability to understand, I need someone to teach me, and he asks Philip to join him in the chariot.

This gives Philip the opportunity to speak about Jesus from the prophetic word of Isaiah 53. Philip gives him the good news about Jesus, Isaiah 53 being an excellent chapter to speak of the suffering Saviour and His sacrifice upon the cross. The Ethiopian immediately sees the relevance to himself and as they were passing a place of much water, he asks Philip if he can be baptized. In this short conversation the Ethiopian is moved on a simple spiritual journey from a man who does not understand to believing the Gospel message. Philip having explained the message of salvation, which results in the now believing Ethiopian, to publicly proclaim his faith by being baptized. Once that was accomplished, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away and the Ethiopian saw him no more. But, more importantly as the Ethiopian continues his journey, he went on his way rejoicing. True joy comes into a person’s heart the moment they trust Christ as Saviour and publicly tell others by the powerful yet simple means of baptism. The Ethiopian now had a treasure in his heart greater than that of the treasure of queen Candace, of which he was the treasurer and guardian.

This Scripture about the Ethiopian and his place of responsibility reminds me of a hymn by C. A. Coates, (1862-1945).

Thy grace, O Lord, that measured once the deep  
Of Calvary’s woe, to seek and save Thy sheep,  
Has touched our hearts and made them long for Thee,  
Thyself our treasure and our all to be.

Thy glory, Lord, at God’s right hand above,  
Supreme of all in that blest scene of love,  
In sonship tells our hearts their wondrous place,  
In Thee accepted by the Father’s grace.

Thy fulness, Lord, of light and love divine,  
No thought can grasp, nor human mind define.  
The whole vast scene of glory will display  
That fulness in a quickly - coming day.

When all things filled by Thee are wholly blest,  
And God’s deep love eternally shall rest  
In that which ever speaks to Him of Thee,  
Thy greatness, Lord, the universe shall see.

Thy beauties, Lord, Thy holy precious worth,  
Surpassing far the deepest joys of earth,  
Attract our hearts – our joy Thy constant love,  
Thyself our object in those scenes above.

The Ethiopian glimpsed the depths to which the Saviour went when he read Isaiah 53 and Philip spoke to him of Jesus. The above hymn captures that, but also takes us further than Calvary on to a coming day when the glory of Christ will be seen throughout the vastness of the universe.

### **3. The treasure of reproach**

“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward” (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Moses is an important figure on the pages of Scripture. He is credited with being the author of the first five books in the Bible. In our scripture in Hebrews chapter 11, the great faith chapter of the Bible, we gain an understanding of what was behind the actions of Moses in the early chapters of Exodus. Moses was held in high esteem by the Jewish people as is clearly seen in the Gospels of the New Testament. He is considered a major prophet and God indicates that he is someone special because Moses had the privilege of speaking face to face with Jehovah.

His childhood was dramatic. Hidden at home for the first three months but when this was no longer a viable option, his mother made an ark to keep her child safe floating on the water hidden among the reeds. This was only temporary as God, moving in a mysterious way, used Pharaoh’s daughter who had come to the river’s edge to bathe. The little ark, being spotted among the reeds is brought to Pharaoh’s daughter. When the ark was opened the child cried and that touched the heart of this influential woman who claimed the child for herself. But she needed a nurse which resulted in the child eventually being returned to his own mother to continue looking after him until he was old enough to go to the palace. For the detail of this part of the life of Moses read Exodus 2:1-10. However, there is a sad incident in the life of Moses, probably at the age of 40 when he had good intentions but wrong actions; he ends up killing an Egyptian. However, God amazingly turned the situation around resulting in Moses fleeing from Egypt to live for another 40 years as a shepherd working for his father-in-law. Exodus 2:11-25 cover this second part of the life of Moses. I mentioned Moses having good intentions and this is where in Hebrews 11 we have God’s view of those intentions which is not obvious in the historical account in Exodus. Verse 26 contrasts two treasures. The treasures of Egypt with that of the greater wealth connected to the reproach of Christ, Jehovah, Israel’s God. Moses endeavoured to carry out his intentions in his own strength and in his own ideas which only resulted in him fleeing Egypt. The timing was wrong, and the method was wrong, and Moses had to wait another 40 years.

We all have choices to make in this world. One such choice is which treasure will I pursue in life. For a Christian, making the wrong choice regarding the pursuit of wealth will be disastrous for our Christian life. The treasure in heaven is the right choice which does not conflict with ‘making a living’, as long as the Lord Jesus Christ still has first place in the believer’s life. Moses had lessons to learn. There is a saying about the life of Moses, 40 years learning to be someone great in Egypt, 40 years learning to be nothing working as a shepherd for his father-in-law and the last 40 years when he leads the nation of Israel out of Egypt learning that God is everything.

Moses weighs up the treasure that is temporary connected with this world and the treasure which is eternal. When Moses was brought up as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, he was no doubt destined for great things, humanly speaking. He would be given the best of Egypt’s education and physical training. But those early years when as a babe and then as a child nursed and looked

after by his birth mother, he was taught the invaluable lessons as to whom he really belonged, the slave people, the people of Israel. There he understood the true path of faith and the blessings that God had promised to his forefathers. The path of faith for the people of God entails suffering and the rewards or treasure far outstrips what this world can offer.

It is just the same today; this world's treasures are temporary and cannot be taken across the boundary of death. All must be left behind. However, what is transferable across the boundary of death is the spiritual treasure of a new life in Christ, sins forgiven and the joy of an inheritance that death cannot touch. How can we balance the 'three score years and ten' of this world's treasure with eternal blessings and joy in God the Father's house where the heavenly treasure is not affected by moth and rust to corrupt?

#### **4. Treasure in jars of clay**

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:3-7).

Paul, in verse 7, likens himself and fellow believers to jars of clay (or 'earthen vessels'(AV)) in which is contained a heavenly treasure. This heavenly treasure may refer to one or both of the following:

- a) the light of the **gospel of glory of Christ, who is the image of God (v.4).**
- b) the **knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (v.6).**

Jars of clay are not worth considering, almost worthless in value. The message being it is not me or my fellow companions, we are just clay pots. The value is in the contents of the jars of clay that is the treasure that they had received from God. This is what Paul is proclaiming, making nothing of himself or his companions but rather the treasure that they bring which is the message that they proclaimed.

The message or good news concerns the glory of Christ who is the image of God. Christ, the heavenly risen man, is the only one who can truly represent God. Also, He is the very centre of the Gospel message, making salvation the forgiveness of sins available to all who will trust Him for their eternal blessing. In verse 5, Paul makes it clear that he is not preaching about himself, it is about Christ. In verse 6 the knowledge of the glory of God can only be seen in the face of Jesus Christ. If we want to see the glorious God, then we need to look at Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the good news of the glorious heavenly man, Christ Jesus, who makes God known.

What Paul is saying that this glorious person, Jesus Christ, became a man to die on a cross to procure a means of bringing sinners into the eternal blessing of sins forgiven. Amazingly this glorious person, as man, is the image of God, and we can only know God through Him. Jesus Christ is central to knowing God; there is no other way. It is Christians who are given this knowledge. Paul states that this knowledge is a treasure which we have in these mortal bodies, the jars of clay.

There will come a time when these jars of clay will be broken, done away and made new, given a heavenly body suitable for a heavenly scene. Miss M. Bowly (1813-56) captures this thought in her hymn.

We are by Christ redeemed:  
The cost – His precious blood;  
Be nothing by our souls esteemed  
Like this great good.  
Were the vast world our own,  
With all its varied store,  
And Thou Lord Jesus, wert unknown,  
We still were poor.

Our earthen vessels break;  
The world itself grows old;  
But Christ our precious dust will take,  
And freshly mould:  
He'll give these bodies vile  
A fashion like His own;  
He'll bid the whole creation smile,  
And hush its groan.

Thus far, by grace preserved,  
Each moment speeds us on;  
The crown and kingdom are reserved  
Where Christ is gone.  
When cloudless morning shines;  
We shall His glory share;  
In pleasant place are the lines;  
The home how fair!

To Him our weakness clings  
Through tribulation sore,  
And seeks the covert of His wings  
Till all be o'er.  
And when we've run the race,  
And fought the faithful fight,  
We then shall see Him face to face,  
With saints in light.

## **5. Treasures of wisdom and knowledge**

“For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:1-3).

As Paul opens this second chapter, we are introduced in a few words to his prayer life and the struggle or combat that he has for the Colossians, Laodiceans and others, even though he has not seen them face to face. Believers were in a battle, being assailed with false teaching which would take them away from Christ. Some of these false teachings relate to circumcision, angel worship, philosophy, and traditions, all of which was to displace Christ as far as Christian living was concerned. So, Paul takes them back to the fundamental point that as far as God is concerned

everything in terms of wisdom and knowledge are the treasures found in Christ. The false teaching is based on false knowledge of natural man, and true wisdom is that which is found in Christ. The wisdom of this world is false, corrupt, and misleading.

So, Paul guides the believers away from that which is of this world back to their Saviour and Lord. Their salvation does not need supplements, they were not lacking anything in Christ. The wisdom and knowledge in Christ are likened to treasures, implying what comes from this world, man's imagination, was of no value, was corrupt, and was not a treasure to be pursued but rather avoided.

### **To conclude**

As we have considered these five Scriptures, we have noticed that there are treasures to be avoided and treasures to be held and valued. Let me summarise the main points.

1. Avoid focusing solely on the treasure or wealth of this world which perishes and has no eternal value.
2. The Ethiopian eunuch found the treasure of the suffering Saviour, Jesus Christ, who died to bring the blessing of sins forgiven.
3. The treasure of belonging to a rejected Christ greater than the treasures of this world.
4. As Christians we have the treasure of the Gospel of the glory of Christ in our hearts who makes known the glory of God even though it is in 'jars of clay', these bodies of ours.
5. Finally, our resource and protection from the errors that circulate in the world is the resource that is found in Christ, the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We do not need 'man's' opinions or theories; we only need the truth that is found in Christ.

Thank you for listening to the third talk 'Treasure in the Epistles' in the Truth for Today series 'Treasure in Scripture', talk number T1203.

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