

“Banking in Heaven” (Lk. 12:22-32)

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I've banked with the same bank for about 20 years now. The name sometimes changes as the bank is taken over by some other name, but the current name matches up with the original name. I use a couple different branches, but I don't recognize any of the tellers or bankers. They certainly don't know me. It's efficient and courteous. But no one there knows me, nor I them.

Banking in heaven is a different experience. Through faith, I've banked with Jesus Christ for over 61 years. It's been a lifetime relationship. Before I ever drew breath, that Banker knew my name and had even written a book about my life, according to Psalm 139. Every time I invest in that bank, it is a hugely satisfying experience. Often the rate of interest immediately exceeds my actual deposit. I don't seem to be able to out-give this bank. Banking in heaven is joy. My heart is not locked up in some small, airless safe deposit box, but is lifted and expanded beyond expectation. There are no lines and no deposit slips to fill out.

My local bank takes deposits from me in cash or checks. The CEO of my heavenly bank is more expansive. God deals in a different currency: the currency of compassion. Sometimes we religious folk get confused about the currency. Sometimes the currency we try to deposit (correct doctrine, good deeds, perfect attendance at worship) is unacceptable, even insulting to the Banker who banks in grace.

So today, I'd like to explore with you what God considers valuable. We'll look for insight into what's trash and what's treasure in heaven.

Let's look at three kinds of, well, trash. The prophet Isaiah gives us three specific examples.

First, he refers back to the practice of offering blood and animal sacrifices as part of temple ritual. The book of Leviticus is full of detailed instruction for these offerings: the burnt offering, the grain offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the fellowship offering, and on and on. It seems that people got so into making the correct offering presented in the most correct way, that they lost sight of what the offering represented. All those offerings were to replace the human sacrifice, ritual slaughter of adults and children required by some pagan deities. The terrible and false god Molech required people to burn alive their firstborn babies.

Sacrificing a lamb or a dove is not tasteful, but is a better option, in my view. But eventually God says, “Enough! Stop the barbeque. The smell is making Me sick!” It's easy for churches, even individual Christians, to get so caught up in the worship of religion that we forget to worship the Living God. Our symbolic sacrifices are not God's treasure.

Second on Isaiah's trash list: some of us are trying to offer the sacrifice of sheer commotion. Being busy for the sake of looking busy is a real temptation. An old and not-so-great gospel song goes, "Get so tired working for my Jesus." Religion should not be self-serving. Have you ever been in a church where you became exhausted and burnt out by long meetings to discuss the color of the new carpet? There's a difference between getting things done and discussing them to death where nothing ever gets done. We dissipate ourselves on religious trivia and avoid the demands of the gospel – God's treasure.

Third on Isaiah's trash list are the ever popular worship games. In our contemporary services, one of our favorite songs is by Matt Redman, who is music director at an ultra-large, megachurch. It seems as if he and the worship production team had come to a blinding insight that in their quest for production and performance perfection, they had forgotten Who is the reason for worship. After a year-long fast from any music at all in the worship services, they broke the fast with (the) song, "The Heart of Worship."

. . . [Words to the song were included here.] . . .

So much for trash; let's focus on treasure. God treasures our real worship: worship that manifests that we truly want the will of God as our very lives. When we're committed to that, we are then willing to give up lives of destruction and take on the construction of heaven on earth. We stop doing wrong and take up doing right. What is right? Here's a start: work for justice; help the down-and-out; stand up for the homeless; go to bat for the defenseless. Do this and you will live. You'll live abundantly by seeking (those) whom God treasures.

Dick Willis, the senior pastor at megachurch Christ Church in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida has transformed an old inward-centered church from its death throes back into new life by setting it afire with passion for a ministry for God's treasures. They are recognizing that the people God treasures are the outcasts, the poor, the outlaws, the outsiders. He challenges the whole congregation to pray, "Lord, send us the people no one else wants. Lord, send us Your treasures, that we may treasure them as You would."

When did Christ Church begin to turn this corner? Willis says it was when he stopped praying, "Lord, bless our creative ideas," and started praying, "Lord, help us to be a part of what You are blessing."

Nothing makes your pastors happier than hearing your stories of your ministry among God's treasures. Many of you are in constant mission locally and globally, in what you do and what you give. You are banking in heaven. Your devotion to the needy, to the hungry, the homeless, the abused and the poor reveals your treasure which you are banking, some of you even without notice. God notices. Every time you pray for others and offer some kindness without thought of reward, you are banking in heaven. Those of you who work for peace and justice in whatever way your conscience directs you, you are banking in heaven.

The good life that so many of us desire for ourselves and our loved ones often is confused with having certain things. And we worry that we and they will not have enough of these things of comfort and security. We seem to have forgotten how God feeds and cares for the birds of the air so that not one falls to earth without the Creator's notice and concern. We don't consider the wildflowers of the field that wear beauty as their God-given right.

Jesus reminds us: "Steep yourselves in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Don't be afraid of missing out. You're my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself."

Trust Jesus. You'll get the fullness of the kingdom of heaven if you choose to bank in heaven. It's a bank, a bank you can bank on. You can enjoy your God's treasures now and later. Love and serve God with everything you are and you own. You'll find it all waiting for you again. For where your treasure is, your heart is also.

Bank on it. Bank in joy. Bank in heaven.