### “Purses That Do Not Wear Out” Steve Finlan for The First Church, August 7, 2022

**Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–11, 16**

1Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. 3By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. . .

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. 9By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised . . . 10For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. . . 16 They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

**Luke 12:32–37**

32 “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

35 “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; 36be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. 37Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes.”

Hebrews is all about faith as believing in God’s promises. First, actually, it’s faith that the worlds were prepared by the word of God (1:3). “World” here is *aiōn*, which in the plural is *aiōnas* αἰῶνας. So the first faith is faith in the Creator’s action, creating the worlds, plural.

Then he writes about Abraham’s faith in believing the fatherhood promise that was uttered to him and Sarah. He pictures that faith as hoping for a new city, or a new country, by which he means a city that God has built, or a country that is in heaven. He wants to picture Abraham’s hope as a *spiritual* hope, for a spiritual land. Hebrews is imagining the underlying spiritual motives of biblical characters. Abraham’s and Sarah’s desire for a land is pictured as a desire for a heavenly country.

The saying in Luke is also very spiritual and heavenly. Let’s look at his first sentence, which by itself is one of the most vivid stand-alone sayings in the gospels. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (12:32). It shows the open-hearted attitude of Jesus and of the Father. The Father is not reluctant to save, nor is there any barrier. It is the Father’s pleasure to *give* you the kingdom. It’s important to appreciate the openness of the offer.

Nor does he say that the kingdom is only available after he dies, or that it is contingent on his death. The offer is here and now, and completely open.

Then he moves into his teaching that believers should “make purses” for themselves “that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven” (12:33). Calling them “purses” is metaphorical; they are not literal purses, but there are some heavenly realities that register our faith and our spiritual actions, and which do not wear out, do not decay, and cannot be stolen. Every spiritual deed has a permanent result, which can be called a treasure in heaven.

It’s important that we know of the permanent significance of our actions, that we trust in the *endurance* of goodness. This is an essential part of our faith, belief in the endurance of goodness and truth. We live a life, and we build up treasure in which, where everything of value in our lives is preserved. The treasure will be a record of whatever is valuable in our lives. The record will include only what is of spiritual value; what is of no use will probably be forgotten.

Then comes another stand-alone saying: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (12:34). A person’s real treasure is not what he *claims* to value, but where his heart, his affection, *really* lies. This seems to be a psychological statement. A person’s treasure is what they *really* love.

Finally it moves to another point, one that has to do with readiness. Be ready, like a servant who is ready for his master’s return. The spiritual point is diligence and seriousness, as well as readiness. If you’ve been spiritually focused, then you are ready for the master’s return. It can be tied back to the first thing Jesus says “Do not be afraid” (12:32).

These are some of the assurances on which our faith thrives: assurance of the generosity of God, the permanent endurance of all good things, and the real meaningfulness and endurance of spiritual experiences. The poet Robert Browning said it well: “There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before; the evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound; What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more; On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round. All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist. . . The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard, The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky, Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard; Enough that he heard it once: we shall hear it by and by” (from “Abt Vogler”). Browning says even the broken arcs, the unfinished projects, the dangerously heroic, will be preserved and heard again.

Browning’s poetry was preserved, and will always be remembered. But maybe he also had unfinished projects, spiritual endeavors that will be preserved for him when he gets there. It is an essential part of our faith to believe that everything good is preserved as a treasure in heaven.