



THE FIRST WORD

FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BONITA SPRINGS

Invaluable

SERMON BY REV. BRAD ROGERS ■ JULY 29, 2018

We are going to be asking a central question for the purposes of this sermon. The question is this: What is it that adds value to your life? I stumbled across this question in the summer of 2016 when my wife and I were living in northern Illinois. We were listening to a podcast by Joshua Fields and Ryan Nicodemus called *The Minimalists* which asked that question: “What is it that adds value to your life?” It was perfectly timed for us, as we were living in an 1,100-square-foot home, the saving grace of which was that it had a full basement. What do you do when you have a full basement? You fill it with “stuff,” and we did that. About one-third of our basement was filled with utilities: the washer and dryer, the water heater, and the furnace (which you need in northern Illinois.) Another one-third was filled with kids’ toys which, as I think about it, were actually kids’ utilities: a kids’ washer and dryer, a kids’ kitchen sink and oven, and other kids’ things. The remaining area was filled with bins and bins of clothes for any age foster child that might come into our home, plus a small crafting area for my wife. In other words, that entire 1,100-square-foot basement was filled with “stuff.” This podcast came at just the perfect time, because earlier in that summer we had come to Southwest Florida, met with and accepted the call from this church.

Here was the problem. As you likely have discovered, there are no basements in Southwest Florida. We needed to do a serious value assessment on all this “stuff” in our basement. Ryan and Josh asked their listeners to consider what added *value* to their lives and encouraged them to do a value assessment of the *things* in their lives. If something adds value to your life, you hold onto it; if it does

not add value, you are free to de-clutter by removing it from your life. This can be a compelling and useful question, but I think there is a faulty premise underlying it. To get to that faulty premise, let me ask this question, “Is it possible for the things of this world to add value to our lives?” It is certainly true that our things have value, and it is certainly true that our things are worth something, but can they add value to our lives? We can measure the value of something by how much it costs to buy or replace. We can boost the resale value of something by doing certain things to it, but can it actually add value to life?

If it is true that our things can add value to our lives, then it logically must also be true that if we do not have that particular something in our life, our life is of less value. Would we be comfortable saying that? Whether or not we are comfortable saying that, many of us live and behave in a way that assumes this to be true.

I will confess my own truth to you today: I love technology! In fact, I love gadgets! Every year in June there is a conference that announces when the next version of the iPhone will come out, so I tune in every summer with eager anticipation of the new technologies. Every time I see something announced at the WWDC (the Apple Worldwide Developers Conference), I think, “Oh man, I need that!” A few years ago, when I got my current phone, I wiped my old phone clean and dropped it into a drawer ... on top of another iPhone! I started wondering how much value this “thing” had added to my life. It had a crack in the screen because I had dropped it a couple of times, the battery barely lasted more than a couple of hours, and it was technologically obsolete. How much value had that thing added to my life during the two years that I used it? I don’t know that it did add much value, but the marketers and the ad wizards all try to sell us on the idea that the “stuff” in our life is good and that it will add value. The iPhone can add simplicity to our lives; is that the added value?

Other things, we are told, will make us feel better. That is the perceived value added to our lives. While we might not be comfortable

with the idea that if we do not have something, our life will have less value; we certainly, through our behavior, buy into the premise that if we get that *something* it will add value our lives. Is it possible for the things in our lives to actually add value to our lives? Are there things in our lives that are *invaluable*? Are there things that are essential, that we could not live without?

The scriptures have a lot to say about where it is that we place our value and the value that we have as people. We assume that if we get something, it is going to add value to us. We read a bit about that in Colossians 3 during the Call to Worship today. Jesus had a lot to say about this as well, which we will hear from one of His most famous sermons: The Sermon on the Mount. This passage is sometimes quoted during our stewardship season, but today we are talking about what adds value to our lives and whether or not adding value is even possible. Hear now these words from Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew 6:19-20.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

[In other words] ... where if you drop it, the screen cracks; where the batteries wear out; where there is a tag on it that says “dry clean only” but you put it in the washer and dryer and it’s never the same; where as soon as you drive it off the lot it loses 10% of its value.

Jesus is saying to place your value on those things that are *not* going to wear out; place your value on those things that will *endure*. If you place your ultimate value on something you perceive will give you a sense of your own worth in this world, when it wears out or stops working, you will be left disappointed and feeling as though your value has been diminished. **Do not place your value on the things of this world, but rather place your value in heaven!** There is an ultimate test of whether the truth of Jesus’ words holds up and that test is coming for all of us as we near the end of our lives.

A friend had a shirt that said, “He who dies with the most toys wins.? I can remember it vividly. I was about eight years old, and I watched him walk in with a black shirt and those white words on it. Instinctively we know that this is not true because we cannot take our toys with us when we die. Just in case you think I am talking about only this “stuff” in our lives, it is true of more in our lives than just tangible, physical things. It is true of our power, our achievements, our family, and our friends. Nothing from this world will be taken with us when we die.

Jesus goes on to say in verse 21, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” The problem with ascribing value to the things of this world is that what we value, where our treasure is, says a lot about that which we love. As we have been saying, if we place all our value and all our love in the things of this world—in that person, place, or thing in this world—we will be disappointed, and our hearts will be broken. But if we place our love in the things that will endure, we will never be disappointed or discontented.

Church father St. Augustine once famously said that the greatest problem in our lives is that we have *disordered loves*. In other words, we often love unimportant things more than important things; the things that we ought to love we love less than the things that we ought not to love. The things that we ought to value, we value less than the things that we ought not to value. The greatest problem of humanity, according to St. Augustine, is that our loves have been out of order. Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” and St. Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God.” *Our hearts were not meant for the temporal; our hearts were meant for the eternal.*

C.S. Lewis once famously wrote about this very reality in his book **Mere Christianity**:

Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to

you, but they never quite keep their promise. The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy. I am not now speaking of what would be ordinarily called unsuccessful marriages, or holidays, or learned careers. I am speaking of the best possible ones. There was something we have grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in the reality... The wife may be a good wife, and the hotels and scenery may have been excellent, and the chemistry may be a very interesting job: but something has evaded us.

If we place our ultimate value on any “thing” it will ultimately disappoint us, but if we place our value on the things which are “eternal” we will never be disappointed.

Jesus later talks about the things that God values over the things that we value. He begins by pointing out where it is that we place our value rather than where our value should be placed. Listen now to these words from Matthew 6:25-26.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

The compelling question: **“Are you not much more valuable than the birds of the air?”** Jesus asks this question in such a way that His listeners already know the answer. Of course, we are much more valuable than the birds! As surely as He takes care of the birds, He will take care of us. **“Are you not much more valuable than they?”** We know that God created us and loves us with an unquenchable, undying love. The insistence of this passage is that we are valuable to God. We have value to God, or in even stronger terms, we are *invaluable* to God! At the beginning of this sermon, I mentioned my

working definition of what is invaluable. **Being invaluable means that you are essential to God, that God cannot live without you.**

The story of the Scriptures is this: God took on the form of Jesus Christ. He left all of eternity and became man in Jesus Christ and gave His life to purchase **you** from the power of sin and evil in the world. Why did He give His life to purchase you? Because God loves you so much that He could not bear the thought of spending eternity without you. Jesus asked the question, **“Are you not more valuable than the birds of the air?”** Of course, you are **invaluable** to God. Maybe we could say it another way; maybe we could say that you are of **infinite** worth to God.

Remember when you were a child and you and a friend got into an argument? Young men may remember this more than the women among us; I am not sure if there is an equivalent. Perhaps you have witnessed young boys having an argument something like this? Two boys about eight years old are having a debate about whose dad is stronger. One says, “My dad is stronger than your dad,” and the other says, “Oh yeah? My dad can lift 100 pounds! The first responds with, “My dad can lift 125 pounds!” Back and forth they go: “My dad can lift 150 pounds!” “My dad can lift 200 pounds!” (As a young dad myself, I’m wondering if I could lift that much and hoping my son never gets into a similar situation.) The argument inevitably escalates until one says, “My dad can lift infinity!” The other responds with “My dad can lift infinity +1” —but that doesn’t make any sense when you understand the value of infinity. Infinity plus one is still infinity; you cannot add to its value.

You are of **infinite** worth to God. There is nothing you can do to add value to your life. The answer to the question that we raised at the beginning of the service—“Can the things of this world add any value to your life?”—is, qualitatively, “No!” **You are of infinite worth to God!** There is nothing you can do, achieve, buy or sell that can add more value to your life or that can take value away from your life, because you are of infinite worth to God, so much so that **Christ died for you.**

This news ought to free us to live in a completely different way. So much of our lives are based on the insecurity that we need to add worth to ourselves by accomplishing, doing, buying, and acquiring. If we don't have to do those things to have a sense of our own self-worth, we ought to be free to look at our lives and do a value assessment not of our things, but about where we place our value. That is the question I want to leave you with today: Where do you place your *ultimate value*? Jesus told us to not place our treasure (value) on the things of this earth, but to place it on the things of heaven which will not wear out or be destroyed, and which will truly satisfy the longings our heart. **Where do you place your value?**

Our behavior is the best indicator of where we place our value. It is possible to say, "I value [this thing]," but if your behavior does not live it out, do you really value it? Your behavior is the best indicator of what it is that you truly value. Consider these questions:

1. What is it that takes up space in your mind? What occupies your headspace? What is the mental furniture that needs to be rearranged? As St. Augustine said, we need to reorder our loves. Where do your thoughts and daydreams take you?
2. What is it that occupies your time? Just look at your calendar to see where you spend your time.
3. Where do you spend your resources?

When you look at these three questions—what occupies your mind, what occupies your time, and what occupies your resources—you may begin to hear a song being played in your life. Have you determined the alignment of these three categories? If so, the next question is, are those the things that will endure? Will you be able to take them with you?

May you come to see that nothing you can do or buy in this world can add value to your life. May you come to know that the reason that nothing in this world can add value to your life is because you are of *infinite* value to God! He demonstrated this by

becoming a man and dying to purchase you from the power of sin and death. May that knowledge free you to look at your life and to do an honest assessment of where it is that you place your ultimate value. If you place your value in the things of this world, it will not last; but if you place your value on the things of eternity, it will last forever!



BONITA SPRINGS

9751 Bonita Beach Road | Bonita Springs, Florida 34135 | 239 992 3233 | fpcbonita.org