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## BURIED TREASURE

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Let me take you back to your childhood:

If anyone says “Buried Treasure” what images come to mind?

For most of us those images are associated with stories from childhood. For me, the classic memory is Robert Louis Stevenson’s Treasure Island. That story captured my imagination as a child. The boy Jim Hawkins, the too-talkative Squire Trelawney, Captain Billy Bones, Ben Gunn, and of course Long John Silver and his band of knuckleheaded pirates. The ill-fated voyage of the good ship Hispaniola. [Sidenote: the Walt Disney movie about this story, made in 1950, with Robert Newton playing Long John, forever framed “Arrrrr” as the crown of pirate lingo.]

But that’s just a novel, epic though it may be. There are also real hidden treasures. One is the Lost Dutchman’s Gold Mine in the Superstition Mountains near Apache Junction, Arizona. About three years ago my wife and I hiked those mountains with friends. We weren’t looking for that mine, but we did find some petroglyphs in the back of a small canyon. [Sidenote: the name of this mine seems strange, since it’s the mine that’s lost, not the Dutchman].

Back in 2010, an eccentric guy named Forest Fenn sent a lot of people on a real treasure hunt. He buried a chest full of gold and jewels in a remote area of the U.S. West. Over 350,000 people searched for it, and four lost their lives in the effort. Fenn’s treasure was found last year.

So, what’s common to all these examples – both the stories and the true accounts? Those who searched (and still search for the Lost Dutchman’s Mine) demonstrate tremendous determination, diligence, and focus. That is necessary to find and own a hidden treasure. Those who search do so with a singleness of mind rarely demonstrated elsewhere. That laser focus comes from an absolute commitment to possess the loot. This kind of determination is so great that many people view those who engage in such searches to be crackpots – *even after they find the treasure!*

By now, I’m sure you know where this is headed. Let’s consider the parables of Jesus in Luke 15. In verses 3-7, Jesus describes how diligently someone will search for anything valuable that is lost. In this case, a lost sheep. Jesus reinforces this point with the story of the lost coin in verses 8-10. Both parables perfectly prepare His audience for what comes next in Luke 15 – the story of the lost son. We understand that Jesus is teaching us about a real lost treasure of immeasurable price! The sheep and coin represent anything valuable. Jesus connects this idea to the kingdom of God. The return of the lost son tells us our own souls and the souls of our brothers and sisters are far more valuable than any treasure we might find this world. That lost son represents you and me.

Peter said it so beautifully in 1 Peter 1:3-9:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to **an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you**, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, **being much more precious than gold that perishes**, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you*

*love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, **receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls.***

So, what Jesus is really saying is that we are all on a life-long treasure hunt to find heaven. Each one of us already possesses something of immeasurable value – our souls. But here’s the best news. Finding heaven is a lot easier than locating the Lost Dutchman’s Mine. The treasure map is neither hidden nor in code – it’s the Bible and it’s right there in plain view! God wants us to find Him and His saving truth! The instructions are as clear as they can be! This is way better than any novel or movie!

Jesus promised: *So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.* Luke 11:9-10.

With a guarantee like that, why aren’t more people motivated beyond imagination to find the Gospel and save their souls? Is it because our souls aren’t like the riches of this world? Because we can’t spend it like material riches? It is because we have to wait to receive this immense treasure, so we tend to drift off target in the meantime?

A wonderful day is coming. On that great day of judgment, so many souls – literally billions of them – will wish that they had spent their time reading God’s treasure map. But it will be too late for all who ever lived but did not choose to search. Just like the epic tales of hidden jewels, there is a risk – you can die! But that risk becomes reality for those who don’t seek this treasure, not those who do.

Everyone who diligently reads God’s treasure map will find the treasure reserved for them since before the world ever was. There will more than enough “loot” to share with all who serve God and wait. Have you already found the treasure God prepared for you? Then guard it carefully every day from now on. Don’t lose track of God’s treasure the way the plots run the movies. Keep it close to you and pass it on to as many other souls as possible. Just the way Captain Billy Bones passed his map on to Jim Hawkins in Treasure Island. Your eternity is at stake. That’s far more valuable than any treasure in this life.

Matthew 6:19-21 *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

The Dutchman can keep his mine. My heart is not in the Superstition Mountains. Where’s yours?