

Treasures in Heaven

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[0 : 00] Jesus is a Christian.

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Jesus calls believers to be different. The first half of the chapter taught us to be different from the hypocritical Pharisees. And in the second half, we're to be different from the materialistic unbelievers.

Let's go ahead and read tonight's text. That will be Matthew chapter 6, verses 19 through 24. Jesus said, If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness?

No one can serve two masters, for he will either hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

[2 : 09] In this passage, Jesus turned to warnings about the personal failures that most often deprive a believer of the spiritual victories and also damage his witness.

So here's the main idea for tonight. Believers must use their possessions to glorify God and to advance God's kingdom. Believers must use their possessions to glorify God and to advance God's kingdom.

We're going to look at the passage in three sections tonight. And the first section of the passage covers verses 19 through 21. In verses 19 through 21, Jesus gives us the precept.

The precept. A precept is a command given as a rule of action or conduct. So listen to the precept as we reread verses 19 through 21.

Jesus said there again, 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.

[3 : 20] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Among their other faults, the religious leaders of Jesus' day were greedy.

In Luke 11.39, Jesus rebuked them for their greediness. Listen to what he said in Luke 11.39. That says, And the Lord said to him, Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.

Often people like the scribes and Pharisees did have used their material prosperity as imagined evidence of their spirituality, proclaiming without shame that they are materially blessed because they're spiritually superior.

We see that today from the prosperity gospel televangelists. Jesus' words in verse 19 in tonight's text fly in the face of that type of thinking.

His words serve as a warning against putting our trust in possessions. Jesus notes that moths and rust destroy earthly possessions, and if we avoid those, thieves might come along and take our things.

[4 : 29] The temporary perishable nature of our possessions is one of the reasons that Jesus gives for why we should avoid stockpiling treasures on earth.

Jesus' use of moths and rust in his explanation were more significant to his original audience than they may first appear to us. Back in those days, most people held their wealth in either clothes or grain.

Garments represented a considerable investment. Rich people sometimes had golden threads woven into their clothing, and they did it for two reasons. One was to display their wealth, and the other was to store their wealth.

Can you imagine having to get the threads out of a garment before you threw it away if they were made of gold? The best clothes, though, were made of wool, and of course moths loved to eat the wool.

So even the richest people had difficulty protecting their clothes from the insects. The word translated rust there literally means an eating, and it's translated with that meaning everywhere else in the New Testament except for here.

[5 : 37] So it seems best to take the same meaning here. So in reference to grain, it's talking about grain that is eaten by rats, mice, worms, or other insects.

The Old Testament has similar warnings to what Jesus says in tonight's text. Listen to Proverbs 23, verses 4 and 5. Proverbs 23, 4 and 5 say, Do not toil to acquire wealth.

Be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven. Think about the passage that says, Do not lay up treasures on earth.

Lay up and treasures both come from the same basic Greek term. And so the literal translation of that phrase would be, Do not treasure up treasures for yourself.

The idea is that of stockpiling or hoarding. Jesus pictures wealth that is not being used. The money or other wealth is simply stored for safekeeping.

[6 : 43] It's kept for the keeping's sake, or to make a show of wealth, or to create an environment of lazy overindulgence. The distinction is important to notice.

What Jesus denounces is the stockpiling or hoarding of our possessions. The Bible is clear that believers can have possessions. The issue is what we do with those possessions, and how we view those possessions.

In a single verse in 1 Timothy, the Apostle Paul showed that having possessions is fine, but he also warned against those possessions being used incorrectly.

Listen to 1 Timothy 6, verse 17. Paul wrote, As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

So you see there that God provides us with possessions to enjoy, but we're not to set our hopes on the uncertainty of those possessions. Do you see the difference there in that text?

[7 : 52] It's all about our attitude toward those possessions. Listen to this quote from John Wesley. John Wesley said, It is right to provide for our families, to make reasonable plans for the future, to make wise investments, and to have money to carry on a business, give to the poor, and support the Lord's work.

It is being dishonest, greedy, covetous, stingy, and miserly about possessions that is wrong. To honestly earn, save, and give is wise and good.

To hoard and spend only on ourselves not only as unwise, but sinful. The classic biblical example of someone who hoarded possessions is in the parable that Jesus told in Luke 12, verses 16 through 21.

Listen to those verses. In this parable, Jesus used an example of a person who hoarded his wealth in crops. So here are Luke 12, verses 16 through 21.

Remember that these words come straight from Jesus. Starting in verse 16, it says, And he told them a parable, saying, The land of a rich man produced plentifully.

[9 : 05] And he thought to himself, What shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops. And he said, I will do this. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones.

And there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, be merry.

But God said to him, Fool, this night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.

Jesus made it pretty clear there what he thinks of somebody who stores up treasure for himself. He called that person a fool. The key to Jesus' warning is ourselves.

When we accumulate possessions simply for our own sakes, whether to hoard or to spend selfishly and extravagantly, those possessions actually become idols to us. Our text tonight in Matthew 6.20 tells us where we should lay up our treasures instead.

[10 : 16] Look at the start of Matthew 6.20 again. This is where we see the actual precept in the text. Jesus said, But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

We're to put our trust in God rather than in our own possessions. The start of verse 20 raises an obvious question. That question is, What does Jesus mean by treasures in heaven?

The simple answer is that Jesus was silent about what he meant by those treasures. The commentators we trust mostly mirror that silence.

But John Stott made some educated guesses. Listen to what John Stott had to say. He said, What is this?

Jesus does not explain. Yet surely we may say that to lay up treasure in heaven is to do anything on earth whose effects last for eternity. Then he goes on to say, The phrase treasures in heaven seems to refer to such things as these.

[11 : 21] The development of Christlike character because all we can take with us to heaven is ourselves. The increase of faith, hope, and charity, all of which Paul said abide.

Growth in the knowledge of Christ whom one day we will see face to face. The active endeavor by prayer and witness to introduce others to Christ so that they may too inherit eternal life.

And the use of our money for Christian causes which is the only investment whose dividends are everlasting. Whatever the treasures in heaven are, we do know that they will be better than anything we can imagine.

Listen to 1 Corinthians 2.9. 1 Corinthians 2.9 says, But as it is written, 1 Corinthians 2.9 is easy to believe when we consider the good things that Christians already have.

We have forgiveness of our sins. We have eternal life. We have the promise of spending that eternal life with the one who gave his life for us.

[12 : 36] Just those things should be more than enough to satisfy us. So hang on to those until one day when we'll see the treasures in heaven in person. We know we can trust a God who is faithful to those who obey him.

Hebrews 6.10-12 tell us that. And Hebrews 6.10-12 say, For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints as you still do.

And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope and to the end so that you may not be sluggish but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Jesus may have kept silent on the specific meaning of treasures in heaven. However, he answers a more important question. That question is why the location of our treasures is important.

Look at verse 21 of chapter 6 now. Jesus says, For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. If we pursue what is earthly, corrupt, and temporary, our conduct in life will never manifest a righteousness that is pleasing to God.

[13 : 53] Only when we have a new goal and attitude toward material things will our life conform to the standards of holiness given in the word of God. If the heart is right, everything else in life falls into its proper place.

The person who is right with the Lord will be generous and happy in his giving to the Lord's work. A person who is covetous, self-indulgent, and stingy has good reason to question his relationship with the Lord.

Most of you were here for Evan's deacon ordination this past Sunday night, and that got me thinking about my own. I remember one thing that Pastor Don told me during the prayer portion of that.

It stuck with me, and Don simply said, Whatever has your heart, has you. And of course, that's based on biblical verses, but that simple sentence of whatever has your heart, has you, is very true. The location of our treasure indicates where our heart already is. Spiritual problems are always heart problems. Sinful acts come from a sinful heart, just as righteous acts come from a righteous heart.

[15 : 05] People are never saved because they put their treasure in heaven. People put their treasure in heaven because they are saved. The second section of the lesson comes in verses 22 and 23.

In those verses, we see the next reason why we should put our treasure in heaven. When we put our treasures in heaven, we have the proper perception. The perception is what we see in these next two verses.

And look at the importance of that perception as we reread those two verses. Jesus said, The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.

But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness. We need to go back to some of the original words in this text to understand it a little better.

The word translated healthy can also mean single as it's translated in the King James Version. An eye that is clear represents a heart that has single-minded devotion.

[16:18] The word translated as bad usually means evil as it's also translated in the King James Version. In the Septuagint, which is the Greek Old Testament, that word is often used in translating the Hebrew expression evil eye.

And the Hebrew expression evil eye was a colloquialism that meant grudging or stingy. So again, it meant grudging or stingy. Said another way, to have an evil eye signified having a distorted view of things.

At first glance, these two verses can be confusing. Martin Lloyd-Jones' commentary was helpful to me here. He pointed out that the way we perceive things indicates the condition of our mind.

He said, the picture of the eye is just Jesus' way of describing by means of an illustration the way in which we look at things. Or you could say the way in which we perceive things.

He continues, according to our Lord, there are but two ways of looking at everything in the world.

There is what Jesus calls the single eye, the eye of the spiritual man who sees things really as they are, truly and without any double view.

[17:35] His eye is clear and he sees things normally. But there is the other eye which he calls the evil eye, which is a kind of double vision or the eye in which the lenses are not clear.

That is the evil eye. It is colored by certain prejudices, colored by certain lusts and desires. It is not a clear vision. It is all cloudy.

That is what is meant by the statement which is so often confused people because they do not take it in its context. He goes on to say, Our Lord in this picture is still dealing with the laying up of treasures.

Having shown where that treasure is, the heart will be also. He says that it is not only the heart, but the mind as well. These are the things that control a man.

John MacArthur added this comment. He said, The heart is the eye of the soul through which we see spiritual experience. Through our hearts, God's truth, love, peace, and every other spiritual blessing come to us.

[18:44] When our hearts or our spiritual eyes are clear, then our whole body will be full of light. Words that closely relate to the word translated as healthy mean liberality and generously.

The implication then is that if our heart represented by the eye is clear, our whole spiritual life will be flooded with spiritual understanding or light.

The clear eye will be a generous eye rather than a hoarding eye. All the way back in the Old Testament, Moses taught the children of Israel that they had a responsibility toward a brother in need.

If a brother's need came to a man's attention and he shut up his heart and refused to give that brother what he needed, that man had a wicked heart. That individual was blinded in a sense. His vision was distorted by his greed. He might recognize the need, but the love for his possessions was evidence of a wicked heart because he refused to help the brother.

[19:47] The evil eye likewise revealed the distorted view of things and reflected a moral perversion. Here's how Moses put it in Deuteronomy chapter 15 verses 7 through 9.

Moses said, If among you one of your brothers should become poor in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.

Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, The seventh year, the year of release is near, and your eye look grudgingly on the poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry to the Lord against you and you be guilty of sin.

The phrase that the ESV translates as, And your eye look grudgingly, also can be translated as, and your eye be evil. Moses continued in Deuteronomy 15.10 with these words, He said, You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

And in this verse as well, grudging could be translated as evil. Going back to tonight's text, look at verse 23. Jesus tells us what will happen if our eye is bad or evil.

[21:23] He said, But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness?

Remember that how we perceive things indicates the condition of our minds. And if our mind's perceptions are wrong, then we will be in spiritual darkness.

The rabbis had taught that the way to keep the soul healthy was to give generously. To be miserly was to distort that vision. If somebody was miserly, the eye of the soul would be blinded.

But what the rabbis had taught was ignored by the Pharisees. So our Lord said that they were in blindness or darkness. The eye that is bad corresponds to the heart and the mind that are selfishly indulgent.

The person who is materialistic and greedy is spiritually blind. He has no way of recognizing true light. He thinks he has the light when he really doesn't have the light.

[22 : 28] What is thought to be light, then, is really darkness. And because of his self-deception, Jesus says, How great is the darkness? Let's look at a few more Old Testament examples.

These examples further illustrate what Jesus' original audience would have understood him to mean when he referred to a bad eye. Here are Proverbs 23, 6, and 7.

Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy and do not desire his delicacies, for he is like one who is inwardly calculating. Eat and drink, he says to you, but his heart is not with you.

The Hebrew word translated as stingy in that passage could be translated more literally as do not eat the bread of a man whose eye is evil. Proverbs 28, 22 says, A stingy man hastens after wealth and does not know that poverty will come upon him.

So can you guess the more literal translation of a stingy man? You're right. The more literal translation is a man whose eye is evil.

[23 : 42] That would make the verse read a man whose eye is evil hastens after wealth and does not know that poverty will come upon him. So after we familiarize ourselves with the Jewish expressions of the day, we can more easily see how verses 22 and 23 still relate to how we view our possessions.

We come now to verse 24 in the third section of our lesson. We've talked about possessions and perception. In a sense, the two previous things lead up to the third.

And the third thing we see tonight is the priority. The priority is the last thing we'll look at. If we have the wrong understanding about possessions or if we have the wrong perception of this world, that will lead us to have the wrong priority.

Listen to what Jesus said in verse 24. No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and money. The word translated money in verse 24 actually is mammon, a Jewish word for money or possessions.

[25 : 04] To really grasp what Jesus means here, we need to look at the history of the word mammon. Mammon had come into Hebrew from a root word meaning to entrust or to place in someone's keeping.

Mammon therefore meant the wealth that one entrusted to another for safe keeping. Let's pause there for a second and think, who actually owns all the wealth in the world.

God does, so whatever money and possessions we have, have been entrusted to us by God for safe keeping. And in its original context, mammon of course did mean the wealth that had been entrusted to another.

So the word lacked any bad connotation at first. A rabbi could say something like, let the mammon of thy neighbor be as dear to thee as thine own.

As time passed, though, the sense of the word mammon shifted away from the sense of that which is entrusted to the sense of that in which a man trusts. So this new meaning made mammon an entirely bad term.

[26 : 12] The word mammon was originally spelled with a small m, but it came to be spelled with a capital m as if it were a god. So here's what J. Dwight Pentecost said about the word mammon with a capital m.

He said mammon is a personalization of God's chief rival, that is money or material things. Our Lord viewed the acquisition of wealth as a goal that brings a man into the most abject slavery, that prevents him from discharging his responsibility as one enslaved to Jesus Christ.

He becomes enslaved instead to money and can serve no one else, least of all God. When a man is consumed by a passion to accumulate material things, there is room for no other love.

The Lord did not condemn possession of wealth, he did condemn being possessed by that wealth. He viewed the love of money as gross idolatry.

That sentence about being possessed by our wealth gives us something to think about. We can become so focused on accumulating possessions that the possessions begin to possess us in a sense that they control the way that we think and they control what we do.

[27 : 34] Let's dig deeper now into verse 24. Jesus simply says, No one can serve two masters, for he will either hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and money. The word translated as masters is the Greek word kyrios. Kyrios is often translated as lord.

It refers to a slave owner. By definition, a slave owner has total control of the slave. For a slave, there is no such thing as partial or part-time obligations to his master.

He owes full-time service to a full-time master. He's owned and totally controlled and totally obligated to that master. He has nothing left for anyone else.

To give anything to anyone else would make his master less than his master. From the definition of that one word, the truth of verse 24's first sentence is obvious.

[28 : 42] Having more than one full-time master is impossible. That's why no one can serve two masters. John Calvin said, Where riches hold the dominion of the heart, God has lost his authority.

Consider the differences when either God or Mammon is our master. God commands us to walk by faith. Mammon demands that we walk by sight.

God calls us to be humble. Mammon calls us to be proud. God tells us to set our mind on things above. Mammon tells us to set our minds on things below.

God calls us to love light. Mammon calls us to love darkness. God tells us to look toward things unseen and eternal.

Mammon tells us to look at things seen and temporal or temporary. Jesus said that we will either hate one and love the other or be devoted to one and despise the other.

[29 : 50] John Stott meant no words when he said anybody who divides his allegiance between God and Mammon has already given it to Mammon because God can be served only with an entire and exclusive devotion.

That's a pretty hard hitting sentence isn't it? Anybody who divides his allegiance between God and Mammon has already given it to Mammon because God can only be served with an entire and exclusive devotion.

Then he continued, to try to share God with other loyalties is to have opted for idolatry. And when the choice is seen for what it is, a choice between creator and creature, between the glorious personal God and a miserable thing called money, between worship and idolatry, it seems inconceivable that anybody can make the wrong choice.

It is more than a question of comparative durability and comparative benefit, but of comparative worth, the intrinsic worth of God and the intrinsic worthlessness of the other.

James Montgomery Boyce asked, have things become your God? Remember that these things are written to Christians, and that's something that's easy to forget.

[31 : 11] Remember, all the way back to the start of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was speaking to his followers here, so he's talking to believers. So Boyce said, remember that these things are written to Christians, and that they are therefore meant to ask you whether the Lord God Almighty occupies the central place in your life, or whether things obscure him.

If you think most about your home, car, vacation, bank account, clothes, or investments, then you are building your treasure on earth, and according to Jesus, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Martin Lloyd-Jones put it this way, he said, these earthly treasures are so powerful that they grip the entire personality. They grip a man's heart, his mind, and his will.

They tend to affect his spirit, his soul, and his whole being. Whatever realm of life we may be looking at or thinking about, we shall find that these earthly treasures are there.

Everyone is affected by them. They are a terrible danger. That's why Paul said these words in 1 Timothy 6.10. He said, For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.

[32 : 35] It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. Money and possessions used correctly are tools for God's glory, but

the love of money or possessions is a serious sin that, left unchecked, becomes someone's master. That's why Jesus said at the end of verse 24, you cannot serve God and money. So now that we've been through the verses, let's consider some ways to build up treasures in heaven.

Said another way, let's consider ways to make sure that God is our master. Proverbs 2, 3-5 say, yes, yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

We gain wisdom through reading God's word, through hearing God's word, and through prayer. The more we learn about God's word, the more we learn about God himself.

That knowledge will make us want to serve God. Listen to this quote from A.W. Pink. A.W. Pink said, in his written word and preached gospel, God's two hands do, as it were, hold out to us this heavenly treasure and all spiritual blessings.

[34 : 08] Our faith is the hand of the soul reaching out to receive, and by our prayers we testify to our faith. The Apostle Paul understood what it was like to have a single-minded focus on God.

He said this in Philippians 1.21, there he said, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. So Christ was the whole focus of his life.

Another way to build up treasures in heaven or to make sure that God is our master is to ensure that our possessions have the proper place. Compared to most of the world, nearly all Americans are rich.

And that means these verses in 1 Timothy 6, 17-19 apply to us. Here are 1 Timothy 6, 17-19. Paul wrote, As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

They are to do good and to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

[35 : 30] Consider how closely those words parallel Jesus' words about storing up treasures in heaven rather than on earth, and serving God rather than mammon. Hear again what Paul said there.

He said, As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Another way to build up treasure in heaven is to love the brethren. When we love other believers, we will put their needs above our needs instead of hoarding our possessions.

Listen to 1 John 3, 14-18. Those verses say, We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.

[36 : 33] Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and truth.

during our lifetime, most earthly possessions will wear out or be destroyed. For those earthly possessions that remain, we'll leave them behind when we die.

However, verses like 1 Peter 1, 3-5 remind us that believers have something better waiting for them. 1 Peter 1, 3-5 say, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

[37 : 59] Listen to what Arthur Pink said. He said, What abundant cause have Christians to adore the triune God for having begotten them into an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them?

What reason have they to love, trust, serve, and glorify their God? Surely we would rather part with all that we have than with this treasure.

Friends, goods, country, liberty, and yes, even life itself are things that we should be willing to part with if necessary. Early believers understood Pink's sentiment.

Listen to Hebrews 10 34. Hebrews 10 34 says, For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

That's interesting, isn't it? To think that they joyfully accepted the plundering of their property because they knew they had a better possession and an abiding one. They really understood Jesus' words in Matthew 6, 19, and 20, where he said, 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.

[39 : 31] Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the reminder of what really should be important to true believers. Help us keep that in mind as we go through our lives, and let us focus on you rather than our possessions.

Make us more willing to share those possessions with others in need. and help us show them Christ through that. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.