

## Matthew 6:19-24

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**CENTRAL THEME:** OR 'Set your mind on things above' (Col 3:1)

All of us are living our lives for something. All of us have an ultimate goal or aim. Jesus challenges us to stop living for this world, and instead to live for God and his eternal reward. He does so by asking us three questions:

*What do you live for? How well do you see? Whom do you serve?*

### **Context:**

In the first half of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus has called his followers to honour God with genuine heart service, not hypocritical religious show. Our ultimate aim should be to please God our Father, not impress other people. The second half of ch.6 develops the theme of genuine devotion to God. Two things are emphasised: i. live wholeheartedly for God and his eternal kingdom (19-24); ii. trust God completely for all earthly needs (25-34).

### **1. What do you most value? (19-21)**

By treasure, Jesus means the thing that we prize most dearly. It is often revealed by our daydreams – the things we long for and that our minds drift towards when they are in neutral. It does not necessarily have to be something of intrinsic financial value. It might be our reputation or a relationship. Jesus warns us not to store up treasure on this earth. His reasoning is simple. The things of this world do not last. Possessions can fade, rot, rust. That which doesn't, like gold, can be stolen. Every earthbound treasure is liable to fail. Money can disappear in a recession. People can reject us or die. Health, beauty and strength will fade. Our earthly possessions and achievements are like Monopoly money – we strive after them and take great pride in them, but soon enough the game will end, and Monopoly money is worthless in real life. So too earthly treasure is worth nothing in the real, eternal life to come.

The book of Ecclesiastes is an interesting commentary on this verse. It is a book of wisdom that explores how empty it is to live for what is transient, passing, and earthly: Success, sex, money, fame, pleasure; none of these things can satisfy eternally.

Instead we are to store up treasures in heaven. Unlike earthly treasure such riches are secure and reliable (20). But what does it mean to store up heavenly treasure? 1Timothy 6:17-19 help us to understand this: '*Command [the rich] to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age.*' So to lay up treasure in heaven is to serve God by doing good and giving generously for the spread of his kingdom and the relief of the needy. We do so confident '*that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him*' (Hebrews 11:6). As to what these rewards are, we are given pictures in the Bible, but have no idea what the heavenly realities will be!

Verse 21 explains that the issue, as ever in the Sermon on the Mount, is in the heart. It is true that 1Timothy 6:10 says that it is not money itself that is a problem, but rather '*the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil*'. However, it is very hard to acquire

wealth without earnestly desiring it and treasuring it in our hearts. So these verses ask us whether our greatest hopes and desires are for things in this life, or are focussed on God's eternal paradise. The answer to this is seen in how we live. We show we are storing up treasure in heaven when we sacrifice treasure on earth to serve God. Financial giving, sacrificial serving and courageous evangelism are solid demonstrations of a heart that is set on heavenly treasure. In each case they show that we are foregoing things on earth (financial comfort, time to pursue my interests, and the desire for popularity) to seek God's kingdom and reward.

## 2. How well do you see? (22-23)

The second image is more complicated to understand. In the light of the context I think the best way to understand it is that by 'eye' Jesus means 'the way you view the world.' In other words, if you don't learn to look at the world with the eternal perspective of verses 19-21 then you will live in darkness. A worldly outlook on life will infect and corrupt every part of you. We must learn to view life rightly if we are to live rightly. Unless we learn to see the passing, fading nature of this world and its trophies, we will never live in a way that looks wise from the perspective of eternity.

Following on from this, we will be shaped by and move towards whatever we look at most. If cycling side by side you look ahead, you will keep moving in a straight line. Start looking at each other and you end up swerving into each other. If we are always looking at, daydreaming about, planning for, hoping for earthly things, we will be full of darkness.

Paul sets out what it means to look at life with heavenly eyes in 1Cor 7:29-32. The particular context is teaching about marriage, but he applies it more widely: *'What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of this world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.'*

The challenge for you and for me is whether we will view all of life through the lens of eternity: career decisions, relationship disappointments, health set-backs, success, financial stress, evangelistic opportunities, etc. One of the reasons it is so important to read the Bible each morning is that doing so helps ensure we start each day with a heavenly mindset. It is like putting on corrective glasses which enable us to see the world rightly.

## 3. Whom do you serve? (24)

The final section is a simple but stark challenge: whom do you serve? We are always tempted to try to make it God *and* money, but it must ultimately be God *or* money. Note the subtle change from verse 19. The question is not what do you *treasure* most, but whom do you *serve*? We are mastered by the things we value most. We will do anything to obtain them, and sacrifice anything to keep hold of them. So we will inevitably serve them / be their slaves. God is a kind, gracious, generous, merciful and true master. Money can be none of those things. It is worth noting that the term used for money in v.24 is broader than just financial currency. The old

translation was '*mammon*.' This meant something in which one puts confidence. Money is simply the most obvious candidate for this.

The problem we have with verse 24 is that most of us think Jesus is wrong. We look at our own hearts, our own lives and feel like it is perfectly possible to love Jesus and pursue wealth. After all, western churches seem to be full of people with a vibrant faith who have made plenty of money... We need to remember that throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches using extreme language. This love / hate language is a common Semitic way of speaking about a strong preference. It's a way of saying that ultimately, you can have only one ultimate goal/trust. It is very easy for money to displace God. As we look to the future, what makes us feel secure (or anxious if we lack these things)? Is it the thought that we have a good career? That we will inherit a house from our parents? That we have got a foot on the property ladder? Or is that we have a loving heavenly Father who encourages us to ask him for all our daily needs?

Carson quotes a striking example of a man who had a right perspective on money and God in his commentary. The 17<sup>th</sup> century Bible commentator Matthew Henry wrote the following in his diary when he got home after being robbed:

*'Lord I thank you that I have never been robbed before;  
that although they took my money, they spared my life;  
that although they took everything, it wasn't very much;  
that it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.'*

## **APPLICATION**

We need to sort out our eyes – that is to shape our thinking and outlook by continually saturating ourselves in Scripture. Then we need to act in the light of that. Make practical decisions about how we use our money and our time, and whether we are willing to share the gospel, that show we are looking for heavenly treasure.

Two 'D's' reveal where our treasure is, and who our master is: Daydreams and Decisions. What do we daydream about? What happy place does our mind drift off to? So often our daydreams reveal what we truly long for. Likewise, our decisions reveal what matters most to us. What factors consistently hold sway in our decisions? Is it gospel priorities, or earthly security and comfort?

## QUESTIONS

- What attitude has Jesus been attacking up to this point? [*Hypocrisy*] Now we see him move on to the need for wholeheartedness
- What do your friends and colleagues most want out of life? What do they work for and live for?
- What about you?

## Verses 19-21

- What are we not to do, according to Jesus?
- What do you think he means by earthly treasure? Is it just physical / financial things?
- Why should we not live for earthly treasure?
- Give examples of the way different earthly treasures can fail for us.
- What instead are we called to do?
- In pairs look at 1Timothy 6:17-19. What does it mean to store up treasure in heaven?
  - How can you tell what your treasure is? [*good way is to ask what you daydream about...*]
  - What will storing up treasure in heaven mean in the reality of day to day life?

## Verses 22-23

- What do you think Jesus means by healthy or unhealthy eyes? [*our perspective on the world / eternity*]
- In pairs look at 1Corinthians 7:29-31. According to this passage, what does it mean to have healthy eyes?
  - What can we do to ensure that our eyes remain healthy? Or to put it another way, how can we ensure we view the world through gospel glasses each day?

## Verse 24

- How will we relate to the things we treasure according to this verse? [*serve it*]
- What does that mean?
- How do you respond to what Jesus says here?
- Why can we not pursue both God *and* money?
- Why do you think Jesus warns us about money so often?
  - What are the most important factors in working out whether to take a different job?
  - What makes you feel secure when you think about the future?
- In pairs: what one thing do you want to change about your life in the light of this passage?
- How practically can you help ensure you don't treasure / serve earthly things? [*make decisions and take practical action such as giving more if finance is an issue, or inviting people to guest events if you care too much about their opinion of you, etc*]