

Treasures in Heaven

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[0 : 00] If you have a Bible with you, then please turn to Matthew chapter 6, verses 19 to 24. Matthew chapter 6, verses 19 to 24. We are still in the Sermon on the Mount.

This is the Word of God. 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 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!

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.

[1 : 04] You cannot serve God and money. Amen. We are making our way through the Sermon on the Mount.

And it's perhaps because this is my last sermon here that Corey has given me the passage on money. Because money is awkward to talk about, isn't it? It's not something we talk much about here in Scotland.

I'm from Germany. In Germany we say, you don't talk about money, you have it. Or you don't have it. And it's in our Western world, which is so material, it's something we like to keep to ourselves. But here in chapter 6 of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus has talked a lot about difficult things. The last things we've considered were him talking about giving and praying and fasting and saying these religious practices are not just things we do.

But you have to have the right heart. You have to have the right attitude towards them. There are good things and right things to do for the right reasons, but don't do the right thing for the wrong reason, basically.

[2 : 14] Don't just give to be seen by others. Don't pray to be seen by others. Don't fast to be seen by others. Don't forget to be seen by others.

But he's telling us how to live practically as Christians. And he starts with money. And we are uncomfortable with money. But Jesus talks a lot about it. Jesus actually talks about money in 16 of his 38 parables.

I don't know if you knew that. 15% of Jesus, all of Jesus' teachings are on money. So we have to talk about it. And that is reason enough, I think, to do so. So let's consider what the Bible is telling us here. Verses 19 to 21, Jesus is talking about treasures. I don't think we use the word treasure very much, maybe in pirate movies or something like that, but I don't really use the word treasure in my day-to-day life. But it is exactly what Jesus is describing here. He says, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. Literally, he's saying, do not treasure treasures. And in this verse, we see that earthly treasures, whatever Jesus means with that, definitely has an element of it being able to perish.

perish. Everything that is a treasure on earth is able to perish, to be eaten, to rust, to be stolen by thieves. And people back in Jesus' day, they, of course, also had belongings that they treasured, and they would sometimes put them in a box and bury them in the ground. And of course, the danger then is that a war might come and eat it, or that thieves break in and steal it.

And it's the same for us today, isn't it? We all have things we treasure, and we put them somewhere where we know maybe a safe, where a thief can steal it. Or yesterday, I had this experience. It was the first time for me. I put all my belongings in a storage unit. I don't know if you've ever done that.

[4 : 26] Very interesting experience, because they make you write down a list with everything you own and how much it's worth. Don't worry, I don't have very much. It's a minister in training. But I did ask them, out of curiosity, what happens if I don't pay my monthly fee? And they say, well, at some point, we will probably just sell your stuff. So it's not secure. All our stuff, all our earthly material stuff is perishable. It can go. It can be stolen. It can be sold. It can actually be destroyed.

And so I think the meaning is obvious in this verse, that earthly treasures can always perish. Instead, Jesus says, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal. Treasure up treasures in heaven. Great. Amen, right?

But what are heavenly treasures? That is actually not an easy question to answer, especially because they seem really mysterious. Jesus himself never really defines what heavenly treasures are, but he does talk about them quite a bit. So in the Sermon on the Mount, in verse 1, in chapter 6, verse 1, he says, don't practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them, for then you will not have any reward from your Father who is in heaven. And he uses this word reward, he uses it in verse 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 18, all the time, and he never really explains what he means by that. He says, don't pray to be seen by others, don't give to be seen by others. Don't fast to be seen by others, but do it out of love and a desire to be closer to God, and he will reward you. Sometimes I think in Christian circles we can kind of talk about this like there's a heavenly currency, you know, and you wash the dishes for a friend after having a meal, and you just think, ah, I just got some cash on my heavenly bank, and maybe you pray for someone, you think this is really good. I don't think this is necessarily how it works. God wants us to do the right thing for the right reasons, and he doesn't want us to do the right things for the wrong reasons.

So the question of what a heavenly treasure is is really difficult to answer, but we find one very explicit example in Matthew chapter 19. It's the story with a rich young ruler who says he wants to follow Jesus, and Jesus asks him if he has kept the commandments, and he says, yes, all the commandments I have kept. What do I still lack? And then Jesus says to him, if you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess, and give to the poor, and you will have, what? Treasure in heaven, and come follow me. And then the young man, he hears this, and he goes away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus then tells his disciples that only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.

He says it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Isn't that interesting? That Jesus asks the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions so he could have treasures in heaven. We have this very specific example here, that for this young man selling all his possessions means treasures in heaven. Is that the same thing that it means for us?

[8 : 11] Do we now just have to sell all our possessions and we will have treasures in heaven? Probably, probably not, because actually not all of us do have so many possessions.

It's about something else, I think. Jesus is connecting these heavenly treasures to entering the kingdom of God. If you remember when we talked about the kingdom, there will be a kingdom after this life, but the kingdom has already started. It's already here and not yet. So there are heavenly treasures we can enjoy right now. And, you know, it still sort of probably seems quite unclear what heavenly treasure is. So Jesus, he uses metaphors. At one point, Jesus says heavenly treasure means inheriting eternal life. At another point, he says it means entering the master's joy. Another time, he says it means inheriting the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. So a sort of responsibility that you will have over the kingdom. So one scholar says spiritual treasure should be defined as broadly as possible as everything that the believer can take with them beyond the grave. So for example, he says holiness of character. That's a heavenly treasure. Obedience to all of God's commands. Souls won for Christ.

So people you have led to Christ. Disciples nurtured in the faith. People you have helped to disciple. In this very specific context, he says, it also means storing up treasures, which means focuses particularly on the compassionate use of material resources to meet others' physical and spiritual needs in keeping with the priorities of God's kingdom. So we see that in this specific context, it means you have to be generous. You have to give your stuff away to an extent. You also, you know, you have, you need something to live, obviously. But in the next verse that I want to look with you, Jesus says something really, really important. He says, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. It's such an important verse. For where your treasure is, your heart will be

also.

Because we might think, what's the problem with money? What's the problem with having possessions? And Martin Luther, the German reformer, he said, whatever your heart clings to and relies upon, that is your God. So if you find out what your heart loves, if you find out what your heart clings to and relies upon, you will find out what your God is. You will find out if you are looking for heavenly treasures or for earthly treasures. You know who you are. You know what you're truly worshiping if you know where your heart lies. And that sometimes requires reflection and asking yourself difficult questions.

And it requires looking at your heart, at your inner being. So that the Bible, with heart, the Bible means the seed of your emotions, your desires, where you make your decisions. What do you talk about when you spend time with your friends and family? Is money something that you think about a lot? What keeps you up at night? Spiritual concerns or material concerns? Is Christ's undying love my true treasure, or do I actually treasure other things more? Is my money an indicator of my true treasure? Is my reputation, comfort for my family, recognition, is that why I need money? Or do I live my life knowing that God's love and grace is all I need? How much money do I need? Will the answer to that always be more? I need more money? Why do I want to hold on to my wealth? Am I trying to prove something? What am I trying to prove?

[12:26] Pride, power, prestige, selfishness, insecurity, fear. Am I a control freak when it comes to money? Or is it just normal to keep collecting money because that is what the culture tells me?

Is that what God wants me to do, to flow with the culture? Or does God want me to do something very different, maybe radically different? All of these questions we need to ask ourselves to find out what is our relationship with money? Because quite often when we talk about this in church, you will think, well, this is not about me. But it is about every single one here. We all have to look at our own hearts.

Your life, if you're a bit like me, you don't have much money, can still revolve around money just as much as the life of a very rich and wealthy person can revolve about money, around money.

So, Jesus is giving us a little model here to look at our hearts and to find out and to actually be able to keep looking to Jesus so we don't start becoming greedy. And he says it in a weird way. Actually, Jesus says in verse 22, 23, he says, 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? Why is Jesus talking about eyes all of a sudden? Why is he starting to talk about your eyes? There are three reasons, I think.

First of all, we probably don't get it as English speakers when we read the Bible, but in Jewish wisdom literature, this is a common saying. People say you have a good eye. What do they mean? They mean you're generous. I'm not exactly sure why, but it's true. For example, we see that in Proverbs 22, verse 9. It says, whoever has a bountiful or a good eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor. Jesus says, you need to have a healthy eye. You need to have a good eye. You need to be generous. You need to share your bread with the poor. The second reason why Jesus is saying this is actually that there is a play of words happening, which we cannot quite grasp if we don't know Greek. So, the word that Jesus uses here is a word that actually doesn't mean good or healthy. It means single, which is not what you would expect if you have a single eye. And the word for that is haplos, and it sounds very similar to the word haplos, which means generous. Okay, what is Jesus trying to say here? He's trying to create a double meaning. Have a healthy eye. Have a single eye. And a lot of commentators, a lot of preachers will say, Jesus is trying to tell you, have a single focus. Be a single-minded person. Not simple-minded, but single-minded. And it doesn't mean we can't think about multiple things at once. It means to have a single focus. It means we should always, always, always have the one single purpose of our existence in mind, which is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

[16:06] And of course, that also relates to how we deal with financial things, with our money. That is actually the key to dealing with money. It's not yours. It's given to you for a purpose.

And you have to be careful not to lose that single focus, that single-mindedness. God gives you freedom to use it as you please, and either you can use it for self-fulfillment, or you can use it to advance the kingdom of God. And maybe some of you are wondering, why should I give money? Why should I just give away the money that I've earned with hard work? And that is another thing that Jesus is saying here. You have to keep your eye healthy. You have to look at the light. And Jesus is the light in that regard. We read about Jesus in Philippians chapter 2, that Jesus emptied

Himself. Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever considered what that means? Jesus emptied Himself all of His glory. He left the heavenly realms, heavenly realms, and He came to this earth, and Jesus was never rich in any material sense.

Yet Jesus gave, and gave, and gave, until He didn't have anything to give, because He gave His life. Jesus gave everything. He embodies radical, sacrificial giving. He shows what it means to selflessly give away. He emptied Himself. He left His glory. He never had anything that He called His own during His time on this earth. He gave everything away. When He saw His people, lost sheep without a shepherd, fallen in sin, unable to save themselves, greedy, lustful, power-hungry, He became their greed. He became their sin. He became your sin, so that you may become free. He gave everything.

Am I viewing myself as a manager or trustee of what God's given me, or am I seeing myself as an owner and controller of my own stuff? Instead of asking, why should I give this away?

Maybe does God want me to ask, why shouldn't I give this away? As I continue to realize that Jesus gave everything by His death on the cross to purchase me, is there maybe a new level of sacrifice I want to give and surrender to Him? Giving is not natural to most of us. It's a way of offering worship. Without generous giver, we couldn't sit in this building here tonight that, you know, needed money and resources that people have generously given. And if we don't start giving in small amounts, we will never be able to give in larger amounts, and we will never be able to give in a radical way, in a sacrificial way, like Jesus did.

[19 : 15] The third reason why I think Jesus is using this saying with the eye being the lamp of the body is because it is the entry to our hearts. He already mentioned the heart, and that your heart is where your treasures are, that it's a place of your emotional decisions, of your desires. It's really where your inner life happens. And Jesus is making a connection here, and He says, your eyes have something to do with that. And we see that throughout the Bible, don't we? For example, Genesis chapter 3, Eve sees the fruit on the tree, and then she desires it. It often begins with seeing that we start having desires. It begins with seeing rich people that we suddenly want to be like them, living in comfort, living in luxury, just enjoying that sort of life. When we see something, it just becomes so much more real.

And that's why Jesus wants us to be filled with light, to look at what is good, what is wholesome, what is uplifting, to look at Him alone. In Hebrews 12, we read about that, that we are supposed to look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and who is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. And I think there's really a key element to this, looking at Jesus, not just when it comes to money, but actually in general. We live in a time where everything is visual, where there's screens everywhere. We perceive so much more with our eyes than we hear with our ears. And I think there's such a true principle in all of this. Some of you don't like Lord of the Rings illustration, I hear, which is strange. So I'll give you an illustration from The Hobbit. In the last movie, there is this dragon, Smaug, and he lives in the Lonely Mountain. You don't have to know any of the plot for this, it doesn't matter. And he has this treasure that gets stolen, so he comes to the nearest town and completely destroys it. And there's this tower, and there's a man and his son on the tower, and they have this certain arrow that you need to kill the dragon, okay? And the bow that they need is destroyed, so they kind of spontaneously improvise a bow. And then the father, he uses his son to look at him, and he puts his arrow on his shoulder to aim at the dragon. And he says to his son, look at me, look at me. And he uses his son's shoulder to aim for the dragon who comes behind the son. And the dragon, you know, he's angry, he's making a lot of noises, he's spitting fire everywhere. And the son, in fear, turns around. And what does the father do? He says, no, look at me. You look at me.

[22 : 27] So the son does, and the father, he fires the arrow straight into the heart of the dragon, of course. The movie ends well. But what's the point? The point is that as sons and daughters of the highest one, we can look at him in full trust that he has defeated all darkness. We don't have to turn around to look at the dragon, to look at the darkness. We look at him who fills us with light.

In all regards. And let's look at the last verse, verse 24. Is money your master? Is money your master? That's my question tonight. Are you being controlled by your possessions, by what you have materially? Tim Keller says, money is a surface idol that functions as a deep idol. It's how we justify ourselves, prove our worth, and try to control the world. Isn't that interesting? Money is very special in that. It's different to other sins in a way, because money actually allows us to pursue all

the things that we want. Happiness, freedom, wealth, comfort, control. And in this verse, Jesus is saying to us, you cannot serve two masters. Money is a slave master. He says you cannot be a servant to both God and money.

You can't serve money as well as God, because they're complete opposites of each other. God is a God of generosity, who gives and gives and gives and gives. And God is a master who asks you to be generous towards others as well. God is a God who gives himself away. And money is a slave master that will always leave you unsatisfied and hungry for more. It'll make you greedy. It'll make you thirsty, a thirst that you cannot quench. You will always want more and will never be satisfied. If you make five figures a year, you'll hang out with people who make six figures a year, and you think, oh, but they have more. And the people who make six figures a year, they hang out with people who make seven figures a year, and they say, oh, but I want more. And that goes all the way up until you're friends with Elon Musk, and he's not even satisfied with the world anymore and says, we have to go to Mars. It makes you greedy. You want more and more and more. How do we determine if money is our master? Does the thought of sacrificial generosity make me feel anxious? Does giving make me feel anxious? Am I living to hear others say of me, you are a great success? Or am I living to have God say of me, well done, my good and faithful servant? Here is a little test for you to see if money is your master. When you meet people who are clearly richer than you, sorry, first the other one. If you meet people who are clearly poorer than you, okay, do you feel superior to them? Do you think, oh, okay, they're nice, but they are so poor, and they don't have anything. Clearly, they are not responsible, and I'm better than them, right? I'm superior to them. If that's the case, then money is your master. If you meet people who are richer than you, the same thing applies. Are you jealous?

Do you resent them? Are you saying, oh, they're so rich, that's sinful? Are you saying, they don't actually know what to do with all their money? I mean, they just live in a completely different world. They don't know what it's like to be me. If you're thinking that, then money is your master.

What's your reaction? We are all striving to be more like Jesus, right? What did Jesus do? He visited the rich. He went to Zacchaeus' house, and he was completely unimpressed by his earthly possessions, so much so that he changed his mind, and Jesus spent time with the poorest of people, and he could relate to them, and he could love them. We want to be able to say, Jesus died for the rich as well as the poor, and therefore, we can love all of them alike. It doesn't matter whether you're rich or whether you're poor. It doesn't matter where you are. We want to look at Jesus and treat people the way he treated them, and we want to be able to say, money is not my master. If you feel anxious about giving, if you think that the number, the 10 percent of your salary is too big of a number to give, then go and pray about it. Go and look at Jesus and what he's done for you. Ask God to grant you a heart that is joyful in giving. If you are the opposite, and you think it's never enough, what I give is never enough, then just think about what God, what God ever say to you when you stand before his judgment seat, you blew it. You sold those shares, and you gave them to feed the hungry, and evangelize the lost, and then two years, two years later, the stock market peaked. Do you think

[28 : 01] God would say that, or would he say, well done, my good and faithful servant? God wants you to be generous. God wants you to give yourself away, just like Jesus gave himself away. Be generous. Be joyful givers. Don't serve two masters, but serve like the one true master who gave himself away. Let us pray.

Father, we give thanks for your goodness towards us. We give thanks for your generosity, for all your good gifts. We give thanks for the money and the resources that we have, and we ask that you would grant us a heart that just pursues the will of your kingdom, that pursues gospel work, that we would become generous givers, giving away to those who need it, giving away so that the gospel would shine, and I just pray that for everyone who's here in this room, that you would give us the grace to consider how we are to deal with the things, the earthly treasures you give us, so we may achieve heavenly treasures. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.