

“Jesus Challenges our Loyalties”

Matthew 6:19-24

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus has challenged His hearers to reject the wrong teaching of the Pharisees – even though they used Scripture incorrectly [more accurately abused Scripture] – because wrong doctrine always results in wrong application. The wrong doctrine was, if you're poor, if you're disabled or diseased and if you're socially unimportant you are not blessed of God. The Pharisees pointed to themselves as examples of success and 'obvious' blessing of God. And if you're told all your life that God hasn't favoured you because there's something wrong with you or you're poor or you're socially unacceptable, then believe you have to be more successful or less poor or healthier so that you will be blessed of God.

When Jesus says blessed are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the ones who hunger after God and are persecuted for believing in Jesus, the people begin to listen and stand a little taller. Now Jesus has been telling them that when you give and pray and fast, do it quietly and not for show because God sees what we do in secret and He'll reward us. How will He reward us? Like the Pharisees with lots of nice clothes and houses and gold?

Jesus says, no. Don't fall for the what the world defines as success based on outward appearances and nice stuff. God wants to reward you in a different more valuable way than the world's definition of rewards. And maybe this is one of the most difficult things we wrestle with because we live in a world that tells us over and over that success is measured by what we have or who we are.

Jesus says the way we look at our possessions is what separates His people from the world. Yes, we are to pray for our daily bread, which means be content with how God met your need today. But what about tomorrow? How will I know He'll meet my need tomorrow? Maybe I better hang on to my stuff a little longer and fill my storehouse fuller in case my needs aren't met – in case God doesn't come through.

This is what it boils down to; loyalty. Do we trust God or ourselves to meet our needs? And if we have more than we need can we trust God as we let it go to help meet others' needs? In vv.19-24 Jesus uses 3 examples to challenge us to choose God as our greatest loyalty. So, we're going to use these examples and ask ourselves 3 questions that Lord-willing will help us examine our present loyalties and, if we need to change, orient them back to God.

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The first illustration about storing up the right kind of treasure causes us to ask ourselves . . .

Are We Putting our Trust in What Lasts? **(6:19-21)**

V. 19 and 20 are the exact same words except the first says don't do this and the second do, do this. Jesus knows the temptation to hang onto stuff here is very real. We hang on to things for security or for status or for personal pleasure. The wording in v.19 literally says 'Put a stop to storing

up for yourselves treasure on earth' and v.20 literally says the counterpart *'Begin to store up treasures in heaven.'* So Jesus paints a very distinct contrast between His followers and the followers of the world. And so, we're to . . .

Show others how living for Jesus changes the way we handle our stuff (v.19)

'Lay up/store up treasures' means put away for future purposes. Does that mean we shouldn't buy in bulk? Jesus is not talking about buying things we will need only as we need them – He's all for us buying wisely and saving money because money we save in one place can be made available for ministry purposes. Jesus is talking about the tendency we have toward keeping for no other reason than keeping. Or having the biggest and best when smaller and stable works just fine. The world is always competing for bigger, better or more. Look at the lineups in stores when a new phone comes out. Look at the attempts of advertisers to always make us want to go out and spend money on things we don't necessarily need. *"Advertising helps keep the masses dissatisfied with their mode of life, discontented with the ugly things around them. Satisfied customers are not as profitable as discontented ones."* That was written in an advertising trade magazine in 1930! Not much has changed.

But when the follower of Jesus says 'No, I didn't have to live that way, I am quite content with this or that, it distinguishes us from the unsaved around us. If we were to ask ourselves how is our lifestyle or how we use our resources different from our unsaved neighbours and friends, would it be difficult to answer?

Jesus says the stuff of this world either breaks down or becomes the object of thieves. Are we paranoid about losing something of earthly value? Are we unconsciously trusting in it to give us security? Jesus gives us an investment strategy. He urges us to . . .

Invest in our eternal future (v.20)

Jesus does believe in storing up for the future but in the spiritual realm not in materialism. Since we can't take anything with us from this world why should we live for that which doesn't last? For that which will eventually rot, rust or just dis-appear? Think about something you have that you value, that you would be reluctant to part with? Realize that it won't last forever, it won't go with you and someone else will end up with it for a short time. Perhaps that will help us lessen our grip on it. Don't trust in things that don't last. Instead invest in that which does last. Like what?

Our salvation. Peter writes:

¹Pet. 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

The trials that we go through now, Peter will write, refines our trust in God resulting in our rejoicing when we see Jesus one day. Why? Because we realize none of the good things in this life will surpass knowing and seeing Jesus for all eternity and all the bad things in life will stay here. There will be nothing negative in eternity!

If that's true for us wouldn't we want to see people we know and care about have that too? One of our eternal invest-ments is evangelism. Sharing the truth with those who don't have the living

hope of the resurrection in their life. Who don't have assurance of forgiveness of sins. Isn't that a good thing to invest our lives in? That would also include using our resources to help advance the gospel here and around the world. That's a great way to invest in the future.

Jesus says in v.21 . . .

What we treasure reveals our heart (v.21)

for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

What we treasure we spend money and time on. If God is our focus in life we will invest time in knowing Him more and using His resources more for His purposes. It's funny, if we're planning on a trip we'll spend time getting more acquainted with where we're going, make plans for what to do when we get there and save up money for the trip. Shouldn't we then be spending time getting to know God more, who we will spend all eternity with, reading more about our eternal future and home and making investments now with the resources He's given us so that we'll experience more of the rewards He promises to give us?

Where your treasure is there will your heart – the center of our life, the focal point of our life – be.

Jesus gives another example or illustration, one which we're not quite sure what He meant.

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

Hear Jesus tells that we need to have a good eye or clear sight when it comes to using our resources. This is the context of the passage and we know He's still talking about this because v. 24 says we can't serve God and money. So obviously vv.22-23 is still talking about how we use our resources for eternal purposes.

The eye is the lamp of the body and if it sees clearly then we can function properly. Function properly in the way we use our resources. But isn't this a funny way to say it? Not if we lived in Jesus' day. Every culture in every generation has its own idioms. We have our own. People from a different culture probably scratch their heads at us if we say 'Don't beat around the bush', or 'he left me out to dry' or 'he got my goat' or 'I almost kicked the bucket'. Well in Jesus' day they had the expression 'Have a good eye'. 'Have a good eye' meant to look out for the needs of others and be generous. A bad eye meant you were stingy.

When Jesus tells the parable in Matt. 20 of the landowner who paid everyone the same wage even though some didn't start work until 3 and 5 in the afternoon, those who worked all day complained that they were being cheated. When the landowner responds and says in v.15 *"Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or 'is your eye evil' [literally] because I am generous?"* Most translations catch the idiom and translate it 'are you envious' meaning are you looking at this selfishly, stingily and don't want to see them get that money?

We also see this expression used in Proverbs. Prov. 28:22 says,

²² A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth and does not know that want will come upon him.

And in 22:9 we read,

⁹ *He who is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor.*

This literally reads 'the generous eye will be blessed' because he gives to the poor. What was Jesus saying?

Are We Seeing as God Sees? **(vv.22-23)**

Over and over we read in the Bible that God commands His people to look after the widows and the poor. He instituted laws like, don't harvest the edge of your fields so that the poor can glean the edge and have some for themselves (Lev. 19:9-10). Wipe out debts owed to you after seven years (Deut. 15:1).

Jesus, in commanding us to lay up treasures in heaven, is telling us when we see the needs of others as God sees them and use our resources to supply their daily bread,

We shine as light when we are generous (v.22)

But

We show ourselves to be evil when we are selfish (v.23)

The word for 'bad eye' is evil. Jesus says to store up treasures for ourselves and not see the needs around us and meet those needs is evil. That's strong language but those are God's words and we have to let them sink in and ask ourselves are we seeing as God sees? Do we have a good eye or a bad, evil eye?

And one more illustration to drive home this same point is in v.24,

²⁴ *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.*

One more probing question:

Who is our Master? **(6:24)**

Love/hate is another Jewish idiom that means you can't have both; one has a higher allegiance than the other. Jesus shows this most clearly when He said in Luke 14:26,

²⁶ *"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.*

Jesus can't mean actually hate them because then we would be dishonouring our parents. But He means have a higher allegiance to Himself over family. If we claim to be Jesus' disciples He must be our primary allegiance. His will comes first. You can't have it both ways.

And maybe for some of us that's more our problem than storing up earthly treasures. That family is our master more than Jesus. That when we have to choose between obeying God and pleasing family we put family first. Perhaps that's why Jesus forewarns us there isn't marriage in

heaven. Even now Jesus describes us, the church, as His bride. Are our earthly fathers, mothers, children given more priority than our heavenly Father?

Jesus was very clear in His teaching here; we can't serve our greatest treasure God and our earthly treasures equally; one gets the priority over the other. If we've been giving what doesn't last more a priority than what does last, God, what do we need to put a stop to and what must we begin to do?

Col. 3:1-4 says

Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

If we know Christ as our Saviour our 'being raised with Him' is guaranteed. That's why Paul speaks about our future resurrection in past terms because it's a done deal. And when Jesus returns and takes us with Him in glory, we won't say to Him 'Oh hang on Jesus, there's a few things on earth I really want to take with me.' The glory of Jesus and God and the future eternal new earth will be so fantastic we'll wonder why we treasured anything on this earth at all.

Therefore, we should be setting our minds on the things above more than the things down here that won't last. Are we then putting our trust in what lasts or doesn't last? Is our lifestyle distinguishable from our neighbours? If we were to apply the three R's to our lives (reduce, reuse, recycle) how could that free us from the temptation to trust in the things of this world?

All of us have extra stuff we don't use anymore. Is it garbage, then get rid of it. Is it reusable to someone else? Things we have that our children grew out of that others could use. If we're thinking about making a new purchase do we really need it? Do we really need it now? Do we really need it brand new? Can we find something just as good at Bibles for Mission, Value Village, Kijiji?

Jesus also challenged our vision towards the needs of others. How generous are we? Are we involved in a ministry that helps the poor, the defenseless, the unsaved in our communities or world? Or do we only give once in a blue moon as a guilt reaction to a request?

When we free ourselves from the treasures of this world we free up God's resources to meet the needs of others and spread the gospel to areas where it is needed. And I don't know anywhere in the world where it isn't needed including right here. Last week tornadoes ripped through an hour and a half north of here and Samaritan's Purse is right there as are other organizations looking for help.

Jesus endorsed storing up for the future but not our future on earth. When we use our time and resources for God's purposes we are making eternal investments that will never be destroyed or stolen. And we know from personal experience that when we give and serve for God's purposes the Holy Spirit fills us with His joy, giving us just a taste of what our eternal joy will be like. So, let us experience the joy of God more as we serve Him more with our time and resources.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net