

The Imperishable Riches of the Kingdom of God

Matthew 6:19-24

Introduction: 1) “Earthly treasures may leave us in this life. It is certain, that we will leave earthly treasures in our death.” This simple, but obvious truth seeks to help us put things in proper perspective concerning what is real, ultimate, and of lasting value; what really matters and is of true importance.

2) You see we all have things that we treasure, that we value, that we are convinced are absolutely essential to our happiness and fulfillment. For some persons it is possessions, money, and the material things of life. For others it is their reputation, their standing and status in society. Still for others it is looks, brains, education or family. And, the list goes on and on.

3) For the Christian, things are different, or at least they should be. Daniel Boerman puts it well, “The Christian lives in this world, but his sights are set on the world above.” (“Imperishable Treasure,” *Discipleship Journal*, #21, 1985, p. 39). Boerman is simply echoing the words of Paul in Colossians 3:1-2 when he writes, “So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

4) Here is Matthew 6:19-24 Jesus deals with the subject of our priorities, what we treasure. He does so by addressing the heart (vs. 19-21), the soul (vs. 22-23) and the will (v. 24). Our Lord wants us to have the right treasure, the right devotion and the right master. Obviously that means it is possible, and even a temptation, to have the wrong treasure, be devoted to the wrong thing, and serve the wrong master. The stakes are high in this drama and battle for our soul. The missionary Adoniram Judson helps us see just what is on the line when he says:

“Life is short. Happiness consists not in outward circumstances. Millions of Burmans are perishing. I am almost the only person on earth who has attained their language to such a degree as to be able to communicate the way of salvation. How great are my obligations to spend and be spent for Christ! What a privilege to be allowed to serve him . . . and suffer for him . . . But in myself I am absolute nothingness. . . . Soon we shall be in heaven. Oh, let us live as we shall then wish we had done!” (*EGT*, 50)

There are three clear and simple movements that unfold our text in these verses. Putting them in context, Quarles is right, “verses 19-24 explicitly state the priorities that the model prayer [6:9-13] assumes” (*Sermon on the Mount*, 233).

I. Jesus says pursue heavenly treasures over earthly treasures 6:19-21

- Life is basically a series of decisions, of choices we make. These decisions shape our character and guide our destiny. Forks in the road confront us again and again. Which road will I take? Which path will I choose? Sometimes the choices are stark in their comparison: God or Satan? Right or Wrong? Righteousness or unrighteousness? Belief or unbelief? Light or darkness? Earthly treasures or heavenly treasures? The decisions we make are critically important. They can be eternal in their consequences.
- Jesus simplifies things for us. He tells us there are only two places where our treasures can be: on earth or in heaven. These are our two options. What do we learn from where we have them?

1) What you treasure shows what you value 6:19-20

- Jesus is direct and to the point: “Don’t store up for yourselves treasures on earth.” The verbal form is a present imperative, a word of command calling for constant vigilance. Don’t prize and treasures as most precious the things of this world. Why? Because they don’t last and they can be taken away. They don’t last because “moth and rust” can destroy them. They are “here today and gone tomorrow.” They

lack staying power. And, “thieves can break in and destroy.” They ultimately aren’t capable of being protected.

- In our modern, idolatrous context we need to be reminded that looks fade and bodies wear out. Money and items we cherish can be stolen or lose their value. These earthly treasures are transient and temporary. They don’t last!
- So, what is our Lord’s counsel? Treasure the right things that do last and can’t be taken from you. Verse 20: “But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy, and where thieves don’t break in and steal.” The verbal form is again a present imperative. It literally reads, “treasure for yourself treasures in heaven. . .” Earthly treasures are not secure but heavenly treasures are eternally secure. Quarles is very helpful when he points out that, “In the Sermon on the Mount the actions that are specifically described as accumulation rewards include suffering persecution for Jesus’ sake (Matt. 5:12), loving one’s enemies (5:46), generous gifts to the poor (6:2-4), fervent and sincere prayer (6:5-6), and humble fasting (6:16-18)” (*Sermon on the Mount*, 234). Jesus says, these are things worth treasuring. These are things of real and lasting value.

- Where is your treasure located? Is it down here or up there? Is it located on the earth where it can be lost or is it safely secure in heaven?

2) What you treasure shows what is in your heart 6:21

- Jesus tells a story in Luke 12:16-21 that provides a helpful commentary on our text. There He says,

Then he told them a parable: A rich man's land was very productive. He thought to himself, 'What should I do, since I don't have anywhere to store my crops? I will do this,' he said. 'I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grain and my goods there. Then I'll say to myself, "You have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy; eat, drink, and enjoy yourself."'

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. And the things you have prepared—whose will they be?'

"That's how it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

- This story ties together verses 19-20 to verse 21. Store up treasure for yourself, here on earth, and you will not be rich toward God and

heaven. In fact, the condition of your heart and what you truly value will become clear for all to see. Why? Because “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

- One of the basic and fundamental truths of the Christian faith is that our heart, who we really are on the inside, should belong to God. He created us and in Christ He has redeemed us, purchasing us with the precious blood of His Son. To love anyone or anything, to treasure anyone or anything, more than Jesus is nothing less than spiritual adultery. It is idolatry of the heart. In Matthew 13:44, Jesus tells the parable of the hidden treasures buried in a field. When the man finds it, there is such delight and joy in his heart that “he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field.” That treasure is the eternal kingdom of heaven. That treasure is Jesus. That treasure, worth more than all this world can offer, should be the treasure in our heart. Don Carson is right, “It is a poor bargain which exchanges the eternal for the temporal” (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 77).

II. Jesus says pursue light (good) over darkness (evil) 6:22-23

- Sometimes the teachings of Jesus can be hard to understand. There is nothing wrong at all in acknowledging this. Sometimes his teachings are purposefully vague in order to make us think. At other times the problem

is the time gap between living in the 1st and 21st century. I believe verses 22-23 fall into this latter category. Now, the basic truth is not difficult to understand at all. It is a well-known theme we find repeatedly throughout the Bible. We should go hard after what is good, represented by the image of light, as opposed to going hard after evil, which is represented by the image of darkness.

- Jesus uses the images of light and darkness to draw attention to what we love in John 3:19-21. There are Lord said, “This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.” So the basic principle of light and darkness is clear. The question then is this, what specifically was Jesus teaching in these two verses by His use of the terms? Two truths, I believe, stand out.

1) Be single on your devotion 6:22

- Jesus says to His disciples, “The eye is the lamp of the body.” This is easy. The eye is the source of light for us. Like a window lets light into a house, the eye lets light into the body. Therefore, it is very important that we have good healthy eyes.

Why? Jesus tells us, “If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.” Your whole body will be full of truth.

- Because of the context, some think the good or healthy eye represents generosity in giving. An evil eye is stingy and miserly. It is an eye focused on earthly treasures not heavenly treasures. In contrast, a good and healthy eye is generous and giving. For example, Proverbs 22:9 says literally, “A good of eye person will be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.” Now, this is certainly a legitimate and possible understanding of this verse.
- However, most commentators believe the good or healthy eye is one of fixed and single devotion. The idea is you do not suffer from double vision, a double mind or a double heart! Quarles says, “the good [healthy] eye is one whose focus is fixed on God and whose vision is not blurred by focusing on two objects at the same time, God and possessions. . . In this adjective the themes of generosity toward others and singlehearted devotion to God coalesce to define the disciples proper view of possessions and riches” (249). Carson adds, “The good eye is the one fixed on God, unwavering in its gaze,

constant in its fixation. . . the individual with a single eye toward kingdom values is the person characterized by maximum understanding of divinely revealed truth and by unabashedly pure behavior” (80). His eye is on the prize of one treasure, one kingdom and one Master, and he will not be distracted by anything this world has to offer.

2) Be on guard against self-deception 6:23

- Verse 23, sadly, presents the exact opposite scenario of verse 22. The focus is now on a bad and unhealthy eye. You are attracted to and looking at the wrong things. Again, Quarles puts it well, “When greed forces out any trace of inner good and only evil remains, the inner person is indescribably evil. The greedy person’s corruption is complete. No room remains for God or pursuit of the kingdom and its righteousness (vv. 24, 33)” (253, emp. mine).
- Jesus is clear and direct, “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full darkness.” Your perspective on life, your priorities, what is truly valuable and important, will all be turned upside down. You won’t see things as they truly are. You will see but you will see wrongly. Therefore our Lord

concludes, “So if the light within you is darkness, how deep is that darkness.” *The Message* paraphrase is worth noting, “If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have!” Your self-deception will be complete. You will have lost the ability to see life correctly. James Boice simply says, “If you are absorbed with money, you will miss everything else in life that really matters” (*The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 1, 105).

III. Jesus says pursue God over money 6:24

- John Piper well says, “There is something about God and money that makes them tend to mastery. Either you are mastered by money and therefore ignore God or make him a bellhop for your business, or you are mastered by God and make money a servant of the kingdom. But if either tries to master you while you are mastered by the other you will hate and despise it. This is why Jesus said it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Much money makes a cruel master.” (“Don’t Be Anxious, Lay Up Treasures in Heaven,” Part 1) (3-2-03).
- Jesus says the mark of His disciple is that His eyes are fixed on heaven not earth. He says the mark of His disciple is that their spiritual vision is single and not divided. He says the mark of His disciple is that serve he serves the

right master, not the wrong one. In verse 24, Jesus clarifies for us the situation we all face and the decision we must all make.

1) We can only serve one master

- In verse 24 Jesus states a simple and irrefutable truth. It remains to this day a popular colloquial saying: “No one can serve two masters.” By the very nature of a master/slave relationship a slave can have and serve just one master. Sinclair Ferguson is right, “We should notice the obvious implication of Jesus’ teaching here. We were made to have a master” (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 140). Jesus then makes clear the dilemma we face. No one can serve equally well two masters because “either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other.” To one master you will show love and devotion. To the other master you will demonstrate hate and spite. Luke 14:26 provides a helpful insight where Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.”
- Divided allegiance and loyalty is not possible in the Kingdom of God, especially when it comes to your master. “Only one can come out on top” (Carson, 81). Only one can be your Lord! Charles Spurgeon is

spot on, “God and the world will never agree, and however much we may attempt it, we shall never be able to serve both. . . .You can live for this world, or you can live for the next; but to live equally for both is impossible” (C. H. Spurgeon, *Commentary on Matthew*, 64).

- We cannot submit to two Kings. We cannot obey two Commanders-in-Chief. We cannot serve two masters. We cannot worship two Gods.

2) We can only satisfy one master

- Jesus now specifies the #1 challenge to total and absolute surrender to His Lordship: money (*KJV*, mammon). “Originally the word meant “something in which one puts their confidence. . .” (Carson, 81). The principle, once again is simple, “You cannot serve both God and money.” The simple fact is one will win and one will lose in terms of mastery over your life. Divided loyalty is not an option. You cannot be devoted to two things, here God and money, at the same time.
- The issue is really not what you have. The issue is who or what controls you, who or what you live for. If you live for God, you can’t live for money. If you live for money, you can’t live for God. Jesus clearly understood that we only have so much devotion, love and service to give. This requires us making some hard but necessary choices. The more we love money, the less we will love God. As our

obsession for money increases, our passion for God decreases. Sell your soul to money and you will forfeit your soul to God. Money, in the final analysis, as a god, will only take you down. It is God as your God alone, who can take you up.

Conclusion

- I do not know if the Apostle Paul was meditating on Matthew 6:19-24 when he penned 1 Timothy 6:17-19. I do know it provides a fitting commentary and conclusion to our study of this text.
- “Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share, storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life.”