

Text: Matthew 6:19-34

Title: Earthly Treasures

Truth: Jesus investigates the heart of your religion.

Date/Location: Sunday 6/6/2021; Wed 6/9; Sun 6/27/2021 at FBC

Introduction

These verses cover the section of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus speaks about issues of priorities and what is most desirable.

I. Summary of the Passage

As often occurs in Scripture, two possible life paths are considered. Jesus preaches very clearly about which path we should follow. Here they are, summarized side by side so you can visualize them:

The Ungodly Path	The Godly Path
6:19-21	
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.
Principle: For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.	
6:22-23	
Illustration: The eye is the lamp of the body. Paraphrase: A good eye brings in light, a bad eye results in darkness.	
Principle: You have a "light" in you. It is either good or bad.	
Internal darkness	Internal light
6:24	
Principle: No one can serve two masters.	
Explanation: for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.	
Serve money	Serve God
Reiterate the principle: You cannot serve two things.	
6:25-34	
Do not worry about your life...what you will eat... drink... clothing... tomorrow...	But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Illustrations: birds, flowers

Principle: God knows your needs.

II. To Save or Not to Save (Money)?

- A. The Lord's instruction may seem initially like you are not allowed to save money in your bank or in investments for retirement or other needs. If you simplistically read the Lord's instruction to mean that, then you are misreading it. We know this because other portions of Scripture are positive about the value of frugality and saving.
- B. The classic example is the wise Joseph, son of Jacob, who ruled over Egypt. On a national level, he arranged Egypt to save (by taxation) 20% of the produce during 7 good years in order to help the nation during the coming 7 famine years (Gen. 41:34-36, 47-49; 47:24, 26).

This was not a sinful laying up of treasure on earth; it was setting aside bounty to be used at a time when there would be little provision at all. We can and should do the same. We should not live "by so much faith" that we give away much of what we have, so that we have to rely on others to cover needs we could have covered if we had been more careful. Neither should we live wastefully so that when "famine" comes we have to beg or borrow or go on welfare. We should prepare ourselves during the years of plenty by saving, investing, educating, training, etc. so as to increase our value and be able to handle the times to come.

- C. So if saving money aside for such things is not equal to "laying up treasures on earth," then what does that phrase mean? I believe it means:
 - 1. Piling up wealth beyond what you might ever need. If you are a multi-millionaire, or effectively so, you need to consider your ways! Are you greedy about this matter? Are you like the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-24 or like the foolish rich farmer in Luke 12:16-21?
 - 2. Treating your possessions with higher care than people or God. Even if you do not have vast wealth, you can still be treating things that you own as little treasures. Your antique car, your

property, your collection of whatever knick-knacks, etc. They will be passed to another person after you die, or thrown out if they become obsolete, and eventually burned up in the great conflagration that will make way for the new heavens and new earth.

3. This is an issue of the heart, not of the amount. It is an issue of greed, of priority, of love, of time.

D. James 5:1-6, 1 Tim. 6:6-10, 6:17, Heb. 11:26 speak of wealth and warn against loving it. Matthew 13:22 shows that riches are deceitful and choke out the word of God in one's life and make it very difficult to enter into the kingdom (Mark 10:23-24). He exposes here that it is an issue of trust—those who trust riches have this problem. Yet there are some people who have wealth and are good stewards of it (Luke 16:11).

E. The New Testament letters extol riches like riches of the glory of the mystery (Col. 1:27), the riches of the full assurance of understanding (Col. 2:2), the word of Christ dwelling richly (Col. 3:16), God supplying all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ (Phil. 4:19), God giving us richly all things to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17), the riches of the glorious inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:18), God who is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4), the riches of God's grace and kindness (Eph. 1:7, 2:7), the riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8) and of God's glory (Eph. 3:16), the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Rom. 11:33), etc.

III. The Insecurity of Earthly Treasures, 6:19

The Lord lists several problems with riches in this text.

- A. They are “earthly.” They are not heavenly. They indicate a misplaced priority structure.
- B. Bugs eat organic things like cloth. Moths eat up clothing. These treasures do not last. Even if they outlast you, they don't last.
- C. Oxidation (rust) ruins metal finishes and eventually eats the things away entirely.
- D. Thieves steal things. You have to use other money to buy safes and locks and protective equipment.

E. In sum, buildings become run-down; cars rust; humidity and mold ruins documents and paintings; bugs ruin clothing; fires burn up important documents; and you cannot take anything with you out of this life!

IV. The Security of Heavenly Treasures, 6:20-21

- A. No bugs to destroy things. I do not know if this means no bugs, or just no harmful bugs!
- B. No oxidation. I do not know if this means there is no oxygen, or there is no second law of thermodynamics.
- C. No thieves. The last “thief” in the future will be the Lord Jesus Christ, the one “coming as a thief.” After that, thieves will not be able to get away with their evil work and God’s people will be secure. The thief of thieves in this world (John 10:10), Satan, will be banished and punished forever.
- D. Such treasures are “heavenly” and therefore indicate that your heart—your love, your priority, your center of worship—is in Heaven instead of on the earth with its worldly system of values and worship.

V. Lamps

A. “The lamp of the body is the eye.” This always mystified me to some extent. Maybe that was because of where I am situated in our western culture with science education has an effect, that I think of the eye as a converter of electromagnetic radiation into electrical signals to the brain to process the images formed by the light bouncing off things into our eyes. But that is obviously not how Jesus is thinking of it here, despite being the designer of that marvelous viewing system.

Now as I think about it, it does not seem too complicated. Close your eyes for a second. What do you see? Darkness. Could you almost be convinced that your whole insides are dark because no light is coming in? When you open your eyes, light floods into you, after a manner of speaking.

- B. A good eye, that is, a functioning eye, will let light in. A bad eye is an eye that does not function, like that of a completely blind person. No light comes in and thus “your whole body will be full of darkness.”
- C. Like the physical organ of sight is the spiritual vision. The control center for this vision originates from inside instead of outside. The Lord exclaims that if the spiritual vision you have inside is darkness, that darkness is great, because it comes from a “bad eye” and there seems to be no way to fix it. This is what it means, “if the light in you is (actually) darkness.”

This “spiritual eye” is related to the immaterial aspects of our being like the heart and the conscience. Darkness ought to bother our consciences, but if we are full of darkness, the conscience may be unable to discern right from wrong as it once was, and as it was designed to be.
- D. This in turn affects how we fill our lives from the outside. If we have internal darkness, we will seek to fill our physical eyes with sights that conform to that darkness, and we will be bringing more darkness into us. Satan parades about like an angel of light, but is actually a purveyor of pure darkness. Sometimes he uses things that seem enlightening, but are actually “endarkening.”
- E. But if we have the light of life inside of us, then we will turn our eyes toward things that will “lighten” our lives further.

VI. Two Masters, 6:24

- A. The teaching is straightforward. The fact is that you *cannot* serve God and money. If you believe that you *can* do so, then you are in direct contradiction to the Lord.
- B. The two masters are assumed to be incompatible in some fundamental way. It is not like a situation where you have a supervisor and your supervisor has a supervisor, both of whom are on the same page when it comes to when you are supposed to be doing. This is where you have to choose who your devotion and service go to—either one or the other. If you try to straddle the fence, in fact you will be loving one and hating the other. Or, you will give up the façade entirely and just go all in for one master.

VII. Worry, v. 25-34

A. Definition. I am going to lump together ideas like worry, fear, stress, and anxiety. One symptom if not definition of worry is that your mind is consumed with some issue, difficulty, problem. They are all interconnected. I am not talking about fear of an intruder in your home—that is a different kind of fear. We are not talking about the “thing” you are worried about, like, “my biggest worry in life is...” Rather I am talking about the feeling of angst that you have when there is some kind of problem.

I am also excluding a matter of legitimate *concern* which prompts you (not *panics* you) to prayer and action if you can do anything. If you are concerned for grandma’s health, then you might help her do something about it, or if you cannot help, you can pray with her and for her about it. It is an area of concern, but not anxiety.

What is anxiety? It is a feeling of loss of control. It can be from something that has already happened or something that you speculate may happen. It is a bad feeling about the past or the present or the future. It happens when you try to import the things that are under God’s authority and place them under your own authority.

B. Worry shows that your:

1. Priorities are wrong. It assigns the wrong level of importance to the thing you are worrying about. Maybe there is a pre-eminent desire for personal comfort as over against a desire for the glory of God.
2. Character needs development. Your character includes your faith. If you are a person who trusts in the Lord, your worry-meter will show that. If you do not trust in the Lord, but trust in yourself or others, your worry-meter will be higher.
3. Theology has not been applied properly. You are not remembering that God is sovereign. There are things that are outside of your control. Now, if that is the case, forget about them, in a sense. If there are things in your purview (in your scope of influence) and you can do something about it, then do so. You might worry about areas where God has already

delegated to you the responsibility and the authority to make some changes. Instead of being anxious, do something.

4. Contentment needs a tune-up. Recognize when your real needs are met. If you have food, drink, clothing then you have enough. I often add “shelter” because it is a necessity in cold climates. **Perhaps you lack contentment and that is why you worry. Perhaps you *want* more than you *need*. You may say, “What am I going to wear today?” when concerned about how you want to appear and you don’t have anything that perfectly fits the occasion or feeling. Or, perhaps you worry because you have too many clothes to choose from! That is to say, you might worry if you have too little, *and* you might worry if you have too much! Eccl. 5:12 says the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep! One thing that might come up if a person seeks help from the church is this: have you eliminated everything unnecessary from your budget? You do not *need* a cell phone for every person in the family, or cable TV or AC at 72 degrees all the time or two car payments!**
5. Speculation is running rampant. Sometimes worry comes because of a thing that has happened in the past or is happening presently. Other times, however, worry is caused by what *might happen* in the future, and often our minds are very skilled at thinking up the worse thing that could be. And if it is not *that* which happens, you reason, it might be something even *worse*! **But then again, that thing you speculate about may not happen at all, and the worry is worthless.**

C. Carefully read the passage from 6:25-34 and ponder it. The main teaching is obvious: do not worry (repeated in 25, 31, and 34).

Then the Lord explains by asserting via a rhetorical question that “life is more than food” and the “the body is more than clothing.” What does He mean about this? Man shall not live by bread alone (food), and the body is the home of the soul. Clothing and food are of secondary import to life itself.

“But you cannot tell me not to worry. I cannot help it! Life is very difficult!” Good try, but that will not fly. Obviously with God’s help we *can* stop worrying. It is a prohibition from God, and it is

important because worrying is sin, it puts self on the throne, so to speak, and worrying is harmful. We must figure out in our own context how to obey this command, but obey we must. We are *not* permitted to make an excuse, as if we surpass Jesus's authority by our own.

- D. Verse 26. Lesser to greater illustration of the birds. God feeds them, but they do not take special measures to feed themselves. They are of far less value than human beings. Note that, please. Animals are not humans. They are of less value than humans. So says Jesus! Note also that this is an illustration. It does not mean that we can sit around and take welfare instead of taking action to feed ourselves. God has given us means to get food, and we are commanded to use those means lest we be in disobedience.

To put the welfare thing another way, you do not see birds sitting around while other birds gather food for them. Baby birds are obviously exceptions! Birds do something to eat: they move around, search, peck, nibble, hunt, etc. So, you cannot make an argument for welfare from nature!

- E. Verse 27 teaches that worry cannot add anything that has value to your life. It cannot add height, years of life, wealth, spiritual maturity, health, etc. If you deny that, you are in direct opposition to Christ—no matter how you rationalize it.

What *might add* to your life is something like Ephesians 6:1-3. This has nothing to do with worry, and everything to do about godliness. You “worry” about your godliness—meaning you concern yourself with that aim—and God will “worry” about your “worries.”

- F. Verse 28. So why worry? It is useless. It is worse than useless, in fact, because we know from physiology and personal experience that it is harmful.
- G. Verse 28-30. The Lord gives another lesser to greater illustration, this one about field grass. God “clothed” the grass, and it does not do anything proactive to accomplish that. In fact, it cannot because it is not a sentient being even though it is “alive.” Again, that does not mean we can sit around and wait for others to give us clothing.

We use the means God has given. The point is that God has taken care of grass which will be burnt up in short order. He will do the same for you—and more—because you are of infinitely higher value than grass.

H. You ask, “What about all the impoverished people in the world?” That is a problem, but it is not a strike against this passage about God’s promised provision. Our Lord Jesus said that if you seek first the kingdom of God, all these things will be added to you. He did not say what would be provided if you do NOT seek His kingdom. I take it that if you do not seek his kingdom, He does not give you that comforting promise. He may or *may not* provide. And of course, at some point we all run out of natural vitality, so we cannot apply this truth to say that God will always provide *life*, for He eventually provides death for us to move us into the next life.

God has a general care for all of human creation, but not an equal care to how He cares for His own children. If the world does not want God and wants to go it alone, who are we to demand God provide for them just like He does for His family members? I have had many times where people seeking benevolence basically say that the church *must* provide for them whenever they ask. I resist that guilt-driven approach. Rather, they *must be born again and join God’s family*.

Do you expect to provide for others outside of your own family? Sometimes we do that, and it is nice and good and can be a good testimony. But if someone lacks and is living in conflict with God’s word, they should not expect God to satisfy their cravings for His promises while they go on living in sin. Instead, they should repent. Perhaps God uses their need to point them to the cross! After they come, as part of God’s family, God cares for them through the various means that are available to them.

VIII. Antidote to Worry, v. 33-34

A. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Go back to 6:9-10 where we learned that we are to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” *That* is seeking first the kingdom of God. You make God’s priorities your own.

- B. Do not worry about tomorrow. The priorities you are seeking (above in these notes, and above in heaven) will keep your focus so that worry will be less and less of an issue for you.
- C. There is the practical concern as well that there is enough to concern yourself about *today* without borrowing trouble from tomorrow. So let it stay with tomorrow.

“But what if I can do something today to solve tomorrow’s worry?” Then DO IT! Do not worry about it. The Lord did not say, “do not DO anything about tomorrow.” He said, “do not WORRY about tomorrow!”

If you are a smoker, don’t worry about getting lung cancer tomorrow. QUIT SMOKING TODAY!¹

If you are struggling with besetting sin today and worried about the consequences tomorrow, stop worrying and QUIT SINNING!

“I might not have enough money tomorrow to eat.” OK, so get a second job TODAY to help pay the bills. Or, CUT an unnecessary bill TODAY instead of worrying about tomorrow.

- D. It is interesting that “worry” or similar occurs 11 times in the English New Testament. 6 are here in this section 6:25-34 and three in a parallel passage in Luke 12:22, 25-26.
1. Three are in Matthew 10:19/Mark 13:11/Luke 12:11: do not worry about what to speak when you are persecuted. God will help you. I do not believe this is a prohibition about *thinking* about what you might say, but it does prohibit worrying about it. The Spirit of God can use that to “give you in that hour what you should say.”
 2. There are some similar words that reflect a matter of concern or some level of pre-occupation, not necessarily worry in a bad sense. For example: 1 Cor. 7:32-34 (4x); 1 Cor. 12:25; Phil. 2:20.

¹ I really dislike having to put footnotes of this sort in my sermon, but just in case there is some pedant reading these notes: Yes, I know that you cannot necessarily stop smoking in a day. But you can START TO STOP! That is the point. DO something instead of worrying. I am speaking generically about tomorrow as in “the future,” not just 24 hours from now.

3. There is one more major passage on the topic, and that is Philippians 4:6. Let's read it—verses 4-9. Please notice the character traits of rejoicing and gentleness. Then, three steps to peace:

* Take your anxieties, convert them into prayer requests, and talk about it with the Lord. Give Him thanks as you do so. Peace will become your portion over time with this approach.

* But also, think on true and pure things (v. 8)

* And also practice what is taught in Scripture (v. 9). That is the other support for inner peace.

If you are missing any of these three ingredients, then you will struggle with the matter of peace.

Conclusion

Note that the Lord is dealing with internal matters of religion—how we do benevolence and why we do it; He speaks of why we pray and fast, not for men, but for God. The “how” of these religious acts is driven by the why to be God-centered instead of man-centered. We are challenged to point our hearts heavenward (19-21), to be transformed/illuminated from the inside (22-23), and to serve God instead of worldly wealth (24). Finally in chapter 6, Jesus deals with worry, which is another internal matter that reveals a lot of what we are truly “made of.”

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