

Lasting Treasure

Matthew 6:19-21

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Introduction:

Today we return to our study of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel.

- As we do, I want to remind you of a few things...

First of all, do you remember what Matthew's gospel is all about?

- It is about the coming of King Jesus, the Messiah, to establish His righteous kingdom in a sinful world.
- Matthew begins His gospel by presenting Jesus to us as the promised One who comes to save His people from their sin...
 - At the end of chapter 4, Matthew tells us how He revealed Himself to His covenant people in Galilee where He began His public ministry...
 - And that public ministry consisted of two things set forth in Matthew 4:23:
 - The ministry of preaching and the ministry of healing
 - Matthew 4:23: And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.
 - This verse serves as a kind of outline for what follows.
 - In chapters 5-7,
 - Matthew gives us an example of Jesus preaching ministry in the Sermon on the Mount....
 - And in chapters 8-9,
 - He gives us examples of his healing ministry.
 - And at the present time,
 - we are studying about the things Jesus preached in the Sermon on the Mount.

This great Sermon began in chapter 5 with the beatitudes,

- Here, Jesus tells us who the people are that are blessed in His kingdom!
 - He shows clearly that it is not the proud
 - but the poor in Spirit who realise they have no righteousness in themselves...
 - not the self-satisfied, but those who mourn over their sins...

- not the ones who are self-confident,
 - but the meek who give up governing themselves to follow Him...
- not the ones who are full of righteousness
 - but the ones of hunger and thirst for righteousness...
- not the ones who receive service from others,
 - but those who are merciful...
 - and so on...

After this, Jesus explains that He has not come to do away with God's law, but rather to fulfil it..

- And then He calls us to look at the law honestly,
 - without all our twistings and distortions that we come up with when we are trying to pretend that we have met all its demands...
 - He lays out for us its true meaning for us...
 - so that, if we hear Him, we will be poor in spirit, broken over our sin, meek and hungering and thirsting after Him for righteousness!
 - If we hear Him and believe,
 - we will know that we need a Saviour because we will see how far short we have come of God's righteous calling.

And in chapter six, Jesus begins to challenge us about the need we have to trust God as our Heavenly Father and rewarder.

- When He had revealed Himself to Abraham in the old time, He said,
 - "I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."
 - It is the part of faith to believe that Jesus shields us from the wrath and curse of God that has justly fallen on this world...
 - And that He Himself is the reward and the rewarder of those that diligently seek Him.
- If you are blessed in His kingdom,
 - you believe that all your reward is to be found in Him,
 - not in yourself or from any other source.
- In the first half of chapter six,

- Jesus shows how we don't seek Him as our reward even in our best religious deeds!
- There is the religious man...
 - giving to the needy... but more concerned about the praise of men than pleasing God the Father as He does!
 - What a distorted, perverted outlook—as if man is responsible for our blessing instead of God!
- And there he is again, praying,
 - yet all the while he is more concerned about what other men think of him than what God thinks!
 - What could be worse than to be come before God Almighty in prayer and act like the people who are looking on are the greater, more significant presence!
 - What blindness is this!
 - What lack of faith!
- And then there is this matter of fasting, not because you are earnest with God...
 - but to impress man!
- In each case, Jesus presses home the point that even in these religious deeds,
 - men are more concerned about the reward they get from men than from God!

Today we come to verse 19:

- Jesus continues talking about seeking reward from something other than God...
 - Only now, it is not the reward that man can give,
 - but the reward and happiness that we hope to find from our material possessions in this world.

How twisted and blind we are to think that things have the power to bless us...

- how lacking in faith we are in the living God who alone can bless and curse and is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

Listen now, as I read to you from verses 19-21, the portion we will be looking at today:

- READ> Matthew 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. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

In these words, Jesus issues a very simple command—

- If you look at the essence of it, Jesus simply you not to do something...
 - “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth”
 - But to do something else instead...
 - “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

This is very simple,

- Like so much teaching in the Bible, there is a “put on” and a “put off.”
- The idea is that in serving God it not ever enough to stop doing what is wrong unless you replace it with doing right...
 - For example, in the Bible a thief has not really changed when he stops stealing—
 - He is changed when he stops stealing and starts working with his hands so that he will have something to give to those who have need.
- So in the matter of treasures,
 - you are to stop laying up treasures on earth (that is the put off)
 - and start laying up treasures in heaven (that is the put on).
 - You have not really changed the way God wants until you have gone from one to the other...

I. But I say, there has been much confusion among Christians throughout the ages about this simple command.

A. It seems that God’s people have often been confused about how to obey this teaching.

1. There seem to be two extremes...

a. First, there are those who say,

- 1) “Oh it is quite clear, you are to sell all that you have and give it away to the poor.”
 - “It is wrong for you to own anything.”
 - “That is surely what Jesus means when He says, ‘Do not store up treasures for yourself on earth.’”
 - “The only reason you struggle with it” they continue, “is because you don’t **want** to obey it.”

2) Are these folks right?

- Are you disobeying a clear command of Jesus if you have money in the bank today—or in the market?

- Is it wrong to own a house and a bed—after all, the Lord Jesus Himself had no place to lay His head?
 - Is it wrong to have fine jewellery or a collection of art in your home?
- b. What do the folks on the other extreme think?
- 1) They are the ones that look on the poor as cursed of God and the rich as blessed of God...
 - With a superior attitude, they look down their noses at those who have less success in this world...
 - You know, there are the TV preachers who remind you that God loves you and wants you to be happy, and that if you are not rich in this world, there is something wrong with your faith...
 - They quote Mal 3:10-11 which says:
 - Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you *such* blessing That *there will not be room* enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," Says the LORD of hosts.
 - They point out how God blessed Solomon when he asked for wisdom and also gave him riches so that even silver became as common as stones.
 - 2) Now most of you won't come forward to defend these TV preachers...
 - But at the same time, if you are honest, isn't there something of that in your heart?
 - Don't you believe to some extent that God has given you things because he loves you and wants you to be happy...
 - And that your riches are a sign of His blessing and favour?
 - And doesn't the Bible bear you out on this:
 - Pr 22:4: By humility *and* the fear of the LORD *Are* riches and honor and life.
 - Ps 112:1-3: Praise the LORD! Blessed *is* the man *who* fears the LORD, *Who* delights greatly in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; The generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches *will be* in his house, And his righteousness endures forever.

TRANS> So what do we do with these two extremes?

2. I would say that most Christians live in tension somewhere in the middle!

- a. Some even think that is what they are supposed to do...
 - “Everything in moderation, they say...”
 - “We have to be balanced Christians,
 - neither laying up too many treasures
 - nor refusing to enjoy the good things that God has given us.”
 - b. When you live in such tension, you become legalistic—setting an arbitrary standard of what is “balanced...”
 - 1) “Its okay to have a new Ford, but a Mercedes is too extravagant....”
 - “Its okay to have stainless steel refrigerator as long as you got from the scratch and dent section at Sears bargain basement...”
 - “Its okay to have a house, but two houses is going too far—you can only live in one at time...”
 - “Its okay to have nice CD collection, but if you get a collection of expensive paintings, you are guilty of storing up treasures.
 - 2) The problem with such legalism is that it is totally arbitrary!
 - The Christian in Sudan who thinks like this and who doesn’t have enough water to drink thinks you are extravagant to have your CD collection and your used refrigerator....
 - the same way the Christian who has the little apartment thinks you are extravagant to have your own house—and such a big one at that!
 - 3) God does not call you to live in the tension of legalism!
 - He does not call you to be always a little bit guilty when you get something new...
 - And always feeling like you have to justify why it was something God wanted you to have.
- B. The problem is that we think riches are the problem instead of us!
1. The sinful heart always wants to blame **things** rather than the sinful human heart!
 - a. It’s not sinful people, but guns that murder...
 - b. It’s my sinful heart, but wine that causes drunkenness and food that causes gluttony.
 - c. It’s not my sinful heart, but riches that draw me away from God.
 2. Yet, the Bible clearly presents four different possibilities as far as wealth is concerned...

- a. First, there are those who are rich and blessed of God
 - Clearly, Job and Abraham were very rich and very blessed of God—
 - and in fact, their riches were an expression of God’s blessing and favour.
 - In the New Testament, you have blessed rich persons who owned houses that were big enough for the church the meet in—
 - people like Philemon or Lydia or John Mark.
 - I already quoted from Prov 22:4 and it is true!
 - Pr 22:4: By humility *and* the fear of the LORD *Are* riches and honor and life.
 - Prov 24:3-4 declares:
 - Through wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established; By knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches.

TRANS> So we first of all that it is possible to be rich and blessed of God.

- b. But secondly, the Bible teaches that there are those who are rich and cursed of God...
 - Just because a person has riches does not mean that God is pleased with him.
 - Look at the wretched man Nabal who refused to show hospitality to David...
 - When David didn’t kill him, the Lord Himself struck so that he died...
 - And look at Pharaoh whom God raised up in order to demonstrate the glory of His judgement in all the earth.
 - Proverbs 13:7 says:
 - Pr 13:7: There is one who makes himself rich, yet *has* nothing; *And* one who makes himself poor, yet *has* great riches.

TRANS> And that leads to the third possibility...

- c. Third, there are those who are poor and blessed of God.
 - In the Old Testament, you have someone like Elijah who wondered about in rough clothing and lived off the land the same way John the Baptist did...
 - And in the New Testament, you have the poor widow who cast in her two mites into the treasury at the temple and was more blessed than all the rich who put in their costly gifts.

TRANS> Just because a person is poor does not mean he is not blessed of God.

- He may be poor and yet very dear to God—
 - Jesus even says that the last will be first and the first last...
- But there is a fourth possibility...

d. Fourth, there are those who are poor and cursed of God.

- Proverbs 22:16 states:
 - Prov 22:16: He who oppresses the poor to increase his *riches*, *And* he who gives to the rich, *will* surely *come* to poverty.
 - You think of the covetous Lot who was chastened of the Lord and died with nothing but a cave to his name.
 - Then there were those in the Thessalonian church whom God refused to feed out of His treasury because they would not work.
- It certainly can be a sign of God's displeasure to be poor.
 - The Bible condemns those who are poor because they will not work or because they are foolish in their spending.
 - We must never suppose then,
 - that there is something automatically noble about being poor any more than we should assume that there is something automatically noble about being rich.
 - The Bible recognises both blessing and cursing with riches as well as blessing and cursing with poverty.

TRANS> There is a very important principle that you need to learn from this!

- Namely that you neither please God simply by acquiring riches, nor simply by making yourself poor.
 - You don't have to live in tension about where you ought to draw the line.
 - Jesus is not concerned about how much you have or don't have when He tells you not to lay up for yourselves treasures on the earth....

II. Jesus is concerned about what you are looking to for reward!

A. It is the same concern He had in verses 1-18—

1. There the problem was looking to men's favour for your reward as if men were the ones who have the power to bless instead of God...

- And here it is the problem of looking at riches as if they have the power to bless you apart from God...
 - as if they carry some kind of intrinsic power to make you happy and satisfied in themselves.
 - as if as long as you have them, you will be blessed and secure.
2. I want you to think further about how this compares with the one who seeks men's praise in verses 1-18...
- a. Let me ask you a question...
- Was that man who sought the praise of men disapproved **because** people thought well of him on account of what they perceived to be godliness?
 - Was Jesus saying you should be anxious to make sure that you hide your godliness from others so that no one will know?
 - That you should try to have a bad reputation?
 - Of course not!
 - A good reputation is not the problem!
 - The praise of men is not the problem.
 - The problem was with the sinful human heart that sought that praise as its portion and reward when God is the reward!
 - The problem was that they had things turned completely backwards so that to them,
 - the thing that mattered most was what other thought of them rather than what God thought.
 - They were living to please man, whom they could see, rather than God, whom they could not see!
- b. You see how this is parallel with riches...
- The person who lays up treasures on earth is not condemned for having treasures...
 - He is condemned for making his life to be about laying up treasures on earth rather than treasures in heaven.
 - It is not that he is only supposed to lay up treasures on earth a little—just for next week's groceries and nothing more...
 - He is not to lay up treasures on earth **at all!**
 - It is an absolute statement—not something that is to be balanced.

B. How does this work out practically?

1. Well, it is like this...
 - a. If you are seeking the treasures of earth, your goal is to get these treasures in whatever way you can.
 - 1) Plain old stealing might not be the best way because you might get caught and lose everything.
 - Besides, you know that stealing is wrong—your mother taught you that.
 - But if you can get by with doing a little work under the table... everybody does it... then that would definitely increase your treasure!
 - 2) And in selling your house—you don't have to tell them about how you just painted over all that rotten wood...
 - or how you got the furnace to run a little longer until the sale was made...
 - Your goal is just to make a reasonable profit!
 - 3) And of course, you can't afford to tithe to the church on your salary...
 - And that person who is need—you know that there are others who are more able to him than you...
 - besides, his wife isn't even working...
 - they would have plenty if she would just put the kids in government school and get a decent job.
 - 4) Oh yes, and family worship—
 - There is no time for that!
 - You have to pay the bills!
 - Nevermind what the pastor said about working on Sunday.
 - There just aren't enough days in the week to make a decent living these days...
 - It might have been that way 50 years ago, but there are so many more demands on us now.
 - b. It is obvious that a person who reasons like that does not believe that blessing comes from God, but from earthly riches.
 - 1) He is much more concerned about serving riches than about serving God.
 - If God's calling and command gets in the way of laying up his earthly treasure,
 - God will just have to understand!

2) You see that this is a faith issue!

- It is rooted in the thought that the place to find happiness is not from serving God but from gaining earthly riches.
- This fellow is laying up treasures on earth with no concern about heavenly treasures...
 - He is on the path to destruction.

2. Okay then, how do you lay up treasures in heaven?

- You lay up treasures in heaven by following Jesus Christ...

a. The blessing Jesus brings into this world is His righteous kingdom!

1) He came into the world to set up a kingdom of righteousness in a world full of sin!

2) And the treasure of heaven is for you to be restored to this perfect righteousness that He gives!

- It is to have the sin that justly turned God's wrath on us forgiven through His blood that was shed on the cross...
- It is to have His promised Holy Spirit work in us to produce in us the fruits of righteousness...
 - To restore us to the beauty of what we ought to be as God's people!
 - To restore in us love and mercy and truth and wisdom!

b. If this is your treasure, this is where your heart will be!

1) Jesus says so in verse 21:

- "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also!"
- You will be seeking the treasure of King Jesus and His kingdom rather than the treasures of this earth.

2) That means that instead of saying,

- How can I amass more wealth on earth?
- You will be saying,
 - How can I obtain more of my heavenly inheritance—which is this righteous kingdom that Jesus came to establish.

c. Obviously then, your whole life will be moving in a different direction than the earthly treasure seeker...

- If Jesus calls you to pay your taxes to whom they are due, you will pay them in full.
- If He calls you to keep the Sabbath and to seek Him on that day, you will gladly do so...
 - You will diligently apply yourself to the means of grace—the word, prayer and the sacraments—because you want to grow...
- If He calls you to tell the truth to person who is buying your house, you will tell the truth about the rotten wood you painted over...
- If He calls you to tithe and to give to those who have need, you will do it.
 - You are not looking to find your happiness in riches, but in Him!
 - And He is pleased with you when you help those in need!

TRANS> The bottom line is that you believe your reward comes from a different source than the earthy treasure guy... and you are right.

3. But how does this pursuit of heaven work out particularly with respect to riches?
 - a. It means that you will labour diligently in love to others because Jesus calls you to...
 - 1) You will work hard in order that you might provide for you family and have sufficient to give to others.
 - 2) You will work honestly in order to do them good and not evil that you work for.
 - b. This means that you end up with just as much or more of this world's treasures than the guy next to you who is pursuing them as an end in themselves.
 - 1) And this may surprise you, but it is scriptural to say that you will enjoy those earthly blessings even more than he does!
 - The reason is because you will enjoy them as the blessing of God to be used for His glory!
 - You will receive them, not as an end in themselves, but as a gift of God.
 - And you will find delight in using them for His purposes.
 - Earthly treasures are a great blessing when you understand that they are from God!
 - In 1 Timothy it says that “foods” have been created by God
 - “to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing

is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

2) Oh, but you must be careful!

- It is so easy to deceive yourself and to shift from trusting in God who gives all riches to trusting in the riches themselves for your blessing.
- Instead, you must continue to trust in God who blesses with or without riches.

III. Consider, brothers and sisters, who among you gives as much attention to the pursuit of heavenly riches as he should?

A. Is it not true that much of your life is not given to the diligent pursuit of heavenly treasures?

1. Is it not true that earthly treasures that are seen are often more real to you and more worthy of your attention than the heavenly ones?

- Hear what our gracious Lord says!
 - “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.

2. Do you see how He graciously adds an argument to his bare command to help you in keep it?

- He could have just said,
 - “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven”
 - And it would have been ours to obey,
 - but instead He says:
 - “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.

B. He shows you how foolish it is to neglect the heavenly treasure!

1. He knows our sinful propensities.

- He knows our struggle and our weakness and our temptations.
- And so He reasons with us to help us.

2. He reminds us that the treasures of this world do not last...

- a. They can be stolen by thieves or destroyed by moths and rust.
 - rust refers to any kind of eating away whether of rats and mice or of the corrosion of metal.
 - b. The one thing that is certain is that the riches of this world will not bless us forever on their own.
 - In time, they will be taken away from us.
 - But the treasures of heaven cannot be destroyed!
 - We have an inheritance that God reserves for us in heaven that is incorruptible, undefiled and that will never fade away—
 - because it is God’s inheritance and He is the One who sustains it for us.
 - c. Now I want you to think how foolish it would be for you to inherit a million dollars and invest it in a company that you knew was going to fail next year...
 - People would tell you and you would say,
 - “I know it, but I will enjoy it while I can...”
 - How foolish you would be if there were another investment that was certain and lasting...
 - Surely no one would be so foolish.
 - It would surely appear that you didn’t really believe that the first investment would fail...
 - If you believed it, you would move your money elsewhere.
3. But now tell me...
- a) Don’t you know that you will not be able to keep your earthly treasures?
 - Don’t you know that?
 - Then how is it that you don’t lay up treasure in heaven?
 - b) Do you know that this life is the only opportunity you have to lay up treasure in heaven?
 - This is the time for ploughing and sowing and bearing fruit for eternal life...
 - The day will come for the harvest and then there will be no more sowing and planting.
 - Then you will be like the lazy man in Proverbs 20:4:

- Pr 20:4: The lazy *man* will not plow because of winter; He will beg during harvest and *have* nothing.

c) Now is the time to lay up treasure for all eternity!

- That is what Jesus is calling you to do!
- If your treasure is here on the earth...
 - if you are satisfied with pursuing only what is here...
 - You have your portion in this life!
- Go on and give your heart to it!
 - But let me tell you that your heart rightly belongs to God!
 - He is a jealous God and you have put the earthly treasures that He created in place of Him!
 - He will not have it!
 - To think that you should act as though things have the power to bless and to curse apart from God!
 - It is an insult cast in the teeth of Deity!
 - You will find that He is not the slack effeminate God you like Him to be...
 - But an Almighty Warrior God who is a consuming fire.
 - He will deal with you according to your deeds!

But I cannot end there!

- Because He is also a God of infinite mercy who forgives all those who repent of their sins and turn to His Son!
 - Jesus Christ came into this world that had tried to forget God...
 - And He did not forget God, but remembered that He is the one who blesses and curses...
 - And He knew the horror of the curse that we try to forget...
 - Yet, for the sake of all who would believe,
 - He went to the cross and suffered that cross in their place!
 - It is on that basis that He can offer to you reward in heaven that will never be taken away!
 - I urge you to come to Him and begin laying up treasure for eternal life!