

Jesus warned against piling up money on earth, because money comes and goes. A sad reminder of the vulnerability of money came with the June 2009 news story of an elderly woman in Israel who had hidden her life savings of one million dollars in her bed mattress. Every night she slept on one million in American dollars and Israeli shekels. She must have felt very secure with her fortune literally inches away, holding her up each night—especially since 2008 and 2009 had been disastrous years for banks and financial institutions as the world economy suffered its worst recession in decades. What's more, she had had a bad experience with a bank and had lost trust in them. Whom could she trust? No one! In fact, she did not tell even her own daughter where all that fortune was hidden.

And that was the wealthy woman's big mistake. One day her daughter decided that the mother needed a new mattress. Who knows, maybe she sat on the bed, and it felt a bit lumpy—one of those ten thousand dollar lumps perhaps—and she thought, *What a cheap bed this is!* She decided to replace the mattress. She wanted to present the new mattress as a surprise gift, so the new mattress was delivered without her mother's knowledge, and the old, lumpy mattress went into the garbage.

How pleased the daughter must have felt as she watched the delivery men put the new mattress in place and haul the old mattress out to the truck. Imagine the smile on her face when she brought her mother into the bedroom and presented her surprise gift. Somehow her elderly mother did not put two and two together right away. After a night of sleep on her new mattress, however, she woke up and suddenly realized what had happened to her life savings. She literally screamed.

A video news report of this story showed the daughter walking through a garbage dump hunting for the lost mattress. News reports showed workers combing through the trash as bulldozers moved piles of garbage attempting to uncover the lost treasure.

Truly there is no sure way to safeguard our worldly treasures.

### **Matthew 6:19-34**

The instructions Christ gives about possessions is desperately needed not only by the world but also by professing Christians. In these instructions Christ addressed the problem of materialism that grips much of society.

Jesus' words strike at the core of human selfishness... challenging both the well-to-do (who have possessions to guard)... and the poor (who wish they could acquire them.) ... Look! I am going to be very blunt. Jesus' words in the verses we just read... and in the verses we will continue on with... are so uncomfortable... that even those of us who say we love Him and fight to defend Scripture's authority... find ourselves looking for ways around what He says.

Unfortunately, covetousness and materialism has achieved nearly cultic status... as a traditional American value... under such euphemisms as "the good life" and "getting ahead." ... New Testament scholar... Seminary Professor... and author... Craig Blomberg has written:

*"Many perceptive observers have sensed that the greatest danger to Western Christianity is not, as is sometimes alleged, prevailing ideologies such as Marxism, Islam, the New Age movement or humanism but rather the all-pervasive materialism of our affluent culture."*

What we are about to see... as we continue to study Jesus' famed Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6... is that a right attitude toward wealth is a mark of true spirituality. Remember how Jesus launched into His sermon on the mount. He began it by saying... "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees... you will in no way enter the Kingdom of Heaven... (Matthew 5:20). Here in our passage this morning Jesus is still explaining what He meant by that. Members of God's Kingdom have a new heart. A new heart brings new ambitions.

This section of the Sermon on the Mount that we will be studying today deals with wealth... and another difficult topic for many of us... worry. (Ouch!) These can be so closely related... can't they...?

Those who have wealth have one problem... (They tend to be concerned with accumulating more and more ... AND ... there is no sure way to safeguard their fleeting worldly treasures) ... Those who have little or nothing of this world's goods... carry quite a different burden. (They desperately try to make ends meet... and they tend to worry.) ... Wealth and worry are opposite problems... but they can be equally distracting to spiritual life.

Jesus deals with both of these spiritual distractions in today's passage – wealth and worry. And I have some exciting news. He will not simply treat these as problems that we somehow need to come up with a solution and fix in our lives. He will conclude these topics by giving us a very practical tool for unleashing the new ambitions... in the new heart of every believer. ... So if you feel a little convicted in the early parts of Jesus' discussion... hang in there. He will provide the answer that we all need... (an antidote...

if your spiritual life is being distracted by the problems of materialism and/or worry.)

We have already read Jesus opening remarks about materialism... in verses 19-21. Those verses show how materialism will enslave the heart. The next two verses... 22-23... he shows that materialism will enslave the mind. Then... verse 24 will demonstrate how materialism enslaves the will. ... We can become shackled by the material things of life... but we ought to be liberated and controlled by the Spirit of God.

Let's go back... now... and see how materialism enslaves the heart.

### **Matthew 6:19-20**

At the time when Christ spoke this... thieves could dig through walls and steal a strongbox in one's home. So well-to-do people usually tried one of several other methods to safeguard their wealth: investing money with moneychangers... depositing it in a temple for safekeeping (even most robbers balked at "robbing gods") or burying it in the ground or in caves... where... however... moth (for expensive apparel) or rust (for coins) could destroy its value in time.

Truly there is no sure way to safeguard our worldly treasures... even in our own day. ... Stock market's crash... Real estate bubbles burst... a single (unexpected) law suit can bring down the strongest business... Our national debt could cause our nation's economy to collapse. ... Rioting... anarchy... looting... terrorists... there are so many threats today to our being able to live as prosperous... as we have enjoyed for so long.

Because of where we live... a forest fire could devastate our properties. Truly there is no sure way to safeguard our worldly treasures.

Earthly treasures are beset with problems. Everything you and I have here on earth... are precarious treasures. And... of course... we won't take them with us when we die. ... So Jesus advised His followers to make investments in things of eternal value... which are not affected by the normal processes of earthly decay. Kingdom people must not determine their wealth as the rest of the world does.

What does it mean to lay up treasures in heaven? It means to use *all that we have* for the glory of God. It means to "hang loose" when it comes to the material things of life. It also means measuring life by the true riches of the kingdom and not by the false riches of this world.

Listen to these words by J Vernon McGee:

*Make sure that you are giving to that which will accumulate treasure for you in heaven. If it is used for the propagation of the gospel and to get out the Word of God, it becomes legal tender in heaven, and that is how we gather treasure in heaven.*

*Perhaps you are saying, "But I don't give for that reason." You ought to, because our Lord said, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." That is a laudable motive for giving. And He gives the reason: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." If you get enough treasure laid up in heaven, you are certainly going to think a lot about heaven. But if it is in the bank, your thoughts are going to be on the bank. There is an ever-present danger of worshiping mammon rather than God.*

Those who have a new heart... because they are part of the Kingdom of God... should no longer be consumed with the things of this world. ...Now,

this does not mean that if we ever struggle... or give in to the pull of the world... that we are not disciples of Jesus... (and therefore not members of the Kingdom of God.)

There is an "already—not yet" aspect to the Christian life. We are already saved... but we are not yet in heaven. We are not perfected. We are not glorified. There will always be a struggle in this life. Nevertheless... Jesus' point is that even though we will still battle these ungodly ambitions... and even fail many times... there ought to be at least a competing desire in our hearts for the glory of God and for the kingdom of righteousness. On some level... we should be able to pray with sincerity... (as we saw in last week's passage) "*Our Father in heaven, Your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matt 6:9-10).

### **Matthew 6:21**

What we treasure the most... controls us... whether we admit it or not. If possessions or money become too important to us... we must reestablish control. Jesus calls for a decision that allows us to live contentedly with whatever we have because we have chosen eternal values over temporary... earthly treasures.

The passion for possessions is not reviled but redirected. The Lord told us to lay up for ourselves "treasures in heaven." We do that by giving our time, talent, and "treasure" to forward God's interests on earth and promote the coming of His kingdom.

Materialism will enslave the heart. And materialism will also enslave the mind.

### **Matthew 6:22-23**

The eyes have always been analogous to understanding. Even today when we finally comprehend something we say... "*Oh... now I see!*" What the world understands about wealth... they think is valuable light to guide them safely.

If our eye is unable to determine the safety of our path... we can only expect to stumble and fall... succumbing to the pitfalls that lie ahead. However... Jesus was not talking about the physical sight by which we determine a visible path. ... He used the analogy to demonstrate the pitfalls of those who would cling to the temporal security of their material possessions. ... In the faulty light of the world's misguided philosophy... a person could be duped into the error that the temporal security of wealth should be our greatest pursuit. ... If this is the outcome of one's personal philosophy and lifestyle... then the light that is believed to be a faithful barometer of one's success... is not really a light at all. ... Indeed... this philosophy is so foreign to the light and truth of Jesus Christ and His kingdom... that it really resides in utter darkness. Jesus informed the crowd that such misguided (or twisted) thinking... resides in a darkness so deep... that its depths cannot be determined.

If our primary aim in life is to get material gain... it will mean darkness within. ... But if our main outlook is to serve and glorify God... there will be light within.

Materialism will enslave the heart. Materialism will also enslave the mind.  
And materialism will enslave the will.

### **Matthew 6:24**

One of the commentaries that I was reading pointed out that during the first century... occasionally there would be a situation where two masters shared the same slave. ... I never really looked at this before... from the master's point of view... but the commentator wrote: "*Two masters rarely shared slaves, but when they did it always led to divided interests.*" ...(Ya think?) If one master thinks that he owns the slave... and the other master considers the slave to be his property... the slave has to choose which one he will be loyal to.

This brought back memories of when I was in seminary. I worked for a family business (which I will not mention because those of you from Portland would recognize it immediately.) The man who started the company died and left it in equal control of his two sons (Walt and Earl... who by the time I went to work for the company... these two men did not get along.) My job was to manage the store in front of the processing plant. Earl told me that I was to always be out front serving customers. But Walt would often come and get me to help off-load shipments from a truck into the plant. Then Earl would come get me and ask why I was making a shopper wait. I did not like having to choose who I would be loyal to. (But I have to admit that the job had at least one great perk. I was allowed to take home (from the plant) generous portions of the best chocolate milk... egg nog... and ice cream – that I have ever had.) ... I lasted only 6 months before I went to work for UPS... where I did not have to choose between two masters.



Jesus says we can have only one master. We live in a materialistic society where many people serve money. They spend all their lives collecting and storing it, only to die and leave it behind. Their desire for money and what it can buy far outweighs their commitment to God and spiritual matters. Whatever you store up, you will spend much of your time and energy thinking about. Can you honestly say that God, and not money, is your master? One test is to ask yourself which one occupies more of your thoughts, time, and efforts.

Materialism will not only cheapen our riches... but it will also cheapen *us!* We will start to become worried and anxious... and this anxiety is unnatural and unspiritual. The person whose primary pursuit is money... thinks that riches will solve his problems... when in reality... those riches will create more problems! ... Material wealth can give a dangerous... false sense of security... and that false security often ends in tragedy.

A wrong pursuit of wealth is distracting to our spiritual life. Equally distracting is worry.

### **Matthew 6:25-32**

We are not to be reckless or negligent... AND neither are we to be anxious. We work for our money to supply food and clothing, but we must always remember that these ultimately come from God's hands. When the need arises, we need not worry, for we know that our God will supply.

Have you ever been confronted by someone for worrying too much? ... What is the usual reply...? For me... it is something like... "*I'm not worried. I'm concerned...*"

Here is the difference between worry and genuine concern—worry immobilizes, but concern moves you to action.

There on the side of the mountain where Jesus was giving this sermon... as evidence of the truth of his premise... my mind's eye can see Jesus very simply pointing to the nearby birds... that the crowd could observe... as He spoke. ... Without having a scientific ornithologist tell them... these people had a knowledge of nature... and they knew that Jesus was correct. The birds never planted a crop... nor were they concerned about a harvest... let alone a barn in which the harvest could be stored. ... Birds have absolutely no concern for the next day's cares. ... They simply feed on the seeds that are available to them on a daily basis.

In this context... Jesus spoke of the heavenly Father as the Creator Who established the natural course of His creation in a way that demonstrated His loving care for the smallest of His creatures.

### **Matthew 6:27**

During the Gulf War of 1991, Iraq launched a series of Scud missile attacks against Israel. Many Israeli citizens died as a result of these attacks. After the war was over, Israeli scientists analyzed the official mortality statistics and found something remarkable. Although the death rate had jumped among Israeli citizens on the first day of the Iraqi attacks, the vast majority of them did not die from any direct physical effects of the missiles. They died from heart failure brought on by fear and stress associated with the bombardment.

Psychological studies conducted on Israelis at the time showed that the most stressful time was the first few days leading up to the outbreak of war on January 17th and peaking on the first day of the Scud missile attacks. There was enormous and well-founded concern about possible Iraqi use of chemical and biological weapons. The government had issued to the entire Israeli population gas masks and automatic atropine syringes in case of chemical attack, and every household had been told to prepare a sealed room.

After the first Iraqi strike turned out to be less cataclysmic than feared, levels of stress declined markedly. As in other wars, the people adapted to the situation with surprising speed. Then as the fear and anxiety subsided, the death rate also declined. There were 17 further Iraqi missile attacks over the following weeks, but Israeli mortality figures over this period were no higher than average.

It was fear and the psychological impact of the missiles, not the physical impact, that claimed the majority of victims. Worry doesn't add to our life span. It takes from it.

Jesus continued to drive the point home. Just as he had pointed to the birds of the air that could be observed by the crowds gathered on the hillside, Jesus now pointed to the flowers that dotted the landscape.

Jesus drew the obvious conclusion. If God cares so much for that which we normally consider insignificant, imagine how much he cares for those he has created in his own image. Jesus emphasized strongly that any other conclusion is ridiculous and, in fact, demonstrates a woeful lack of faith.

Disciples must not ask what they will eat, drink, or wear, since these questions are like those of “unbelievers” who do not realize that they have a heavenly Father who knows their needs

“Worry is practical atheism and an affront to God.” ... Anxiety... unlike God... is finite. ... It does not know everything. ... But God does... and the finite needs to let the Infinite take care of matters... for the Infinite does a much better job.

A word of caution may be valuable here. Jesus was not advocating a "do nothing" theology in which disciples could sit on their hands and refrain from any labor whatsoever. Even though birds do not plant or harvest, they work very hard at procuring their daily food and feeding their young. Jesus' emphasis throughout the entire discourse had been to admonish the disciples of his kingdom to have confidence in the Lord's provision for their daily bread.

There is a cure for the spiritual distractions of worry and materialism.. Christ gave the cure in just one verse. This one verse says much in just a few words. It provides the adequate cure for the problems of wealth and worry. God's cures are effective... and will heal these problems.

### **Matthew 6:33**

What is most important to you? People, objects, goals, money, pleasure, and other desires all compete for priority. Any of these can quickly bump God out of first place if you don't actively choose to give him first place in every area of life. Strangely enough, when you get your priorities right,

Jesus promised that God will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him.

*"First."* This is the key to the medicine working. We must put this seeking first in our life. If worry... and/or the pursuit of wealth comes first, this seeking will not get done and will not help us. Getting your priorities right in life will stop false security and worries.

Instead of spending our time worrying about things that seldom matter much in life... we need to put our efforts into seeking things that matter more than anything else. Two things are involved in the seeking that counters anxiety.

**First**, the path in the seeking. *"Kingdom of God."* This speaks of the will of God. To be in God's kingdom means you are in His government and need to obey His rules and His will. If we spent more time seeking the will of God for our path in life... we would have less time for pursuing wealth and for worry. **Second**, *"His righteousness."* God's righteousness is the highest purity. Spending our time seeking the holiness of God for our life is the way to starve anxiety.

### **Matthew 6:34**

Worrying about tomorrow does not help either tomorrow or today. If anything, it robs us of our effectiveness today—which means we will be even less effective tomorrow. Someone has said that the average person is crucifying himself between two thieves: the regrets of yesterday and the worries about tomorrow.

It is right to plan for the future and even to save for the future.

**2 Corinthians 12:14 (ESV)**

*Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.*

Planning for tomorrow is time well spent; worrying about tomorrow is time wasted. Sometimes it's difficult to tell the difference. Careful planning is thinking ahead about goals, steps, and schedules, and trusting in God's guidance. When done well, planning can help alleviate worry. Worriers, by contrast, are consumed by fear and find it difficult to trust God. They let their plans interfere with their relationship with God. Don't let worries about tomorrow affect your relationship with God today.

... ..

This passage penetrates the outer shell of our human concerns and arrives at the very center of our existence. ... All pretenses and hypocrisies are stripped away... and we are left fully exposed before our Lord.... In the light of Jesus' scrutiny... all of our false security is removed. ... We see ourselves for what we really are: frightened children... afraid of a future that may not be pleasant... and who are desperately attempting to create a world of material bounty... that will insulate us from the ultimate futility of our lives.

However... Jesus also described what life is like when a person enters the kingdom. ... For members of His new Kingdom... the peace and security

that we so desperately seek are provided by a loving Father... Who knows what we need before we even ask.

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Tree-skiing may sound like a death wish... but some skiers love the risk of skiing virgin powder lying in a stand of ponderosas. The key... of course... is not hitting the trees!

In Outside magazine, writer and skier Tim Etchells lays out the challenge:

*“Even more so than in deep snow or moguls, what you focus your eyes on becomes critical in the woods. Look at the spaces between the trees... the exits where you hope to be traveling. Don't stare at what you don't want to hit.”*

Jesus said the same thing more than 2000 years earlier – “Don’t stare at what you don’t want to hit.” Seek the Kingdom of God – first!