

“Treasure & The Good Life” Matthew 6:19-24 Steve Harden 7/3/22

You all can be turning in your Bibles to Matthew 6. We continue in our trek through the Sermon on the Mount. I'm Steve Harden. I'm your Executive Director here, if we've not met. Shane is taking a well-deserved break to refresh his soul today, so I know you'll be supportive in thinking about him as he takes a day off! Happy fourth of July weekend to you! I'm glad you're here, and I trust that it will be a really super day, super weekend for you. Alright, Matthew 6, we'll be reading verses 19-24.

19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, 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 in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

24 “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

This is God's word.

The theme of the Scriptures is the gospel, the good news that God so loved the world that He gave His Son to redeem us and also, to redeem the world, that which is broken He has come to heal and restore. We find in the Scriptures that within this one grand thought, this one grand theme that goes from Genesis to Revelation, within this one grand theme, that there are many subplots and many subthemes all feeding into this one most comprehensive and beautiful theme. Like a beautiful vocal performance is supported by instrumentation, so the gospel, the good news, is the vocal performance, and everything else feeds into that one theme. The subplots never stand alone, but they are always seen in light of this overarching story.

So, where I'm going with this is that for some of us it may come as a surprise that one of the main subplots of the Scripture that feeds into the gospel theme, or major plot, is the Bible's emphasis on money and possessions! It's one of the main subplots! Let me give you some examples. I think every time I preach about money and possessions I have to share some of these with you, because I think it's so interesting and telling. Did you know that the Bible devotes twice as many verses to money as it does to faith and prayer combined? Is that kind of surprising to you? It was to me! Right? 15% of Jesus' recorded words were about money and possessions. There are more recorded words of Jesus about money and possessions than there are about heaven and hell. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, one out of every six verses is about money and possessions. Finally, one of every three parables is about money! So, it's not something that we should ignore, because it's a major theme.

The obvious question then, to me at least, is why? Why would you devote so much time to money and possessions? I mean, I'd really like to hear a lot more about prayer, or faith, or those kinds of things. There is a reason, and I think it's because we are so tempted to find our happiness and our fulfillment and our contentment and our security in money and possessions rather than looking to Him for all those things, or when we are discontent and not finding our happiness, oftentimes it comes back to the fact that we are looking to money and possessions, rather than to our Father. I think that's the reason. He knew that we would struggle so much with it, that He gave us a lot of material! We tend to look to money to do what only God can do for the fulfillment that only God can give. My friends, none of us are immune to that siren call. I don't care if you're relatively wealthy, or living in poverty. We all tend, we have that temptation, to look to the created thing instead of the Creator for our happiness and fulfillment.

Now, here in the Sermon on the Mount, in our passage this morning, we find a really comprehensive, yet really condensed teaching about money and possessions. We are nowhere near going to plumb the depths of this this morning, but we will touch on some of the highlights I hope. So, as almost any preacher that ever preached, here are three points that I want you to know, alright? You know, it really bothers me that I have three? This is not in my notes, but it really bothers me, because you know, I think, every text can't have three points, and yet, that's what we do, we just say, 'Here's three,' so I'll follow in line and be submissive to the traditions of old. What you do now, matters forever. Secondly, generosity is a sign of spiritual health. And thirdly, you will serve only one master, and I trust you'll hear those again if you didn't get them down.

Alright, what you do now, matters forever. Verses 19-22: "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." So, the subject is treasure here in this portion. Jesus says, guys, you've got a choice to make, and it's very clear. There's not a lot of nuance on this, okay? A lot of times when we don't want to deal with something we'll say, 'That's a nuanced thing,' but no, there's not a lot of nuance here, right? He says, you can either lay up for yourself treasure on earth, or you can lay up for yourself treasure in heaven. Those are your choices. This is important because He's very, very clear. He says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." So, that's kind of important! Where your heart is, right? The things that you treasure will govern your life. What you treasure will be reflected in your goals, in your priorities, in your relationships, everything that you do. The things that are most important to you are what you'll run after. So, where your treasure is is extremely important! What is it that you must have or there's not going to be any happiness, there isn't going to be any contentment, there isn't going to be any peace, that's where your treasure is. What is it that you count as your treasure?

Laying up for yourself treasures on earth is really a bad choice. Let me suggest three different ways, three different reasons. First of all, laying up for yourself treasure on earth is a temporary thing. I need to break it to you, you're dying. All of us are dying from the very first breath that we take. The odds are really good. Everything in this life regarding the treasures of earth, we're going to leave behind. There was a story written many, many years ago about a

dad who was playing Monopoly with his kids. You may have heard this story, it's been around a long time, but it's one of my favorites because they were having fun around the table and of course you trash talk, right when you're playing games with your family? And he started winning. He started getting more houses, and more hotels, and so, his trash talking got a little out of hand. So, when he finally won, it was late at night and his family said, 'You won, so you put the game away,' and they went to bed. He was sitting and looking at his Monopoly game, he was looking at his houses and his lands and his hotels and all of those things, and you know, what? He really didn't want to put it back in the box, because then it was all gone, right? None of it mattered anymore. He thought, what a metaphor for life. We spend so much time trying to put together a portfolio if you will, or buying homes, or hotels if you're able, whatever! But at the end of the day, we all put it back in the box! So, the treasures of the earth are temporary. When John D. Rockefeller died, his accountant was asked, "How much did he leave?" His assistant wisely said, "All of it." We all leave it all behind, so first of all, temporary.

Secondly, it really doesn't bring happiness. Now, we think that our treasure on earth is going to bring happiness, but it really doesn't. According to the most wealthy, let me give you a few sayings about happiness and wealth. Again, John D. Rockefeller, one of the wealthiest men of his time said, "I have made many millions, but they have brought me no happiness." Vanderbilt said, "The care of 200 million is enough to kill anyone. There is no pleasure in it." John Jacob Astor, an early wealthy man who made his wealth in furs, said, "I am the most miserable man on earth." Henry Ford said, "I was happier when I was doing a mechanic's job." Andrew Carnegie said, "Millionaires seldom smile." Probably the wealthiest one of all was King Solomon, and all you have to do is read the book of Ecclesiastes to see that money, possessions, will not bring you happiness.

So, it's temporary, it won't bring you happiness, but it destines you for perpetual insecurity. Whatever you have, you're going to be afraid that you're going to lose it. Can I hear an amen? It's just the way it is! When your treasure is stored on earth, you're always going to be worried about it. Jesus said, "where moth and rust destroy," now, it's interesting because moth and rust destroy, back in His day, you stored your wealth either by storing it in your clothes, very expensive clothing, or you stored it in storehouses of food and grain. That's just how they stored their wealth. Well, the rich would often weave gold threads into their garments, one, because they were a bit arrogant I guess, but also because it was a way to carry it with them and have it with them. But, their clothes were made of wool. Do you all know what happens to wool when moths get to it? It destroys it! It was their storage for their wealth, but it could be destroyed! And rust, the storehouses of food and of grain, well, the greatest threat to stored grain, from an old farmer, is vermin, mice and rats, they are the ones that eat away that wealth, rust literally means to eat away.

Then He says, "thieves break in and steal," I love this because the literal word for 'break in' is the word, 'to dig through.' Their houses didn't have bricks and aluminum siding, they were made out of baked clay, and so, literally, if you wanted to steal from someone, you just dug through their wall! So, "where moth and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal." In our day you might say, 'The stock market goes up, and it goes down,' right? There's really no safe place for earthly treasures. People will try to convince you that, 'Yeah, this is a safe haven.'

Well, not always. If your treasure is earth-bound, it's always temporary, you're not going to find happiness in it, and you'll never be free from worry of losing it.

But what about treasures in heaven? How do you lay up treasures in heaven? That's kind of a strange statement when you think about it, isn't it? It's easy to get in the ballpark, but really, what does it mean about laying up your treasures in heaven? Well, first, what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that you can't have a savings account. It doesn't mean that you can't buy a house. It doesn't mean that you can't invest for the future. But I think His point is that you don't hoard wealth just to hoard wealth, just so that you'll have a little bit more wealth. Do you see the difference? He doesn't denounce having things, but He really does denounce things having you. That's the difference. Have you ever noticed that the more things you have, the more things are broken at the same time? Have you ever felt owned by your possessions? I think that's kind of what He's talking about. So, that's not what storing your treasure in heaven is. But what I think, broadly speaking, when He says, "your treasure is in heaven," is everything that you can take to heaven after you die! I mean, that is kind of a simple definition, right? If treasures on earth are the things here, then treasures in heaven are things there. I love what Randy Alcorn says, "You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead!" Don't you like that? "You can't *take* it with you, but you can send it on ahead."

There is coming a day when all men will stand before God to be judged, for those who are not rightly related to Jesus, it's a judgment of condemnation. It's a sentence of hell where there is suffering and an existence without the presence of God, and without the common grace that all men experience on this earth. But for Jesus' followers it will be very, very different. In that day, when we stand before God to be judged, we're going to say, 'We're with Him.' That's all. We're with Jesus! We're here because He's told me that we could come, and He will say, 'Welcome in.' I'm with Him. As a follower of Jesus, hear me, you will never be judged for your sin, period. That's cause for dancing in the streets! No sin that I've ever committed will I be judged for. That is phenomenal, because you know what? I'm *guilty* of sin! So are you. But the punishment that is due my sin has already been paid, and in heaven there's no double jeopardy. If Jesus paid for my sin, then I'm not going to pay for my sin. That's a beautiful thing, okay? So, we're not talking about sin. Please hear me. Nod your head like this. Not talking about sin when we're talking about believers being judged. That's not what we're talking about.

But the Bible does teach that there is a judgment for believers. It's more of an assessment, more of an evaluation, of how well we've stewarded His resources. We will stand, you will stand and I will stand before Jesus, not regarding our sin, but regarding our work. Not because my work gained me my salvation, and I feel like I have to always make that caveat, but what did you do with the resources that God gave you? You will be rewarded for how well you steward the resources that He gave you! And everyone is given different resources. Remember, a parable about the talents, ten, five, and one, right? But you will be rewarded!

Let me read a couple texts. 1 Corinthians 4:5, "Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God." He will commend us! Revelation 13:14, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write

this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”” So, what you do now, matters forever. Everyone is given resources to steward: your time, your energy, your talents, as well as your money and possessions. Everyone’s experience in heaven won’t be the same. It’ll all be good! It’ll all be wonderful! We’ll all have blessed happiness and peace forever and ever and ever, but it’s not going to be the same. Some will have greater rewards than others! It’s all based on how we lived while on this earth. What’s more, what’s even really good, we won’t have sin natures in heaven so I won’t be jealous because you’re rewarded more than I am. Isn’t that great? My happiness will be enhanced because you’re more happy than I am! Isn’t that cool?

I don’t know what these rewards will be, honestly. I don’t know. Scripture doesn’t tell us. But I have a guess, and I have a guess because John Bunyan, the 16th, 17th century Baptist pastor said this, and I kind of like him. So, he thinks that it’s a greater capacity for happiness and joy. That will be the reward. Listen, I’m going to paraphrase something that he wrote, he said, ‘He that does the most for God in this world will enjoy Him the most in the world to come because by doing and acting the heart and every faculty of the soul is enlarged and has greater capacity and more room is made for the glory of God. Every vessel of glory will be full on that day, but everyone will not have the same capacity. He that is closest to God on earth is the one that will best be able to enjoy Him in the kingdom of heaven.’ Lay up for yourself treasure in heaven. You can’t take it with you, but you can send it on, ahead.

Don’t set your hope and your security on earthly riches because you’re going to have to put them back in the box. Do good in every area of life, investing for a future day, and that means your time *and* your money. Be rich in good works, kind deeds, invest in that which is good, and right, and helpful. Randy Alcorn again, he says, “God keeps an account open for us in heaven and every gift given for His glory is a deposit in that account.” And then he asks, “Are you making regular deposits?” What you do now matters forever.

Okay, but secondly, generosity is a sign of spiritual health. Generosity is a sign of spiritual health. Verses 22 and 23: ““The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” I’ve got to admit to you that when I first started looking at this I had no idea what He was talking about. This is a passage on money and possessions, very clearly, before and afterward, but He starts talking about eyes and health and darkness, and what are you talking about? I didn’t understand until I saw that Jesus was using a cultural idiom. In Ancient Israel the idea of having a healthy eye was a reference to someone who was generous. They had a healthy eye, they were a generous person and the person who hoarded his possessions and was not willing to share was full of darkness. He is teaching us about the importance of generosity.

Now, one of my favorite texts about generosity is 2 Corinthians 9:6 and following. Now, this is a passage where Paul is writing to the Corinthians because they had agreed to give an offering, a gift, to the saints in Jerusalem who were experiencing a hard time. He sent this letter to them because they had agreed a long time ago, maybe even a year or so ago, that they were going to send this gift and he was coming for that gift, and there were people who were coming

with him that knew they were giving the gift and he says, 'You know, you don't really want to embarrass me or yourselves by not being ready, by not doing what you said. So, you need to be ready.' This is what he said:

“6 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. **7** Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. **8** And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. **9** As it is written,

“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;

his righteousness endures forever.”

10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. **11** You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.”

Very simply, he says, you are given your money and possessions for two reasons. The first reason is bread for food. “He supplies seed to the sower and bread for food.” He provides for our needs! Everything we need to sustain us: food, clothing, housing, okay? He gives us some for that, but He also gives us seed for sowing. He provides for us resources for us to give away to others, to give away! It's a general principle that the resources that God has given to you, not all of them are to spend on yourself! It's just really kind of plain and simple. He gives you some bread for food, and some seed for sowing, and you're not supposed to spend it all on yourself! The instruction is to spend what you need to provide for yourself, but then to be generous with all that remains.

My favorite example of that is, 'Be God's FedEx man.' It's really simple. When you have a package that you want to send to someone that you love, or just someone, right? You don't have to love them. If you have a gift to send, and you give it to the FedEx man, do you expect him to keep it? Well no, you don't! It's not his job! I give him the package and then he is responsible for getting it to the person that I meant to give it to! So, in some ways, that's just who we are. We are God's FedEx man. There are some of our resources that He gives to us, not so we can take it home and open it up ourselves, but so we can get it to the person who He needs for us to get it to. Be generous. Proverbs 11:24-25 says, “One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.” Hudson Taylor, a missionary to China for fifty-one years, said, “The less I spent on myself and the more I gave to others, the fuller of happiness and blessing did my soul become.” So, do you give? Are you generous?

So, what you do now matters forever, secondly, generosity is a sign of spiritual health, and thirdly, God owns it all. Verse 24: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve

God and money.” This is a simple statement of fact. It just says, ‘Look, you know that you cannot serve God and money. You can’t have two masters.’ He didn’t say you can’t have two employers, right? He says, “You can’t have two masters.” Think about in Jesus’ day, it’s a metaphor referring to a master and his slave! A slave in Jesus’ day was owned by his master. He didn’t have any free time. He didn’t have anything that was his own. Everything he was and had was the master’s. And then Jesus says, ‘You know that if He owns everything, there can be no second master.’ It’s just plain and simple. A master in that situation owns the slave. By right of creation, the whole world belongs to God. He created it. It’s His! He owns it all. He is the master of all.

He has given us the responsibility to steward it well, but don’t pretend that it’s yours, because it’s not yours. It’s God’s, and He has called us to be His stewards. Now, that’s not a word we use a lot anymore, but a steward is simply one who is entrusted with someone else’s wealth or property, and charged with managing it for the owner’s best interest. An owner and a steward are very different roles. He owns the resources, I manage His resources. Now, in terms of finances and possessions, I’m God’s asset manager! I’m His steward. I take care of what He has, and He gives me great freedom in the management of His resources. I can manage it and steward it, but the goal is always the same: to increase the owner’s good. God expects us to use the resources that He’s entrusted to us, to the best of our ability, to advance the kingdom of God. Remember, you’re a steward, you’re not an owner. That kind of changes our spending decisions, investing decisions. Whether it’s your time, energy, or money and possessions. It’s not mine, it’s His, and He’s given it to me, some for food, and some to bless others.

I love the story where a man rode up to John Wesley on a horse and he was hysterical, he said, ‘John Wesley, your house has just burned down! Everything that you own that was in that house has been destroyed!’ Wesley weighed the news, and he calmly replied, ‘No, the Lord’s house burned down. That means I have one less responsibility.’ Isn’t that great? Isn’t there something about that that makes you long for that kind of relationship with the things that you have? It’s not mine, I just have one less responsibility. He wasn’t in denial, it’s not that he was pretending to be spiritual, he just affirmed what was true. It was God’s house.

So, as we close it up today, I’m reminded again, every time a preacher says, ‘in summary,’ it means nothing at all, right? I can imagine some of you all thinking, ‘Man, this is hard, Steve. Really? God owns it all? Don’t lay up for yourselves treasures on earth? Temporary? What? These are *hard*, hard things.’ Because frankly, I have to wrestle with it a little bit as well. But I just wanted to close out with one more thought, Matthew 13:44. I hope it will encourage you. It is a parable of our Lord. He said, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then *in his joy* he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” Jesus is the treasure. A right relationship with Jesus is that treasure hidden in the field. To obtain that great treasure will cost you everything that you have. To obtain eternal life means that you give all that you are to all that you know of Him. You give it all away, all of your rights, all of the things that you think that you deserve, your rights to your money, your possessions, your relationships, your thoughts, your motives, everything. You give all that you are to all that you know He is. Another way to say it is that you bow your knee before King Jesus, and you submit yourself to Him, and His will, and His purpose. But what I want you to

see, why I told you this story, is that just like the man who found the treasure in the field, do you remember what He said? It was for the *joy* set before him. It was no sacrifice! It was no hardship for him to sell all that he had for this one great treasure. You see, if Jesus gave you every wealth, every possession in the world, but He didn't give you Himself, He would only have given you second best. The very best gift is a relationship with Him. The treasure hidden in the field, the man goes and sells all that he has *with joy*. God wants you to be joyful! In that joy, you will receive everything. Let's pray.