

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

October 10, 2021

We Are Better Together “What Do We Treasure?” Matthew 6:19-24 Rev. Mike Fordham

When I say, “X marks the spot,” what may come to your mind is a treasure map. X marks the spot on the map where pirates have buried a treasure chest full of gold, silver, and all kinds of coins, gems, and jewels. It is a treasure that people will go to whatever lengths possible to find, for which they will even risk their lives. Why would they go to such great lengths to find and keep this treasure? Most think that if they get the treasure for themselves, it will be a dream come true as they will be filthy rich and as a result, happier than ever because they now can have anything they want, and they will be set for life. I wonder what each one of us would say are the greatest treasures of our lives. Where would X mark the spot for what is most precious to us? Would it be money, our bank account, our house, car, jewelry, retirement, a favorite sports team, our alma mater, food, sweets, job, recreation or entertainment, friends, family, spouse, children, church, God, or what? We all have treasures in our lives both good and bad. Jesus challenges us to consider what those treasures are, eternal or temporary treasures. What is it that we focus our lives on, who or what do we serve with our lives, God, or our wealth?

MATTHEW 6:19-24:

¹⁹ “Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

²² “Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. ²³ But when your eye is unhealthy, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is!

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.

SHORT-TERM OR LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS?

Jesus is teaching the disciples His great Sermon on the Mount. In this section of the teaching Jesus challenges us to consider whether we are investing our lives in treasures that are eternal or treasures that are temporary, heavenly, or earthly, short-term, or long-term? If we look at those things that we treasure most in our lives, we will

see where our hearts lie. The earthly, **short-term**, temporary things we invest our lives in today are things such as: vehicles, boats, cars, house, pets, money, bank accounts, retirement, golfclubs, food, education, material possessions, work, cell phones, electronic gadgets, and so much more. Jesus wants us to hold on loosely to those things in our lives which are temporary, those things we cannot take with us when one day we step through death's door. As the Colonel Sanders himself once said, "There's no reason to be the richest man in the cemetery. You can't do any business from there." When it comes to those things in which we are investing our lives, Jesus is challenging us to think about them in the light of eternity, how long will they last in this life and where will those things be when we die?

On the other hand, Jesus is calling on us to especially invest our lives in those things we can take with us into eternity, **long-term** investments that will last into the next life. Jesus is not saying don't invest in the things of this world but make sure that we especially invest in eternity. Those things that we invest in, in this life that we can take with us into the next life are our relationships with God, ourselves and each other. God says that we invest our lives eternally when we love God, each other, and ourselves with all that we have. We are also called to invest in eternity by how we live our lives here and now, by how we use our finances, our time, our abilities, our spiritual gifts, our bodies, our minds in doing good for others, in serving one another, all for the Kingdom of God. When we invest our lives in eternal, long-term investments, somehow God will reward us. We invest in eternity when we live selfless, sacrificial lives, denying ourselves for the good of others, have compassion for the poor, crippled, lame, blind, orphans, widows, the sick, those in prison, how we love our neighbors and our enemies, by practicing faithful and productive stewardship of all that we have. One good passage that reminds us of how to use our earthly, temporary resources for eternal good is found in *1 Timothy 6:16-19*, "¹⁷ Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. ¹⁹ By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life." If we just look at this logically, don't we all want to store up riches in heaven where we will have them for eternity instead of just storing up riches in this life that we will have for just a short time? A great thought to ponder along this line is that of H. Jowett who once said, "The real measure of our wealth is how much we would be worth if we lost all our money." When we no longer have all the temporary things of this world what will we then be worth?

WHAT WE FOCUS OUR LIVES ON

As Jesus focuses on what our treasure is, Jesus turns to talking about the importance of our vision, especially as it relates to **WHAT WE FOCUS OUR LIVES ON**. Jesus continues the thought of where your treasure is your heart will also be and He uses our eyes as an illustration to make this point. We all understand how important our eyesight is and that they remain as healthy as possible.

Will Mancini and Warren Bird, mention in their book, *God Dreams: 12 Vision Templates for Finding and Focusing Your Church's Future*, that of our 5 sensory inputs (seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching), 80% of what our brain “knows” comes from our vision. Our brain then is continually working to decipher and direct our body movement as our eyes perceive what is right in front of us. This is why Jesus says that our eyes are like a lamp that allows all this input, both good and bad, to enter into our minds that will then affect how we think, feel, and even the direction of our lives.

I have had the joy of snow skiing numerous times, but I am by no means an accomplished skier. I like a lot of powder on very wide slopes that are not too steep. In other words, if the ski slope is called anything like Black Diamond, I will take a break with some hot chocolate at ski lodge instead of tackling that slope. I do, though, know enough about skiing to realize that while skiing I am to do all that I can to avoid trees. Did you know that there is something called, tree-skiing, which sounds like a death wish to me, but some skiers love the risk of skiing virgin powder lying in a stand of aspen or spruce. 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,’ says [extreme-skiing world champion Kim] Reichelm matter-of-factly.” So also, wherever we put the focus of our lives, whatever we give most of our attention to with our lives influences the direction of our lives.

It could also be said that whatever gets the attention of our lives, whatever we give ourselves to, is our treasure. Jesus is calling on us to not have double vision where our loyalty is divided between God and this world. A good, focused eye focuses our attention on living our lives with eternity in mind. We are called to put our attention on Jesus and all that Jesus gave His life to when He walked in this world. We are to walk in the footsteps of Jesus who invested His entire life in eternity which made all the difference in how He lived His life in this world. Let us do what *Hebrews 12:1-2* tells us to do, “*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne*” Let us live our lives with our attention on following in Jesus' footsteps and we will have invested our lives in eternity.

LOVE FOR GOD OR MONEY

In Jesus' teaching here on the Sermon on the Mount, He gives one final way that we can be careful to invest in eternity as Jesus makes an emphatic statement about whether we have **LOVE FOR GOD OR MONEY**. Someone has taken the time to calculate

that the Bible has about 500 verses on prayer, about 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions. Jesus talked a lot about money. Of his 38 parables, almost half tell us how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, an amazing 1 out of 10 verses (288 in all) deals directly with the subject of money. Why is the Bible and Jesus so enamored with talking about money, possessions, and wealth? Probably because one of the most prominent, popular gods of our world then and today is that of our wealth, our money, and possessions. It is also one of the most dangerous gods because when we give our lives to our wealth, we are giving our lives only to temporary, earthly rewards which can slowly but surely and ever so subtly destroy our lives.

Jesus is challenging us to consider whether we serve our wealth, or our wealth serves us. That is a very important, subtle distinction. **When we serve our wealth**, we are stingy, constantly trying to make more, never having enough, always spending what we have, or afraid to spend it at all and end up hoarding it. In the book, *Wealth, Riches & Money* the authors say that there are 10 symptoms of when we are serving or living our lives for the god of wealth. 1) Worry and anxiety over money. 2) Money mismanagement. 3) Consistent Financial Lack “I don’t ever have enough”. 4) I can’t afford it mentality. 5) Impulse buying. 6) Stinginess – which is often exemplified by lack of tithing. 7) Greed. An inordinate desire to acquire or possess. 8) Discontentment. 9) Bondage to debt. 10) Exaggerated emphasis on money – including an overestimate of it’s true power... or overstating the benefits of having it. *Ecclesiastes 5:10-11* summarizes the problem with the love of money as it says, ¹⁰ *Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness!* ¹¹ *The more you have, the more people come to help you spend it. So what good is wealth—except perhaps to watch it slip through your fingers!*” Tod Scofield in his blog article called, “*You’re Gonna Need a Bigger Boat*”, writes, “How much would it take for us to have enough money? Remarkably, studies show that most people, regardless of income, answer the question the same way: We need about 10% more to feel comfortable. 10% will make a difference, and whether we earn \$30,000 per year or \$60,000 or \$250,000 or a cool million, just 10% more is what we want. When people are asked the same question over time, Loyola Marymount University Professor Christopher Kaczor reports ‘when they do get that 10%, which typically happens over the course of a few years, they want just another 10%, and so on, ad infinitum.’ This reality prompted British psychoanalyst Joan Riviere to make the following observation: ‘by its very nature [greed] is endless and never assuaged; and by being a form of the impulse to live, it ceases only with death.’”

Jesus is saying don’t serve our wealth but **let our wealth serve us**. Jesus is calling on us to give our all to loving God and living for God and then use our wealth to serve God and in so doing we will be blessed beyond our expectations. When our wealth serves us who serve God, we then tell our money what to do and not let it control our lives, we work hard to take care of our family, we pay our bills, we wisely and not greedily save as we need to for the future, we tithe to God through our local church, we give generously to the needs of others in our lives, and we even enjoy the benefits of wealth in our lives. We then will find freedom from the destructive power of our wealth and

instead experience God's joy and peace in serving God with our wealth. We are to hold loosely to the things of this world and hold tightly to God. *1 John 2:15-17* says, ¹⁵ *Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. ¹⁶ For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father but are from this world. ¹⁷ And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.*"

We all know that the words of Jesus here are common sense wisdom that calls us to invest all that we have and are in eternity. We can't argue with the wisdom of this investment advice. The returns on that investment will always be with us and much greater than anything this world has to give us. The question is are we going to follow Jesus' teaching? Do we love God more than the things of this world? If we are struggling with it or investing too much of our lives in this world, let's repent and ask for God's forgiveness and then invite the Holy Spirit to empower us to invest in eternity, put the focus of our lives on Jesus, and serve God with our wealth.

Icebreaker I – Where would “X mark the spot” for what is most precious to you?

Icebreaker II – Does your money serve you or do you serve your money?

Icebreaker III – Do you love God more than the things of this world?

1. In our society, how is success generally measured?
2. From what sources do you feel pressured to meet this standard?
3. What alternatives does Jesus propose with respect to treasures, desires, and masters?
4. If Jesus were to analyze your life, what would He say your “treasure” is?
5. What is the connection between eye and body? What does it mean to have good eyes? Bad eyes?
6. According to Jesus, what are we to seek in place of food and clothes?
7. What are the results from seeking this?
8. What is one thing you can do in the coming week to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness”?
9. Considering this past week, is your “bank” on earth or in heaven? What do you need to do to change accounts? Who has been your master lately?

