

Matthew 6:19 – 34

¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²² The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, 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 that is 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 one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

²⁵ For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? ²⁷ And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, ²⁹ yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! ³¹ Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Historical and Cultural Background:

- *Israel's Exile*: The Jewish people knew that they had sinned and were in exile. This exile began with Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but it continued under the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.
- *The Kingdom of God*: The Old Testament expressed unflagging hope that God would rescue Israel and restore them to His reign. This was called 'the kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God'. Almost all Jews interpreted this to mean a military Messiah (anointed king) who would unite Israel and defeat the Romans. Jesus, however, understood these passages to mean a deeper and more profound transformation in human nature, which he had to accomplish first in himself (Mt.3:13 – 4:11), and then in his followers. Jesus had just announced 'the kingdom of heaven' (Mt.4:12 – 25), triggering all kinds of questions, hopes, and expectations.
- *Jesus' Transformation of the Human Heart*: Recall that in Matthew 5:1 – 16 Jesus was describing how his process of transforming people will have a certain kind of influence in the world. In this section, called The Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1 – 7:28), Jesus is laying out his transformation of the human heart.

Leader's Notes

1. I expect that this section will need a little more 'push' by the leader. There is less 'discovery' about this passage since the meaning is fairly on the surface. It's the implications that will be tough. Thus, the leader will need to 'push' a little more. Be spiritually and relationally prepared for it.
2. This passage is clearly about materialism, money and economic implications of lifestyle choices. There will be temptations to broaden the scope of the discussion, to refer to treasuring people's opinions, for example, but try not to do that. Focus on what the text says.
3. Plan the flow of the conversation:
 - a. Start as tangibly as possible.
 - b. Allow the text to challenge our socks off.
 - c. Close by asking people to take a tangible step of faith into the areas of our internal resistance.

Questions

1. Start as tangibly as possible.
 - a. Ask each person to write down or draw things that matter to them.
 - b. Ask people: Of those things, what would you give up to see a friend come to Christ?
 - c. State: The real question is what would we give up in order to see a lot of other people, whom we don't know yet, come to Christ?
 - d. OR, ask people: How did your family deal with money?
2. What is Jesus saying about how materialism is a source of anxiety?
 - a. In the passage?
 - i. E.g. Treasures on earth are such things as clothes and food. Jesus clearly asks us to give those things up, as indicated by 'do not store up.' People may have the tendency to say, 'He means our motivation – as long as we're not motivated by it, we can keep it.' This is NOT what Jesus says. It is a particular action Jesus is looking for. 'Do not store it up.' Jesus calls us to radical generosity.
 - ii. Tie in to Mt.5:38 – 48: We are to love neighbors, to give to those who ask, etc. This is concrete.
 - b. In your life? Here's an illustration:

What is anxiety? In the early 1990's, Robert Sapolski, biologist at Stanford University, set out to study stress and anxiety. He observed zebras being chased by lions. Life and death situation. The zebra goes into panic mode. During the chase, a zebra doesn't need its digestive system, so it shuts down. It doesn't need its immune system either, so that diminishes. All its energy goes into its legs and eyes, its muscles and nervous system. Now when a zebra escapes a lion, its stress level goes back to normal. That's why Sapolski titled his 1994 book *Why Zebras Don't Have Ulcers*. But what about us? When does our stress level go down? Why do we get ulcers? Because we live in a society where we're being chased by lions constantly. In fact, we often place ourselves before the lion.

In the March of 1996, I (Mako) was being chased by the lion. I had worked at Intel doing project scheduling, which is a form of in-house management consulting. I wanted three things: I wanted to have something to show for my two years there, I wanted a promotion, and I wanted Intel stock to do well because I had stock options. Materialism had bit me. I chose to be spread across two major projects. The managers were pretty demanding, and what made it worse was that no one knew how much work I was actually doing. For weeks, the pace was grueling. The worst of it was a block of time, four days in a row, where I came in before 8am and left at midnight. Almost all of the work was tense because I was doing a lot of keyboarding either with managers peering over my shoulders or with deadlines looming on my calendar. Suddenly I got hives, that gross red rash on my skin, and it was itchy, so I went to see the doctor. I asked her whether I had eaten something weird. She said no. It was stress. I was so anxious, she said, the anxiety surfaced in my skin. The hives lasted for four weeks. I had to take Benadryl for weeks to keep the hives down so that I could go to sleep. I later asked my doctor how she had known it was stress, and she replied that she herself had had hives for four weeks during her first year of medical school. She also knew of many cases in Silicon Valley where the stress does weird things to people. The lion is always ready to chase us all.

3. If Jesus were speaking v.19 – 21 in modern terms, how might he phrase it? He might say, "Don't store up treasure in the stock market, where the market crashes, or in banks, where thieves break in and steal." What does Jesus want us to value? HIMSELF!

4. What is 'treasure in heaven' and how do we store it up? (Acts of generosity and sacrifice? Seeking first the kingdom?) Reference Luke 12:13 – 34 to see where Jesus says 'Give to the poor' explicitly.
5. Another way of translating 'clear' in v.22 is 'single' or 'simple.' It seems to reflect a single-focusedness of the eye. Like 'pure in heart' from the beatitudes. If that's true, then can we value money and Jesus? No, that is like trying to have 'two masters,' which is impossible. Really we are valuing Mammon over God.
6. Jim Elliott put it this way: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." What do you think of his statement, and his life?
 - a. Illus: See my journal entry, below, and this story of Jim Elliot

Story of Jim Elliot: the son of a Scottish-American in Portland, Oregon. When he was a sophomore at Wheaton, Jim felt that Jesus Christ in him wanted to go through him to a Latin American country. Previously, Jim had shown great talent in architecture, which would have made him lots of money, but he gave that up to major in Greek, which of course pulls down very little! Jim translated Xenophon, Thucydides, and early Christian literature. He studied Spanish on the side because he wanted to preach in that language. He could have been rich in money, but in November of 1947, Jim wrote a letter to his parents, saying that he wanted to be rich in having Jesus Christ, not "all sorts of other baubles, social life, a name renowned, a position of importance, and scholastic attainment." Towards the end of the summer of 1950, when Jim was 23, he met a missionary to Ecuador who told him about the dreaded Auca tribe, the warlike jungle people who hated the white man. Their only known response to the outside world was to attack all strangers. Jim decided to go to the jungles of Ecuador, and even though he lost all the riches he could have potentially had, he wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Jim Elliott and four other men made contact with the Auca indians in 1955. In January, they lost everything. They were killed by the Aucas. What do you think about Jim's statement, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose"?

7. What kind of lifestyle does Jesus seem to be advocating here? The birds work for their daily food, but we want to accumulate.
 - a. What would it be like to stay at lower-paying positions to serve more people directly in a Christ-like way? A doctor or lawyer who serves the poor? Or an employee in a corporation who has more time to care for people because s/he doesn't climb the corporate ladder? Or a social worker in a community? Or not striving in order to be a good friend to people at Harvard? We would trade SECURITY for KINGDOM SIGNIFICANCE.
 - b. What would it mean to buy clothes at Goodwill stores, to buy fewer CD's, to look for more creative and less expensive ways of having fun, in order to commit to giving more money away?
8. What does seeking first the kingdom of heaven mean?
 - a. Seeking to manifest and spread the lordship of Jesus, especially through the ways Jesus has already called us to do in this section (community in 5:1 – 16, heart-level purity in 5:21 – 32, love for enemies in 5:38 – 48, cultivation of a deep intimacy with God in 6:1 – 18)
 - b. Sometime, people separate Jesus from the kingdom. As if the kingdom of God can be brought, done, or accomplished in a secular sense, as if all God was talking about is 'social justice.' Why is Jesus important?
 - i. He is the king of the kingdom, of course!
 - ii. He is the personal reign of God in a human being. No other human being can be said to show the reign of God, in all His goodness, in their life. Only Jesus has shown what it means for God to reign over everything in a person. That's why Jesus calls us to follow him. How does Jesus show what the reign of God is like, through his life?
9. In what ways is it liberating to be reminded that 'life' is more than things? In what ways is it challenging?
10. PRACTICAL STEP OF GROWTH: What can you/we do this week with our money or time that reflects Jesus' priority on advancing his kingdom?
 - a. Let go of one materialistic thing or goal that you're working towards, and instead do something that advances Jesus' purposes in the world
 - b. Meet with people regularly, and build it into your 'rhythm of life'
 - c. Learn how to deepen conversations so that it feels natural to talk about spiritual things, such as participating in one of the proxe stations that we host every so often
 - d. We aren't to stop with that, or feel satisfied. But we need to take a step no matter where we are because faith is like a muscle we strengthen and develop. Then take another step, and another...

Devotional Reflection on Mt.6:19 – 24
November 5, 2007

Today, my son John (who is now 7 years old) was looking at the pictures of the two children on our wall. We sponsor them through WorldVison. Spontaneously, he took all his money from his wallet to send it to them. His treasure was 6 one dollar bills. He was about to stuff it all into an envelope when I explained that we can't send cash through the mail, only checks. He looked at me and asked, 'Why?' I replied, 'Because other people will see it and just take it.'

That incident gave me pause for two reasons. First, I'm incredibly thankful for my son's generous spirit. This was the second time he gave up a significant amount of money for someone else. The first time was when he said he wanted to give it to a poor child back in November of 2006. That was when we started sponsoring the WorldVison children in the first place. Simplicity for the sake of generosity is one of the primary Christian values that my wife and I want to pass on to our children, as part of their knowing how to follow Jesus. John isn't always like this – who is? – but these moments occur from time to time. Perhaps they're from the Lord, gifts to us as parents.

Second, I was reminded of the fact that we don't send cash through the mail. People will steal cash, even when it's in an envelope with a child's writing, addressed to WorldVison.

'Do not store up treasure on earth' is a call to action. Many have tried to escape Jesus by turning him into a pious Buddhist: 'Well, Jesus really means that I can have lots of money as long as I don't really desire it.' It's not quite that detached. Jesus did want us to be concretely generous, after all. It doesn't make sense to say, 'As long as I don't lust, I can commit adultery.' So it doesn't make sense to say, 'As long as I'm not greedy, I can have lots of material possessions.'

The positive side of this call to action is, 'Store up treasure in heaven.' Heaven is the hidden reality that exists now. The prayer Jesus taught us to pray reflects that: 'On earth, as it is in heaven.' 'Treasure in heaven' not a personal bank account that you can cash out when we die and are 'in heaven.' Treasure in heaven is richness of character now, at this very moment. And the way to develop that richness of character is to be generous and sacrificial with our wealth. Jesus calls us to be open-handed with our enemies: 'If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also... Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you' (Mt.5:40 – 42). At other times, Jesus said to give specifically 'to the poor' (Mt.19:21; Lk.12:33). These are concrete activities that draw our enemies and the poor to Christ. This is how we 'seek first the kingdom of God,' not as an abstraction, but as a concrete movement of God among people.

So Jesus engages us with a set of searing challenges. He asks us what we value (treasure in v.19 – 20), what our focus is on (our eye in v.21 - 22), and who is our master (God vs. mammon). I mention how my wife and I parent our kids because it reflects our struggle to live those things very tangibly. Our true life values of financial prosperity, guaranteeing middle and upper class opportunities, security, stability, and self-indulgence often come out when we think about kids. Are we serious about Jesus' kingdom enough to want our kids to be passionate about him that much? We hope so:

- We live in a lower-income, higher crime neighborhood in Boston – and the least funded school district zone – with the desire to reach out to our neighborhood with the love of Christ. We hope they catch a similar vision, because when they are adults, most of the world will be urban poor. They will have great education from us in that sense, for the purpose of the kingdom of God.
- We own a three story house and share our lives with other Christians in an intentional Christian community. Our mortgage of \$2000/month is paid for by our rental income. We hope our kids catch a similar vision, since it makes a lot of financial, relational, and ministry sense. We are teaching our kids – and others all around us – that they, too, can live lives of deep impact without earning a lot of money, but rather by making smart life decisions.
- We are not saving up for our kids to go to private colleges, even though my wife went to Harvard and I went to Stanford, because we would like to adopt kids at some point and are saving up for that. If our kids go to a private school and get financial aid, we're happy for them to go, but we're planning on affording a public school education. Many people would say, 'We'll give our kids the best education possible, so they can make the choice to be poor when they're adults.' But that's evasive: It really means that when my kids are parents of their own kids, they should do the same thing, all for the sake of providing a theoretical choice to live radically that no generation actually makes.
- We try to role model generosity to our kids. We open our home up to our church to meet in our living room every Sunday. We let our housemates borrow our cars and anything else we own. We allow kids from the neighborhood to use our basketball hoop, sandbox, and swing set in the backyard. We've allowed kids from our neighborhood to stay with us for certain periods of time.

- We shop at second-hand stores, cut our own hair, and dress warmly during the winter inside so we don't use a lot of heat.
- We do not watch television channels with commercials. PBS Kids is great for that. Once, our kids turned the channel and saw an advertisement for a toy, and they immediately asked if we could buy it. Advertisements directed at children are incredibly manipulative.
- We celebrate birthdays by having a gift-swap. So rather than our kids get all the gifts, each child leaves with a gift. This teaches our kids not to expect or hoard presents. To our gladness, other families have started to do this.
- We give some of our money away to the global poor, tell our kids about it, and explain why we do it.
- When they are older, we will describe how we regularly share our budget with other Christians who are also passionate about advancing God's kingdom and caring for the poor.

Those are just some of the ways in which we live. By no means am I suggesting that we've got this thing down. In many ways, I hope you outdo my wife and me. But I mention it because in parenting, you pass on and role model what you value most. I mention it also because it helps to be quite specific. We value the life and love of Christ in ourselves and in our children.

Jesus is the treasure in heaven we value. Every other commodity cannot be owned or consumed by multiple people at once. Jesus can be stored up by all. We want to be rich in his life and love, and we want others to be rich in him as well.