

The King's Sermon

The Priorities of a Kingdom Citizen (Matthew 6:19-24)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on July 16, 2017

Introduction

- ❖ **It's become more apparent to me that we're truly living in a 'both-and' type of world – versus an 'either-or' world.** What I mean is a lot of people today are going to resist binary options. They don't like being limited to only two choices. Where you're *either* this *or* you're that. They want to be both-and. And at the same time they want to broaden the set of choices. They want to be *both* this *and* that, *and* that, *and* that.
 - And that's what makes the Sermon on the Mount so radically counter-cultural. **Because what Jesus begins to do, starting in today's passage, is to whittle down the options for us into categories of two.** There are only two places to store your treasures: *heaven* or *earth* (6:19-20). Everyone has one of two kinds of eyes: *healthy* or *bad*, which fills you with either *light* or *darkness* (6:22-23). And everyone serves either *God* or *mammon* (6:24).
 - And then in chapter 7, Jesus speaks of there being only two gates for us to go through: one that is *wide and easy* leading to destruction vs. one that is *narrow and hard* but leading to life (7:13-14). Then there are two kinds of people who are either like a *healthy tree* that bears good fruit or a *diseased tree* that bears bad fruit (7:17-18). And finally there are two foundations upon which you can build a life: on the *rock* which can withstand the storms to come or on the *sand* which will wash away your everything when the storms hit (7:24-27).
- ❖ **That's how Jesus viewed reality – in binary terms.** Your life is built either on this foundation or that. You're like this tree or that. You serve this god or that. You're either building up a nest egg here or there. Apparently Jesus is very comfortable with a binary view of reality. It's very either-or. So if you're going to take him seriously, then you've got to take his binary worldview seriously and figure out where you fit in the picture.
 - ***On which side of the fence do you land?*** There are no neutral observers on the sideline here. **There are only two teams and Jesus is on one of them.** So which are you on? I know that's an awkward, socially-inappropriate question to ask in polite company. But Jesus says in Matthew 12:30, "*Whoever is not with me is against me*".
 - He doesn't allow for neutrality. **If you read accounts of people encountering Jesus in the Gospels, you see them either falling at his feet in wonder or gnashing their teeth in anger.** No one just stands back and watches from the sidelines. Everyone has an opinion on him. Everyone is *either* with him *or* you're against him. So again, where do you stand?
- ❖ In this morning's text, the choice (not surprisingly) comes down to two options. **There are two treasures, two visions, and two masters.** They're all interconnected. Where you lay up your treasures is largely determined by the health of your eyes (by the clarity of your vision), and that clarity is ultimately dictated by which master you're serving – God or Money.
 - Now if you're still wondering if today's sermon has anything to do with you, just ask yourself: Do I ever worry about money? Do money issues keep you up at night? Do they cause fights with your spouse? Are you anxious over your investments, over your financial future, over what you will eat or drink or what you will wear?

- ❖ That's the connection with v25. **The word ‘therefore’ that starts v25 suggests that the anxieties we face in life are rooted in this binary choice between our treasures, our visions, and our masters.** So I want to walk through our text this morning and explain to you three universal laws that apply to all of humanity. And I think you'll begin to see the wisdom and clarity of Jesus's very binary viewpoint.
 - So let me list the three universal laws and we'll consider each in detail. **1) Everyone invests their treasure somewhere (vv19-20). 2) Everyone has eyes captured by something (vv21-23). 3) Everyone bows down and serves somebody (v24).**

Everyone Invests Their Treasure Somewhere

- ❖ The first law for us to consider is the law that says everyone is an investor. **We all have treasures of some sort, and we all invest our treasures somewhere.** Look with me in v19, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal”*.
 - **Now it's important we don't limit the idea of 'treasures on earth' to money alone.** Money was most likely in view here. The passage goes on to speak of serving God and not money (lit. *mammon* which was Aramaic for riches or wealth). But these earthly treasures can be interpreted more broadly. **They could include anything that money can buy.**

- ❖ You can actually go further. **Your earthly treasure could be a valuable possession, but it could also be something of little monetary worth – but to you it means everything.** It doesn't even have to be a material object. Your 'treasures on earth' could be the praise of man, a position of power, a dream job, a lifelong ambition, or a desired relationship.
 - Ask yourself: *What are the earthly treasures that vie for my heart? Who or what is everything to me – so that if I were to lose it – I would lose a sense of identity and purpose in life? However you answer – those are the treasures we're warned not to lay up on earth.*

- ❖ Now notice Jesus doesn't say, “Do not treasure treasures”. **The problem is not that we treasure these earthly things or earthly relationships.** That's more of a Buddhist diagnosis – that says the problem is we desire too much. That says it's selfish to even treasure treasures.
 - That's not what Jesus is saying. **He doesn't say the problem is we're being selfish. No, the problem is we're being foolish.** His condemnation is not that we're looking out for ourselves but that we're not looking out for ourselves well enough.
 - It's like what C.S. Lewis described in his sermon “The Weight of Glory”. **He says the Lord doesn't find our desires too strong but too weak.** *“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”*

- ❖ We're too easily pleased by the accumulation of earthly treasures. **We're too easily satisfied by our ambitions to be rich or to simply be comfortable and secure.** For us it's often enough to just get our hands on that power, that status, that dream job, that dream family. **Jesus's point is that we're making really bad investments.** That's how he argues in v19.
 - He gives two reasons to stop laying up treasures on earth. On one hand, he stresses the **perishability** of earthly treasure and, on the other, the **insecurity**. Eventually moth and rust destroy or thieves break in and steal. **So his warning is *not* that you might lose your earthly treasures but that you'll *always* lose them.**

- ❖ **Proverbs 23:4-5** paints a good picture of this. It says, *"⁴Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. ⁵When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven."*
 - So just think that thing you own that you're so possessive and protective of. **Just picture that house or that car or those clothes or that smartphone sprouting wings and flying away.** Because, one day, that's what it'll do. Whatever earthly treasure you're gripping so tightly to today – you can be sure it's going to break down or wear down. It'll soon be obsolete or fall out of fashion or you'll just tire of it.

- ❖ And even if you manage to preserve that treasure throughout this life, you can't take it with you into the next. Like they say, there are no U-Hauls behind hearses. **Death is the ultimate thief who steals away all earthly goods.** Listen to **Psalm 49:17**, *"When [the rich man] dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not go down after him."* Bottom line, **treasures laid up on earth will either perish or be left behind.** You can't take it with you. So *not* investing your treasures on earth is not just the right thing to do – it's the smart thing to do.

- ❖ Look at the smart investor with the smart investment in v20. *"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."* **Unlike the ones on earth, treasures in heaven never perish, and when you die, you don't leave them behind.** They'll be waiting for you when you arrive in heaven.
 - Randy Alcorn calls this the Treasure Principle. He wrote a book by that same name, and in it he describes the biblical principle like this: **You can't take treasures with you, but you *can* send them on ahead.**

- ❖ So instead of being anxious about how to accumulate and secure treasures on earth, we should be figuring out how to send them on ahead, laying them up in heaven. Now Jesus doesn't explain what these 'treasures in heaven' are. Nor does he elaborate on how you actually lay them up for yourself in heaven.
 - But if turn to the Apostle Paul, he helps us identify these things in **1 Timothy 6:17-19**. *"¹⁷As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."*

- ❖ This helps us understand how we can lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. Listen again. We are “*to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share*”. **So to store up treasure in heaven is to devote your time and energy (your heart) to any good work on earth whose effects last for eternity.**
 - So the distinction between ‘on earth’ or ‘in heaven’ is not really referring to the location of the treasures but to their quality – whether they’re perishable or imperishable. Whether they’re temporary or they last forever.

- ❖ Just think about what's going to last. **Scripture identifies three things that will last forever: God, God’s Word, and people created in God’s image.** So if you're devoting significant time and energy to your relationship with God and to your knowledge of his Word – you are laying up treasures in heaven. If the future age is about the enjoyment of a perfect, uninhibited communion with God himself, then it makes sense to say that any time spent with him and his Word now is storing up (preparing you) for an even greater experience of that communion when you do get to heaven.

- ❖ And the same goes for your relationships with people. **If you're going to share eternity with the people of God, then investing in those relationships now makes complete sense.** Investing in the lives of your fellow church members has eternal value.
 - And if you're convinced that only those who repent of their sins and trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior are going to be in heaven, then **it's a wise investment of your resources to put them towards the good work of gospel work.** Whether that's your own efforts to share the gospel or you're financially supporting the gospel work of others. That makes me think of Jesus's parable of the Shrewd Steward (Lk. 16:1-9). **Where he says to invest your earthly treasures in such a way that when you arrive in glory, the people who benefited will be there to welcome you.** That’s laying up for yourself treasures in heaven – in the form of relationships.

- ❖ So what are you investing in? **All of us are investors and we’re all investing our money, our time, our energy, our resources into something.** Are you making the wise decision? Are you investing in what’s going to last for eternity or are you far too easily pleased with mud pies in the slum?

Everyone Has Eyes Captured by Something

- ❖ Now we haven't looked at v21 yet, “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*” I was saving it for the next section of our passage. It relates better to our second universal law, which says this: **It says everyone has eyes that are captured by something.**
 - There’s a transition here in v22. **It goes from two types of treasures to two types of conditions describing you.** Where the healthiness of your eyes is used as a metaphor. “*22The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 23but 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!*”

- ❖ So v21 bridges these two sections. Look there again. **It says our treasures don't follow our heart. Our heart follows our treasures.** That means whatever has captured your attention, whatever your eyes are fixed on – earthly treasures or heavenly – there your heart will be also. That means more than just your emotions. The heart was biblically understood to be the control center of your life.
- ❖ The point is this: **Whatever you're treasuring will have your heart.** It will control the entire course of your life. Or to use the eyes metaphor: **Whatever has your eyes; has your heart.** Whatever your eyes are captured by will affect the whole of your life. So if they're captured by earthly treasures, if your spiritual vision is clouded by the love of money, then it's no wonder if your life is shrouded in darkness.
 - Just think about it. If you're anxious about your life, if the path before you is unclear, if you lack a clear purpose in life and you feel stuck in the rat race – **all of that darkness and cloudiness can be explained by the fact that you've allowed your eyes to be fixed on earthly treasures.** I think that's what Jesus is saying.
- ❖ Now if, by God's grace, your spiritual vision has been corrected and your eyes are now fixed on eternal things, if they're set not only things below but on things above – that offers you a unique simplicity to life. There's a clarity to your life because it's filled with light.
 - **A healthy vision puts earthly treasures (that are good in themselves) in proper perspective (priority).** If my life comes down to knowing Jesus and then making him known – that equips me to enjoy the things of this world in proper proportion.
- ❖ **So what have you allowed your eyes to be captured by?** What's usually the last thought on your mind before you fall asleep or your first thought in the morning? What are you always daydreaming about? What are you known for always talking about?
 - **I hear Christians say they know that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions** (cf. Lk. 12:15). They know they shouldn't be living for a paycheck, living for weekends, living for mindless entertainment. They know it's not all about making money and then securing that money. They know life is about so much more.
 - **They tell me they were once (back in the day) so passionate for ministry, for missions, for sharing the gospel and serving the church.** They had a huge heart for the poor and needy.
- ❖ But that was then and this is now. They don't feel it anymore. They lost that passion, that heart. And they don't know how it get it back. **They don't know what to do to recover that passion.** But Jesus tells us right here. There are two universal laws to consider.
 - Ask yourself: ***What are my eyes consistently captured by? And where am I investing my treasures?*** Because whatever has your eyes, has your heart. And wherever your treasure is, there your heart is also.

- ❖ **So do you want to recover that heart for missions you use to have so long ago?** Then put more of your money in missions and set your eyes on a good biography of a missionary (recommend: *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret* or *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson*). Start doing those things and just watch your heart follow.
 - **Do you want to regain that passion you once had in serving the church?** You were once so committed but life got busy and other priorities popped up. How do you get that passion back for church ministry? Give generously to the local church and set your eyes on the ministry needs of others in your church and not just those that concern you or your family. Start doing that and watch your heart inevitably follow.
 - **The same goes if you want to have a huge heart for the poor and needy.** Donate more of your money to ministries serving the poor and set your eyes on real people with real needs. Go and meet them, spend time with them. You will be surprised how quickly your heart follows and expands in compassion towards the poor. *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

Everyone Bows Down and Serves Somebody

- ❖ So the first law is that everyone is an investor investing their treasures somewhere, and the second law is that everyone has eyes captured by something. And depending on where your treasure is laid up *and* what your eyes are fixed on – your heart, your life, will go one direction or the other.
 - Now in the choice between two treasures (where we lay them up) and two visions (where we fix our eyes) is a choice between two masters (whom are we going to serve). **That leads to the third universal law in our text that says everyone bows down and serves somebody.** And whom you serve is what determines where your treasures are invested and what your eyes are captured by.
 - So this is the most important law. Let's read it again in v24, *“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.”*
- ❖ You can serve two employers. You can have two jobs. But it's different when dealing with masters. **Your service and allegiance to a master is all-encompassing.** So there's no way you can serve two at a time. That's why Jesus says you cannot serve God and money. You're going to end up using one as a tool to serve the other.
- ❖ **I think it's so sad and yet so common for people to serve and worship God – not as an end in itself – but as a means to another end.** That's where I worship God – I serve and give to his church – with the hope that he'll bless me in return with greater health or wealth. But God's no fool. And he's no tool. And he knows when we're treating him like one.
 - The fact is money is the tool. Money was never meant to be a master. Money is suppose to be our servant. **Our true master gave us money as a tool that we can wield in service of our heavenly aims and heavenly joy.**

- ❖ God is our one and only Master, so that means all of my money (all my earthly treasure) belongs to him. I don't truly own anything. Everything I have was entrusted to me and to my care by the True Owner.
 - **This is why we shouldn't make any distinctions in our pocketbook or bank account between God's portion and my portion.** It's unhealthy to treat a percentage of your net worth as God's portion (which you give as an offering) and treat the rest as yours to be spent as you please. **Once you embrace that kind of thinking (that kind of distinction) God's portion is always at risk of shrinking.**

- ❖ Martyn Lloyd-Jones tells a story about a farmer who one day reports to his family that their best cow had given birth to twin calves, one red and one white. He said to them, *"I feel we ought to dedicate one of these calves to the Lord. So let's raise both, and when the time comes we'll sell one and keep the money, and we'll sell the other and give the money to the Lord and his work."*
 - Then his wife asked him which one he plans to dedicate to the Lord. He replied, *"There's no need to bother about that now. We'll raise them up equally, and when the time comes we'll decide."*
 - Well a few months later, the man comes home looking miserable. His wife asks what happened. *"I have bad news,"* he said, *"The Lord's calf is dead."* *"But"*, she said, *"I thought you hadn't decided which one was to be the Lord's."* *"Oh,"* he replied, *"I had always decided it was going to be the white one, and it's the white one that died. Sorry but the Lord's calf is dead."*

- ❖ Lloyd-Jones's point is that it's always the Lord's calf that dies. **When money is tight, when the market is down, when the economy is bad, the first thing that dies is God's portion.** The first thing we cut back on is our contribution to God's work, to the kind of work that lays up treasures in heaven.
 - And we in turn start laying up treasures on earth. **That's what happens if we keep thinking of money as *our* money (even if just a portion).** But it's not *your* money. It's not *my* money. It's God's money. He is our one and only Master.

- ❖ And when we give an offering, we're not giving him his portion. We're not paying our dues. We're worshipping. **We're giving God what's rightfully his, and in so doing we're telling him, we're telling ourselves, and we're telling the world who is our Master.**
 - That's the thinking behind the idea (that I brought up last week) to eventually incorporate an offertory in our worship service. The goal is to reserve a moment in our worship where we can proclaim together that money is *not* our master. That money is a tool that our Master gives us so we can invest in treasures in heaven.

- ❖ **I want to encourage those of you who aren't giving regularly to the Lord to make a change.** To make a start. But of course you'll need the right heart, the right motives, which can only be found in one thing – the good news of what Jesus has done for you.

- ❖ **The gospel is the good news about our Lord Jesus Christ, who was rich yet became poor for our sake, so that by his poverty we might become rich** (2 Cor. 8:9). It's the good news that those who are poor in spirit – who humble themselves and confess they have nothing to offer God to earn his favor – they're the ones who receive the kingdom (Mt. 5:3). They're the ones called sons and daughters of the God Most High (Mt. 5:9).
 - In fact, one of the major themes in this section of the Sermon on the Mount is the relationship that Christians have with God as their Father. In chapter 6 alone there are ten references to God as your Father. Look right before our passage in v18, *“And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*

- ❖ **It would be a terrible mistake to read the commands in vv19-20 apart from this Father-child relationship with God – made possible by Jesus.** If God – the one and only Master – is also your Father, then why do you fear? Why are you anxious about what you will eat or drink or about your body, what you will put on? (Mt. 6:25) **If God is your Father, why do you fear that you won't have enough if you start regularly giving?**
 - If the gospel sinks in for you, then you're truly free. Free to seek first your Father's kingdom and his righteousness. Free to invest your money on treasures in heaven and not on earth. You're enabled to give freely and generously because you have a trust in your heavenly Father to give you your daily bread and satisfy your daily needs.