

## **"True Treasure"**

### *Sermons from the Mound – sermon #2*

#### Matthew 6:19-24

Today we are continuing our series titled "Sermons from the Mound," as we continue to examine that critical sermon that Jesus preached in Matthew 5-7. In this famous passage, actually called "The Sermon on the Mount," Jesus covers all sorts of topics from prayer and fasting to divorce and loving your enemies. This is important stuff. As I said last week, if you call yourself a follower of Jesus - a disciple of Christ - you must listen to and do what he says.

Last week we talked about the Beatitudes. In the first few verses, Jesus takes conventional wisdom and turns it upside down. He tells people who would follow him to be poor in spirit, humble, and meek; to love righteousness and peace, and don't be afraid if the world mocks you for not playing along. In short, Jesus tells his followers to be focused on eternity more than temporary.

Have you ever seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer? No? There is a good reason. We all know, we can't take it with us when we perish. In fact, Jesus tells us not to store up any possessions on earth because they perish, too. Instead we are to store up treasures in heaven. What does that mean? Why should we do what Jesus says, anyway? He's pushing buttons. I don't like it when preachers push buttons, and I am one!

By any global comparison, we are staggeringly wealthy in this country. Almost half the world — over three billion people — live on less than \$2.50 a day. At least 80% of humanity lives on less than \$10 a day.<sup>1</sup>

Even so, most of us think, “I’m not rich. But if I could just have a little more, I would be happy.” We have been sold a lie that “Things make us happy.” We buy things. Lots of things. But when we have a lot of things, we need bigger things to put them in. Bigger houses. A bigger garage. Bigger cars. Trailers. It amazes me that there is an entire industry built around rental storage. Our homes are so full, we need to buy extra space for our things! When I first moved to Bellaire, someone built a brand-new set of storage facilities right next to the airport. We are stuffed with stuff!

Consider this: The average American has 91% of their wealth in assets — stuff — and only 9% in cash.<sup>2</sup> Think of it: 91% of our stuff is frozen, non-liquidable assets, stuff that depreciates and eventually has no value.

We all want to be happy in this life. When I was younger, I thought getting a new car would make me happy. Or that getting a good job and a high salary would make me happy. I had both, and I wasn’t happy. It wasn’t until I let go of accumulating wealth that I found satisfaction in life. When I left engineering, I was getting paid \$47,000 a year. That was almost 20 years ago, and that’s still a ton of money today. But I told God, “I will give my life to You. I’m going to trust You to provide for me.” When I first started as a youth minister, I made \$24,000 year. And it was enough, because God always provided.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats](http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ltw.org/watch/webinars/giving-from-your-assets-not-just-your-checkbook>

When Katja and I were first married, before we even had our first child, Katja’s parents gave us a sizable inheritance: \$25,000. It was the largest sum of money I had ever known. We had no debt, no mortgage (we lived in a parsonage). This gift was the equivalent of a whole year’s salary. There was so much we could have done: bought a new car, taken a vacation to Hawaii, put it in the stock market. But none of those things appealed to us. In fact, none of them ever crossed my mind. One thing, I knew, would make God happy: if I gave it to Lake Louise Christian Community, the summer camp where I am going later today. Combined with a another family’s gift, we created an endowment that still provides funds for camping needs and scholarships 15 years later.

Jesus says clearly in many different passages, what we do with our money reveals the status of our heart. (Matt 19:21, Mark 4:19, Luke 8:14, 16:14, just to name a few. For more ideas, see below.<sup>3</sup>) If we spend most of our money on ourselves, that is self-worship. Jesus said that we should store up treasure in heaven.

So what does that look like? Clearly, when we give to the church offering, we give to the Lord. But what does that offering do, exactly? It provides resource for ministry to make disciples. We give to bring salvation to the least, the last and the lost. That’s why I gave to the camp. That’s why I always have and always will tithe 10% of my salary back to the church. That’s why in my will, I have set aside a lump sum to go to the church. Because I know in the end, spending that money on myself only provides temporary satisfaction. Giving to God’s work saves lives for eternity.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.crosswalk.com/family/finances/debt/what-did-jesus-actually-have-to-say-about-money.html>

The Bible does not say that money is evil. Money is money. It's neutral. It is a tool. Actually, the Bible says, in 1 Timothy 6:10, "...the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil." Back up a verse. 1 Timothy 6:9 says, "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." It is not money itself that causes our hearts to be turned away from God. It is the love of money, the accumulation of stuff for stuff's sake, that causes us to sin and wander away from God.

Jesus wanted us to have pure hearts. He knew that where our treasure was, that was what we worshipped. If Jesus looked at your finances, what would it tell him? And if you think Jesus can't see your checkbook, remember, the bible says he knows our hearts. (Matt 12:25)

Jesus uses a second body part as a metaphor for the struggle to store up treasures in heaven. In Matthew 6:22, Jesus says the eye is the lamp of the body. The Abingdon New Testament Commentary explains: "Building on the popular assumption that the eye is the window to one's inner life and values, common Jewish metaphors spoke of the "healthy" eye as a sign of one who is generous; conversely, the "unhealthy" eye was symbolic of one who is possessive or stingy."<sup>4</sup>

Most of the information we receive comes through our eyes. We can consume life through our eyes. If we see what God sees and want what God wants for our lives, then God's light fills our body. In Matthew 5:14, Jesus calls us the light of the world. When we give generously of our treasure, time, and talents, other people see God's light in us. That is amazing. Yet when we hoard

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<sup>4</sup> ANTC, [ministrymatters.com](http://ministrymatters.com)

and spend our wealth only on ourselves, that glitz and glimmer is really darkness instead of light. Greed, coming through our eyes, infects the whole body. Jesus says greed is a disease, a terrible disease that corrupts us.

It is interesting that Jesus mixes metaphors here, starting with treasures and hearts and moving to lights and bodies. Let me give you a modern metaphor for two types of givers: a standard incandescent light bulb versus an LED. An LED light bulb is 90% efficient. That means, of the electricity that comes in through the wire, 90% is “given away” as light, while only 10% of the power is wasted in heat. On the other hand, an incandescent bulb is only 10% efficient at best. That means of that same power, only 10% is given out in light, while 90% is wasted as heat. An incandescent bulb, after just a few seconds, is so hot, you would burn your hand if you touched it. Why? Because that bulb “stores up” energy internally for itself. It’s wasted.

A similar metaphor for generosity is found in the Middle East. There are two bodies of water fed by the River Jordan: the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. Only one is fresh water and sustains life. The other is seven times saltier than the ocean. Why? Because only the Sea of Galilee has an outlet. The Dead Sea consumes, but never gives out.

Consuming without ever giving is deadly for our souls. “The followers of Jesus are supposed to be the light of the world (5:14), but if [we] try to serve both God and mammon, to value both what is worldly and heavenly, the light in [us]

goes dark and [we] have nothing to offer."<sup>5</sup> Jesus pointed out that we can only serve one master. It's either God or mammon.

So what is mammon? Here is a short video to explain. [Bluefish TV]

"You cannot serve both God and mammon." This is a hard saying. But Jesus speaks the truth. Jesus is the truth, the way and the life. (John 14:6) We can trust him. If Jesus says you cannot serve God and Mammon, it must be true.

So what is the good news? Are we lost because we have wealth? Not at all. The grace in this text is this: God gives us a choice. We don't have to be possessed by our possessions. We don't have to only be consumers. We don't have to buy more stuff. We can put our gifts in God's hands and watch the kingdom grow.

For example, Jesus said in Luke 16:9, "I tell you, use worldly wealth to make friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, they will welcome you into eternal dwellings." That's an example of storing up treasures in heaven.

Hebrews 13:5 admonishes us to "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, for God has said: 'Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.'" Our view of money really comes down to fear versus trust in God. That's why Jesus said you cannot serve money and God. If you trust your money to save you, it will disappoint you. Love of money will not get you ahead in God's kingdom. But using our money in healthy, biblical ways will show that we love God.

When we love money, how do we hate God? It's sort of like being married. Most people, when asked, would say that they would enjoy being happily married

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<sup>5</sup> HBC, 877

to one person. However, would you marry a polygamist? Would you intentionally marry someone who every few months decides to marry another spouse? I hope not!

God is jealous for our love. God created us, and God knows us inside and out. Being a follower of Jesus means loving God – and not letting anything else get in the way of that love, especially not possessions.

God gives us everything we have. Psalm 24:1 reminds us “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.” We are only stewards of God’s stuff. God doesn’t want us to stuff our stuff. God doesn’t want stuff to control us. God wants us to use it to honor and glorify him. Yes, that means giving to the church, God’s church. But it also means having a healthy view of money – not going into debt and stealing our future ability to give and be generous. Jesus says more about money than heaven and hell combined. It must be important.

If you have never trusted God with your wealth, I encourage you to do so today. If you never give to the church or any charity, you have no idea what you are missing. If you give periodically, you can take up God’s promise that he will provide for you. You can become a sacrificial giver. If you give your wealth back to God, he will multiply it. I promise you, if you have never tithed before, you don’t know the blessing you are missing. In fact, I promise you that if you tithe for three months faithfully and don’t experience God’s blessing, I will personally refund your money. I mean it.

What kind of giver are you? An LED, a Sea of Galilee? Or an incandescent bulb, a Dead Sea? No one can serve two masters. Which will it be? Will you obey Christ? Let us pray.

**Memory Verse: Matthew 6:20 (NLT)**

“Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.”

**Reflection Questions:**

- 1.) What do you estimate is your net worth? What percentage is possessions, and what percentage cash?
- 2.) Do ever wish you had more?
- 3.) How do your possessions possess you?
- 4.) Why did Jesus say to store up treasures in heaven? What does that look like in your life?
- 5.) Do you give your money to any charities? To the church? How much? Why?
- 6.) What would it take for you to embrace tithing as a way of living a generous life? Could you do it? Would you try?