

5. Laying Up Treasure in Heaven

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 6:19-34

We continue to explore Jesus' teaching, which many call the Sermon on the Mount. As Jesus spoke to His disciples and followers, He shone light into the souls of His listeners. His words pierced their hearts as well as ours. He challenges us to focus on things that last forever, things that are eternal, rather than things of this world. People at that time had their temptations; indeed, they didn't have the Internet and TV, and all the temptations that destroy the character of many, but they had things that entangled their hearts in deep darkness. I think that if they were somehow able to see into the future and view our lives today, with all of the possessions of the 21st century, even in the lives of believers, they would be shocked. It is likely they would find our lives so complicated and so full of all kinds of things that it would seem incredulous to them that sin has managed to gain acceptance in the culture. I wonder how many of those days would trade their lives, if they could, for a life in the 21st century.

A Wasted Life is an Early Death

President Ferdinand Marcos became president of the Philippines in 1965, crediting his wife, Imelda, as the one who swung the election in his favor. Imelda was looked up to by the many who were poor in their country, perhaps because she was a beauty queen in her younger years. The Philippines went through great economic hardship after the Marcos government stole an estimated 5-10 billion dollars from the country, holding the Guinness World record for the greatest robbery of a government.¹ After mass protests in 1986, Ferdinand agreed to step down as president. The couple soon fled to Hawaii, where they spent years in exile. Imelda left many of her belongings behind at Malacanang Palace, leading the press to report extensively on her massive wardrobe.² Imelda's shoe collection reportedly totaled 3,000 pairs. Her wardrobe also included 15 mink coats, 508 gowns, 888 handbags, and a bulletproof bra. Many of Imelda's shoes are on display at the National Museum of the Philippines in Manila.³ I wonder how many of those who gained great riches ever reflect on a wasted life and vain pursuits. It was Johann Goethe who said, "A wasted life is an early death." The most important thing one can leave behind is the impact they have had on other lives. This was the focus of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount—making an impact on those around you by the quality of your character, your relationship with God, as well as your relationships with others.

In our last study from Matthew 6:1-18, we looked at the Lord's encouragement for us to maximize our rewards for the end of the age when comes the Harvest of the Earth (Mark 4:29; Rev 14:15). In Matthew 6, verses 19-34, the Lord carries on this theme, focusing on the kinds of things we can do that can affect our eternity and those around us. We can so focus on happiness in this life that we forget to store up for our eternal well-being. The pursuit of happiness is one of our values as Americans, but should one's life be wasted in just serving ourselves and making ourselves "happy." How many shoes did Imelda get to before she became "happy," if ever she did? Should we pursue the things of this world for temporary comfort? I put it to you that our pursuit, especially if you

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imelda_Marcos

² <https://wwd.com/pop-culture/culture-news/who-is-imelda-marcos-1235749455/>

³ <https://wwd.com/pop-culture/culture-news/who-is-imelda-marcos-1235749455/>

are a follower of Christ, is the glory of God—Jesus said we are to lose our self-life and follow His model. He said, “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work (John 4:34). What the Lord is saying is that the food that really satisfies Him on the inside is to do God’s will. If that is so with Him, how much more those who walk with Him? There should be no regrets for the children of God as they approach their twilight years. Let’s look at verses 19-21 first:

Treasures in Heaven

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

Life is one of service to our fellow man. Happy is the man who is not focused on things for their personal comfort but is concerned with the desire to see people saved and discipled to walk with Christ. The real treasure is to invest in reaching and influencing others for God. I pray that each of us has precious people in eternity who will come and find us and thank us for reaching out to them. Life has a way of stealing our treasures laid up in this world. In New Testament times, the things of value were to have richly made clothes. Clothes gave one status and promoted envy in others. A beautiful Babylonian robe is what caused Achan to sin in the overthrow of Jericho in the time of Joshua (Joshua 7:21); he was stoned to death for his sin and disobedience to God. The lust for silver and beautiful clothes was also what caused the servant of Elisha to sin and become leprous (2 Kings 5:22). The Lord used the metaphor of moths that would make holes in rich clothing stored up for a great occasion.

In New Testament times, to bank one's silver and gold did not happen so much; instead, it was hidden and buried in a safe box away from the town. But those suspecting one of having silver and gold would watch them and go later and dig it up, as in treasure that was buried in a field in the [Parable of the Buried Treasure](#). When homes were not as structurally sound as they are now, robbers would also dig under the walls of the house of a man of means and steal his wealth while he was away. Jesus advised us to store up the kind of treasure that no one can steal, that cannot be corrupted. I wonder if Imelda was happy with her life while her people were going through great poverty. It is reported that many of her 3,000 shoes rotted away from a leaking roof after being stored in shoe boxes at the National Museum. Happy is the man who has stored up his time, energy, talents, gifts, and money in things that will be rewarded in heaven. Jesus said that our hearts follow our values and investments in this world (v. 21). Where our treasure is, our hearts will be focused. What you value as “treasure” shows the present condition of your inner man, your character. We need to understand that it is not things that steal our hearts but the love of things, chasing after that which can never truly satisfy. It is not about the number of possessions we have, but our treasures have a way of having us.

1) [What would you say are the eternal treasures that one can take with them when they depart from this life?](#)

What Do You See?

The Lord now turned His attention from the heart to focus on what you give your eyes to—how you view life in this present evil world system we live in. Do you look at life with a view to eternity, or are you confirmed in your belief that there is no life beyond the grave? The worldview you hold affects your life. Are you the master of your life, or is God the One seated on the throne of your life? Here’s how Jesus put it:

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! 24 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:22-24).

When I left commercial fishing to follow the Lord wholeheartedly, I started my own business by cleaning windows to provide for my family. It gave me the freedom to manage my time to do church planting. People would see me cleaning their next-door neighbor and come out and ask me to do theirs as well. People were surprised at how much light came inside their homes once their windows were cleaned. The eyes are the windows of the soul, the instrument that regulates light into the inner man. Some people refuse to open the blinds of their windows. They like the darkness and control how much Biblical light they allow, sometimes even refusing to hear anything that will challenge their worldview. Let the light in, and the whole body will have light. Our windows can get distorted by the things we see through them. In the time of Jesus, all kinds of prejudices against the Samaritans and the Gentiles distorted the way Jews viewed people. We also can allow all sorts of prejudices to fog up the windows of the way we view people. Other examples of our eyes being unhealthy are jealousy of others, as well as the self-conceit of thinking of ourselves as more important than others.

The amount of light or darkness we allow into our soul is often one of the first areas of attack by the evil one. The enemy prompts thoughts to view something unhealthy for our soul that should set off alarm bells in our hearts, if we are awake to spiritual things. The attack is different for each of us. What gets a second look for one does not affect another. For instance, I do not take a second look at what shoes a person wears, but obviously, Imelda Marcos valued such things highly. The temptation is often on small things first, gradually, incrementally, gaining in darkness until the windows of the eyes become shutters to the light.

When we refuse to let the light shine into our hearts, our eyes become darkened, as likewise, our hearts. Jesus said, **“But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” (v. 23).** There was an article published in 2020 by the American Academy of Ophthalmology which lists 20 health problems that are detected in a routine eye exam including heart disease, stroke, multiple types of cancer, diabetes, medicine toxicities, and vitamin and mineral deficiencies.⁴ The article states that your eyes are windows to the live action of blood vessels, nerves, and connective tissues throughout your body. Problems spotted in the eye are often the first signs of disease lurking elsewhere.

⁴ <https://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/surprising-health-conditions-eye-exam-detects>

Can evil be seen in a person's eyes? Although we do not want to pre-judge others by appearance, in some cases, evil can be discerned spiritually. Some interviewers, when speaking to murderers or serial killers, have noted a flat or dead-looking appearance in the eyes of those who have committed such crimes. The people who interview such individuals sometimes describe a coldness and have chills themselves during the encounter with such a person. Where does this come from? It is a very vivid testimony that evil is real.

If we could have interviewed the man called Legion in Mark, chapter five, who was restored to sanity after the demon was cast out, I wonder what he would have told us about his previous state and how he ended up that way. Likely, he would say to us that it was a condition that came upon him gradually, through incremental sin that he allowed. Give the enemy an inch, and he'll take a yard; give him a yard, and he will want a mile. Sin is only a temporary enjoyment, and then comes guilt, regret, and condemnation. These are undoubtedly extreme situations that I am referring to here, but I mention them to highlight the fact that good and evil are real and alive in the world around us, and we do well not to allow sin to occur in our lives habitually.

What we give ourselves to will affect not only our perceptions but can even affect our characters and the people we are becoming. The enemy is bound by having to get consent from us. Be careful as to what you give consent to. Learn how to open the eyes fully to the Light of Life—pursue Christ and His righteousness. The Lord used the analogy of two masters. He's not talking about two bosses at the two jobs you might work at: He's talking about bondslaves of the time of the New Testament. If you were a bondsman, you were wholly owned by one master to do everything your master required of you. If a man or woman lives for money and how many “shoes” one owns, then wealth is a hard taskmaster, and one is rarely free from the stress of losing one's treasure. put it this way:

According to our Lord here, these earthly, worldly things tend to become our god. We serve them; we love them. Our heart is captivated by them; we are at their service. What are they? They are the very things that God in His kindness has given man in order that they might be of service to him, and in order that he may enjoy life while he is in this world... What a tragedy; he bows down and worships at the shrine of things that were meant to be at his service. Things that were meant to minister to him have become his master.⁵

Jesus warns us categorically not to serve two masters. You cannot love God as well as money or treasures of this world (v. 24).

Do Not Worry

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and

5D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971) vol. 2, p. 103

yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? (Matthew 6:25-27).

2) What are the things that worry you the most? How can your understanding of God's love and care help to dispel worry?

True peace within is knowing who you are and who owns you. The best remedy for worry and anxiety is to cast all your cares on Christ, with a deep understanding that He cares for you. When we know that the Lord Jesus owns us and we understand the immense riches we have been given in Christ, this is the most effective way to combat worry and chase anxiety and fear from our minds.

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (Matthew 6:28-34).

When our treasures, our valuable possessions in this life, are focused only on how much we can accumulate, then stress, fear, and worries can infect our eternal souls. There was a time in my life before I became a Christian when all I wanted was to have a decent home and a family. When the Lord came into my life, everything changed. I became concerned for those who did not know the God who had changed my life. By the time I was 21 years of age, I was privileged to have my own commercial fishing boat, my own home, a lovely car, a motorbike, and a good-sized bank account. I guess people envied me and wanted what I had, but I was never satisfied. When the challenge came to me to leave my fishing occupation and follow Jesus, then came the thoughts—what would I do? How will I provide for myself? What will I wear? How will I pay the mortgage? Those are the kinds of things that creep up on a person and bring fear, worry, and anxiety to one's life as they did to me. At this stage of my life, I thank God that I gave up my fishing boat, my house, my girlfriend, and my bike and followed Christ to labor in His harvest.

Somehow, I don't think the Lord wore the Armani shoes and the richly ornamented robes of the day. The Lord uses the example of the wildflowers on the hillside beside the crowd, how Solomon was not dressed better than the flowers of the field. They did not spin their wool or cotton to make their beauty; they didn't strain or stress themselves in their growth. Worry can siphon off our hope, but we are to remind ourselves that God has seen the end from the beginning. He views each of us in the present moment and knows what decisions we make, and He is able to change our future accordingly, so don't allow your choices to hinder what God is calling you to do in your future. God is well able to provide for you and me. He is already there in the future with your provision for what He has called you to do.

My father was one of the most well-known and loved fishermen on the east coast of England. His real name was Ernest, but everybody called him Tom Thomas (perhaps named after Ernest Shackleton, the famous British explorer who went to Antarctica and got stuck in the ice for around 18 months). He saved all of his men and brought them all home. His first fishing boat was called Why Worry and this name exemplified his life because nothing seemed to faze him—he was always doing things that other fishermen would not do. Did you ever want to be like your father? Unfortunately, some of us cannot look up to our fathers and take an example from their lives. My father was not perfect, but neither is any of us, but he did leave a legacy with me of walking life with no worries and trusting that all will be well with us. Thank God for Jesus, who has modeled to us a lifestyle of freedom from fear and of stepping out in faith.

3) How do we seek first the kingdom of God in our daily choices? How can this help us not to worry about tomorrow?

At the beginning of our study, the question we asked was: What would you say are the eternal treasures that one can take with them when they depart from this life?

Let's talk about some answers to this question.

- 1) The Word of God, which we have stored in our hearts.
- 2) The people we have witnessed to and been used to influence them into a relationship with Christ.
- 3) The love of God.
- 4) The good works that God ordained for us to do. (“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10).
- 5) The spiritual rewards promised to the believer- “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Let's think about that and let it sink in. In our wildest dreams, we cannot even imagine what awaits those who love God in eternity.

Do often-seen numbers have any reminders for you? For instance, often in the mornings, my eyes will awaken to see the clock beside my bed, with the time at 6:33. Right away, my thoughts recall Matthew 6:33 which has been a reminder to me through my walk with Christ to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). My prayer in closing is that this will become the habit of your life—to seek first for God's kingdom to be done in your life and those around you.

Keith Thomas

Website: groupbiblestudy.com

Email: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com