

Treasures in Heaven

Matthew 6:16-24

We are looking at the Sermon on the Mount and we saw in Matthew chapter 5 how Jesus introduces the **good news of the kingdom of God** by describing the character and blessings of its citizens. Jesus then challenges the common perception that the Pharisees and teachers of the Law were very righteous because of the way they kept petty regulations and how they impressed people by their public worship. Jesus gives such radically different concepts of belonging, of righteousness and worship that must have at first shocked his hearers. Jesus shows that keeping the Law and worship in God's Kingdom is all about our hearts not about outward observances.

In our passage today Jesus moves on to show that kingdom life and kingdom attitudes are starkly out of sync not only with formal religion but also the way of the world. He speaks about laying up treasures in heaven, not on earth, and about how what we look at affects us, about serving God and not money, about seeking God's Kingdom and not worrying, about not criticising people, not casting our pearls before pigs, asking God for what we need and concludes the section with what is often called the golden rule, 'treat others as you yourself want to be treated'.

Having dealt earlier with some of the ten commandments, Jesus now address the last commandment 'You shall not covet'. Coveting is 'wanting what someone else has got' and it is the most potent way in which our sinful nature reveals itself. Paul, recognising that we would not know what sin was if it were not for the law, wrote, *"Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I wouldn't have known what sin was except through the law. For I wouldn't have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.' But sin, seizing the opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetous desire."*

Jesus' teaching shows us just how horribly prone we are to every kind of covetous desire. So let us look at our verses by asking three questions.

1. What do we treasure? 6:19-21 *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* Treasure is not just a matter of money or wealth. Whether we are rich or poor, our treasures are the things we hold and value highly. We need money for everyday life, but it is what we treasure that enriches life and makes it special and meaningful, more than just existence. We all need treasure. Jesus says 'do not treasure for

yourselves treasures on earth', and points out that treasures on earth have a tendency to get 'eaten up' by insects, canker and corrosion or need protection from theft. Rather he says, treasure for yourselves treasure in heaven which is immune to corruption and loss. Covetousness is the desire for treasure on earth that we don't have. If our hearts are merely focussed on the transient things of this world we will lose out. If we fix our hearts on eternal treasure then, when this life is over, we will find those treasures there waiting for us to enjoy for ever! His key statement is '*where our treasure is, that's where our hearts will be also.*' We can't escape this question, "Where is our treasure? or What do we treasure?"

2. What do we look at? 6:22-23 "*The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*" What a remarkable image - our eye is a lamp shining light into our bodies. What we look at outside of ourselves is projected into our minds. If this stirs up coveting we have a problem, not with what we are looking at, but with our eyes. We have an evil eye! Whatever we see with our eyes are neutral, neither good nor bad. It is how it gets translated through our visual processes into our minds where the problems lie. If what we see appears beautiful, good and causes us to praise, we are full of light. Even unpleasant and ugly things can fill us with light if we have what Jesus here calls a 'single eye'. But our eyes can also project evil images: evil desires, covetousness and lust inside us. The indication of an evil eye is if we are critical, lustful, negative, complain or moan. If the light projected into us is actually darkness Jesus says, "How great is that darkness!" What a dreadful situation to be in. What sort of eyes do we have? What happens in us to whatever we look at?

3. Who do we serve? 6:24 "*No-one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money.*" Jesus uses a third image to show us how covetousness causes us all kinds of problems and inner conflict. Who is your master? In today's society we love to think that we are our own masters and that we control our own lives but that is not actually true. Please read John 8:31-36.

The image is of a master and a bonds slave. In English we don't get the full force of Jesus words. "No-one can be a bonds slave to two masters." To us the idea of serving is of a voluntary occupation, but serving a Master is actually about being a bonds slave. No slave would ever have two different masters. Jesus says 'we cannot be the bonds slave of God and Mammon'. Mammon is an Aramaic word that means gain or profit especially involving extortion, dishonesty or violence (Ex 18:21) Mammon was the god of acquisitiveness, the pursuit of wealth, an insatiable desire for material things. As Paul later wrote, the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. So again Jesus is addressing covetousness. It enslaves us, compels us to go

after material wealth, demands our allegiance and alienates us from our true Master, the Lord. We read in Heb 13:5, *'Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*' What a promise that God will never leave us or forsake us so we never need love and pursue money.

Jesus challenges us. What do we truly treasure, where are our hearts, what preoccupies us, and who are we serving? People all around us are covetous, but as citizens of the Kingdom, Jesus gives us another way. Value only heavenly treasures, cultivate a single eye and recognise that only the Lord Jesus is your Master. This is Christ's antidote to the worldly pull of material desires. 'Godliness with contentment is great gain'. Enrich our lives with our spiritual treasures. What are they? Such things as our experiences of God, revelations from God's word, answers to prayer, times of refreshing in the Lord's presence. These are far more precious than gold! I have seen God doing amazing things in my life - my desires for my wife and my boys have been spiritual desires. When they were at school and college I was equally pleased if they did well, or not so well, because I was more concerned about their spiritual development than their education. I am satisfied that they have married Christian wives, are strong in their faith and are raising their children in God's ways. That is my treasure.

It was a great privilege and delight to be able to take Leslie Draper's funeral because he had written a wonderful account of his treasure, an account of his life and God's dealing with him, including an account of his conversion, that I am sure Phil and Janice and Mark and Clare will treasure as a wonderful inheritance to add to their own treasures. I am thinking of making an inventory of my treasures. Let us all enjoy heavenly treasures and not be too bothered by earthly stuff.

Let us keep our eyes 'single' letting only pure light into our minds. If we find we have a problem with our eyes, get help from a trusted friend or leader, so that whatever we look at see its beauty, see the Lord's hand in it all and not the evil stuff. And let us also make sure our hearts are 'single' too - there is only one who has bought us with a price!

Phil Rogers

16th Jan 2011