

# “What Will You Value Above All Else?”

## Matthew 6:19-24

prepared by Scotty Neasbitt

for

Northwest Hills Community Church

January 13, 2008

“We want to be a saint, but we also want to feel every sensation experienced by sinners; we want to be innocent and pure, but we also want to be experienced and taste all of life; we want to serve the poor and have a simple lifestyle, but we also want all the comforts of the rich; we want to have the depth afforded by solitude, but we also don’t want to miss anything; we want to pray, but we also want to watch television, read, talk to friends, and go out.” That’s a quote from Ronald Rohlheiser in his book, *The Holy Longing*. And I like it because it describes the choice we have to make when it comes to deciding what we value above all else.

As followers of Christ, we struggle with opposing desires. On one hand, we long for what our flesh desires...the remnants of our former selves. On the other hand, we wish for what our spirit desires...the fresh, new dreams of our redeemed selves.

This morning, we’re going to look at what Jesus had to say about this choice. It is a choice we need to make between all that is around us in this life and all that he has promised will be ours in the life to come.

We find ourselves in the midst of the Great Sermon on the Mount with Jesus once again talking about His Kingdom. In our particular passage, Jesus is challenging His disciples – by extension, He is challenging us – to live as though His Kingdom has already arrived.

Read along with me in Matthew 6:19-24.

Jesus preaches a basic principle, he explains it by way of example, and then He draws a conclusion about the choice we have to make. Let’s look at the principle first.

Verses 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.

Did you see the principle? Jesus starts with a negative command; something that we should not do. He says, Don't gather treasures for earth. The word that Jesus uses refers to things that can be stored; things that can be gathered and put away. Don't misunderstand what's being said. He is not saying that we cannot hold possessions. It is not some ban on private property, or even wealth. His point is that we must be careful not to hoard wealth or hoard things as if they have no other purpose than to be possessed.

Did you notice what Jesus is emphasizing? He tells us not to lay up for ourselves "treasures upon earth." The treasure he condemns is whatever is built up for exclusively earthly ends. It is a matter of perspective. Jesus wants us to apply earthly wealth to heavenly ends. And then He tells us why.

Ancient wealth often consisted of two things other than money: expensive clothing and storehouses of food & grain. The rich would weave gold threads into their garments to both display their wealth and to store the gold. But most clothing was made of wool. And we all know what can happen to wool. Beware of moths, right!

Then you have the idea of rust. The Greek word that we translate as rust literally means "to eat away." Jesus could have been talking about rust eating away at metal implements, but it is more likely that he is referring to a loss of crops, which would have been a big source of wealth. Worms, rats, and other furry things eating away at the storehouse.

Then Jesus reminds us that thieves can break in and steal. He used a word that literally means "to dig through." It is the idea that thieves, in that day and age, could have easily dug through the clay walls of a home.

Of course, today we have moth balls and safety deposit boxes and burglar alarms, right? True, but things are no less corruptible – no less transient. What about inflation and rising interest rates and economic slumps and stock market crashes – rising unemployment – high energy costs – lack of rain – too much rain – war? Each of these things can wreak havoc on our wealth, and they prove that the things we store up for ourselves on earth are no more secure today than they were when Jesus walked the earth. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

So, Jesus doesn't forbid us from laying up treasure, He just wants us to store up treasure that lasts. How do we lay up that sort of treasure? In the context of what Jesus has been preaching in His sermon on the Mount, it would seem that we lay up the sort of treasure that lasts by pursuing the very virtues that He preaches about in his sermon. Craig Blomberg writes, "Spiritual treasure should be defined as broadly as possible – as everything that believers can take with them beyond the grave – e.g., holiness of character, obedience to all of God's commands, souls won for Christ, and disciples nurtured in the faith."

Perhaps Dallas Willard says it better: "Invest in your relationship with Jesus: in knowing and loving him more intimately, and enjoying his knowledge and love for you. Invest in other people. Invest your life in what God is doing, which cannot be lost."

Don't store up treasure for treasure sake; instead, invest in what God is doing, because it cannot be taken away. And then Jesus gives the basis for it all. He says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

The things we treasure govern our lives. The things in our lives which are a priority to us dictate how we live and what we pursue. What we value tugs at our minds, pulls at our emotions, it

consumes our time and energy; we devote ourselves to getting it, keeping it, protecting it, increasing it, and enjoying it.

What is your treasure? What is your priority in life? What do you value above all else? Your answer will tell you where your heart is.

Jesus did battle on the cross for your heart, and He doesn't want it lost to the things of this world. He wants your heart directed toward him and toward what he is doing in this world. That's the principle, now let's look at the example.

Verses 22-23 The eye is the lamp to 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?

You've probably heard the expression, "Your eyes are a window to your soul." The idea is that what we see in your eyes is a reflection of who you are deep down inside. What's interesting here is that Jesus seems to turn that saying on its ear. Instead of the eyes reflecting what's in your soul, Jesus seems to be saying that what is in your soul is determined by what you've been focusing on. If your eyes have been on good things, then your body is full of light. If your eyes have been on bad things, then your body is full of darkness.

What Jesus is talking about relates to what he said about your heart. In other words, your focus determines your direction. The things that we focus on determine the condition of our heart. Jesus' example here doesn't highlight money or property, but rather a need for total commitment to God and his work in the world. Earthly possessions are simply one example of a rival for the devotion of your heart. Sam Storms explains it this way: "If the goal of your life is single-minded devotion to Jesus, neither possessions nor poverty will make any substantial difference in your happiness."

Now we know the basic principle: your treasure determines your affection. By way of Christ's example, you now know that your focus determines your direction. Now it's time to look at the conclusion that Jesus makes about the choice we have to make.

Verse 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.

If your treasure determines your affection and your focus determines your direction, I'd say that your master determines your destiny. And as Jesus puts it, you have a choice between two masters: either God or money.

Jesus simply states undeniable fact: you cannot serve two masters. He doesn't say you should not, but that you cannot. Jesus isn't talking about an employer. He isn't saying that you can't hold down two jobs at once. He is referring to a slave whose master owned him. A slave in the ancient world had no time to himself. Every minute belonged to the man who owned him. Jesus is making the point that in our relationship to God, we belong to him. Our time, our talents, our energy, our efforts, are all his.

The choice is between serving God or serving that which we possess. Jesus doesn't say you can't have money at the same time you serve God. He says that you cannot serve it and serve God simultaneously. So, what does it mean to serve money?

John Piper writes, "Money exerts a control over us because it seems to hold out so much promise of happiness. It whispers with great force, 'Think and act so as to get into a position to enjoy my benefits.' This may include stealing, borrowing, or working. Money promises happiness, and we serve it by believing the promise and walking by that faith. So we don't serve money by putting our power at its disposal for its good. We serve money by doing what is necessary so that money's power will be at our disposal for our good."

A couple of months ago we were in the book of Ephesians talking about our identity, and we said our identity depends solely on our relationship with God. Now for these few verses, Jesus has been talking about our relationship to money. For some of you, this is an area in which you need to change. For some others, this is an area where you don't struggle all that much, but it is a good reminder to keep your eyes on Jesus.

How many of you believe that your financial worth is the measure of your personal worth? How many of you tie your personal identity to your ability to create and manage wealth? See, as long as you believe that your financial worth is the measure of your personal worth, these challenges from Jesus himself will have no effect on you. The question becomes, "Why do we feel driven to serve money, to hoard possessions, no matter the cost?" Each of us struggles with that from time to time. The answer is that we believe that money can give us something that God can't: personal fulfillment, happiness, joy, power, satisfaction, you fill in the blank.

William Shakespeare is said to be the most quoted person in the English language. Do you know who the 2<sup>nd</sup> most quoted person in the English language is? You probably don't even know him that well. His name is Samuel Johnson. He was an author in the 1700's. There is a story about Dr. Johnson that yields the perfect quote. In the late 1700's Dr. Johnson was shown a luxurious and noble castle. He walked through the grand structure, taking special note of its fixtures, the elegant furniture, the exquisite beauty of the grounds, and he had one thing to say, "These are the things that make it difficult to die." Now think about that for a minute. Does your perspective on stuff – on the things you possess – make it difficult for you to die? In other words, does what you've worked for and put away for and hoarded make it difficult for you to desire Heaven – to desire more for what is to come than for what you've already acquired?

The answer to that question is the measure of materialism in your heart. Better yet, it is the gauge by which to decide if money is your god or if God is your God.

Conclusion What will you value above all else? Where would we find your heart, if we went looking? What would we say about your eyes? Are they good or bad? The truth of the matter is that not everyone here struggles to a great degree with this in their lives. But, there is no doubt that each of us struggles with it on occasion. That's why it is so important that we ask the question, "What do I value above all else?" Is it this thing? Is it the pursuit of more money? Is it the desire for bigger and better things? Or, is my heart turned toward God and what He is doing in this world? Am I investing in what He has his hands on? Am I investing in the people He has put into my life? If we are going to reflect the generosity of God – and be able to say that we serve only one master, and that is God himself – then we must be able to say that we value Him above all else.