

Series: Teachings of Jesus

Choosing the Right Treasure

Matthew 6:19-24

Introduction

In verses 16-19 of Chapter 6 we come to Jesus' teaching on the relationship between God's kingdom and material wealth. And the key verse is 6:24. "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

The question is: Who will you serve, God or Mammon? Mammon is a word of Aramaic origin meaning "riches." It is also used in Hebrew as a word for "money". "Mammon" refers to material wealth. The idea that you can serve both is an illusion. Only one can be your true master, and who you choose sets the tone and shapes the course of your life. And, unless you consciously choose to serve God you will by default serve Mammon.

Why should we choose to serve God instead of Mammon? Is it just some abstract theological or ethical argument? Or are there good personal reasons for doing this? In verses 19-23, Jesus provides us with two reasons by contrasting two treasures and two eyes . . .

Look at verses 19 and 20. ¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

Notice that Jesus is not against laying up treasures for yourself per se. The key issue is about what kind of treasures you are laying up.

I. Identify the Treasure

You want to be sure you lay up the right kind of treasure, because the stakes are high. Serving Mammon is "laying up for yourself treasures on earth."

Before we learn why Jesus warns us not to do this, we need to be clear on what it is and isn't. From 1 Tim. 6:17, we learn that it is not making more money, or having a higher income or enjoying material possessions.

The Apostle Paul says, Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. We also learn that it is not exercising prudent financial preparation for future needs. Look at verse 25:

"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? ²⁷And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? ²⁸And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, ²⁹yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith! ³¹Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' ³²For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Serving mammon is when you put your trust and your future in this life. Serving mammon is about hoarding your money or amassing lots of material possessions. Serving mammon causes you to seek wealth and possessions well beyond what you really need. Greed simply means "the desire for more". According to Jesus, mammon is the same thing as greed, and He says it is idolatry.

In our culture it is called the American Dream, as advanced by Walter Williams a professor of economics at George Mason University, who writes: "What's the noblest of human motivations?"

Some might be tempted to answer: charity, love of one's neighbor, or, in modern, politically correct language, giving something back or feeling another's pain. In my book, these are indeed noble motivations, but they pale in comparison to a much more potent motivation for human action. For me the noblest of human motivations is greed. I don't mean theft, fraud, tricks, or misrepresentation. By greed I mean being only or mostly concerned about getting the most one can for oneself and not necessarily concerned about the welfare of others. Social consternation might cause one to cringe at the suggestion that greed might possibly be seen as a noble motivation. 'Enlightened self-interest' might be a preferable term. But I prefer greed since it far more descriptive and less likely to be confused with other human motives."

But Jesus tells us we are not to do this! Why? Because material wealth is not permanent. You can lose things in this life in a variety of ways. Jesus cites corrosion and theft. But to this we could add inflation, stock market crashes, bank scandals, war, ill health, government changes, and on and on. The truth is that any one of us can be wiped out at any time. In fact, it happens all the time. And even if you avoid loss in this life, it is certain that you will have to give it all up when you leave this life.

In Luke 12:13-21. Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the *family* inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.'" "But God said to him, 'You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?' "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

You cannot take your possessions with you. You came into this world without a penny, and you will go out without a penny. Have you ever noticed, there are no trailer-hitches on hearses. "How much are you going to leave behind when you leave this world?" "All of it!" Would you invest all of your money in stock in a company that you knew was shaky and going to fold? Then why would you invest your life in the pursuit of material wealth, which will never be secure and will definitely be taken from at the end of your life? So, what's the alternative?

II. Invest the Treasure

Jesus says to "lay up for yourself treasure in heaven". "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;"

This is what Jesus in Luke 12:21 called becoming "rich toward God." To be rich toward God you have to establish a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:16). The moment you devote your life to Christ, you are guaranteed eternal life with God. That is the most important thing you can do in your lifetime! Consistently investing in your spiritual growth causes you to serve God with all that you have.

We also become rich toward God by serving other people as representatives of God's kingdom (1 Tim. 6:17-19). "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

Being "rich in good works" involves sharing your faith with others and teaching them the ways of Christ. (Evangelism and discipleship).

And it involves being generous and ready to share your financial resources to alleviate human need and advance God's kingdom in the world. Which by the way is always a totally secure investment. No one and nothing can take what you invest in God's kingdom from you. Everything you invest in God's kingdom will be waiting for you (with interest) in the next life. And you can accumulate as much as you want regardless of your financial resources!

III. Inspect the Treasure

Read 6:22-23. "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

In this parable, Jesus gives us one other reason why we should serve God and not Mammon. The eye, even though it is a small organ, is the key to the functioning smoothly in this life. Just as the condition of your eye powerfully affects the well-being of the rest of your body, the treasure you seek will powerfully affect the well-being of the rest of your life. The treasure you pursue will determine not only your ultimate wealth in the next life, it will also determine the quality of your life in this life. If you have a "bad eye" (seek material wealth), it will give you the illusion of being enlightened (6:23b), but it will lead you into greater and greater darkness (misery and damage).

Paul says the same thing in 1 Tim. 6:9,10. "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." You don't even have to believe in the Bible to realize that materialism delivers just the opposite result! Nothing illustrates the way serving Mammon promises you quality of life like commercials and advertisements. Notice the non-material values that are linked with material goods (If you buy our product you're going to feel good!) When we fill our lives with things we are broadcasting to others that we are empty inside.

David Myers writes in, *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty* (Yale University, 1999), who studied the correlation between material wealth and happiness. From 1960-1993, real income in America doubled-- but during that same time the divorce rate doubled, teen suicide tripled, juvenile violence quadrupled, and unwed births quintupled. What does that mean? Well, although the average American has more money today, there is "less happiness, more depression, more fragile relationships, less community

commitment, less vocational security, more crime and more demoralized children." Some of you could add your own eloquent (and probably anguished) testimony to that.

On the other hand, you can develop a "good eye" by serving God and pursuing spiritual wealth. If you do - you will not avoid suffering--but your life will become progressively more fulfilling. You will begin to experience a healing and satisfaction in the areas that really matter:

- Satisfaction of knowing you are accomplishing God's will.
- Clear Conscience.
- Fulfilling relationships.
- Confidence in God's care.
- Hope for the future.

Conclusion

Matthew 6:24 says, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

At the end of the day, the choice you make about this is huge! On one level, it's neither simple nor all-at-once to serve God instead of Mammon. But God will show you how to do it at each step if you ask him to do this.

Which treasure are you seeking? Which master are you serving? Which God do you love? Let me give you some questions that may help you answer this question:

- What comprises your dreams & aspirations?
- Are they dominated by material things, or by spiritual growth & service?
- Who do you admire and want to be like?
- Who are your closest friends?
- What excites you most?
- How regularly & how generously do you give of your money to God's service?
- Which direction are you moving in this area? Is your giving growing or shrinking?
- Are you able to be content with what you have materially, or do you always itch to have more because you are bored without more things?

One indicator to evaluate from time to time is your own personal debt.

- What do you do with your spare time?
- How much time do you invest in your family, ministry, spiritual growth?

- How do you view retirement? As a time to focus on material enjoyment which you have earned and deserve, or as a time of greater freedom to serve God?
- Are you enthusiastic about following Christ and investing your life in serving Him?

Only you can choose what you treasure most! So Jesus says to each of us:
"Choose the right treasure – Choose the Eternal Life!"