

Sunday Sermon
Northshore Church
Sunday, July 16, 2023
9:00 AM & 10:30 AM

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters
Sermon Series - Focus on Righteousness
Sermon Title - Treasures in Heaven
Sermon Text - Matthew 6:19-24
Sermon Presenter - Dr. Jeff Nave

Treasures in Heaven
Matthew 6:19-24 (ESV)

Good morning. It's a blessing to have this opportunity to share with you as our sermon series titled Focus on Righteousness continues. This series is a part of a larger effort on the part of our preaching staff that has us walking together through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as we see it recorded in the Gospel of Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7. We're about halfway through at this point and, if you're a regular attender or online listener, you know we're going deep into the incredibly rich teachings of Jesus found in these 3 chapters.

Our Senior Pastor, Larry McEwen, is taking some time off this week to spend with his grandchildren in Tennessee and will be back with us next week.

Today we'll focus on the words of our Savior found in Matthew chapter 6, verses 19-24. If you look this passage up in your Bible or on the Bible app, you will likely see the heading, "Treasures in Heaven."

If you're following the series closely, you may ask why we have skipped over verses 16-18 in this chapter. These verses address the Spiritual Discipline of Fasting. While this is sometimes a difficult topic to address in a sermon, we didn't chicken out or skip these verses entirely. Pastor Larry will be back next week to share with you a message on fasting. We planned this series of sermons some time ago and began working on the messages we would each share. More recently, a schedule change, more my fault than Larry's, led to this swapping around in order of topics in this part of the Sermon on the Mount. I trust, however, that you will be gracious and that God will speak through his Word despite any shortcomings on my behalf.

Let's begin by reading through our passage together and then we'll dig in a little deeper.

Matthew 6:19-24 (ESV)

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if

your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 23 but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! 24 "No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money.

Let's look closer at what Jesus said about treasures.

Your Treasures are What You Value Most

Matthew 6:19-20 ESV

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

While we see Jesus make a specific reference to money in verse 24, his use of the word "treasures" was not intended to elicit visions of gold coins in a pirate chest. It was his intention to contrast that which may seem to be of value now with that which has eternal value.

Moth and rust, the ravages of time, destroy all material things, including our physical bodies. Material possessions are also vulnerable to theft. There are non-material "earthly treasures" such as fame, authority and influence. These are also vulnerable to loss due to the whims or actions of others. It's no fun to think about, but our sense of physical safety and emotional well being are also vulnerable to loss in some ways. Jesus warns us against "laying up" or thinking about such things as a source of security for the future. His use of the plural form of the word for treasure suggests that many things might be thought of in this way and may become the focus of our hopes and passions. While Jesus focuses on material possessions, he is not talking about dollar values; he is talking about the fact that some things we invest in will have no meaning in eternity.

Treasures in heaven. What does it look like to store up treasures in heaven? I think we can apply the eternal vs. temporary test. It's a little more involved than acknowledging that earthly possessions are perishable. We can put material resources to work in ways that will make an eternal difference. Food and medicine are material resources that will certainly pass away, but desperately poor and starving souls come to know Christ as their Savior because they were kept alive by a meal or antibiotics and had the chance to hear the Gospel.

Time and the focus of our attention are resources that will transcend the end of all things on this earth. If you are indwelt by the Spirit of God, saved by his sacrifice on the cross, then you are an eternal being. We don't know exactly what that consciousness will look like in eternity, but we are promised that we will never die. When you take the time to focus your attention on the needs of another, to listen carefully and respond with thoughtfulness and generosity of spirit, you are doing something that will last. You are storing up something of value that moth and rust cannot destroy.

It's important that we recognize the distinction between Jesus's instruction in these passages and the religious teaching both then and now that says, in essence, "If you are a

truly good person then you will want to do good things.” Jesus isn’t challenging us to demonstrate our goodness by doing good things. He is challenging the whole idea that we can just make ourselves desire what’s truly good. While other religious teachers would try to guilt people into demonstrating their innate goodness or worthiness,

Jesus Flips the Script

Members of Jesus' audience who were familiar with some of his teachings had likely heard that he often warned about the corrupting influence of material wealth. Perhaps you have heard a Bible teacher say that Jesus talked more about money than any other subject. The warning Jesus gave about it being harder for a rich person to enter heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, and his scathing parable about the rich fool were scandalous in some circles and many had come to see Jesus as champion of the poor who was always on their side in opposition to the rich.

It may have been tempting to categorize Jesus’ challenge to store up treasures in heaven as one more attack on the 1%, but Jesus looked at those gathered around him and said something more personal. In verses 19 and 20, as he contrasted earthly vs. heavenly treasure, Jesus used a plural form of Greek pronoun that we see translated as “yourselves.” The language would be consistent with saying just generally, “People should not store up treasures on earth, but should work to have treasure in heaven.” In verse 21, Jesus switches from plural to singular and we see “you.” His audience would have recognized this distinction and understood that he was talking directly to each of them when he said:

Matthew 6:21 ESV

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

This passage is often misquoted and if we’re not careful it can be easy to say it backwards, “Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also.” But the order of the words makes a tremendous difference in this case. When we say it backwards, we unwittingly endorse the perspective of Secular Humanism; the notion that all people are basically good and will do what’s right if they’re given the chance. Sometimes the truth is humbling, but that doesn’t make it less true. Original sin and the conviction that we are all sinful is a foundational part of our Christian Theology and world view. If it were not so, why would we need a Savior?

We regularly examine Romans 3:23 as a part of our explanation of the Gospel. In it, Paul reminds us of our sinful nature with the words:

Romans 3:23 ESV

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Jesus says exactly the opposite of the Secular Humanist in:

Matthew 15:19 ESV

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

This is what's in our hearts. If the saying is, "Where your heart is, there your treasure will be." then all our treasure would be tied up in the things that satisfy our sinful nature. But that's not what Jesus wants for us. He knows that the more we invest in our sinful desires, the more miserable we will ultimately become.

If you are a faithful follower of Christ and you have been living in a relationship with him for many years, this notion of a heart or motivations tainted by sin may strike you as offensive. Perhaps you have successfully ordered your life around spiritual disciplines to the point that you do not struggle greatly with the temptation to engage in gross sinful behavior.

The danger in this perspective is that we may convince ourselves that our innate response to any situation will be the right one and forget that we are still sinful beings who still must rely on the presence of Christ in our lives.

Oswald Chambers' **My Utmost for His Highest** has been my daily devotion for close to 30 years. Some of my daily readings are soothing and affirming, while others are arresting and convicting. One such daily reading comes from July 26. I'm always a little shocked by the language with which Chambers reminds those who are good, faithful Christians that their goodness does not come from the inside.

Before I share this short selection with you I need to let you know that it contains a very strange word. Oswald Chambers was British and he was writing in the early 1900's. He uses the word "blackguard." It means a common criminal.

"If I make conscious innocence the test, I am likely to come to a place where I find with a shuddering awakening that what Jesus Christ said is true, and I shall be appalled at the possibility of evil and wrong in me. As long as I remain under the refuge of innocence, I am living in a fool's paradise. If I have never been a blackguard, the reason is a mixture of cowardice and the protection of civilized life:"

If we are living a Christian life day to day and we're surrounded by good Christian friends and family, it really is easier to do the right thing. That's why it's important for us to create a real community with other believers. But we need to be mindful of our sinful nature and be charitable toward those who are struggling to store up treasures in heaven without the support of others seeking to do the same.

Jesus' instructions about what we treasure, what we invest our time and money and talent in, is a reflection of his desire to see us experience blessing rather than curses, hope rather than misery, joy rather than pain, and peace rather than suffering.

The last few weeks, our Pastor has been putting prayer under the microscope. I have found it encouraging and challenging to think more carefully and in greater detail about the meaning and resource of prayer. It's been a consistent theme throughout our series that we are looking a little closer and seeking greater detail about the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. In

contrast to this idea, I want to take a moment to run the focus way back so we can examine some broader themes in the Sermon on the mount material.

As a way of characterizing the content of each of the three chapters that record Jesus' famous sermon, I would like to suggest the following. In chapter 5 we see the beatitudes, an admonition to turn the other cheek, and the formula, "You have heard..., but I tell you." Jesus is correcting misconceptions about the Law of Moses and helping sincere seekers of God understand how to live by the spirit of the law without the bureaucratic red tape heaped on by the religious leaders of his day. In a few weeks, we will begin examining chapter 7 where Jesus helps us understand how to live in the unbelieving world around us. These concise themes fail to capture the full breadth of each chapter, but will help us see how in chapter 6, Jesus pursues a clearly distinct theme.

Chapter 6 in Matthew is focused on our intimate personal relationship with God. There is not one verse or passage that addresses our relationship to others. Jesus refers to others only to contrast the ways in which we should relate to God.

One way that I might summarize chapter 6 is to quote Jesus himself when he said, in:

John 10:10 ESV

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

The instructions Jesus gives us about how we are to pray and practice other Spiritual disciplines, and the instructions he gives us concerning the things we treasure are all designed to help us experience the abundant life he came to give us.

An alternative way to characterize the order of Jesus statement about treasure and our hearts is by examining the words of the Psalmist found in:

Psalm 37:4 ESV

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

This is one of our Pastor's favorite verses and he often reminds us of the significance of the Hebrew construction which implies that when we focus on or delight ourselves in the LORD, he will fill our hearts with desire for the things that bring us life.

My hope this morning is that we hear not only the words of our savior recorded on the page, but listen to his voice. I think if we could travel back in time and sit with the crowd at his feet we would hear in his voice, and see in his manner, his great love for us. It may help in this regard to examine the passage in Luke that concludes with the same phrase found in Matthew 6:21

Lk 12:32–34 ESV

32 "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not

grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

If we follow Jesus' instruction, the teaching of Scripture, and respond to the conviction of his Spirit living within us, we will choose to value things differently, and ultimately will be blessed as we see God's will working out in our lives. But if we allow ourselves to set aside his will and just follow our gut, we will never receive that which is of eternal value. The problem is:

We Have Distorted Perceptions of Value

Matthew 6:22-23 ESV

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 23 but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

These verses are often overlooked even in the most detailed examination of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' reference to the eyes is cryptic to our modern ears and falls in between the more well known and easier to understand verses about treasure in heaven and serving two masters. It makes sense to assume that the two verses are related to what comes before and what follows, but it's hard to see.

However, I believe it would be a mistake to miss what Jesus says to us about our "eye" or eyes. I believe that Jesus said everything he said for a reason, and in the case of his choice to talk about eyesight, he was making an important point about the nature and clarity of our perception of ourselves, our relationships, our circumstances and the world around us.

Jesus chose a physical reality that most of his audience understood, to communicate an important Spiritual truth: seeing clearly is important.

The pre-scientific audience that Jesus addressed had some interesting ideas about how the human eye functioned. They believed that light went out from the eyes and illuminated objects so that they could be seen. Jesus acknowledged this perspective with his description of the eye as the "lamp" of the body.

Coming as it does after Jesus' careful explanation about trusting his way of valuing things over our unreliable heart, His description of our eyes serves as a warning. If you trust the light that emanates from within you to light your way, you will be walking in darkness.

Jesus died for our sins so that we can be delivered from the penalty of living in rebellion against God in our hearts and our actions. If we receive him as Savior, we can know that an eternity unsullied by our own sin awaits us. But while we remain in this life we have to will, to choose, to do that which lines up with our eternal destiny or we will spend our days chasing after things which have no real meaning because our sinful and devious heart will lead us astray.

In our final verse this morning, Jesus presents a dichotomous choice.

We Have to Choose

Matthew 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 the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Our modern society has no tolerance for either/or choices. It's both/and. And you're a bigot or worse if you claim otherwise. But real priorities simply don't work this way. Only one thing in our life can be the most important thing in our life. Everything else is, by simple logical deduction, less important. We can serve only one Master. Everything else has to take a back seat. Money isn't the only thing that competes with our loyalty to Jesus, but it may be the most insidious, if not the most powerful.

I have always been a little troubled by the story of the Rich Young Ruler who came to Jesus seeking to be justified in his relationship with God. Let's look at this interaction together.

Matthew 19:16-22 ESV

16 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" 17 And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." 18 He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, 19 Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 20 The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 22 When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

The thing that bothers me is the question, what if the Rich Young Ruler had been willing to give away 75% of his wealth? Wouldn't that have been enough. The context suggests, and most Biblical scholars agree, that Jesus did mean, and the Rich Young Man understood that he meant, sell everything, give to the poor; and then come follow me.

Notice that Jesus began with, "If you would be perfect." Jesus responded to the young man's desire to have it all. He wanted to keep all he had, and be perfectly justified or right with God. Jesus' personal prescription for him was: sell it all, because your wealth will always compete with me for first place in your heart.

The challenge for us this morning is to identify the things that compete with Jesus for first place in our hearts and to choose the only one who can give us abundant life.

My hope this morning for all of us is that we can be constantly moving toward a deeper and more meaningful relationship with our Savior and that we can live in the truth of the words of the old hymn:

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold.

I'd rather be his than have riches untold.

I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands.

I'd rather be held by his nail scarred hands.

Than to be the king of a vast domain,

or be held in sin's dread sway.

I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords to me.

Let's pray.