

"Kingdom Approach to Money and Possessions" – Matthew 6:19-25a

Read Matthew 6:19-25a

1. (vs. 19) How do we store up treasure and why?

In Jesus' day they would store up treasure in fine garments, which were worth a considerable amount and could be passed along to subsequent generations. They would store wealth in grain, held in barns, that could be sold or planted in the face of future need. They would store wealth in precious metal or perfumes that could be hidden away in the clay walls of the home.

We store up in many different ways, most notably real estate, investment portfolios, retirement vehicles.

Why? To meet our basic needs and continue the lifestyle we have grown accustomed to for as long as possible. To turn down the anxiety in the face of an unknown future. To have enough to retain choices in the face of unexpected developments.

2. (vs. 19) What is Jesus' assessment of such behavior?

It is rather foolish.

You think you will address your anxiety, but you won't. Moths will destroy the fabric; rust, or more accurately vermin, will eat through the grain, and thieves will dig through the walls of your home to take what you have hidden.

He could say the same to us.

This is rather foolish.

You think you will be addressing your anxiety, but you won't. You will never have enough, never feel like you have enough, rust will take the car, a downturn in the market will wipe out your savings, you have no control over natural or geopolitical forces. If that doesn't take it way, the inevitable disintegration of your material reality will. You can't take it with you. There are no u-hauls at funerals.

Read Matthew 19:16-22; 1 Timothy 6:17-19

3. (vs. 20) What does it mean to store up treasure in heaven?

In the sermon Tim reflected on not only the Matthew text, and the hearing of the 1 Timothy text, but also the famous Jewish story of the King who liquidated his assets during famine to feed his people. The story's assessment of his behavior was that he was storing up treasure for himself in heaven.

As a summary then, to store up treasure in heaven is to give away earthly treasure. To invest in the business of heaven on earth. To resource the work of God wherever it is to be found, that God's will would be done on earth as in heaven.

4. (vs. 21) This statement is both a diagnosis and a transformative truth. As a diagnosis, if we want to discover what really drives us in life we are invited to follow our treasure, follow our money. If you step back from your financial picture, what does it tell you about what truly drives you? What you're truly pursuing?

In the sermon Tim relayed his own reflections on his financial picture. He said that he spends money most freely most joyfully on leisure and control. Spending to follow his favorite pursuits, spending on holidays to see, taste and experience the best the world has to offer. He also longed to see his savings grow each month, not necessarily with anything specific in mind but to turn down the anxiety in the face of an unknown future and that if something unexpected comes to be able to choose a few options rather than to be left with none.

We struggle to talk openly about money so it may help if you as a leader are willing to go first. Spend some time prayerfully before your study thinking through what your financial picture tells you about your heart - what truly drives you - what truly gets you out of bed in the morning. Such openness and transparency will encourage others in your group to be similarly vulnerable and open, leading to honest reflection on subsequent questions.

As a transformative truth it tells us that where you put your treasure your heart follows. What impact would it have on our hearts to invest in the business of heaven?

As followers of Jesus we long to have our hearts mirror that of Christ. We long to have our heart broken by the things that break the heart of God. Invest in the poor, the broken, the marginalized; invest in drawing others to the heart of Christ, healing hurts, restoring beauty, full flourishing for all and your heart will follow.

It is likely that your giving to charity invests you in the work that they are doing in a way that goes beyond simply the cheque writing or direct debit. Think through how your heart has become engaged more in the work by giving toward it and share its impact upon you to spark others thinking and sharing.

5. (vs. 22-23) This is a Hebrew idiom. The good eye is a generous spirit, living to give away. The bad eye is the miserly spirit, living to store up for oneself. What impact does it have on us / our world when we live to store up for ourselves?

In the sermon Tim went through a few examples of how the pursuit of treasure leaves us blind, in the dark.

- I. *We live in one of the most prosperous countries at one of the most prosperous times in human history. We are some of the wealthiest people that have ever walked the face of the earth. We have attained a lifestyle that is multitudes higher than the wealthiest person in Jesus' day and yet likely none of us think of ourselves as wealthy, likely none of us think of ourselves as greedy, likely none of us think of ourselves as materialist. In 20+ years of ministry I have never had anyone come to me to say "Pastor I need your help – I think I might be greedy" – no – we are not sure how to define it and we can always find someone whose relationship with money is far more suspect than ours. We are blind to its hold on our hearts.*
- II. *The pursuit of treasure makes us stop asking questions of how we make / spend money. We don't ask - is the product my company is producing, the business we conduct, the deals we make, the investments we hold, the products we buy good for the social fabric, for communities, the environment, the poor?*
- III. *When we pursue treasure for our sake we tend to treat other people in terms of it. We encounter the poor and feel superior. It was my wisdom, drive, hard work, and intellect that got me this. I can't learn anything from them. We feel superior to the rich thinking they must have done something nefarious to attain such wealth as we also feel envy and resentment.*

What impact does it have on us / our world, when we approach those around us with a generous spirit?

Just consider the impact of a person who is constantly looking at their friends, neighbours, church, the poor, the city with a posture of – How can I give away what God has given me for the sake of others?

Such generosity tends to breed generosity in others.

6. (vs. 24) Why is it do you think that we believe we can be both generous and store up for ourselves? What would Jesus say to that self assessment?

I think we are hedging our bets.

We live in a secular world – secular meaning lifespan – the belief that this lifespan is all there is and so I've got to fill this lifespan with as many beautiful things, experiences, and pleasures as I possibly can. The entire force of our culture is shaping us toward this end. We want to enjoy the best the world has to offer.

We also as followers of Jesus believe there is eternity, an eternity that is predicated on our relationship with Jesus. So we desire also to live in obedience to him. He asks us to give so we give.

Many of us have made the teaching of Jesus around money into a rule so that we can hedge our bets. We may have been taught that the biblical teaching around money is to give a tithe, 10% of our income away. If we make Jesus' teaching into a rule to follow we can satisfy our conscience by giving away a percentage and then think, the rest is mine to do with as I wish.

Jesus says it's impossible to hedge your bets in this way, there is no serving Jesus and serving money at the same time. Jesus asks for all of you, all that you are and have. If anything else occupies your heart all of you cannot be given to him.

7. (vs. 25) How does giving away, investing in the business of heaven break money's hold on the heart with it's attending worry?

The anxiety around money leads us to want to hold onto it. When we give it away and see that our anxiety does not increase we come to realize it wasn't money that was keeping us safe, it was and will always be the Living God.

Anything other than God at the center of our lives will lead to worry. Why? Because anything other than God changes. It decays, fades, diminishes. Moth destroys, vermin eat, thieves break in and steal.

But when Jesus is at the center, we encounter one who in generous love gave up everything that his had. His position, his power, his heavenly throne, his closeness with the Father all to make us his own. In other words Jesus gave up his heavenly treasure to make us his earthly treasure. When he is at the center it forms our hearts in beautiful ways to give away for the sake of the business of heaven on earth.

Money then ceases to be the currency of our joy and security. It is his love that gives us joy. It is his promises that keeps us secure in the face of an unknown future.