

Treasure Shift | Matthew 6:19-24
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One of the blessings of being back in Virginia is the opportunity for me to re-connect with some of my old friends, especially those who are in ministry. And it's been so good to hang out with them again. But one of the interesting observations about our recent interactions have been the topics of our conversations.

I remember in our younger years talking about things like who we should marry, whether we're going to marry, our dreams for the future, and what ministry path to take. But as we've gotten older, and all of us are now in our mid to late 50's, the discussions have shifted. We're talking a lot more about which parts of our bodies are breaking down; we're comparing the litany of meds we're on for things like high blood pressure and cholesterol; about what we'll do as empty nesters, but most importantly, especially those of us who are pastors, HOW we want to spend the latter years of our ministry life.

Specifically, ALL of us as we've been thinking about the next 10-15 years before we get into "retirement" age, though you never really retire from ministry, we've been asking each other HOW we want to really use the time we have left. And this has become even more important since several of us have had some major health scares recently. So, we are keenly aware of the frailty of life and that life really IS short.

So, we've been asking each other the question: Are we REALLY investing our gifts, talents, time, and resources in the right things – are we maximizing these things for God's Kingdom? And are we living for the things that not only "matter", but in the things that matter to God?

Well, I bring this up because this is precisely the question and challenge that Jesus wants ALL of us to think about in the passage we're going to look at this morning: Whether we're younger or older; new to the faith or have been around a block for awhile in our faith.

And IN this passage Jesus does two things: He first presents to us WHAT we ought to ultimately live for – that is, HOW we should invest our time, talents, money, and energies in the limited time we have on this earth, but also WHY that's so important - especially for those of us who call

ourselves followers of Jesus. So... WHAT are we supposed to live for and WHY... Let's begin with the "WHAT".

Look with me at **Matthew 6 vs. 19**. You can follow along either in your bulletin or in your Bible. Listen to what Jesus says:

*¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth (**more literally, "stop storing up for yourselves treasures on earth"**), where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but (**instead**) lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.*

So, what's Jesus saying here? What does he "mean" by telling us to "stop storing up for ourselves treasures on earth" but instead store up treasures in Heaven? Well, in order to understand the meaning, we need a bit of context.

The larger context of this passage is the **Sermon on the Mount**, which is Jesus' famous sermon which He gives from Matthew Chapter 5 to the end of Chapter 7. And one of the purposes of this sermon was to paint a **picture** of what it means to be Jesus' genuine follower – a person who is now a part of God's Kingdom. In essence, Jesus tells us that Kingdom people, those who genuinely follow Him, live radically different lives than the rest of the world.

He tells us that Kingdom people not only "view" and interact with God in a radically different way, they also treat other people in a radically different way. For instance, Kingdom people not only love those who are good to them, but love even their enemies. Kingdom people also have a completely different worldview and value system. They value not only external behavior, but the motives and attitudes of the heart; They value things like humility, repentance, spiritual hunger, generosity, forgiveness, and mercy. This is all in Chapters 5 and 6. But just as important, Kingdom people have radically different priorities from the rest of the world. And thus, invest their time, money, talents, and energies into very different things. And they do it for very different reasons. Well, this is where our passage comes in.

Because here, Jesus tells us that Kingdom people, those who genuinely follow Him, first STOP prioritizing and STOP investing their lives, their time, talent, money, and energies into building up "treasures on earth." But again, what does THIS mean? Well, here in this context, "treasures on earth" can refer to money, or wealth. We see this in **vs. 24**. BUT... it also can refer to the applause of people which we see in **verses 1 to 18** of this same chapter. This is when Jesus talks about praying, giving, and fasting SO THAT you get noticed by people instead of doing it for God. As well, it can refer to

material and physical things like food, shelter, and clothing, which Jesus later talks about in **verses 25 to 32**. *In other words*, “earthly treasure” is ANYTHING in this life that people deem “valuable.”

But, what’s important to note is that these “treasures on earth” are NOT bad or evil in and of themselves. In fact, these are oftentimes GOOD things. We NEED money to provide for ourselves and our families. Having a high position can be a good thing because it can be a result of hard work and our competency. Having influence or power can also be good if we use it in the right way. We NEED food, shelter, and clothing to live. These are all “gifts” of grace from God. HOWEVER, the issue that Jesus is addressing here is the “**storing up**” of these things for a **selfish reason**.

John Stott, a well-known theologian comments that the picture that Jesus paints here is of a person “hoarding” wealth and always wanting more for themselves: Picture “Gollum” and his precious in the Lord of the Rings. And we see this idea later in **vs. 32** of this chapter, when Jesus says that non-believers “run after,” “prioritize,” and “pursue” these earthly things above all other things.

So the issue isn’t about how much money we have or don’t have; it isn’t about the car we drive, nor about the position or power we have or don’t have; but it is about the “running after,” the “obsessing” about, the “prioritizing” and the storing up of these things – even though they may be “good” things - in a self-serving way. That’s what it “means” to stop storing up treasures on earth.

But what does it mean to instead “store up treasures in Heaven”? Well, in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, particularly **Chapters 5 and 6**, we store up treasures in Heaven by engaging in things like giving, fasting, praying, doing good deeds, sharing the gospel, and loving our enemies. Simply put, to store up treasures in Heaven is **to pursue above all things, to prioritize our relationship with God and living for His purposes in this world**. To put it another way, it is about seeking to build “God’s” Kingdom instead of “our” kingdom. This is why Jesus later in **vs. 33** of this same chapter tells us: “*But seek **first** his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*”

As we think about this for a moment, I think the question that this passage immediately challenges us to ask ourselves is: Whose Kingdom have we been really building? How HAVE we been investing our time, talents, gifts, and resources? Has it been to store up treasures in Heaven or treasures on earth?

And these are important questions to consider because ALL of us can so easily focus on building earthly treasures instead of heavenly ones; ALL of us can become obsessed about and focus on the stuff of this world - because earthly treasures ARE oftentimes “good” things. But it’s when the “good” things of this world start to take priority over God and HIS things that it becomes an issue. THIS is at the heart of what Jesus is saying.

Well, that’s the meaning of Jesus’ command and WHAT we ought to live for. Now, to the question of “WHY.” “WHY” should we make this “shift” and change in priority and treasure? And “WHY” should this actually matter to us? Well, here, Jesus gives us 4 reasons.

And the first reason is simply because “earthly” treasures are temporary and insecure, but “heavenly” treasures are eternal and secure. Look again in **vs. 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.

Here, Jesus is referencing the fact that back in His time, people used to store wealth in several different ways: 1) fine garments; 2) in barns because grain was equated with wealth due to the reality of famine; 3) in pots or 4) buried in fields. However, over time 1) Moths could destroy garments; 2) Mice & mildew could eat up grain, and 3) Thieves could either break into the house or come and dig up the field. The word “break in” here can also be translated, “dig up.” In other words, what Jesus is saying is that treasures of this earth are temporary and insecure, no matter HOW good they may be, but the treasures of heaven are eternal and secure. Thus, the focus and priority of our lives should be on investing in the things that will last forever, the things that will never fade and is 100% secure. Not that we neglect the things of earth, but that we put them in their rightful place.

Jesus is reminding us that we should hold lightly to the stuff of earth like wealth, possessions, power, position, and the applause of people because they will all fade and we won’t be able to take them with us when we die. But instead hold tightly to our relationship with God and what we do for HIM because THAT will last forever.

Proverbs 23 vs. 4 puts it this way: *“Don’t wear yourselves out trying to get rich. Be wise enough to know when to quit. (Because) In the blink of an eye wealth disappears, for it will sprout wings and fly away like an eagle.”*

John Ortberg, a pastor and author, shares a story *about* how his grandmother taught him how to play the game monopoly. This is what he shared:

Now, my grandmother was a wonderful person. She raised six children. She was a widow by the time I knew her well. She lived in our house for many, many years. And she was a lovely woman, but she was the most ruthless Monopoly player I have ever known in my life... She understood that the name of the game is to acquire.

When we would play when I was a little kid and I got my money from the bank, I would always want to save it, hang on to it, because it was just so much fun to have money. She spent on everything she landed on. And then, when she bought it, she would mortgage it as much as she could and buy everything else she landed on. She would accumulate everything she could. And eventually, she became the master of the board.

And every time I landed, I would have to pay her money. And eventually, every time she would take my last dollar, I would quit in utter defeat. And then she would always say the same thing to me. She'd look at me and she'd say, "One day, you'll learn to play the game."

I hated it when she said that to me. But one summer, I played Monopoly with a neighbor kid—a friend of mine—almost every day, all day long. We'd play Monopoly for hours. And that summer, I learned to play the game. I came to understand the only way to win is to make a total commitment to acquisition. I came to understand that money and possessions, that's the way that you keep score. And by the end of that summer, I was more ruthless than my grandmother. I was ready to bend the rules, if I had to, to win that game. And I sat down with her to play that fall.

Slowly, cunningly, I exposed my grandmother's vulnerability. Relentlessly... I drove her off the board. The game does strange things to you. I can still remember. It happened at Marvin Gardens. I looked at my grandmother. She taught me how to play the game. She was an old lady by now. She was a widow. She had raised my mom. She loved my mom. She loved me. I took everything she had. I destroyed her financially and psychologically. I watched her give her last dollar and quit in utter defeat. It was the greatest moment of my life.

*And then she had one more thing to teach me. Then she said, "**Now it all goes back in the box**—all those houses and hotels, all the railroads*

*and utility companies, all that property and all that wonderful money—**now it all goes back in the box.***

(But) I didn't want it to go back in the box. I wanted to leave the board out, bronze it maybe, as a memorial to my ability to play the game.

*"No," she said, "None of it was really yours. You got all heated up about it for a while, but it was around a long time before you sat down at the board, and it will be here after you're gone. Players come and players go. **But it all goes back in the box.**"*

*And the game always ends. For every player, the game ends. Every day you (read the news), and you can turn to a page that describes people for whom this week the game ended. Skilled businessmen, an aging grandmother who was in a convalescent home with a brain tumor, teenage kids who think they have the whole world in front of them, and somebody drives through a stop sign. **It all goes back in the box—**houses and cars, titles and clothes, filled barns, bulging portfolios, even your body. (John Ortberg – *It All Goes Back in the Box*)*

And I would add, "all" the things that we see as "treasures" on this earth **ALL goes back in the box** because they are temporary and fleeting. But the things that remain, the things that WON'T go back into the box are those things that we do for God and our relationship with Him. THIS is why our primary focus and passion should be on Heavenly Treasure.

The second reason: It's because **where we have our treasure reveals who or what we ultimately LOVE**. Look at **vs. 21**: "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" In other words, if we spend most of our time, money, and energies into storing up stuff on this earth, even if they are good, that is ultimately where our heart and devotion will be. That's what we'll ultimately "love" above all other things.

For instance, in romantic relationships, especially when we're in the beginning of the relationship, the more we give of our time, money, and energies into that person, the more our hearts and devotion for that person grows. The more "affection" and "love" we will develop for that person. And it's a fairly simple principle. The more you have "skin in the game," the more you will be devoted and committed to that person or that cause. And this can be true of sports or our hobbies, our jobs, or any cause.

But this is also true of spiritual things. The more we give of our time, talent, money, and energies into building heavenly treasure – into our

relationship with God and living for HIS cause - the more love and affection we will have for Him. The more “God” will be our ultimate treasure. And in the end, this is what God is really after in our lives. As the Great Commandment tells us, God’s greatest desire for our lives is that we love HIM with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. So, living for and investing in, and obsessing about the right treasure **matters** because it addresses the very essence of God’s purpose for our lives: to know and love Him above all things. Where treasure is, our hearts will be there also.

The third reason why we should STOP living for the stuff of earth and instead PURSUE above all things God and His Kingdom is because **when** we have the right priority and when we are investing in the right treasure, **we will begin to see life more clearly... we will see life more clearly.** Where do we see this? Look with me at **vs. 22:**

²² *“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eyes are 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!”*

Here, Jesus is using a metaphor: The eye is like a lamp that lets light in. And “eye” here can be equated with the “heart.” The Psalms speak of this often. As well, the word “healthy,” or “good” in other translations, can mean “single, or undivided loyalty.” And “bad” can mean, “evil or selfish.” Thus, if our heart or “eye” is single, that is, focused on the right thing, with undivided loyalty, we will have light and thus, we will be ‘walking in the light.’ That is, we will be able to “see” things clearly. We will have clarity in life. But if our heart or ‘eye’ is selfish, or bad, that is, focused on the wrong priorities, then we will be like a person walking in complete darkness. And Jesus calls this a “great darkness!”

In other words, when we have the right priority and focus in life, when we are investing in God and HIS things above all other things, when the “good” stuff of this world are put in their rightful place - life will begin to make a lot more sense – things will become more “clear.” Not that life gets easier, but we will be able to see life more clearly. We will be able to see the stresses of life and the difficulties we face with a proper perspective. We will be able to make decisions with a clearer mind.

On the other hand, when our priorities get all out of whack, when we are prioritizing the “wrong” things, and when the good things take the place of God things, life will feel a lot more “clouded” and “confused.” We will feel like we’re stumbling around in the dark. As D.A. Carson comments about these

verses: *“the person who tries to focus on both God and possessions has no clear vision and will live without clear orientation and direction.”*

For me personally, I have found this to be SO true. Even on a daily basis, when I give myself to, and prioritize, being with God in prayer and His Word BEFORE doing anything else, the rest of the day starts to fall in line; I’m able to see myself, my family, my circumstances in a clearer light; I’m able to gain the right perspective. Everything else start to take their rightful place; The stresses of life and the problems don’t disappear, but I’m able to see them through God’s perspective. And thus, I’m able to walk “in the light.”

But when I get so busy that spending time with God and focusing on HIS priorities start to take second or third place, and I just get lost in the busyness of life, WHEN the problems or conflicts come, and WHEN I have to make decisions, things seem a lot more “cloudy.” There’s a lot more anxiety and confusion. And it often feels like I’m walking “in the dark.” And this is especially true when I am in transition, or when I have to make major decisions, or facing uncertainty or difficulties.

The Psalmist in **Psalm 73** talks about this when he says that things in life were pretty confusing; things didn’t make any sense, “UNTIL he entered the sanctuary of God.” THEN life made sense; he saw what was happening from an eternal perspective. And as a result, he found clarity which resulted in him declaring: “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

I think this is one of the reasons why Jesus tells us in the Lord’s Prayer to BEGIN our prayer by focusing on God and HIS priorities, focusing on God’s Kingdom and Will BEFORE presenting your request for daily bread. Because it’s when our focus is on God and HIS Kingdom, the stuff of life take their rightful place; we can see life more clearly. **Clarity comes when our hearts are focused on Christ and His Kingdom above all other things. THAT’s the principle.**

For us this morning, maybe some of you here are seeking “clarity” about some things in your life: Maybe about your future, your major, your spouse, your career, your family. But things may seem “foggy” or “unclear.” Well, maybe, just maybe, one reason is because your spiritual eyes are not clear; because the focus and priority of your life have been out of order; that in some ways God and HIS Kingdom has taken a back seat to the stuff of this world – though they may be “good” things.

But my hunch is that IF today you would make that “priority shift”, that “treasure change,” and surrender afresh and anew to God; and begin to live for HIS purposes and HIS Kingdom and put God above everything else, that the “cloud” would start to disappear and things will start to make a lot more sense. Because clarity comes when our hearts are focused on Christ and His Kingdom above all other things. Again, as Jesus says in **vs. 33**: But seek FIRST His Kingdom and righteousness, THEN all these other things will be taken care of.

Reason number four is because where our treasure is ultimately reveals who is truly the Lord of our lives. Look with me at **vs. 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.”*

Here the word “money” is more literally, “mammon,” which can also be translated “wealth” or “property.” But again, it can be anything in this world that we value that may be good things but takes the place of God and HIS things.

And the words “hate and love” are not simple emotional reactions, but it is about what we value, trust, and prioritize in our lives. This is similar to the time when Jesus says in **Luke 14:26**, *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.* He is obviously not saying that we should have emotional hate towards our family members, but it is about who is our ultimate trust and allegiance. It is about what or who we value above all things. It’s about priority.

And the picture that Jesus is referencing is the fact that back in those times to be a slave meant 24 hr. devotion to the master. They were on call every moment of every day. So, it was impossible to serve two masters. When you said yes to one, you have said no to all others. It is just like marriage: to say yes to one means saying no to all others. *Thus*, if you say yes to God and choose to follow Him, the implication is that you must say no to all others. Putting it more simply: God will not have competition for the #1 spot in our lives.

And for Jesus this is the ultimate litmus test of whether we are truly Kingdom people, genuine followers of Jesus. Because being a “Kingdom” person means you have a new “King.” It means that nothing and no one else is on the throne of our lives. And what Jesus is saying here is that one of the main ways you know who is on the throne is by examining what we prioritize,

what we obsess about, about what we run after, and how we invest our time, talents, money, and energies.

So, these are the reasons WHY it's so important to stop storing for ourselves treasures on earth but instead start storing up treasures in Heaven. But the question is: HOW do we actually do this? How do we make this "priority shift" and start giving ourselves fully to God and His Kingdom above all things? Because this isn't an easy thing to do, especially if we've been focused ALL of our lives on building up our own kingdom and living for the stuff of earth. Well, the answer is: we CAN'T. At least, not in our own power and strength. Because it's just too difficult to all of a sudden switch from earthly treasure to a heavenly one. But the only thing that makes it possible is if **something** or rather **someone** gives us something that radically changes the equation.

Specifically, it's when we see a treasure SO valuable that we are willing to give up ALL other treasures in our lives. And THIS ultimate treasure is Christ and what HE has given us. That is, it's only when we realize the price that God paid for us – so that we might become His children and follow Jesus, that we will not only have the motivation to make the shift in priority, but have the power to do so. It's only when we are convicted and convinced of the truth that though we did not deserve it, God gave EVERYTHING for us; God gave HIS greatest treasure, His Son Jesus, so that we might be brought back to Him.

And the more we realize how much God has given us – the more we will be able to let go of the obsession for the stuff of earth – and give ourselves fully to God and His Kingdom. We can finally let go of that precious ring like Gollum because we have found something far more valuable – Christ and His Kingdom.

Jesus in **Matthew 13** gives an illustration about this. He says: "*The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*" The only way we will be able to let go of the earthly treasures is by seeing a treasure that is far more valuable, far more wonderful. It's only when we see Jesus as our greatest treasure – this pearl of great price – that we will be able to drop the treasures of this earth to pursue and to live for and to die for the treasures of Heaven.

This is what Paul experienced when He met Jesus. And because he saw Jesus as a treasure far beyond any treasure on earth, he was able to say in **Philippians 3:7-9**:

"I once thought these things (that is, earthly treasures) were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with Him."

It's only when we see how precious and valuable Jesus is: knowing Him, loving Him, and serving Him; that we will be able to drop the treasures of this earth and start living for the treasures in Heaven.

So that's my prayer for myself and for ALL of us here: May we see the worth and value of Jesus because of what He's done for us on the cross – may we SEE Jesus as this pearl of great price – worth living for, dying for, and giving everything up for.