

Matthew 6:19-24

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes 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 unhealthy, 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 a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus brings to light some spiritual concepts for a higher level of understanding human emotions, behaviors, and motivations. Jesus doesn't just talk about the divine / human relationship; he digs deep into the heart and soul, the very essence of what makes you tick. He isn't just teaching, he is getting into the inner being of the individual.

The Scripture addresses earthly treasure. Jesus is not teaching that you cannot have it. The treasure itself is not forbidden. What is forbidden is storing up and hoarding treasure, the failure to share what God has shared with you. A failure to be generous is a failure of the heart. Your treasure is where your heart is. The point is that undivided devotion can only be given to one. There cannot be a split in loyalty. Followers must have absolute devotion. Jesus never indicates that it is OK to be a complacent member of society with occasional worship and half hearted devotion. It is never OK to be half way in with divided loyalty. The challenge is one of devotion and commitment to the heavenly kingdom over the earthly kingdom. Jesus does not condemn wealth. The problem is not rich people. Poor people can prioritize things of the earth over the kingdom of God. The problem is failing to share what God has given to you. There can only be one master. Only one gets the top spot of what you value most. Value the divine things - God's name, God's kingdom, God's will, God's love.

Today's message is one of stewardship. The challenge is to trust in God's care over you and all of creation. Seek God's kingdom and make God your priority in life. Jesus isn't talking about money. Money is a resource; we all use it for survival and comfort. However, it is designed to flow like a river. If it stops flowing it is nothing because its only value is in the exchange, what it can be traded for. Jesus is talking about treasure, what you value and desire the most. Your treasure is your heart's desire. Jesus is attacking individual selfishness. No one can serve two masters. Treasure in heaven is a guiding principal. God gives you all you need for survival and satisfaction in life. The soul of the human being is superior to tangible items. We are not perfect. We have desires and wants. We do not have perfect obedience. The children of God cannot possibly obey to absolute perfection but with the help of God's grace we make progress in that direction.

The following is a real life story.

Several people in my hometown left a particular Church for a couple of reasons. The first was a couple had been told to donate their entire 401(k) to the Church, because of the verse about laying up your treasures in heaven, not on Earth.

In this case, the institution is obviously wrong. Throughout the centuries the church has struggled to come to terms with the words in today's Scripture. It is easy to manipulate others when the scriptures are interpreted to suit your own needs. This lesson from Jesus should never be abused or misinterpreted to favor an institution. A common thread throughout the teachings of Jesus is the urgency of seeking the kingdom of heaven above all of our earthly distractions.

Followers of Jesus are the light of the world. If you try to serve both God and materialism, it does not work, your light goes dark and you fail to be a light to the world. The lesson is about your heart's desire. The way of the world is a quest for a lifestyle of the rich and famous with an endless burden of competitive struggle that results in winners and losers. The way of the kingdom of God sees life as a gift from God. All resources are provided by God. Everything is provided by God. The outpouring of God's care sets us free from materialism so we can be generous to others. The individual has to choose where loyalty lies.