

God, money, treasure and eyes

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[0:00] Three persons in the Trinity, fundamentally, he is happy. And I won't quote you the verses, but you can think of so many cases where one part of the Trinity enjoys honoring another, and there is a joy and an interaction in God.

Fundamentally, he is happy. The second point I want to make is that our desire to be happy is quite reasonable.

And in 1 Timothy 6, and we will come to this verse a little bit more fully, a few verses around here later, but it says, God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Right? So you're looking out on this world, and before we talk about where your treasure is, can we just get that point clear that God is happy, and some of you will know that Westminster Shorter Catastrophe, man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

So that's a good place to start, isn't it? Before we think, hang on a minute, be careful. God is a positive. Can I ask you, before we just move on then, are you happy?

[1:14] Just think about your witness, think about other people seeing you. Are you happy? Or does it seem like the Christian faith on you is just a drudgery? I've always got something else to do, and it's all just so much.

Are you enjoying what God wants you to enjoy? He richly provides you with everything to enjoy, and he is happy, wants to share that with us. So then we come to treasures on earth, and we find this challenge here.

Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth, and it says where moth... Now, the version read to us said rust, didn't it?

The new NIV says vermin. Moth and rust or vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. Now, it's worth remembering back in the times that Jesus was moving in, this was an agricultural community, so they didn't have really organised banks and big bank balances, but they probably did have barns with grain and food.

So treasures to them is having mountains of this security for food for years to come. What were their dangers? Creatures that could get in there and eat it all up.

[2:30] Or, indeed, people who would come and steal. And we, not long ago, were talking about Ruth at the threshing floor in that story, and Boaz was, in fact, on guard at the threshing floor, because it was quite common for people to be breaking in and steal.

But Jesus is saying, do not store up treasures for yourself. What's wrong with this, fundamentally? That the treasures are for yourself.

Not treasures necessarily wrong in themselves, but when you gorge on them, when they are only for you, and for your luxury, this is where it's coming under this command.

Do not store them up for yourselves. And some examples of these give you some picture images. I don't know.

You have to be careful with these. The man, you know, whoever owns that super palace, and I think it's got a jacuzzi in the foreground, he might be a multi-billionaire who's doing all kinds of other things with a lot of else, and this might be quite a modest part of his empire.

[3:43] I don't know. It's just a picture. But if, indeed, this is a person, and his treasure, and you've seen all these programmes, is it Grand Designs, people who have put all of their life savings into this fantastic palace, and it's really only for a small circle of friends to

see, treasures for yourselves.

You can guess. We're talking about material things. There are some examples. Of course, I could have drawn a luxury yacht with a helipad on it, couldn't I, or got a picture of one. So why not store them up?

Why not store these sorts of treasures up? Well, for one thing, Jesus says so, but for two, they have a limited life. Why do they have a limited life? Yes?

Yes? We can't, yeah, right. We can't take them with you. So you've heard so many stories about people who seem to have enormous wealth, and people often ask the question, don't they, when they've died, how much did he leave?

And you know the answer? Everything. He left it all. So even if it appeared for a while, and was in use for a while, treasures have a limited life. They might be stolen.

[5:03] They might decay. But in the end, they're only for this life, treasures on earth. The other reason, why not to store them up?

Going back to some of those beatitudes we read at the start, that we're meant to be focused on other people. The one that said about wanting to be merciful, that's about being aware of when you see someone else in need, you want to do something about it.

Moving towards it, because you want to. Not because you just feel it's on a list and you have to, grumbling. You want to. You should want to bless others. So you don't want to store up treasures for yourselves, and shut yourself around with iron gates, and locks, and burglar alarms, and everything else, to the nth degree.

But then, this is an important passage. We quoted a little bit of this earlier when we touched on the fact that it's okay and God wants us to enjoy things.

Let me just read this from 1 Timothy 6. Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

[6:21] Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way, they will lay up treasure for themselves for, I missed out a few words, for the coming age.

Command those who are rich not to be arrogant. Now there are two principles that come out of this verse. And the first one is, and it's there in the first few lines, that we should be putting our hope not, put our hope in God and not in material things.

Material things are very attractive. They are the things you see. They are, they have a strong pull. But if you are rich in this present world, put your hope in God, not in those material things.

That's one principle. What's the second one here? And it's in the second half of the verses, that we are to use the material of this world in the light of the world to come.

I mean, we haven't stated it, but it's, you know, just reminding ourselves, we are, we are creatures with a soul. The Bible teaches, we are here, and although one day when our body dies, our soul goes to be with him for an eternity.

[7:42] And that eternity is much more important than anything that is going on now. And the primary reason for this life is to be ready for the next. And I'm not just inventing a whim in my head.

I'm not going to quote all the verses on it, but that is fundamentally what God says, that we are to be ready to meet him. So then we go on to treasures in heaven, because we've been told not to store up treasures on earth, but to store up treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal.

So what are these sorts of treasures? I'll take a couple of ideas from you lot. Any ideas? What are the treasures in heaven?

Acts of kindness. I was thinking of being content in God. Being content in God. Happiness. Any others? I had some...

Eternal life. Yes, sorry? Eternal life. Yes. Invested in the kingdom. Invested in the kingdom. Souls. Yes.

[8:56] I'm thinking... Things like... I mean, biblical... Things in the Bible that are valued. Acting justly. Looking after the needs of people who are oppressed. Walking humbly.

Spreading the gospel. Helping to support people spreading the gospel. You know many other verses about looking after it. It almost covers the same thing about having mercy. Being generous to those in need. So much in the Bible about looking after widows, orphans. These are... If you've learned from the grace of God shown you... Me as a sinner, I know I've been forgiven much. And God has come and given his grace to me. And because of that love, I want... We want... To give out and be generous to others in need. So there isn't a definitive list. But you're doing things that you know are for others. You know they fit in with the biblical principles and patterns. And you are storing up treasures in heaven. [9:55] Does it mean, in the way we think, that when you get to heaven, you're sort of getting your salary check or your boroughs of gold will be this high or that high? Well, I don't think so.

There are differing rewards talked about in heaven. But when you think about this, if you've put so much effort in because of your love and prayers for someone and you've perhaps been helping missionaries and someone has been converted and they're in heaven and you see them, isn't just seeing them a treasure enough?

That... Or some act of kindness that maybe was the point where someone was said, hang on a minute, your faith is real because you're a bit different. They're all...

How it's measured out, we're not told exactly. But treasures in heaven, why are they better than those on earth? Because they last forever.

And people can't break in and steal them. Nothing can destroy them. They don't decay. They last forever. And they will make us truly happy.

[11:05] We're talking about happy later. The consumer culture will tempt me to think that when I obtain this, I will be truly happy. Then I'm not, but then I feel I need something else and then I'm truly happy.

It's all a lie. But when you have these values and live by them, you can be truly happy. And then we go on to the next part of what we're looking at.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. So can you see a progression here? We start by storing up treasures.

It could be on earth, it could be in heaven. Then we get to this verse. Your treasure is where your heart is. So suddenly, and the heart, we mean that deep part of you where your will, your decision making, not just your head.

The deep part of you, your heart goes. So you've been spending a lot of time thinking about your treasure. And your heart is there. And you can't stop thinking about it.

[12:11] And the next progression, we will be coming to it soon. But soon we find we're talking about which master? God or money? Not just your heart is there, but actually that is mastering you.

That God or money is mastering you. So there is a progression here that makes me ask a question. How important is your heart?

How important is your heart? There's a lovely verse in Proverbs. I've quoted it probably often here. It's one of my favorites. Above all else, guard your heart because it is the wellspring of life. Guard your heart. it is the wellspring of life.

Now, I think we'll find that this next section is very related to this, so I move on quickly. But this is in some ways the more difficult part to understand. The eye is the lamp of the body.

[13:15] I'll read it again. In my new NIV, it says, if your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, I think you have the words good and bad in the standard NIV.

If your eyes are unhealthy or bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness? And this is clearly a metaphor, but it's not the most straightforward thing.

If you just look at it at face value, you're thinking, hang on a minute, an eye is something I see with. How can it be a lamp? It's a little confusing, but there is in the picture very clear that when the eye is good, at least the body is like a picture of a room, and when the eye is good or clear, the inside of the body is full of light.

It's at least that idea. The lamp in the Bible, it's just interesting to see how that word in the eye is the lamp of the body.

Sometimes it means life, so I'm quoting you a verse in 2 Samuel there, the lamp of Israel will not be extinguished. It can just mean guide. Lovely verses, isn't it? Your word is a lamp to my feet.

[14:29] So when you're talking about the eye being the lamp of the body, you're saying it's like life and like a guide. And the word for healthy or good, it can mean generous or it can mean singleness of purpose.

You might immediately think with treasure that the generous idea is the most appealing, but you have to look in the context. It's probably more likely to be singleness of purpose, which is the other meaning, because although he is talking about treasure, he's just talking about the different values of treasure, not at the moment about giving away, as it were.

And other verses about eyes that the Bible, I'm just trying to draw a link between eyes and heart, eventually here, but notice in Job, he says, my eyes have grown dim with grief.

So there is something that other people can see in the eyes that shows that Job is full of grief.

Same book earlier, the Lord hates haughty eyes.

You can sometimes sense something about the evil in a person just by the look of their eyes. On a positive side, though, in Ephesians, there are things like this, the eyes of the heart.

[15:43] I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened. So, I also think it's worth exploring one of the good principles about dealing with any of these passages is trying to understand the culture then and what the passage meant to them, right?

Now, the mechanics of sight then and now, we're perfectly clear, aren't we, today, about how sight works. The light goes in here, hits the retina, message to the back of the brain, or the visual brain interprets.

We understand perfectly clearly that nothing is, no light is coming out of the eye. We understand that. It's all easy, isn't it? But in those days, the ancient Hebrews and the Greeks, they didn't know all that.

And from some of the writings of people like Aristotle, some of these Greeks, it's perfectly clear that people did think there was a fire in the eyes. And when you actually sometimes look in people's eyes and you do see something of their heart, there is something coming out of the eyes as well. It's not light in a physical sense, is it? But there is something coming out. And they would have, in the old culture, they would have probably thought there was something in the eye coming out.

[17:00] And some people actually thought that the vision was part of what's come out of the eye, met the light from the object, and that's how you got vision. That's as much as they understood. But it would have been quite easy for them, although for us, with our modern understanding, it seems very confusing.

But the main point here, that these eyes are the gate to the heart. And I think in what I've said so far, there's this sort of two-way thing.

Two-way thing. think hard about, now this is where, it's worth just pausing here for thinking this out a little, isn't it?

But it does seem to be saying that if your eye is good, the gate to your heart is good. So you're looking at things but when you see something, you also perceive something from it.

So we can all see the same things. I could see a super flash car, someone else could. I might think, I don't need that. I'm very happy with the one I've got.

[18:10] Someone else might think, someone else sees the same thing and they're thinking, oh, that's better than mine. I want that one. The eye, you're seeing things but the next step is you're understanding something according to your heart.

You get the point? And I think the point that is really coming out of this is that where your eye lingers and where you dwell, it's actually either making your eyes clearer and your heart inside lighter or it's going the other way that you are getting drowned in, oh, I've got to have, you know, the consumer culture is pummeling me, I've got to have this, I've got to have that and actually your eyes are just getting darker and darker and inside you don't know where you're going.

Your heart is becoming dark and other people, they don't see it all from a look in the eyes but people will tell you some of the women are more perceptive looking at people and sussing out people from looking at them but there is something to be said from a look in the face, a look in the

eyes.

The eyes are a gate to the heart but then it says at the end of this bit, if then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness? How great is that darkness?

So if we don't keep our eyes healthy in the way I've just been thinking of, challenging about what we look at, what we think about, what happens? You go blind.

[19:40] Your heart. It is a metaphor, you have to take it in the way it is. Your heart. The key, go back to that, guard your heart because it's the wellspring of your heart, goes blind.

You don't know where you're going. We're not talking about physical sight but spiritual sight. Just reminding you of a couple of verses here about, although the world will tell you, the media will tell you that if you see it, it's real, if you can't see it, it's nothing.

The Bible tells us something different. Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Lovely verses in 1 Peter, even though you do not see him now, talking about Jesus, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and a glorious joy.

Open my eyes, it says in Psalm 119, that I may see wonderful things in your law. and it's not just meaning that you can understand the black and white words and read them, but that in the heart that you can see wonderful things in God's word.

So when you use your eyes, before we move to the next section, what do you see? Where do you linger? Are you aware enough of how you might have a few hours in front of the Bible per week or listening to people speak about it, but how many hours do you have in front of adverts and newspapers, a lot of which is telling you something else and encouraging you to be constantly unhappy until you've got this or that.

[21:27] There's a favourite song of mine, I like Casting Crowns, that's quite well known here, I keep on quoting them, but there's a song they wrote, Slow Fade, and it's on the lines of Be Careful because you can slide downhill so easily.

It says, Be careful, little eyes, what you see. It's the second glance that ties your hands as darkness pulls the strings. And there's the rest of the song and towards the end, Oh, be careful, little eyes, what you see, for the Father up above is looking down in love.

Oh, be careful, little eyes, what you see. And then the last part of the passage is that no one can serve two masters.

We saw the progression earlier that you start storing things up, then your heart is where your treasure is, and suddenly you find, although you didn't really want to think you're a slave of anyone, that one or the other is controlling you.

If it is God who has won your heart and you are, you love his ways and you just want to do those, that's a lovely thing. But when this evil of wanting money or possessions, material things, just for your own luxury and selfish advancement, it's got you as a slave and you can't break out of it.

[22:50] You keep on thinking that the next thing you're going to get that's bigger and better is going to make you happy. It doesn't work like that. You end up loving your money and therefore, although you kind of think God's important, he's on the back seat in your life.

You end up loving one and hating the other. You can't serve both. So we have an important choice to make. And in our consumer culture, this is not that easy.

Think hard about that. You don't spend too many hours in front of the Bible every week, but the messages coming from this world, they are preaching a different message. It's not just a, would you like to think about this?

It's a forceful presentation designed to make you unhappy. Designed to make you discontent, someone I think said about being content. Let's just move on to hear what Paul says about being content.

He says, Paul had learned, I know what it is to be in need, I know what it is to have plenty, Paul the apostle had learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.

[23:58] He said he could do all things through Christ who gives him strength. That's in Philippians 3. And there's another verse in 1 Timothy, godliness with contentment is great gain, and we've touched on this earlier, for we brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it.

But it is a strong comment at the end of that passage in 1 Timothy 6. for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. So Christians can live a simple life and be content.

Now, if you think about the fruits of the spirit being gentle, loving, that's not, I'll show you, that's a general Christian quality, not a fruit, but when you think of so many Christian qualities that there are, you know, according to different ages we live in, some might be more important than others. So if you were living around the time of Hitler, where his idea was to discriminate against a race and to not love, maybe in that culture the quality of accepting other people and loving would have been a key quality that should have shone.

In our culture, in this consumer culture that we live in, how much of a strong witness it can be if we have just learned, like Paul, and we are bombarded more than he was by this, you must have this, you must have that, you're not arrived until you've got this or that, how much of a powerful witness can it be if we can just learn to be content, to not jump into having to pursue all of these things.

[25:42] things. I'm on my last slide, I think. Summing up, God is a happy God, so our desire for happiness is legitimate.

Put your hope in God, not material things. That means holding things lightly. So if God has blessed you and you have material things, hold them lightly.

Share them with people in need. Use the material of this world in the light of the world to come. It is about being generous and not greedy.

The heart, guard it above all things. The eyes are the gate to the heart. That works both ways.

People see something of what your heart is like in your eyes and what you linger on.

Either darkens or lightens your heart. So are you keeping your eyes and your heart healthy? Does it all sound like nonsense to you?

[26:48] Are you keeping your eyes, heart healthy? And where are you storing up your treasure? Where is your heart?

Is God or money your master? I'll just repeat those lines from that song. Oh, be careful, little eyes, what you see.

For the father up above is looking down in love. Oh, be careful, little eyes, what you see. So we'll sing.

I've got two songs lined up and after that... ..