

The Treasure of Heaven

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[0 : 00] And I do want to encourage you that your brothers and sisters throughout the classes are in prayer for you during this time of vacancy and I hope you are encouraged.

! Our text this morning comes from Matthew 6, 19 to 21 and then verse 24. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moths and vermin do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

And then 24. No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, open to us this morning your word. Make it alive in our hearts.

[1 : 13] Send your spirit to impress your truth into our very beings. That we may see you and know you better. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

As Steve mentioned, I am a financial planner. So I spend my work week helping people get ready for retirement and storing up earthly treasure.

So maybe you think that this is a little bit of penance for me. But I want to show you that this text is not quite as much about wealth as we might initially suspect.

Scripture doesn't actually condemn wealth in quite the way that we expect. Proverbs 3 commands us to honor the Lord with our wealth.

And in the New Testament, the message does get a little bit more nuanced. And we're going to explore some of that. But both Jesus and the early church were supported by wealthy patrons.

[2 : 16] There's not a blanket condemnation of wealth that we might expect. And this text is not telling us that the way to store up heaven's treasure is to give away or get rid of earthly treasure.

That's sometimes the message that we get from the way that these two things are contrasted. But I think if we make it explicit, it's easier to see the problem.

If we said, for example, the more money you give away, the more God will bless you. Suddenly, wait, no, that's not quite right. So we can subconsciously end up reading this text as a hot investment tip.

Invest now by donating or giving away and you'll get huge rewards when you get to heaven. And that can actually run contrary to what Jesus is really talking about in this text.

Right. If we are so focused on wealth that we just think of, well, how do I get more wealth in heaven? We were kind of missing what Jesus is talking about.

[3 : 29] So I think this text is really unlocked by verse 24. Right. No one can serve two masters, two different masters.

That's that's what Jesus is talking about. See, there are earthly priorities, earthly desires, earthly judgments. And in the Sermon on the Mount, a theme that comes up over and over is how these earthly priorities differ from heavenly priorities.

From heaven's priorities, heaven's desires, heaven's judgment. If we are viewing this as an investment text about how to be rich in heaven, we're simply moving our earthly priorities into the context of heaven.

So what Jesus is talking about is giving up our earthly priorities and focusing instead on heaven's priorities. Luke's Luke also presents this teaching in his gospel.

Luke's gospel and and he adds a little bit more content. What he what he has Jesus include after this text are woes.

[4 : 51] Right. Woe to you who are full now for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now for you shall mourn and weep.

So, in that context, right, how important is wealth? Well, it can be a fun thing. It can bless others. Maybe you get to sponsor a missionary or help your church meet its budget. Maybe you get to send flowers to a widow. Or send a care package to a college student. Maybe you can help a young family pay their rent. Or send their kids to Christian school. These are good things. Wonderful things. And wealth can be a blessing to others. But in that context, right, in the context of heaven's priorities, it's not a treasure in itself. It's not something we need to cling to. It's not something we need to sacrifice for. It's not something to be the pursuit of our lives.

[11 : 53] So, how do we store up treasure in heaven? As we said, it's not through wealth.

It's not by having wealth. It's not by giving wealth away. Treasure in heaven is not something that we can buy. The first way that we can build up treasure in heaven is by adopting heaven's priorities. If you were going to move to a foreign country, how would you prepare? Presumably, you might start to learn the language so that you could communicate in that country. You might get used to their food so that you can eat something without looking around for the nearest McDonald's. You might find a job that fits the way of life in this country. There's no point in being a furnace installer in a tropical country or a hog farmer in a Muslim country. You would want a job that fits the culture of that country.

[13 : 05] In the culture of heaven, the number of zeros in your bank account isn't worth anything. What is worth something? Generosity, integrity, caring for others.

Those are the things that fit the culture of heaven. But this isn't actually the treasure of heaven. See, in 1 Timothy, Paul writes to Timothy in a way that very much mirrors our text. Let me read it to you. He tells Timothy, That's what we were saying.

It's God who secures our future, not wealth. He continues, They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Did you catch that? Generosity, good works, all the things that we've talked about, they are a good foundation. They are a treasure, but they are not the treasure of heaven.

[14 : 36] If you own a home, you know how valuable it is to have a good foundation. But you also wouldn't be very happy if your builder put up a good foundation and then stopped.

Right? The foundation is only valuable because of what it supports. What does this treasure, this foundation, what does it support?

That they may take hold of that which is truly life. This foundation, this treasure is valuable because it allows us to take hold of a greater treasure.

See, virtue is not unimportant. We grow in godliness, in virtue as the Holy Spirit transforms us into Christ's people, into people who can embrace him.

Because virtue is not unimportant. Because virtue is not the goal. It prepares us to take hold of the goal. The goal is Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[15 : 55] He does not give us life as though it were something that he could give away. He is life. When he gives us life, it is by giving us himself.

He has called us to come to him. He has invited us into his kingdom. He has given himself to us that we may take hold of him.

There's a story about a rich man who is coming to the end of his life.

And he was very distressed because he had worked hard his whole life to accumulate his treasures. And he didn't want to leave those treasures behind.

And so he began to pray that he might take his treasures with him to heaven. And an angel heard his plea and appeared to him and said, you can't take your treasure with you into heaven.

[17 : 06] And the man asked the angel, please ask God to see if he will make an exception. And so the next night the angel reappeared and announced that God had decided to make an exception and was allowing him to take one suitcase with him.

And the man was overjoyed and he prepared himself to die with the largest suitcase he could find.

And soon afterward he did die and he showed up at the pearly gates.

And St. Peter was amazed to see his suitcase. But he said, hold on, you can't bring that in here with you. And the man explained, no, God gave me an exemption.

I can take this suitcase. And so St. Peter went and checked. And sure enough, he came back.

You're right. You're allowed one carry-on. But I'll have to check it before I let it through.

And he opened the suitcase to find out what the man found too precious to leave behind. You brought pavement? Right? Often, when we see sin for what it is, it's equal parts tragic and humorous.

[18 : 27] Right? We can spend our lives pursuing treasure. We can accumulate all the gold we want. And it's worthless in heaven, right?

It's pavement. We only have a few years before we enter into Jesus' eternal kingdom. How could we waste them more spectacularly than by using them to gather pavement? Jesus has given us a wonderful guide for how we can prepare ourselves to be at home in his kingdom. We can and should prioritize becoming people who will be right at home under his rule. Growing in Christ-like virtue so that we can take hold of him.

But the real treasure of heaven is not something that we can store up. It is not something that there could be more of no matter what we do.

[19 : 43] The real treasure of heaven is Jesus Christ, our Lord, who has already given himself to us totally and completely. Let us prepare to embrace him fully.

Amen. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, you know our hearts. you look on us and see what it is we desire. What it is we prioritize. You know that we are people of this earth.

And you know that that we are bent and sinful. And the things that we desire, the things that we prioritize are so often things that are important only here.

Give us new hearts. Give us new hearts that long for you, that long for your kingdom. Give us hearts that are shaped to the world that you are bringing about.

[21 : 04] to the world that is as you want it to be. Give us desire for you.

That we may long to be with you. To share in the kingdom you are making. So that we may have the priorities of heaven.

And that when we arrive in your kingdom, we will be overjoyed to embrace you and your son. In his name we pray. Amen.