

Our Commitment to Christ

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[0 : 00] Matthew 6, 19-24 Just listen to, it's a very short reading anyway.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The eye is the lamp of the body, so if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.

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 that darkness?

[1 : 29] 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. So, we're going to be looking at these verses that I've just read, which probably, as most people here know, are part of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel, which comprises chapters 5, 6 and 7.

So called the Sermon on the Mount because somewhere in northern Israel, in Galilee, Jesus was sitting on a mountain when he delivered this sermon.

And he didn't only deliver it to his disciples, but he delivered it to a great, massive crowd that were also listening to this sermon.

And the ministry of Jesus is, in a sense, quite easy to sum up because the subject of the ministry of Jesus from first to last is the kingdom of God.

[3 : 01] And what he's doing at this point in the sermon is trying to show how Christians, how believers, how disciples of the kingdom, how kingdom people, how their life should look and how the practice of their Christianity should look.

And he's done that in a sense, you could say, for our church life or our spiritual side of our Christianity when he was talking about how not to pray and how to fast and how to do your charitable acts.

And essentially, he was saying, there wasn't a, don't do them to be seen by other people and to get honour from other people. And now here, you might say, I don't think there's any hard and fast separation or distinction here, but you might say as we get to verse 19, he's talking about the broader space of our life.

You could almost say the secular part, the part that we're, is more broadly away from church, our day-to-day living of our Christianity.

Christianity. And therefore, at the threshold of a new year, I was trying to think and ask God, what should I bring to the folks at the threshold of this new year?

[4 : 46] And as I wondered about that, the word commitment came to me. And what Jesus is saying in these verses that I've just read relates very strongly to our commitment or non-commitment to our Christianity.

And therefore, as we enter 2022, let's ask ourselves, each one of us, and this sermon is preached to me before it's preached to anyone else.

As we stand at the threshold of 2022, as we look down and away into the horizon, let's ask ourselves this question.

How committed am I to my Saviour Jesus Christ? Jesus mentions three things for us Christians here in these verses.

to be in our guard about in terms of our commitment to Christ. They are the heart, the eyes, and the will.

[6 : 03] Let's look then more closely at these verses. First of all, the heart. I said that our call to worship was very simple.

my son, my daughter, give me your heart. What that means is this, give me your whole being. What can I give the Lord? What shall I render to the Lord for all his goodness to me? your heart, your whole being?

What's the problem? As we pilgrims and kingdom people step by step, make our pilgrimage home, there's plenty of other people and plenty other things trying to steal our hearts. that's the problem. Jesus' temptation, fall down before me and worship me and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world.

[7 : 24] We don't need such a mega temptation to cave in. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.

This verse in Matthew's gospel, verse 19 of Matthew 6, with the words, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, it starts with this negative particle, the sentence starts with this negative particle. It starts like this, don't. What is it?

The other thing that I should say is in our English translations, it's the same Greek word that is used for store up and for treasure.

So in actual fact, if you were reading the original, it would say something like, don't treasure up for yourselves treasures on earth. So there's a kind of wordplay there.

[8 : 39] One is a noun and one is a verb. And the noun, in a sense, points to where those treasures are being laid, deposited.

because the image of this verse is someone who has a precious repository or place where they hoard and amass and put all these things that mean so much to them.

And they protect them and they keep them for themselves and they will not let them go and they have a great attachment to their heart. that's the picture that Jesus is presenting before his people, before his audience.

It's not that wealth as such is forbidden. What is forbidden is, think of the language here, don't lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.

Jesus' words are noteworthy however, aren't they? I remember being struck the first time I read this in the Gospels when Jesus said, and his disciples were dumbfounded by it, how hard it is, said Jesus, for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

[10 : 12] There's something about when we start amassing something other than the glory of God as our guiding principle in life.

There's something that begins to get mesmerising about these things, and they start to get their tentacles around us. I remember reading one day, this is an aside by the way, I'm not going to follow this thought that I'm about to share with you through very far, but I remember reading about a man in the paper, just not very long ago, and he went into this place and he bought a painting for 500 million pounds.

that was his sweetie money. Of course, for me, it was a symbol of what is chronically wrong with society.

That's all I'll say. Jesus said, how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God? God. You see, we can never ever know the French intellectual and thinker who died in her late 30s and was part of the resistance movement in France in the Second World War.

I've quoted this lady before, but I love her quote, and I don't apologise for quoting her again, Simone Weill. She said, in this life, we possess nothing.

[12 : 00] She's absolutely true, isn't she? So accurate. You might be thinking, yes, I've got my house or houses. I've got my car or cars.

I've got my gadgets and my technology. I've got my health. I've got this. I've got that. I've got my status. You've got nothing. It can be taken from you in the snap of a finger.

Think of these tragic scenes in the States of the typhoons or whatever it was, just in a moment, wiping everybody's belongings out like that.

Fading is the worldlings' pleasure. pleasure. What Jesus is encouraging us to do is to make the driving principle of our life the pursuit of God.

And he's saying, you know, every prayer, every thought, every song for him and to him, every reading, every act, that's currency that will never be lost.

[13 : 33] Where, then, is your heart at the beginning of 2022? As we stand at the threshold of another year, where will our hearts be in 2022?

Is any of Earth's treasures captivating us and entangling us? can I ask, what does your life orbit around?

What gets you up in the morning? What drives you? What's your life predicated upon? Is it the precious Saviour?

Is it your precious faith? Or is it your precious possessions? that brings me to my second point. First point was the heart and the second point is the eyes.

[14 : 49] But, before I leave that first point, the last statement Jesus makes is the most powerful statement. Why, what would these readers might have been thinking or hearers, I should say, why is it you're saying all of this to us about possessions and don't be amassing treasure on earth where moth and rust doth corrupt and all this sort of stuff?

Why are you saying all that? And he tells us why he's saying it. For where your treasure is, right there is your heart.

What makes you tick? What drives you? What your life is predicated upon? What really gets you excited? That's where your heart is. Secondly, the eye and perceptions.

In this picture of the eye, the eye is the lamp of the body, so if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. I'm sure you'll agree with me.

Everything is determined by one having healthy or unhealthy eyes. The Jewish rabbis regarded both the physical outer eyes and the inner spiritual eyes much the same way as they regarded the heart which they saw as the seat of the individual, what we may call the central nervous system, the hub, the entity from where it all fires out.

[16 : 37] the physical function of our eyes for Jewish rabbis were the expressions of our heart and our soul.

You can see that the way that Jesus even speaks at times. He said, remember, if you look at a woman to lust, you've already committed adultery in your heart.

it didn't begin with the look, it began somewhere else. There's another proverb, isn't there?

As a person, as a woman, as a man, as a boy, as a girl, thinks, so is she. How healthy are our eyes?

I mean, in the context of how Jesus is using the concept here of health. Indeed, there's various ways of translating the underlying language and health and health is only one way of doing it.

[18 : 09] I'm going to tell you about another way. If our eyes are healthy, they will have a correct vision of reality and truth.

If our eyes are unclouded, if our eyes are unmixed, vision is right, I said I would mention another way you can translate this word is single.

And we might sort of think, as we think of that way of translating it, absolutely single-minded, utterly focused.

I love tennis, and I especially loved it when our own Andy Murray was winning lots of the big tournaments. tennis, and you watch those tennis players and you see how focused their eyes are on this ball that's coming out 100 and whatever it is, 40 kilometers towards them, and you see their absolute focus, their single mindedness, every sinew, every cell in their body to hit that ball back. back. This is exactly what Jesus is saying. The only safe place for kingdom people is to be single-minded.

[20 : 10] But here's a wee question. How do we get those healthy eyes and how do we keep them?

Because we're all born blind spiritually. Jesus said to one of the leading rabbis in Israel, a guy called Nicodemus, he said to Nicodemus, Nicodemus, unless you're born again, you will not even see the kingdom of God.

There's your answer. And the miracles that Jesus did were not just miracles, they were signs, they were illustrations of spiritual truths.

So when Jesus healed blind Bartimaeus, when Jesus healed blind people, he was saying, need new eyes. And if you're not a Christian today, and those listening in Zoom, perhaps you're not a believer, perhaps you're not part of the kingdom, let me say to you, that although according to the Bible, we're spiritually blind, Jesus can make us see.

He can heal us, and he can touch us, and he can open our eyes. I urge you to come to Christ if you're not already a Christian. I had what they called, and I'll move on quickly to the final point, a lazy eye when I was a young person like these children there.

[21 : 57] and they used to put a patch on my good eye, and therefore I went along, I went about with this funny persona, having a patch in one of my classes.

And I don't know much about these things, but they reckon that part of it was a muscle that wasn't being used very, very well. But we can have spiritual lazy eyes.

And our spiritual muscles might not be getting used very well in our walk with Christ. We can also have something called double vision.

I remember somebody quite recently saying to me, I'll not say who it is, and I think you probably would know who it is if I told you, but I'm not going to tell you. But anyway, and this person stood before me, says, I'm seeing two of you.

And I said, I feel sorry for you. But, yeah, but there's such a thing as spiritual double vision. Our heart is tugged to Christ, so-called, and our heart is tugged somewhere else.

[23 : 22] Let's make sure for 2022, two, but our eyesight, physical and spiritual, is single. That brings me to my last point, the self.

And remember what I said, Jesus is really, he's getting across the same truth, he's reinforcing it by three different world pictures or metaphors.

But this is definitely the clincher. the cat's out the bag here in this third one. This is what Jesus has been talking about in the two previous world pictures, the battle for the self or the ego is the biggest battle of our lives.

people talk about a split personality. Jesus is talking here about a split or divided devotion to God. what does he say about it? First thing he says about it is this, it's utterly impossible. It's all or nothing.

[24 : 46] Notice the force of the language in verse 24. Notice how emphatic it is. No one can serve two masters.

Utterly and absolutely no one. For either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

And he has that little inclusio doesn't he in this verse here because he repeats himself you cannot serve God and mammon.

if you want to come to Christ yes you come as you are but it's the whole being that must come. You must come in your entirety and if we want to be people of the kingdom we must serve God exclusively.

[25 : 59] I mean there are some illustrations aren't there? Okay I know that there's some wacky people out there and they have different ideas I know all about them and I know there's different cultures of different ideas but imagine you said to your wife one day well I'm actually wanting to have another wife and I want to share my love with the two people is that okay?

it's not okay Jesus says it's impossible or imagine you're being head hunted for a job I know somebody the now that's been head hunted for a job it's definitely not me anyway I know somebody that's been head hunted for a job imagine the people that were head hunting him he said well yeah I'll take your job but it's okay if I work for your rival company as well so I mean even in human life we can see the absurdity of that can't we we're not talking about human life here we're talking about the eternal God something else

I want you to notice from this verse as we come into the close of this message no one can serve the word that's used here for serve is doulos and it's the word there's two words for serving or service that you find in the New Testament diakonos from which we get a word deacon but the other word is doulos and that word is mainly used not just in New Testament Greek but in secular Greek for slaves and you know here that Jesus is using the term master actually the word is kurios lord but it's a fair interpretation of the word lord there as master because that's one of the interpretations of kurios kurios can be interpreted in different parts of the bible in the new testament either as sir or as master or as lord in a theological way but it depends where it is

Jesus knew all about Roman slavery and he knew all about the history of slavery I'm sure in his own culture and in the bible slavery is a horrible thing but in Rome it was varied the experience and life of slaves no doubt as it was in the deep south it was varied but the one commonality of slaves in Rome was this they were the property of somebody else they were actually owned they were in that

sense de facto not looked upon as a human being as a person they were looked upon as a possession a piece of property as a consequence they had no legal rights in law
Jesus is using this master slave language and that brings me up to my final point really of this third issue of the self and of the sermon I'm calling it the double paradox of slavery Jesus once said he that sins is the slave of sin let me sort of reinterpret that he that predicates his life on the self is the slave of the self but here's the thing Paul in Romans 6:18 in fact I'll maybe just turn it up it's maybe worth 6:18 yes and having been set free says

[30 : 48] Paul from sin notice the language slave language set free emancipated liberated have become slaves of righteousness here's the paradox people often who are not Christians and who want to hold on to their life think they're free or not they're bound to their ego and their self the people that are free paradoxically are the slaves of Christ because if the son shall set you free said Jesus you shall be free indeed because you've been set free for what you were made for God you're God shaped there's a spiritual shape within the depth of your being that no attention to self can ever fill the great reformer

Luther he captured something of that paradox he said a Christian is an utterly free person lord of all subject to none but at the same time a Christian is an utterly dutiful person servant of all subject to all true freedom is being enslaved to Christ the great lie is we are free so long as we hold on to our own ego and will is is your eye single where is your heart what treasures are you amassing in this life are you a slave of

Jesus Christ amen let's have a word of prayer father we thank you for Jesus for our great teacher and we thank you that he gives us such lessons that our hearts might be filled with hope and love and joy help us then lord to receive that word into our hearts for your glory and for our eternal good amen yea thank you for your hope thank you so fun