

# Looking for something more - why does this life never fully satisfy?

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[ 0 : 00 ] The reading this morning is from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 6, beginning at verse 19, and you'll find that on page 978 of the Bibles.

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 your heart will 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 the darkness!

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. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, though neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if so, if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Great if you could have that passage open in front of you. I'm going to pray and ask for God's help, and then we'll look at it together. Let's bow our heads and pray.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your holy, in your mighty presence. Our prayer is simply that your word might be our rule, that your spirit, your Holy Spirit, that he might be our teacher, and that your honour and glory alone might be our supreme concern. For Jesus' sake we ask. Amen.

[ 3 : 05 ] Well, if you could have that passage open in front of you, that would be a great thing. Bond 25 is the name being given to the 25th James Bond movie. Arguably, Daniel Craig's fifth and final outing as 007. Expected to hit theatres around spring next year. Apparently, it's not going to be called Shatterhand, as was recently rumoured. Well, think back to the 19th Bond film, starring Irish actor Pierce Brosnan. In it, a beautiful villainess, in her attempts to seduce and recruit Bond, says to him, I could have given you the world. Yet, with steely determination, Bond replies, the world is not enough. James Bond would rather be true to queen and country than sell his services to an evil baddie bent on world domination, even when she promises to satisfy him with everything this world has to offer.

Of course, James Bond is not real. Except as a character in books by Ian Fleming or on the big screen. It's easy for him to rest content with the notion that this world is not enough to satisfy his hopes and aspirations. After all, he gets to drive fancy cars with those added special features. To eat in the best restaurants, to wear expensive suits, and to visit exotic locations. He always gets the bad guy, and some beautiful Bond girl always utters those immortal words. Oh, James.

My problem is that this world is plenty, and if I'm honest, the truth is, often I cannot get enough of it. It keeps telling me that I have not lived until I have driven that car, can afford this suit, have been to this island, and have got a home that looks like one of those features in the latest edition of Hello Magazine. The great paradox of our time is that we spend more, yet we have less. We have more household gadgets, but less time. More leisure, but less fun. More experts, but more problems. More medicine, but less wellness. We have multiplied our possessions while reducing our values, our moral values.

Incredibly, we've been all the way to the moon and back, and yet we have trouble crossing the road in order to show kindness to a neighbor. We've split the atom, but not our own prejudices.

We have higher incomes, but lower moral standards. We live in a day of steep profits, but shallow relationships. We may have world peace, but also domestic violence. Fancier houses, yet more divorce. More two-income families, but also more broken homes.

[ 6 : 30 ] Now, please don't misunderstand me. There is nothing wrong with having lots of money, nor even the very best that that money can buy, whether the latest smart devices, exotic foreign holidays, or very good private education. The Bible says that if you are fortunate enough to be able to afford such things, you should thank and praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for giving them to you, and enjoy them. But the Bible is also clear that this life does not, and will never fully satisfy anyone. A part of us will always long for something more.

In part, this is because materialism does not pay. That's the first thing I want you to note from the passage that was read earlier. Materialism simply does not pay. Jesus says this in his most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, which is Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7. We're in chapter 6. Look at verse 19 with me of chapter 6 of the Sermon on the Mount. Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. Jesus wants us to understand that the most important things in life are not and never have been things.

Jesus is not against prudent stewardship so much as selfish accumulation. He wants us to understand that it is a foolish fantasy to believe that your life consists mainly in the abundance of your earthly possessions. And in verse 19, that's what stands behind the phrase, lay up for yourselves treasure on earth. A sports car had a sticker on the back that read, he who dies with the most toys wins. And that's how some people are tempted to live, isn't it? And perhaps that's how you've been tempted to live. Perhaps that describes you. Well, Jesus wants you to understand that nothing could be further from the truth. This world, you see, is a place where moth, and rust destroys, and where thieves break in. In other words, nothing lasts in this life, no matter how much money you've paid for them. For the scientists among us, all our earthly possessions are subject to the law of entropy, that is, decay or disorder. But the truth is, even if you had enough money to buy only the very best this world has to offer, you would not be around indefinitely to enjoy them. You see, death laughs at the person who invests everything in this present world, making it. In the late 1990s, one newspaper worked out that if Bill Gates stacked all his money in dollar bills in a pile under his bed, he would have to parachute over 25 kilometers to get down to his bedroom floor.

I don't need to tell you, that's a shed load of money, isn't it? Literally. And yet, according to the Bible, he will not be able to take even one cent of it with him when he dies, as indeed one day he will, like all of us.

Materialism simply doesn't pay. But the second thing Jesus tells us in this his most famous sermon is that materialism does not satisfy.

[ 10 : 45 ] Not only does materialism not pay, also it does not satisfy. At least, that is the implication of what Jesus says in verses 22 and 23 of Matthew chapter 6.

Look at it with me. Verse 22, 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 the darkness. See, having healthy vision can drastically affect the quality of your life.

A blind person, in other words, walks in darkness, whereas a person with 20-20 vision is able to bask in the light of day. But Jesus is not here really telling us to go for an eye test.

No, rather, he is using the eye as a metaphor for the human heart. Jesus is saying where you invest your life is of the utmost importance.

[ 11 : 53 ] If my life or your life is focused on material things, if at the core of your being, you are focused purely on this world or on earthly things, then it's as if your vision, your eyes are bad.

Or to put that differently, instead of your whole body being full of light, verse 22, it is rather flooded by darkness, verse 23. You see, your eyes or your heart have this one thing in common.

They both determine the course or direction of your life. Jesus is saying that a materialistic mindset affects a person's whole personality and can have disastrous spiritual consequences.

The ability to eat in a really cool and expensive restaurant, to own really nice things, to be able to negotiate your way around a professional culture or a particular peer group.

All such things can become more important to you and me than we care to admit. So, for example, how do you know when money isn't just money to you anymore?

[ 13 : 11 ] Well, signs might include a reluctance in giving large amounts of it away or being petrified at the thought of having to make do with less than you're accustomed to doing so.

Or when it is no longer a tool, but rather a scorecard. Or having more or better things than the Joneses or the Smiths.

Apologies if there are any Joneses and Smiths in the room. When it has such a grip on you, but its power over you keeps you from relationship with the God who created you.

Life is then reduced to that elusive, never-ending, unsatisfying quest for materialistic comfort and contentment. After having a heart attack, one of our nation's funniest comedians was asked why he didn't just slow down.

He replied, I can't. I haven't got enough. A British singer, songwriter and actor, Will Young, has struggled with alcohol addiction amongst other things.

[ 14 : 24 ] He said, I just kept having sex to fill the void, watching porn, shopping, anything. Apparently he spent thousands on therapy and doing things that he thought would make him feel better.

Like completely decorating a house, thinking it would make him feel happy. Or going on a shopping spree, only to find himself feeling empty afterwards.

A consensus among psychiatrists is that people in our country, in our century rather, are several times more likely to be depressed than people who lived in the 20th century.

And that despite the latter being the bloodiest and most violent in world history. Ironically, it would seem that despite being richer, people today are more deeply dissatisfied than in pretty much every previous generation.

To value money then, more than anything else, leads to not only poor mental health, but also lower levels of satisfaction. Who would have thought it?

[ 15 : 36 ] Well, actually, I don't think any of this would have been a surprise to Jesus. Because he says, materialism neither pays nor satisfies. So what's the solution?

Well, the really great news is that Jesus offers us, thirdly, a guaranteed future. Look with me at verse 20 of chapter 6 of the Sermon on the Mount.

Let me get a read from verse 19 again to capture the flow of Jesus. Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Treasure on earth won't last. Both it and us will succumb to entropy, that is, to decay and death, respectively. Treasure in heaven, says Jesus, will last.

You see, Jesus Christ came and died on that cross 2,000 years ago and rose again so that all who trust in him could have a guaranteed future.

[ 16 : 56 ] A treasure in heaven. One that will both last and satisfy. Elsewhere in the New Testament, we are told that the inheritance that Jesus secures for his true followers through his death and resurrection is both imperishable and unfading.

Jesus is trying to help us to live with the crucial perspective that this world is not all there is. In addition to our temporal perspective, Jesus wants each one of us to have an eternal perspective.

The children's writer and Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis, put it well when he writes, Humans are amphibians, half spirit and half animal.

You see, you are so much more than just a physical or material being as you sit here this morning listening to me. We have all been created supremely to be in a relationship with the God who has revealed himself wonderfully in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus claims to be God himself come in the flesh. What therefore matters is not so much what you possess materially, but rather who you are personally.

[ 18 : 25 ] One writer put it this way, You see, in the world still to come, only two things will ultimately matter.

Your relationship to Jesus Christ. And secondly, your inward character. Indeed, all any of us can take with us beyond death is our very selves.

It is therefore crucial to understand that what matters most is not the character of your outward adornment or possessions, but the clothing of your inward character.

Character is what you are when nobody sees. It is, in essence, who you are by nature.

Sadly, for each one of us here in this room, our rebellion against God has twisted and distorted our character, making you and I someone who naturally dishonors the Christian God of the Bible.

[ 19 : 48 ] The Bible calls this sin. Accepting that Jesus was punished in your place on that cross 2,000 years ago, taking a punishment that both you and I deserved because of this perversion of our character.

This is the only way to secure the guaranteed future that Jesus promises here in the Sermon on the Mount. Remarkably, if you do this, God's Holy Spirit comes and lives within you.

He then begins the work of changing your inward character day by day, month by month, year by year. Slowly making you more like the person you were created to be.

This is all preparation for that guaranteed future where you and I will be able to relate to God the Father, God the Son, and to one another in a way that was always meant to be.

Imagine for a moment a world of harmonious relationships. Harmony with the God who created you. With the world itself.

[ 20 : 59 ] Imagine a world where there's no global warming. No pollution. No David Attenborough telling us that we're ruining the planet. A world with no war, strife, slander, gossip, hatred, or animosity between one another.

Well, perhaps you're thinking, well, this so-called guaranteed future sounds like pie in the sky when you die. But even if I were willing to consider it for a moment, what about my life here and now?

I've got bills to pay and a family to consider. My mortgage won't pay itself. Well, Jesus would have you understand. But not only does God provide for your future, He's also a generous Father who also provides for you in the present.

So trust. Depend. Rely upon Him. So that's the last thing I want you to notice. The God Jesus reveals to the world is a generous Father.

The God Jesus reveals is a generous Father. And Jesus clearly spells out the implications of this in verses 25 and 26 of our passage. Look at verse 25. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.

[ 22 : 26 ] Is not life more than food? And the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns. And yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not of more value than they? I mean, look at verse 33. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. And all these things will be added to you.

The main thrust of verses 25 to 34 is to not be anxious. The word anxious appears in verses 25, 28, 31, and twice in verse 34.

Rather, we should trust God knowing Him to be a generous Father. Any other attitude, says Jesus in verse 30, is to be a person of little faith.

Notice the therefore in verse 25 that connects verse 25 to 34 with what has gone before. In the light of the temptation that you and I face to limit our horizon to this world alone.

[ 23 : 35 ] To foolishly believe that materialism will pay and will satisfy in the light of this. Jesus said verse 25, therefore don't be anxious. Don't spend all your time worrying about the here and now.

Think about the future. Don't spend all your time worrying about what you will wear, eat, or drink. Anxiety then, yours and mine, is often the sinful condition of the heart that leads to many other sinful ways of thinking and behaving.

So anxiety about finances can give rise to coveting, to greedy hoarding, and stealing even fraud. Anxiety about career success can turn you into an irritable, bad-tempered, impersonal workaholic who neglects loved ones, family, and friends.

Anxiety about relationships can cause withdrawal, indifference, and even a callous attitude towards those around you, ironically. The key to all this is understanding the God of the Bible to be a generous Father.

In verse 26, he feeds the birds of the air. In verse 31, he clothes the flowers of the field. Are you not more valuable than they?

[ 24 : 59 ] Asked Jesus. Of course the answer is yes. Let me explain how precious you are to this generous Father. He loved you so much that he came into this world in our sinful likeness, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in order to make us fit, once again, for perfect relationship with himself. That is what the cross is all about. Jesus bears on his body the scars that prove how generous the Father has been.

The moving story is told of a young boy who was deeply embarrassed by the horrible scarred hands of his older brother. The whole school made fun of those hands, and the younger brother felt increasingly ashamed.

One day his mother caught him crying, and so she explained to him that when he was a toddler, he had reached up to a saucepan of boiling water on the stove and was about to pull it down onto himself.

When his older brother saw what he was about to do, he grabbed the boiling saucepan with his bare hands. And despite the agonizing pain, he had taken that saucepan to the kitchen sink and poured away the contents.

[ 26 : 26 ] But even after months of operations, his hands had been disfigured and scarred beyond repair. After a long silence, the small boy whispered, I think I like my brother's hands now, because they were scarred for me.

Well, in a similar way, you and I need to embrace the scars of Jesus Christ on that cross, because they speak of a generous Father who sees you and me as supremely precious, and so sent Jesus to die in my place and your place.

And to prove that the sacrifice of Jesus was accepted, God the Father raised him to life again as vindication. Understanding this helps us to abandon ourselves, verse 33, to seeking first God's kingdom here and now, while allowing each day to take care of itself, verse 34.

And why? Because we can trust him to provide for our needs. Materialism neither pays nor satisfies.

Yet Jesus offers you and I a guaranteed future from a generous Father. Now, I know that's a lot to take in, perhaps, especially if you're not used to hearing the Bible explained.

[ 27 : 58 ] Maybe you're a guest here today, and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. So can I recommend a few options to take things further, to picking up on what Simon said earlier on? First, why not keep coming to Grace Church Dulwich, so you can hear God's word read and explained over several weeks and months?

That's a great way to get to grips with the Christian faith. I can recommend listening to Simon Dowdy, the senior minister here. He's a great Bible teacher. Why not commit to coming over the next few Sundays?

You'd be in very good hands. Second, why not take something away to read? There's a book table at the back there with a number of things you can take away and read. I noticed a number of gospels.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Why not take one and read it and think about the Christian faith? Or, as Simon said, why not join, thirdly, a CE group where you can ask any question you like, and you can get to grips with the Christian faith in a warm, friendly environment where there's no such thing as a silly question?

Fourth and last, I'm going to close as I pray. And you might like to echo this prayer in the quietness of your hearts if you agree. And if you pray this prayer, perhaps for the first time and truly mean it, why not tell someone, maybe a friend you came with, or Simon, or even myself?

[ 29 : 18 ] Let's bow our heads, close our eyes, and pray together. Dear God, please forgive me for thinking this life and this world is all that matters.

And for pursuing material things with little thought to who you are. Thank you for generously sending Jesus to die for me.

And for guaranteeing me a future with you. In the world to come. From this day forward, please help me to accept that Jesus died for me.

Help me to trust you and to begin to seek first your kingdom in this my earthly life.

For Jesus' sake I pray. Amen.