

Seeking First Real Treasure

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[0 : 00] Amen. Friends, I'll pray for us. Almighty God and loving Father, may the words that I speak now be from you.

May you graft them into our hearts and work in us so as to bring forth in us the fruit of good works. And we pray this for the honour and praise of your name through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen. Friends, about a month or so ago I received two letters. I received them both within a week of each other.

And I thought that I would read parts of them to you this morning. Both came, you see, with letterhead bearing the marks of a legal company. Both were signed. One of them, the first one, had a stamp on it from South Africa and it read like this, with the exception of the made-up name that I've created in place of the real name.

Here it is. Attention, beneficiary. I have the privilege to notify you, having been appointed as the trustee and executor of the late Gillian Bloggs' last will and testament, in which you and your ministry were nominated as one of the beneficiaries.

[1 : 11] The late Gillian Bloggs in her last will and testament bequeathed the sum of 5 million US dollars to you and for the support of your ministry. According to the testator, this money is to support your ministry and your personal endeavours.

That was very nice. I was then to acknowledge receipt of the letter and contact the trustee. So that's letter number one. Letter number two.

It came, as I said, within a week of the first one. And again, I've made up names for persons named in the letter. And this letter read like this. Dear Sir, read the estate of the late Joseph Bloggs.

No relative, I think. We act on behalf of X and Y, who are the executives for the estate of the late Joseph Bloggs. Pursuant to the terms of the will of the deceased, the residuary estate is divided into 288 equal parts and your institution is entitled to 24 parts.

We enclose a cheque made payable to your institution for the sum of \$208,033.44.

[2 : 23] Kindly acknowledge its safe receipt. We confirm that there will be a further distribution in due course. Now, I want to tell you that the first letter could quickly be picked up as a scam.

A very brief scan of the South African death notices online picked up no person of substance, and I reckon to have \$5 million you'd have to be a person of substance, that had died recently.

Moreover, there was no attorney with that name in any location in South Africa. And the location named within the letter didn't exist.

Now, and not only that, I had never known the person mentioned at all. However, the letterhead on the second letter came from a reputable Christian legal company that I know of.

The name mentioned in the letter was one I knew instantly. I had buried this saint in this building 15 months earlier or thereabouts. He was an ex-missionary, a well-known man in our church.

[3 : 22] Anyway, friends, what I want you to do for the rest of this sermon is just store those two letters away in the back of your minds. We are going to return to them later. By the way, I don't want you speculating on who the latter person was.

I will tell you later on. Okay, for the moment, let's just have a look at the passage in front of us. So open up your Bibles, please, at Matthew chapter 6. And I want to set the context for this.

As you know, we are in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. We're looking at it. We have been for some time. And last week, we had a very good summary of the first 18 verses of this chapter.

Some highlights for me were the encouragement not to practice our righteousness in front of others in order to be seen by them. You might remember that Jesus said that if this was our way of doing things, well, we had our reward in full.

There'd be nothing else coming to us. We live before an audience of one, Andrew told us. That is, before God alone. And God alone will reward us, which is what the passage said. We then heard about prayer, although we skipped over the Lord's Prayer because we'd looked at it last year. [4 : 28] And we noticed again, as we got toward the end of this passage, a reference to having our reward in full when we came to verses 16 to 18. Those verses were about fasting.

Today, we come to a section that runs from verses 19 all the way through to 34. But there are four sections, but we're only going to deal with the first three. So let me tell you about the whole four sections, and then next week we'll pick up the last one.

Nearly all of these have something to do with money or possessions. The first one is 19 to 21. It's all about where you amass your treasure.

That is where you put it aside. The second one is verses 22 to 23. It's all about your eyes and your heart and what makes them healthy or unhealthy.

The third is verse 24. It's all about the impossibility of having God as your master, as well as money as your master. The fourth stretches from verse 25 all the way through to 34, and it's about whether you're going to be anxious or not, and about the alternative to being anxious about material things.

[5 : 38] Now, there are just a couple of things to notice. First, three out of the four sayings of Jesus are put negatively. That is, don't store up.

You cannot serve two masters. Don't be anxious. The implication, you see, by using negatives is that the Christian disciples that Jesus is speaking to are facing a great danger.

They're in the midst of a danger that hovers around money and possessions, and there's more to be avoided than there is to be encouraged. Does that make sense? There's more things to worry about than things to actually be encouraged by.

There's a great risk, in other words, hence the negativity. I think they can all be summed up in a common theme, and we'll see this as we go through. So with that in mind, have your Bibles open. Chapter 6, verse 19.

Let me read the first saying of Jesus for us again. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

[6 : 44] Store up for yourself 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.

Let's see what we can make of this. First, verse 19 is probably better translated not as do not store up, but stop storing up. In other words, it's something that we're probably already doing, and we're to stop doing it.

Second, it appears to me there's an assumption underlying these verses. The assumption is that the final worth of any treasure you have is measured by where it is stored.

And in terms of where you might store your treasure, there are two options. You can store your treasure in heaven, or you can store it on earth. A heaven, of course, is eternal.

It's not subject to the ravages of this world. However, earth is temporal. It is subject to the ravages of this world. It's a world where moth and vermin, destroy, and thieves break in and steal.

[7 : 44] Particularly in Palestine, where it was sandy and hot, and you had houses built of clay largely, and people could just, you know, break in and steal very, very easily. No deadlocks.

Moreover, it was a world without banks was particularly exposed to this. But the point is clear, isn't it? Because of the temporal nature of earth and the eternal nature of heaven, it is prudent to store up your treasures in heaven.

That's where they're going to last. Now that raises a second question, doesn't it? First question, and there are perhaps a couple of questions. The first question is what Jesus means when he talks about treasures in heaven.

And the great problem with this passage is it's not defined, is it? We're not told what treasures in heaven are. What we could say is it's the opposite of treasures on earth, which we assume treasures on earth are material things.

So perhaps treasures in heaven means non-material, spiritual things. That is, things that disciples can take beyond the grave. That is, things that arise out of our setting of our total wills on heavenly values.

[8 : 55] Things of eternal significance that arise out of what we do on earth. Now what do you think some of those might be? Well, they might include people won and influenced for Christ.

Things like godliness of character, that's non-material, isn't it? You can take it with you. Things like your right standing before God. Things like doing righteous deeds.

Suffering for Christ, forgiving each other, generosity, willingness to share. They're things that will last beyond the grave. No moth or vermin can destroy them. Now as it happens, we actually have a concrete example of what is meant in Matthew's gospel.

I want you in your Bibles to flip over to chapter 19. It's easy to find because you're in chapter 6, so you just keep going. Chapter 19. And I want you to look at verse 16. So Matthew 19.

Matthew 19:16. A rich man comes to Jesus. And most of you will know this story. And he asks him what good thing he must do to get eternal life. And Jesus tells him, well, keep the commandments. [10:02] And this man says, all right, yeah, which ones? And he then, Jesus then tells him, and the man then tells Jesus that he's kept the commandments that Jesus has mentioned to him. And he says, well, so what am I lacking then?

And Jesus says this in verse 21. Look at it with me. If you want to be perfect, then go. Sell your possessions, give to the poor, and you will have, can you hear it? Treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me. So treasure in heaven is, how do you amass it? By being generous, don't you? That is, you amass it by selling your possessions, giving them to the poor, and coming and following Jesus.

So if you want to know how to use earthly possessions to store up treasure in heaven, what do you do? Well, here's the secret. Give it away. That's how to store up treasure in heaven.

Do, be generous. Do good with your money, your possessions or whatever, rather than being selfish with them. And that's what Jesus himself does when you think about it. Paul says this in 2 Corinthians 8, 9.

[11:05] I'm going to read it to you. Listen to this and think about Jesus and his disposition. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Can you see what happened?

Jesus gives away his own riches, his eternal presence with God, to become a human being, to die for us, so that we might be brought back to God.

That is, he was generous. He stored up riches in heaven by giving away things. The thing he gave away was his life. And those riches are us who believed in him.

Now look at verse 21. So go back to chapter 6, verse 21. Jesus says, For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Friends, the heart is a great litmus test.

The heart is the centre, you see, in the Bible of our personality. It involves our mind, our emotions, our will, our decision making, all those sorts of things. It's as though the heart's the focus for them.

[12:16] It's therefore inevitable that what is at the centre of our being, at the centre of our hearts, will gradually find its way into the rest of our lives. John Calvin has a great way of putting this.

He says this. Think about it. If honour is the supreme good for us, that is the great good, then what will our minds be filled with? They'll wholly be occupied with ambition, won't they?

If money is the supreme good for us, then covetousness will predominate our lives. If pleasure is the supreme good, then we'll sink into brutal indulgence.

A story of a contemporary world, I think. But if we are honestly and firmly convinced that our happiness is in heaven with God, then it will be easy for us to despise earthly attractions and to rise toward heaven.

Can you hear what's being said? In the realm of money, it is inevitable that what is at the centre of your heart will eventually be reflected in our purses, our wallets and our bank accounts.

[13:18] Inevitably, our heart will govern those things. So friends, what does your bank account tell you about your heart?

Where is your treasure? Is it in heaven with God? Or is it here on earth where mosques, vermin, governments, global financial crises will gnaw away at it?

Now let's turn to the second saying of Jesus, verses 22 and 23. Jesus says, The eye of the lamp, sorry, the eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If the light within you is darkness, then how great is that darkness? Now before we begin to look at these verses, I have to do some fine tuning with a few things.

For example, the translation. First of all, the plural that is used for eyes here is actually singular. So where you see the plural eyes, it's actually one eye. Second, the word used for healthy in verse 22 is literally translated single or sincere or having no guile.

[14 : 27] It has the sense of, well, are no strings attached or no hidden agendas. And the word used for unhealthy is actually the word for wicked or bad. It has the connotation of being socially worthless.

So let's think about lamps for a moment. At the moment, I've got two lamps here facing me. Actually three, but just imagine there are two for a moment. Let's think about them.

There are a variety of ways to understand what a lamp does. But I think maybe the best way to think about it is this. Think about lamps. What do they do? What are those lamps there doing? They're radiating what they contain, aren't they?

Okay, so that spotlight is radiating toward me what it contains. It contains a light. I'm being lit up actually by it. So they can radiate, of course, the light that is within them.

But if you look at these ones over here, which are broken, they're not radiating anything. They're showing that inside them there is a globe that is in great darkness at the moment.

[15 : 30] That make sense? Okay. Now, if we link this with what Jesus has just said about treasure, we could say that the eyes reveal the condition of the heart.

And let's see what Jesus says. Look at verse 22. Jesus says, The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light.

But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. Jesus is saying that the single eye radiates the presence of an inner and full light.

But the evil eye radiates the opposite. The evil eye radiates the presence of an inner and overwhelming darkness behind it. I think it's like a common saying we have in our world.

We might say, I can see it in your eyes. Have you used that comment before? So you might say to someone, I can see it in your eyes that you're lying to me.

[16 : 33] Or, you might say, I can see it in your eyes that you love me. And so on. Okay? The eyes betray us. They can betray a good, sincere, single-minded person with no hint of grunginess.

Or they can betray an evil, wicked and double-minded person. And where will that be worked out? Where will that inner being which can actually be seen, where will it be seen?

It'll be seen in where your treasure is. It'll be seen in where you store things up. There's a great truth here. Being focused on yourself in relation to your treasure is a sure sign that you haven't yet moved into the world of light.

It's a sure sign that your treasure is on earth and not in heaven. And, you know, my experience in ministry is that this is not just true in relation to money and treasure.

It's true in relation to attitude. Which you'd expect, wouldn't you? Because then, if you have this attitude, it'll reflect in your money as well. So, single-minded focus on God and the things of God sincerity, openness, lack of guile in a person, generosity of spirit.

[17 : 47] They are the marks of someone who's come to know God, who is generous in Christ. And you can see it in their eyes. You can see it in their words. You can see it in their actions.

You can see it in their bank balances. But do you know what? One of the very sad things in ministry that I've found is that this is sometimes very much missing in the lives of Christians I meet.

See, often I find with Christians stinginess. You can see it in their eyes, as it were. You can see it in their words.

You can see it in their actions. And you can see it in their bank balances. And if you can see it in those places, then after a little while you begin to wonder whether they might actually not be people of light, but people in whom there is a deep and great darkness.

Friends, examine the heart. Start with where your treasure is. For the place where you find your treasure is the place that your heart dwells.

[18 : 55] Let's move quickly now to our last saying in verse 24. Jesus says, No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you'll be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve both God and money. Now, the background to this is the world of slavery. Now, imagine for a moment. I don't know if this ever worked, but imagine it for a moment.

A slave who is the property of two different masters. And those two different masters have two different desires and two different commands. Now, as a slave, what's that going to do to you?

A slave in that situation will end up being more faithful to one master than the other, won't they?

And they'll prefer one than the other. In the words of Jesus, they will hate one and love the other, be devoted to one and effectively, therefore, despise the other.

You see, God and money are very different masters. One drives you towards selfishness and stinginess. The other drives you toward other person-centeredness and generosity. One drives you towards the things of this earth and the things of hell.

[20 : 01] The other drives you toward the things of heaven. And the two can't live in the same person without one winning out. Friends, Jesus is clear.

Humans inevitably become enslaved to something. And you can be enslaved to God, focus sincerely and single-mindedly on Him, or you can be enslaved to the things of the world and the devil, but you can't have your cake and eat it.

You can't have both. Now, let me give you, therefore, a hint as to how to avoid the latter. Here it is. In relation to money, the way to avoid being enslaved to the world and the devil is very easy. Be generous. Give your money away.

Don't hold on to it. Don't put it in the vaults of this world. No, give it away to gospel causes. Give it away to the poor. Be generous, even as God in Christ has been generous to you.

[21 : 05] This passage, I think, is really sobering. It is the word of Jesus. And it is His clarion call toward being single-minded and wholeheartedly focused on God and God's kingdom values.

So I want to ask you this morning, will you hear it? Or are you already resistant to it? With that in mind, I want to return to the two letters we began with. Now, in my view, as I said, the first letter was a scam.

It came from a person whose heart was focused on money. That's what they wanted out of it somehow. I don't know how they were going to get it, but anyway, that's what they wanted. Maybe access to my bank account. And it appealed to me as a person whose heart was going to be focused on money, didn't it?

That's what it was trying to do. That's very different from the second letter, isn't it? The second letter came from the will of a man called Horrie Hamer, who most of you won't know, but a number of you will.

Horrie was a man whose heart was filled with God. He served Christ all his life. He went to the mission field. He served his Lord and Master there. If you ever met him, and I remember the first time I met Horrie, I walked into his lounge room.

[22 : 22] He was sitting there on his chair because he couldn't move a lot in those days. And there was a light that shone from his face that was filled with Christ. You could see that the light in him was a very great light.

You could see it in his love of hearing the scriptures taught. He came here every week just to love to hear God speaking to him through the scriptures, read and proclaimed. You could see it in his actions.

And you could see it in his will. Now, I don't mean his decision-making. I mean his will. That is what he wrote down. You see, he knew that God was generous. And he was generous.

And I have it from his son that Horrie returned home from the mission field financially poor. But he invested what money he had wisely. And he also gave it away.

And we here at Holy Trinity will use that money to ensure that treasure is laid up in heaven for Horrie. And for the honour of Horrie's Lord and God.

[23 : 24] Let me say that the same thing could be said of Leon Morris in relation to this. Leon Morris, who was a member of this congregation for a number of years, invested the money that came from his books, the royalties.

And he was a prolific writer. So there were lots of royalties. He set up a foundation with that money. And I know someone who's on the board of that foundation and they love going three times a year to give money away.

To say, yeah, let's give it to this cause or that cause or whatever. And even today, that foundation gives money to gospel causes. Even today, you see, treasure is being laid up in heaven with that money.

Friends, you cannot serve God and money. You will either hate the one and love the other or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

So with which one does your heart lie? With which one does your heart lie? To which one are you devoted? Because you can't have your cake and eat it.

[24 : 34] You'll gradually shift all the way to one or all the way to the other. So let me urge you to flee to the good and generous God whom we know in Jesus and to lay up treasures in heaven.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who though he was rich yet for our sake became poor that we through his poverty might become rich.
Thank you for the great riches you have given us in Jesus. And Father, please help us to mimic our Lord and to be willing to become poor that others might become rich.
We pray that our hearts would overflow with generosity even as his heart does and yours does. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.