

Real Treasure

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[0 : 00] Matthew chapter 6 verses 19 through 24, bottom of page 5 in the New Testament section, the very last line in the second column, and the first three inches of the left hand column on page 6.

Now, you will agree with me, I think, that the most evocative word in the English language is sex. Everybody's ears prick up when they hear that word. The next most evocative word in the language, I think, is treasure.

Most of us, as kids, loved Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island. Most of us enjoyed the game Treasure Hunt when we were children.

Some of us, I'm quite sure, watch the bit of reality television called Treasure Hunters that is being screened at the present time. There's endless fascination in the idea of something precious being sought and found.

[1 : 26] And that, of course, is what the word treasure brings to mind. Something precious. Something of supreme value. Something that's worth any amount of effort to get hold of.

It was so in Jesus' day. One of his parables, you remember, tells of a man who discovered that there was treasure buried in a field, and he sold everything he had in order to buy the field and get the treasure.

Well, it's a very evocative word, and treasure is our theme as we look at this section of the Sermon on the Mount.

Remember what the Sermon on the Mount is. It's instruction for disciples. You get that in chapter 5 and verse 1.

His disciples came to him, and he opened his mouth and taught them. But there were crowds present as well, and the crowds, I suppose, seated themselves round the circle of Jesus and his disciples.

[2 : 39] And they were overhearing everything that Jesus said. And they had sufficient interest in what Jesus was saying to do that.

Well, yes, and the Sermon on the Mount should be heard as the living Lord Jesus still addressing anyone and everyone who has any degree of interest in Christian life at all.

As you know, we Christians maintain that Christian life is the only life worth living. Our Savior believed that, and in many different ways he taught that.

Well, if you're prepared at least to entertain that idea, and most certainly if you've already begun to take steps on the road of that real life, and you can say with truth and joy that Jesus is your Savior, your Lord, your Master, and you're seeking to follow him, well then, of course, the Sermon on the Mount is for you.

And I'm going to assume you're interested, and we're going to plunge into our passage on that basis. In the Sermon on the Mount, as in other of his teachings, Jesus teaches a great deal by the way that he hangs things together.

[4 : 15] A lot of the message, actually, is regularly the way that he connects things. And you have to think in order to make sure that you've seen the connection and can link things up.

We're going to see that here. We're halfway through Matthew chapter 6, and in the first half of the chapter, Jesus has been hammering away at the point that his disciples mustn't follow the hypocrisy, and that's the word he uses, so I use it, the hypocrisy of so many religious people who seem to have no interest except in being admired for being professed followers of God.

And now, in the second half of the chapter, he's going to hammer away at the point that we mustn't follow the example of the materialism of so many irreligious people for whom it seems nothing matters except the affairs of this life.

As far as Jesus is concerned, those folk have already made mistake number one, because this life is the path to another, and we shall see Jesus teaching that we should be living this life in light of the fact that there's another life coming.

That's what I was trying to express in what I said to the kids about birthday being the time to remember that life is like a bus journey.

[6 : 11] Many stops. Think of each birthday as another stop. It started when God gave you life, and it goes on until God ends your life.

And then, at the end of the journey in this world, you move on to the life that really matters, the life to which this life is simply the path.

The life that really matters is the life that goes on forever. The life that, one way or another, is lived in the presence of God, and that presence is inescapable.

And if you're not prepared for that life, it's going to be misery. And that, I believe, is the heart of the Bible doctrine of hell. And if you are prepared to meet the Lord, it's going to be joy.

Well, irreligious people lose sight of that, and so they go through this life as materialists. And here is Jesus spending half a chapter warning people against living that way.

[7 : 27] And our section, verses 19 through 24, are an introduction to the detailed making of that point with regard to the matter of worry and anxiety and the way that you look to the future, which is what he's going to deal with at the end of the section.

But here you've got the general statement. And it consists of three passages, all of which, from one standpoint, could be called parables, or illustrations, or analogies.

I prefer the word analogies myself. They're parallels to what we have to understand about our life.

And the question is, are you wise enough? Are you insightful enough to pick up the parallel and apply it to yourself?

Well, let's see if we are. Verses 19 and 20 and 21, first section, they ask us this question.

[8 : 49] What's the top priority of your life? The way it's expressed, there's a do and a don't here.

Don't lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. It's a very strong phrase in the Greek. Don't treasure up treasures is what Jesus literally says in the Greek, and I suppose in the Aramaic it was just the same.

Don't treasure up treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal. Those earthly treasures, whatever they are, are going to fly away the moment your back is turned.

No, you don't do that. But this is what you do, what you should do anyway. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust don't consume, where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. What's Jesus thinking of, we ask, as he speaks of treasure here on earth?

[10 : 05] Wealth, bank balance, success in whatever area you've set your stall out to achieve success, security, being able to feel that you're in good shape and your future is assured and you've nothing to worry about.

Jesus did a whole parable about that, if you remember. Parable about a goofy fellow who had a bumper harvest and the best he could think to do was to pull down his barns and build bigger ones so as to store it all up and then say to his soul, soul, you're safe for many years to come.

And then he has a heart attack and dies that night. What a fool, says the Lord. And you can only agree with his point. Well, we could go on listing treasures on earth which fly away.

But more important is that we should ask the question, what constitutes treasure in heaven? Well, whenever Jesus refers to heaven, it's always the place of God's presence.

Think of that. Treasure as God estimates pleasure. Treasure, I'm sorry. Treasure as he will confirm when we're giving account of ourselves to him that you did indeed lay up treasure in heaven.

[11 : 44] Treasure as I count treasure. Treasure in my sight. Well, all right. What is that, we ask? What sort of a reality is that?

Well, friends, it's a relationship. It's a relationship in which your daily business and mine, as Christians, as those who've received God's love and his saving grace in Christ, is to please him. Out of gratitude, yes. And in the knowledge that that's the way to a real welcome home when this life ends and the next one begins.

I don't suppose that I'm quite the oldest person in church this morning, but as you've already heard, I'm getting on. And I would be the biggest fool of all if I wasn't thinking about these things on a

regular basis.

It's never too early to start. And Jesus says, where your treasure is, there your heart will be.

[12 : 59] You know what the Bible means by heart? Well, it's the real you. The you inside. The you that people see from the outside.

The you on the surface, if I can put it that way. Out of your heart come the desires that drive you, the interests that occupy you, the concerns that shape your life.

If your treasure is to please God on a daily basis so that there'll be a joyful welcome home one day, well, your heart will be in heaven, as we sometimes say, and that's the right place for it.

I pass through this world just once, but I'm going home. That's what I think about. Well, that's the way to live, says the Lord Jesus.

And the way of wisdom for you and me is to practice that sort of living every day of our lives. So, what is the top priority of your life?

[14 : 19] And what's going to be the top priority from this moment onwards? There's a question for our consciences. Now, look at verses 22 and 23.

Jesus seems to change the subject. Well, it's a different illustration. The eye, he says, is the lamp of the body. You can see his thought.

If your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light. Yes, if you can see well, you will feel that you're living in the light all the time.

If you can't see well, you'll be peering, and things will still be fuzzy and uncertain, and you'll feel you're living in the twilight, in the dusk.

You can never see things as they really are. How do I know? Why, friends, because I've been there. Perhaps on my birthday, I'm allowed for once to be anecdotal.

[15 : 27] I was short-sighted and getting shorter so that my glasses got larger and the lenses thicker for 70 years.

Seven-zero. I went short-sighted, you see, fairly early in life. And last January, I had some very successful cataract surgery.

It isn't always as successful as in the mercy of God it was for me. But some of you have had cataract surgery, and I dare say that you could testify to the same sort of thing that I'm going to testify to now.

Once upon a time, I had to put my glasses on in order to see anybody clearly. Now, friends, I have to take them off in order to see people clearly.

Ah, there you are. And I can... And I can see the expressions on your faces. It's... An interesting range of expressions, actually.

[16 : 38] Some of you are wondering, I'm quite sure what on earth I'm talking about. Well... It is a fact, my friends, my eye man confirms it.

I now, as a result of the cataract surgery, have 20-20 vision in my right eye. And so I have to take off these reading glasses in order to see people, because, you know, when you've got reading glasses on, anything that's more than three or four feet away from your eyes is in a state of smudge.

But, well, as you see, it's a complete reversal of the way it used to be. And, quite frankly, if you'll excuse me for being maudlin for a moment, I do think of it as an early birthday present, and I say, thank you, Lord.

Well, this is the realm of reality that the Lord Jesus is plugging into. Sound eye means a body.

That means, by the way, the whole person. There are a number of places in the New Testament where the body is not just the physical frame, it's the person who lives in and through that physical frame as well.

[17 : 57] It's the whole of you. The whole person. Says Jesus, if your eye is working properly, your whole person will be full of light.

In other words, you'll be able to see what's there in front of you and you'll see it clearly. All right.

Question, the second question raised by these verses is this.

I asked you a moment ago, what is the top priority of your life? I ask you now, on the basis of this parable, what is the main problem of your life?

And I'm going to put it to you that for a lot of people, the main problem is that they can't see spiritual issues clearly.

they are like me with my reading glasses on at present, or me as I was without my earlier glasses before the surgery.

[19 : 07] And the tragedy is that in a day when we are surrounded by folk who are seeking only material values and material benefits, many who come to church on Sunday who would say, yes, we are Christians, they don't see this spiritual issue that we're talking about with any clarity at all.

And so they don't live in terms of pleasing the Lord, pleasing their God, as the top priority of their lives. And that's a very sad thing.

It means that they're not seeing straight, and so in God's eyes they're not living straight either. Look on now to verse 24, where Jesus, taking us along, you see, in these three parables on a single line of thought, gets us to this, which by now we ought to be concerned to get clear on.

Question again, what then is the key principle for your life? What's the top priority, I asked?

Well, what's the main problem? Well, what's the key principle for getting life right? And this is what he says now.

[20 : 51] No one can serve two masters. You should understand that the word serve means be a slave of.

And the masters are slave owners. And the whole world of thought is the world of slavery as slavery has always been.

That is, the slave is the property, the chattel, if you like, of his master. And there are no limits to his master's claim on him.

That's why it's impossible to be the slave of two masters. And Jesus develops the thought, in any case, if you tried, you'd find that you hated the one and loved the other, or you'd be devoted to the one and despised the other.

You can't serve God, and mammon, that's wealth, possessions, the things of this world, the treasure on earth that flies away.

[22 : 06] You can't serve God and spend your time laying up treasures on earth. Wisdom says don't try. God says the key principle for your life must be to love the master who loves you, to love the father who gave his son to die for your sins, to love Jesus who gave himself on the cross in order to put our sins away and open the life gate for us.

We have been greatly loved. And the only proper way of life is the way of great and exclusive responsive love on our own part.

Put that way, it seems very clear, doesn't it? And yet, you know, so few people see it with the clarity of 2020 spiritual vision.

God's God's love so we ask what are we to do? We are to ask our Lord who loves us to use his word through the ministry of the spirit who dwells in our hearts to make us very clear on this question of priorities.

Very clear on our problem of fuzzy spiritual vision. And very clear on the key principle of right living, which is to serve with all your heart the Lord who has loved and redeemed you.

[23 : 59] Now let me put it this way. It all adds up to this question. Is your heart, is my heart, in the right place?

You can see what the right place is. It will be a heart adoring the God who has loved and saved you. It will be a heart surrendered to the God who has loved and saved you.

It will be a heart totally given to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ and his heavenly father. It will be, if we can put it this way, a single minded heart.

The word for healthy or sound, when Jesus talked about the eye being sound and working properly, is the word from which we get our phrase, the single heart.

God, it means the focused vision. Of course it does. And I can express my question that way. Have we yet achieved or allowed the Lord to give us, that's a better way of putting it, have we yet allowed the Lord to give us the focused vision, which makes laying up treasure in heaven our top priority, and makes the service of our loving Lord the key principle of our daily living.

[25 : 38] Is your heart in the right place? Can you see spiritual issues as you need to see spiritual issues?

things. And once again, I take off my glasses so that I can clearly see the look on your faces. Yes, thank God, some of you are taking this seriously.

I can see that. God, grant that we all will. And have we yet learned to be happy slaves in the service of our Lord and Master Jesus?

Let me round it off by reading the solemn words with which each of these parables ends. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be.

If the light that's in you, the capacity that is to see clearly spiritual issues is darkness, if you're in the spiritual equivalent of a state of short sight, how great is the darkness?

[26 : 51] You cannot serve God and mammon. Could Jesus make it clearer to thinking people? Don't see how he could. So may he write these words in our hearts.

And may we, from this moment onward, get it right at heart level. Our top priority right, our key principle right, and our prayer for God's help not to be bogged down by the problem of fuzzy spiritual vision.

Get that right too. And so may God bless us as he wants to do. and so may we bring glory to his name as we should want to do.

Yes, God bless us all. Amen.