



Matthew 6:19–21

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Reflection

The Sermon on the Mount is about Christian counter-culture; who we are and how we are to live as members of the kingdom of God within a culture that does not honour Jesus as Lord. It is three chapters long. After teaching us who we are as members of the kingdom of God in chapter five, Jesus teaches us how to live this out in chapter six. The phrase he uses is how we 'practice our righteousness.' As we've just seen, the first half of chapter six has been concerned with how we practice our righteousness in the traditional religious areas of giving to the needy, prayer and fasting. The second half of chapter six now turns to how we are to practice

our righteousness in the secular world around us. But in essence the message of both halves of the chapter is the same. Christians are called to be different. Members of the kingdom aren't to share in the hypocrisy of the religious establishment, or the materialism of our secular culture. We're different.

If hypocrisy was the colour of the religious practices of the Jews in Jesus' day then materialism provides the necessary background for us to understand the culture of the Gentiles. Two thousand years on, not much has changed. And so now, as Jesus moves from considering how a member of the kingdom of God should live in religious circles, to how they should conduct themselves amidst their secular culture, materialism is never far from the surface

as we see in today's passage:

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In verse 19 Jesus gives us a command: do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth. He goes on to clarify the nature of the treasure he is talking about by suggesting that, whatever it is, it is at risk of moths and vermin – some translations also include rust – as well as being at risk

of theft. So it is clear that the treasure he's talking about is material possessions. Today this might call to mind term deposits, share portfolios, and investment properties but life in the ancient world was very different.

Nothing was safe in the ancient world. There were no banks back then, and if there were, they weren't trusted, and so all your valuable possessions would be 'stored up' in your home. But even then, rats and mice would eat your grain, and moths would get into your clothes, worms would destroy anything buried in the ground, and of course with houses made of unfired bricks and thatched roofs, thieves would even dig through the walls of your home or get in through your roof and steal whatever was kept there. For us today life

is markedly different and yet exactly the same – instead of rats and rust we use terms like: inflation, stock market crashes, redundancy, get-rich-quick-schemes and recessions. 2000 years on Jesus' command is just as relevant and just as true. Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth because they're uncertain even in this life, and worthless in eternity.

Instead, store up treasure in heaven which will last on into eternity. But what is this treasure that Jesus is speaking about? Well, at its most basic level it must be anything that have eternal value, which must be to do with people; ourselves and others. Heaven and earth will pass away, but humankind lives on forever. And so treasure in heaven at one level must include growth in Christlike character, growth in

the knowledge of Jesus, and most especially our active endeavours to introduce other people to Jesus. In addition, this chapter so far has regularly pointed to rewards in heaven for righteous living which Jesus has said includes: giving to the poor; prayer for God's purposes, yourself and others; and fasting. Finally, our Father is in heaven, and so anything we do that brings glory or pleasure to him must also be included in storing up treasure in heaven.

But this is more than a matter of what will or will not last. Jesus concludes our passage with his main point,

‘For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.’

In the bible, the ‘heart’ is the core of a per-

son's being, the real inner person. What a person values is driven by the nature of a person's heart, but our hearts are slippery and deceitful, and Jesus speaks often about the dangers and enticements of worldly wealth. In a couple of verses he will remind us that no person can serve two masters, we either serve God or money. And famously Jesus has said elsewhere that life does not consist in an abundance of possessions (Luke 12:15), posing the question 'What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?' (Matt 16:26)

Think

And so today's passage contains a command that is backed up by a warning. 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on

earth' 'for where your treasure is, there your heart is also.' Please take some time now to deeply consider Jesus' command and his warning. Are you being obedient to his command? Or are you storing up treasures on earth? Are you at risk when it comes to his warning? Does your heart lie more in your pursuits of wealth than in your pursuits for Christ? One of the commentators that I read said that in this passage that Jesus commands Christians not to accumulate possessions they do not use for his work. Do you agree? I think I'm coming around to his position. There is no problem in earning a lot of money if God has blessed you with the skills and life situation to do so. The problem is not using your resources for eternal ends. A lifestyle of comfort and luxury and indulgence is squandering God's blessing at

best; at worst, it betrays a heart that has been beguiled by the prince of this world into preferring the things of this world to citizenship in heaven.

No matter your financial situation take a moment now to consider how you might better use what God has given you, your material wealth and possessions, for kingdom purposes. How can you use these blessings to grow in your Christian character, and to do good in our world that reflects Christ's love to those around us and brings glory to him? And perhaps most importantly, how can you use your wealth and possessions to bring people to know Christ?

Pray

Then spend some time in prayer. It may be that you need to confess a wandering heart. It may be that God has convicted you of a lack of generosity and that you need to pray for the courage to let go of some of the wealth that you have for your own spiritual health, as well as to the great benefit of people elsewhere in the world who are in dire physical and spiritual need. Or perhaps long ago you chose Jesus over career – but there are moments when you falter, and have regrets. If this is the case then pray that the Holy Spirit would strengthen your resolve and refresh your spirit by the truth we find in our passage this morning. Wherever this word finds you, pray that it would be living and active in your heart this morning and bring out the change in your life that God desires.