

Treasures upon the Earth

Jesus had much to say to His disciples about their attitude toward money and the things money can buy. He warned again and again that a desire for wealth, ease, or comfort in this life can lead one away from God and the life God has called us to live. Like many of the words in this sermon, they are very difficult. There are extremes that must be avoided and long hours of meditation and careful thought to be done. Multitudes simply ignore the words and give them little thought. Others have taken them literally and sold everything to live a life of self-denial. There is no question that Jesus' opening words on the subject in His Sermon on the Mount were designed to create a powerful response in His people.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Mt. 6:19-21

Sprinkled through the sermon is the use of the imperative mode which in the Greek language is used for commands. In this chapter they are found in Verse 1: "take heed;" Verse 3: "Let not know;" Verse 6 "enter;" Verse 6 "pray" Verse 9 "pray;" Verse 16 "be not;" Verse 17 "annoint" and again in Verse 17 "wash not." These words require and demand a response. They are not simply teaching or suggestions. Jesus commanded all His disciples not to "lay up" treasures upon the earth. If we hear these words and do them we are wise, building our house on rock, but if we hear them and do not do them our house is built on sand. His disciples must "lay up" treasure in heaven.

thesaurizo ... to gather and lay up, to heap up, store up: to accumulate riches... (Thayer ;2343)

With the above Jesus demanded that instead of "gathering" "laying up," "storing up," and "accumulating" treasures on the earth, we should be "gathering" "laying up," "storing up," and "accumulating" treasures in heaven. Jesus and His apostles used this word frequently to describe things that can be gathered and stored.

*thesaurizo ... "to lay up, store up" (akin to thesauros, "a treasury, a storehouse, a treasure"), is used of "laying" up treasures, on earth, Matt 6:19; in Heaven, v. 20; in the last days, James 5:3, RV, "ye have laid up your treasure" (KJV, "ye have heaped treasure together"); in Luke 12:21, "that layeth up treasure (for himself)"; in 1 Cor 16:2, of money for needy ones (here the present participle is translated "in store," lit. "treasuring" or "storing," the "laying by" translating the preceding verb *tithemi*, see No. 1);..." (Vine's NT:2343)*

Most notably, this same word is used in 1 Cor 16:2 as what we are to do when we give upon the first day of the week.

Throughout this section this theme will not vary. With the finite amount of time and resources available to each of us as stewards of the things God has given, there is a great conflict each disciple must face. When focusing on this life and gaining things in this life, we must take away from our ability to lay up treasure in heaven. When focusing on heaven and laying up treasure in heaven, we must sacrifice gaining treasure in this life.

Jesus final statement above says it all. What we treasure and "lay up" will affect where our heart, affection and energy are directed. His point is simple. If we place our treasures in heaven, then our heart will be in heaven, but if our treasures are on this earth, then our heart will also be on this earth. Think about it! If we plan our whole life for retirement, storing up vast amounts of money and making great plans, where would our heart naturally be? But if we took that same money and used it for the kingdom and for almsgiving, our heart would be somewhere else entirely.

These words run in a different direction than the attitudes our culture have taught us about money. With the multitudes of blessings available today, and the wealth that can be gained just by working hard, it is often difficult to find the proper line. Most of us have far more possessions and gadgets than even the wealthiest had in the days of Christ. Does Jesus forbid us to own such things? Is it wrong for a disciple to own a home, two cars, a flat screen TV, or expensive jewelry?

It is clear from the Old Testament that God never forbid people from being wealthy. Abraham had great wealth as did David and Solomon. It is not the having of wealth, it is the "laying up" that is at issue here. Jesus and His apostles spoke many times about the exact place to put the line. Consider Jesus words in Luke. This parable was given to help us grasp exactly where the line lies.

And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." 16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Lk.

12:15-21

The central issue in this warning is the obligation and duty God gave each of us as stewards of what He has blessed us with. Remember Peter's words: "*according as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God*" (1Pet. 4:10). The problem with this "*rich man*" was not that his land was very productive or that he was rich. The problem was he had stored up "*treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*" He was not ministering his gifts to those in need. Even when he had everything he could want or need, his mind did not turn to God, he still thought only of himself. This is exactly what greed does. It leads us to minimize what God asked in order to have more for ourselves. As Jesus ended His discussion in Luke, this was exactly the conclusion he drew.

33 Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Lk. 12:33-34

When we hoard, fail to give alms, or fail to give as we have been prospered, we fail to make purses that cannot get old, and have little treasure in heaven. This was the problem that faced the rich young ruler who came to Jesus willing to do anything to gain eternal life. Even as Jesus pointed it out to him, he could not face it and refused to do anything about it.

So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 23 But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich. 24 And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! 25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Lk. 18:22-25

What about us? If Jesus asked us to do this, could we? The truth is that we are all on the honor system to do it. We are to consider ourselves stewards of all God has given us and we are to use all that we have to gain treasure in heaven and to make friends in heaven by the way we use our money here.

And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. 10 He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. 11 Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? 13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." 14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. 15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. Lk. 16:9-15

The line is clear. If we are using the majority of our money for our own comfort, gathering up possessions for our own future, then how can we avoid the charge of laying up treasures on earth? When we see money as a powerful tool we can use to help others and serve God, then our money is being used to keep our heart in the right place. When a need arises and we are generous and ready to give, our heart and treasures are in heaven. But if we become uncomfortable and seek for a way to avoid giving anything or as little as possible, then our heart and our laying up is on the earth. There is nothing wrong with being rich, only greater responsibilities to use it and greater temptations not to.

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. 1Tim. 6:17-19

When we have money, we have the obligation to share it with others, to be willing to have fellowship with those who do not have, and fellowship with God who promised to help His people when they are in need and often uses the generosity of His people to do it. If our treasure and heart are on this earth, then it will be difficult to even see what Jesus is saying. We may find ourselves like the rich young ruler struggling even under the gravest needs to find the courage and faith to sacrifice. Even worse, we may like the Pharisees who were lovers of money scoff at what our Lord has revealed. It is not impossible for us to even rob God of the things we owe him.

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. Mal. 3:8-9

Money has a tendency to skew our thinking, leading us to see things far differently than the Scriptures reveal. This is why Jesus makes his next point about the lamp of the body.

A Treasure Worth All that We Have

Perhaps the clearest example Jesus gave regarding these things is the parable of the treasure and pearl of great price.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, 46 who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. Matt 13:44-46

Laying up treasure in heaven occurred when these men saw the value of the kingdom of heaven. With only so much time, money and opportunities available a decision must be made. Where will our heart, zeal, desire and excitement go? Where will our hopes and dreams center? In listening to Paul, we can better understand Jesus:

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ... 12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Phil 3:7-9, 12-14

When Paul found the treasure he found that all must be sold. He therefore laid up his treasures in heaven and where his treasure was, there was his heart also.

The Lamp of the Body

On the first day of creation God created light. Today, through the sun, that light shines into our world. When light reflects off the beautiful things of this world, we see clearly the beauty, complexity and wonder of the creation God has made. Those whose eyes are clear and working properly, have their whole body filled and properly directed by this light. In the physical realm, we call the process of clouding a cataract. In a cataract, the light cannot pass through the lense and clarity is reduced.

"A cataract is a clouding of the lens inside the eye which leads to a decrease in vision. It is the most common cause of blindness... Visual loss occurs because opacification of the lens obstructs light from passing and being focused on to the retina at the back of the eye.

When this begins, colors become muted, details become blurred, and the joy of seeing the stars, the beauty of a flower or the faces of those we love begins to fade. We are fortunate to have created an artificial lense to stop this process and restore the ability of light to pass through.

Jesus took this principle and offered us a short parable or illustration. These same principles are also true of the spiritual light Jesus came to reveal.

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! Mt. 6:22-23

Only our spiritual eyes can behold this light and they can only see it if the eye is single. This was prophesied by Isaiah many years earlier. *"The people that sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them that sat in the region and shadow of death, to them did light spring up(Mt. 4:13-18).* Yet not everyone could see this light or was even aware of its presence. The desire for wealth was one of the reasons why this was so. The light Jesus brought from heaven is a recurring theme for the apostle John who spoke of it often in his gospel.

*4 In Him was life, and the life was **the light of men.** 5 And **the light shines in the darkness**, and the darkness did not comprehend it... 19 And this is the condemnation, that **the light has come into the world**, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."... 12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "**I am the light of the world.** He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."... 35 Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer **the light is with you.** Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. 36 **While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.**" Jn. 1:4-5; 3:19-21 Jn. 8:12; 12:35-36*

Once we understand this, Jesus words become clearer and easier to understand. The lamp of our body is the eye of spiritual discernment which comes through faith.

while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. ... For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2Cor. 4:18; 5:7

With these "eyes" we perceive the spiritual things that are all around us. When this "eye" is single,

the unseen things are prominent. We see Jesus as Lord and the light He came to reveal shines on everything. Our whole body is full of light.

The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. 35 Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. 36 If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light." Lk 11:34-36

We are aware of the spiritual realities and see clearly the obstacles and stumbling blocks that could hurt us. Jesus was clearly warning that treasure on earth can lead to double vision.

then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' 18 "And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. 19 Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. Deut. 8:17-19

because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened Rom. 1:21

When trying to see the seen and the unseen at the same time we must compromise. When making such compromises we become influenced by evil things and our entire body slowly fills with darkness. Jesus warned that wealth can change our eye and make it evil. If our eyes cannot behold the light Jesus brought on the subject of wealth and how to use it, then our whole body will be full of darkness. Sadly many think they are walking in the light when they are really still walking in darkness.

But the path of the just is like the shining sun, That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. 19 The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble. Pr. 4:18-19

No Man can Serve two Masters

The light that keeps our eye single is the realization that if money has any hold on us at all, it is at the cost of our loyalty to God. We are either fully loyal to God or we have given some of that loyalty to money. There is no middle ground.

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Mt. 6:24

Think about it!

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. 1Tim. 6:6-10

Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. Mt. 13:22

It is impossible to give God the quality of service He demands while at the same time seeking to become wealthy. They are two different paths leading in opposite directions. Think carefully: Since where our treasure is there will our heart be, the path to wealth leads the heart in the wrong direction. Since the light that enters our eye is truly darkness when wealth becomes a goal, seeking wealth leads to spiritual blindness.

Those seeking the spiritual riches of faith and sacrifice to God are walking in a far different direction than those seeking treasures of gold and silver. Just like the rich young man, the apostles, and Moses, each of us must choose which one we will walk. *You cannot serve God and mammon* because they are mutually exclusive. You can only hold to one or the other, you can only love or despise one or the other. It is not emotionally or intellectually possible to see the true riches of Christ as being the most important while at the same time seeing the wealth of this world as important. Nothing can be compared to the spiritual treasures God offers. One either sees that or they do not. Those who see serve God and those who do not serve mammon. The choice could not be made any clearer.

How much better to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver. Pr. 16:16

This exactly mirrors how our view of treasure impacts our ability to see clearly. If the light by which we direct our spiritual lives is actually darkness, then how great that darkness is! This is Christ's judgment upon all who view things in this life as treasure, and do not see the true treasures from above. Like the young man, they make bad decisions because they are walking in the dark. They bump into things, then stumble and fall over them.

What is Mammon

Since this word is only used twice in the NT and both in the same context, the translators have little to work with. *Mammon* It is NT:3126

mamonas of Aramaic origin (confidence, i.e. (*wealth personified... avarice deified*) (Strong's NT:3126)

mamonas ... (an Aramaic word): wealth and riches, with a strongly negative connotation - 'worldly wealth, riches.' ... 'so I tell you: make friends for yourselves with unrighteous worldly wealth' Luke 16:9; ... 'you cannot serve God and riches' Lk 16:13. (Greek-English Lexicon NT:3126)

"And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by **unrighteous mammon**, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. 10 He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. 11 Therefore if you have not been faithful in **the unrighteous mammon**, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? 13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and **mammon**." 14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. 15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. Lk. 16:9-15

- 1 What can a desire for money lead us to do?
- 2 What does Jesus command regarding laying up?
- 3 How can one find this line in our culture today?
- 4 What was the real issue with the rich farmer who wanted larger barns?
- 5 Was it that he was rich or that his land yielded much?
- 6 What does it mean "is not rich toward God"
- 7 What do we have to do to make purses that do not get old?
- 8 What did the rich ruler do when Jesus told him to sell all that he had and give to the poor?
- 9 Can we use our money in this life to make friends of those in the life to come?
- 10 When a need arises what do we have to do to be certain money doesn't have to tight a hold on us?
- 11 What did Paul want Timothy to charge the rich?
- 12 What do we need to be doing today to be certain we are fulfilling this?
- 13 What did God create on the first day of creation?
- 14 With good eyes what does light do for us today?
- 15 If we are blind what does light do for us?
- 16 In what realm is Jesus the light of the world?
- 17 How can we be certain the eyes of our spiritual discernment are seeing this light clearly?
- 18 Can we serve God and mammon?
- 19 If we try to do so what will happen sooner or later?