

Sermon 38, What True Worship Looks Like, Matthew 6:19-24

For anything becomes polluted when it is mixed with a nature that is inferior, although not polluted of its kind; for gold is polluted even by pure silver, if it be mixed with it: so also our mind becomes polluted by the desire after earthly things, although the earth itself be pure of its kind and order.--Augustine

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Proposition: If the world and its treasures engross your attention, your longings, and your service, then you are an idolater. The cure for this idolatry is to devote your longings, your attention, and your service to the true God.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this morning to a new section of this great sermon. Remember, in chapter 5 we looked at Jesus' teaching on the character and destiny of the Christian, expressed in the form of 8 beatitudes and 2 similitudes. Then we saw Jesus' teaching on His relationship to the Old Testament and the Old Testament law, from 5:19-48. Then, chapter 6 deals with heart religion, as expressed in giving, prayer, and fasting. Included in that was the 11 weeks we spent looking at the Lord's Prayer. Today we begin a new section of the Sermon on the Mount, looking at true worship and anxiety. Jesus rebuked hypocrisy in the

first half of this chapter; here, in the second half, He teaches what pure religion actually looks like. Specifically, He begins by talking about worship, and He names three characteristics of the true worshipper. The true worshipper has his longings, his attention, and his service focused on God. Conversely, if the world and its treasures engross your attention, your longings, and your service, then you are an idolater. The cure for this idolatry is to devote your longings, your attention, and your service to the true God.

I. The True Worshipper Keeps His Heart in Heaven, vv. 19-21

First, then, we see Jesus' teaching that the true worshipper has his heart in heaven. Jesus begins with a direct command: don't lay up treasures on earth.

A. Our Treasures Are Anything We Value

What are treasures? Literally, they are things you treasure. Anything you value is a treasure to you. Most of us may think of pirate booty and strong oaken chests overflowing with gold and jewels, or the hoard of Smaug the Dragon, a vast pile of coins, cups, armor, precious stones, and various other wondrous treasures that Smaug had stolen from the dwarves and men of Laketown. And that is certainly one form of treasure. However, my guess is that none of you actually have strong oaken chests overflowing with precious metals and precious stones. None of you has an Arkenstone socked away in the backyard under the apple tree. Does that mean that you have no treasures? Of course not. Most of us have a certain amount of attachment to our cars, our bank accounts, our children, and maybe our electronic devices too. How do you know whether you find these things valuable? Well, how do you react when they are damaged? When your car is dented, when your child spills a glass of Kool-Aid into your laptop computer, when your other child shatters the screen of your tablet, and so on, do you take it calmly? If you aren't upset, do you wish that you could be upset?

In any case, brothers and sisters, treasures are anything we treasure, whether that's our movie collection, our books, our home decor, our learning and knowledge, our reputation or position — if it's valuable to you, then in some sense it is a treasure. Those who don't know Christ do oftentimes know the value of money, and they spend their lives trying to acquire pleasure, possessions, and power. They are trying to get as many valuable things as possible while on Earth.

B. Earthly Treasures Are Transient

But Jesus' point here is clear: earthly treasures are passing. Things on earth, no matter how valuable they are, simply don't last. Moths eat clothing. Rust eats metals. Thieves take whatever time and weather and insects don't consume. None of us seriously expect our houses to last for a century without maintenance, remodeling, residing, and so on. None of us expect that the cars we're driving now will still be on the road in 2050 — and if they are, they will have had some major mechanical overhauls in the meantime. Surely, one would think that the point Jesus is making here is uncontroversial. Nothing earthly lasts! And yet if we look around, we see people obsessed with the temporary as if it would be good for centuries, for millennia. Many more

people are thinking about how they will spend this month's paycheck than are thinking about where they will be in the year 2150.

So Jesus tells us not to lay up treasure on earth. Now, does that mean that we are not allowed to have here on earth anything we value? No, that's not what it means. Jesus values us, and we are on earth. We are called to honor our parents and take care of our children, including by providing for them when they can't provide for themselves. The Apostle Paul asked for his cloak, his books, and his parchments. He clearly valued those things to some extent.

Well then, where's the bright line? It's here: do you place your hope in this thing you value? Do you seek ultimate fulfillment from it? It's not a sin to have things on earth that you find valuable. The sin is to act as if those things are the most valuable. The sin is to rate your bank account above your relationship with God, or to rate your iPad screen as more important than your child's soul. Jesus tells us that the kind of treasure He's talking about is the kind in which the heart delights itself. If your heart is mostly delighting itself in anticipating your next vacation, or mostly delighting itself in the thought of the newest tech goodie you're purchasing, then you are probably laying up treasure on earth.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones suggests this diagnostic test: at the time of a general election, do you find yourself believing that one party is altogether right and the other altogether wrong? He says that if you do, then it is almost certainly because you have a vested interest in protecting your stuff, your earthly treasures. If you are unable to see how the opposing party could be right about anything, it's likely because you are thinking with your wallet instead of with your brain.

I hesitate in some ways to preach that as a test because I do indeed think that one of our political parties is completely wrong, and I can't imagine thinking differently. Now, I certainly don't think the other party is 100% right. I think one party is really wrong and the other is sort of wrong. But the bottom line is that I largely fail Lloyd-Jones's test for laying up treasure on earth, and that means that I need to spend some time with God settling that issue, just between Him and me. Do you fail this test of worldly-mindedness? Are you laying up treasures on earth, as measured by your willingness to believe candidates who promise economic growth?

C. Heavenly Treasures Are Anything that Will Last Forever

So Jesus tells us not to lay up treasures on earth, but to lay up treasures in Heaven. What is a treasure in Heaven? Ultimately, it is anything that will last forever. The distinguishing mark of an earthly treasure is its transience. The distinguishing mark of a heavenly treasure is its durability.

What kinds of things last forever? I can only think of two: people, and the good or bad deeds done to them. Every one of us here will endure forever, either living in God's presence or dying in Hell. Bad deeds done to people are, of course, treasures in Hell, if you will. They are what will guarantee you a hotter flame and a deeper pit there. But good deeds done to people are treasures in Heaven. Every person you love who is presently in Heaven is a treasure there waiting for you. Remember, a treasure is anything you value, and the more you value it, the more of a treasure it is. If your mother is in Heaven, she's a treasure there waiting for you. If your baby

daughter or baby sister is in Heaven, as mine is, she's a treasure there waiting for you. If you love and value Jesus, then He is a treasure waiting for you in Heaven.

1. Heavenly Treasures Are Not Exclusively Future

But that way of putting it leaves out half of the picture. It makes it sound like Heavenly treasures are completely future. They're something you'll get when you die, and not before. But that is not what Jesus is saying here. Though the Bible does teach the virtue of delayed gratification, that's not what's principally in view here. Rather, Jesus is simply telling us to stock Heaven with our treasures. That is, keep the things you value most there. Let's just look at the prime example. If you're a Christian, then you are on the record as saying that you value Jesus more than everything else in the world put together. Does Jesus live in Heaven? Yes, He does. So does that mean you can't enjoy Him until you get there? Not at all. Part of why we come to church is to enjoy Jesus. Part of why we read our Bibles, pray together, and sing together at home is to enjoy Jesus. To say that the things you value are in Heaven is not necessarily to say that they are inaccessible; it is just to say that they can't be lost. You see, according to Scripture we are in some sense already in Heaven. As soon as you become a Christian, you are seated with Christ in the Heavenly places. That's what Ephesians 2:6 says.

Heaven is your true home; you already partly live there. So to have the things you value there does not leave you unable to enjoy them.

How can you enjoy your loved ones when they're in Heaven? How can you enjoy your spiritual treasures when they're in Heaven? Only by reframing your paradigm. We are born thinking that what we can see is real, and that what we can't see is irrelevant. Our culture re-emphasizes these ideas to us at every turn. But Jesus tells us here that these ideas are flat-out wrong. Putting the things you value most in Heaven is not just spiritually wise; it is the only thing that makes sense, because earthly valuables are so transient. So are you investing in Heaven? Are you placing the things you value most up there, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God? Are the things in Heaven, the people there and Jesus and God the Father, what your affections go out toward? When your paradigm is that Heaven is most important, that spiritual life with God is what really counts, then you will begin to enjoy your treasures in Heaven. Then you will be glad to spend time with Jesus.

2. Heavenly Treasures Are Created through Giving, Matt. 19:21

Well, "treasures in Heaven" are mentioned again in the Bible only in the story of the Rich Young Ruler, where Jesus tells us how to get treasures in Heaven. "Jesus said to him, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me'" (Mat 19:21 ESV). So how do you lay up treasures in Heaven? You have to do it through generosity. When you give away things you value on earth, what are you doing? You're showing that you value enduring treasures in Heaven more than passing treasures on Earth. Is Jesus saying that, dollar-for-dollar, we can put our money in a Heavenly trust fund? Is the idea that if you liquidate all your assets on earth and distribute the (say) \$500,000 you come up with to the poor that when you die, a half-million "Heaven dollars" will be waiting for you? It

seems not. Such an idea is obviously absurd. Part of the idea of Heaven is that we will all live as guests of God, and that He will provide for our food, housing, transportation, leisure activities, and so on. You won't need that half-million in Heaven. In short, you can't take a passing earthly dollar and convert it into an enduring Heavenly dollar. Rather, as I understand it, Jesus is saying that giving away money will show very clearly to everyone, including you, that you value Heaven more than earth. Joy in Heaven means more to you than dollars on earth. But of course, these things work both ways. You can't give money away for the sake of Heaven unless you're persuaded that Heaven is more worth having than money. At the same time, giving the money away will help you believe in Heaven that much more, because you've committed yourself, and acting on your beliefs make them stronger. In that light, therefore, you will have things you value in Heaven. Your good deeds will be there, preparing a warm welcome for you from everyone you've helped and done good to. At any rate, that's how it seems to me. Treasure in Heaven needs to be conceived in terms of people and relationships, not in terms of stocks, bonds, and capital assets.

D. Our Hearts Follow Our Treasure

Well, Jesus tells us that the bottom line is that our hearts will follow our treasure. The things you value are where your heart is. When you hear about floods in Florida or tornadoes in Oklahoma, it suddenly takes on a whole new dimension of interest when that's where your grandkids live. Your heart is with your grandkids and the other people you love on earth. Well, in the same way, your heart has to be in Heaven with Jesus. The way to get it there is not to say, "I'm going to try really hard to get my heart to Heaven." No. The way to get your heart to Heaven is to really and truly value what's in Heaven — that is, Jesus and your fellow saints whom you so dearly love. If Christ and His people are where your heart is at, then your heart is in Heaven. But if your heart is mostly in shopping, or eating, or relaxing, or reading, or being entertained, then you know that your treasure is on earth. What do you value? God, Jesus, people, and relationships — the enduring things? Or do you value stuff, money, and experiences? Find out where your heart is. That will tell you what you love and what you value.

II. The True Worshipper Keeps His Eyes Fixed on Heaven, vv. 22-23

Jesus goes on to explain true worship from a different angle. He tells us that the true worshipper fixes his eyes on heaven. Just as Heaven has to have your love, so it has to have your attention. What are you looking at?

A. The Eye (Ideally) Illuminates the Body

You have to think in different terms than we are used to thinking to understand Jesus' words here. He says that the eye is the body's lamp. What does that mean? Well, I want all of you to close your eyes. What do you see? Darkness. Now open them. You see light. We tend to think in terms of what we learned in science class about how the light comes in the lens at the front of the eye and then hits the image receptor at the back of the eye, where it is converted into a signal that the brain can process as a visual image. But Jesus wants you to think about sight differently. Imagine, if you will, that your eye is a window into your body. When it's closed, light is

excluded. But when you open your eyes, your body is flooded with light. That's the picture here. If the eye is working properly, you're lit up inside. You've got plenty of light coming in and illuminating you. But if the eye is bad, then you have no light inside you. You might think you do, but Jesus warns us that if what we think is light is really darkness, then we are really and truly swallowed up in darkness.

Now, what is this illustration supposed to mean?

B. A Single Eye Looks Directly to God, not Sidelong at the World

Only this: that a good eye, or a single eye (the word means both things) looks only to God, not sidelong at the world. We all know what a sidelong glance is. It's where you're looking at something but trying to hide the fact that you're looking at it. Instead of openly turning your head and gazing at something, you pretend you're looking off at something else while secretly switching your eyes toward the thing you really want to see.

Well, just as the previous verses said that your heart must be in Heaven, so Jesus says that your eyes must be fixed on Heaven. Where is your attention? What are you looking at? To use a ridiculous example, you might have your attention caught by a bunny rabbit on your front lawn. Based on this bunny rabbit, you might step back into the street to take a picture, only to be hit by a truck that you didn't see because you were so focused on the bunny. Where is your attention? Is it on the things of this world, or is it on the things of God? Can you tell me more about what you watched on TV last week than what you read in the Bible? Can you tell me more about food prices than about answered prayers?

C. An Eye Fixed on Transient Treasures Only Darkens the Body

If you can, you might think you know quite a bit. But Jesus says that an eye fixed on TV shows, or the Nasdaq, or the Middle East, or anything else that is passing away, is really only darkening the body.

Now, does this mean that you're not allowed to know anything about the world? Again, I don't think so. Jesus clearly knew some things about the world, such as how to get to Capernaum. The point, as above, seems to be that if your attention terminates on this world, and never goes beyond it, then you are really only in darkness. In fact, what you think is "light" — your tremendous knowledge of baseball statistics, or American history, or stock indexes, or whatever it might be — is really of no value, because your eyes are focused on the wrong things. It's not a sin to know about the world, and even to value that knowledge to some degree. But it is absolutely wrong for the world to have your full attention, and for you to live as though you have nothing else to look at. You may know about the world, but only for the sake, ultimately, of knowing the God who made that world.

III. The True Worshiper Has only One God, v. 24

Well, Jesus puts it most clearly in this verse. Not only does a true worshiper value God more than anything else, and give God his full attention; a true worshiper does not let anything else compete with God.

A. To Serve a God Is Ultimately to Worship Him

I have titled this sermon “What True Worship Looks Like” because of this verse. When Jesus says “serve,” He uses the word for “serve as a slave.” But to “serve” can also mean to “worship.” Think of Jesus’ reply to Satan, using the word of Moses: “Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Mat 4:10 ASV). While the two Greek words are different, the idea boils down to the same thing: if you serve something or someone exclusively, with a total life dedication, that can also be called worship.

1. Living for this World Is Mammon Worship

Looking sidelong at the world, valuing the world above God — that is, Jesus tells here, the worship of Mammon. This is simply the Semitic word for money or possessions; many modern translations have eliminated the transliteration “Mammon” in favor of the simple translation “money.” You can’t live for money and simultaneously live for God. You can’t have your heart and eyes focused on the world, and be a true servant of Jesus Christ. You just can’t! That’s all there is to it, says Jesus.

Do you live for this world? If you couldn’t have your Netflix, your coffee, your sunsets, your air-conditioned home, would you still find life worth living? If your bank account was emptied, your possessions destroyed or stolen, would the core aspects of your life be shaken or stable? I know you all, and I think that your life would be stable. It would be hard for any of us to lose all those things. But I think you would handle it well, because you really do know and trust Jesus. Be encouraged, brothers and sisters. You are serving God! Just beware that you don’t coast on that service and begin to serve Mammon.

2. Living for God Is True Worship

Living for the sake of God, doing everything you do in order to please Him, is true worship. True worship isn’t a once-a-week thing. True worship is a lifestyle. You aren’t worshipping God here on Sunday mornings unless you are serving Him all the rest of the week, too.

B. The True God’s Service Is Total and Exclusive

Indeed, we can summarize our passage this morning by saying that ultimately, service or worship of the true God is total and exclusive.

1. It Demands the Heart

You have to give God your heart. You must value Him above all else.

2. It Demands the Eyes

You have to give God your eyes. When you become a believer, you promise that you will not look to anything else for your ultimate comfort and satisfaction.

3. It Demands the Hands

This word “serve” shows that God demands your hands. You must work for Him.

4. It Demands that You Forsake All Others

Don't try to serve money. Don't focus on this earth. Don't pile up everything you value here. Keep on valuing Christ more than anything else. Invest generously in relationships and in people and in God's Kingdom, and you will have treasures in Heaven that will never grow old. Amen.