

Wholehearted Generosity

Wholehearted Contribution

Matthew 6:19-21

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Scripture

Three weeks ago I began a four-week series of messages titled, *Wholehearted Generosity*. Wholehearted generosity refers to a person who is completely, sincerely and authentically generous.

In the past three weeks we have said that wholehearted generosity involves *wholehearted commitment*, *wholehearted stewardship*, and *wholehearted servanthood*.

Today, in my final message in this series, I want to look at the topic of “Wholehearted Contribution.”

Let us read Matthew 6:19-21:

¹⁹ “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.” (Matthew 6:19–21)

Introduction

Our text for today deals with your heart.

Now, I am not talking about your heart’s physiological location. Nor am I talking about the person with whom you are in love and have given your heart.

Rather, I am talking about your heart as “the centre not only of spiritual activity, but of all the operations of human life.”² I am talking about your heart “in terms of the investment of your life, motives, attitudes, and thought patterns. Where is the concentration

¹ Much of this material is from Kirk Nowery’s book *Revolutionary Generosity* (Camarillo, CA: Spire Publishing, 2006), 69-85, and also John MacArthur’s *Overcoming Materialism* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1983), 1-42.

² M.G. Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

and the preoccupation of your life? What particular object do you spend most of your thinking, planning, and energy on?”³

Many people spend a lot of their time thinking about some thing like a house, a car, an investment, a bank account, a stock, a bond, a savings account, and so on. The sad fact is that we are creatures committed to things. Many societies are too poor to have things. But we are a society of things.

John MacArthur, in his book titled *Overcoming Materialism*, offers this analysis:

Mr. and Mrs. Thing are a very pleasant and successful couple. At least, that’s the verdict of most people, who tend to measure success with a “thingometer.” And when the “thingometer” is put to work in the life of Mr. and Mrs. Thing, the result is startling.

There he is, sitting down on a luxurious and very expensive thing, almost hidden by the large number of [other] things. . . . Things to sit on, things to sit at, things to cook on, things to eat from, all shining and new. Things, things, things.

Things to clean with, things to wash with, things to clean, and things to wash. Things to amuse, things to give pleasure, things to watch, and things to play. Things for the long, hot summers, things for the short, cold winters. Things for the big thing in which they live, things for the garden, things for the lounge, things for the kitchen, and things for the bedroom. Things on four wheels, things on two wheels, things to put on top of the four wheels, things to pull behind the four wheels, things to add to the interior of the thing on four wheels. . . .

Well, Mr. Thing, I’ve got some bad news for you. What’s that? You can’t hear me? The things are in the way? . . . But then, that’s the problem with things. Look at that thing standing outside your house. Whatever its value to the secondhand thingdealer, it means a lot to you. But then, an error in judgment, a temporary loss of concentration, and that thing can be a mass of mangled metal being towed off to the junkyard.⁴

³ John MacArthur’s *Overcoming Materialism* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1983), 2.

⁴ John MacArthur’s *Overcoming Materialism* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1983), 3.

In spite of how silly this sounds, we are basically committed to acquiring things.

Sadly, the people in Jesus' day were not that different from us. They were also basically committed to acquiring things. They had their hearts set on investing in themselves.

Lesson

In our lesson today Jesus teaches us to have a right view about wealth. In the next section, he will teach about having a right view of necessities. But, in Matthew 6:19-21 he is teaching us how to have a right view about wealth.

Now, let me say that we have a lot of wealth. Even if we are struggling greatly with financial matters, we are wealthy in comparison to three-quarters of the world's population. So, this passage is very relevant to every one of us here today.

But someone may say, "I thought that you said that our text for today deals with our heart. How do you get from our heart to our wealth?" Easy. Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In other words, the way you treat your wealth reveals where your heart is.

I. The Principle

Jesus teaches us that in God's economy there are two treasuries: one is on earth, and the other is in heaven. And he gives us this principle from verse 19a and 20a: **"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."**

You have an option to choose between two treasuries: one on earth, and the other in heaven. And this is true for every person. You may not have thought about it before, but Jesus is saying very clearly and very directly to you and to me: **"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."**

A. *Earthly Treasures*

Jesus uses an interesting wordplay in this dialogue. The Greek word for **treasures** is *thesaurous*, from which we get our English word “thesaurus.” A thesaurus is, of course, a treasury of words. The idea behind the Greek word is something “which is of exceptional value and kept safe,” and “a stockpiling of valuables.” The Greek word for **lay up** is *thesaurizete*, which is the verbal form of *thesauros*. So, a literal translation of the Greek for this phrase is, “Do not treasure up treasures for yourselves on earth.” In other words, “Do not stockpile wealth for yourselves on earth.”

What then was Jesus forbidding? Was Jesus forbidding a checking account, a savings account, an insurance policy, a wise investment, or a retirement fund? When Jesus says, “**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth**” (6:19a), does he mean that you should not possess anything?

No. Jesus never condemns possessions.

“But,” someone says, “what about the rich young ruler? Jesus told him to sell everything.” Yes, that is true. And the reason Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell everything is because his wealth stood between him and God. Jesus knew that the rich young ruler’s heart was in his earthly possessions. And until he got rid of it, he could not have a relationship with God.

What Jesus is saying and what the rest of the Bible makes patently clear is that God owns everything. You and I are simply stewards of everything that rightly belongs to God. And if my heart belongs to God, and I know that God owns everything, and that I am simply a steward of God’s possessions, then what should be my response if God were to come to me and say, “Freddy, I want you to sell all that you have and follow me”?

My response should be, “Yes, Lord, I have absolute confidence that you will take care of me. I will trust you to provide for all of my daily needs.”

Now the person who says “I will not sell everything” is in

fact saying, “I do not trust God. I do not trust that he will provide for my daily necessities.”

And if a person says that, then is he really a Christian?

Now, Jesus does in fact call some people to sell everything and live by faith. That is how missionaries live. They are trusting that God will provide for their daily necessities through the support of his people.

But, for most of us, Jesus calls us to manage the resources that he entrusts to us. And in this country he entrusts an enormous amount of resources to us. And out of all the resources that he entrusts to us, he says, **“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.”**

Now, let me be clear and say again that Jesus is not forbidding the use of possessions. It is right and proper to provide for your family. It is right to plan for the future. It is right to make wise investments. It is right to have money to conduct business.

But it is wrong to be greedy. It is wrong to be extravagant. It is wrong to be wasteful. It is wrong to spend money you don't have. It is wrong to covet what others have or what you don't need.

Ultimately, it boils down to the heart, or the motive. If you are treasuring up treasures for yourself, then Jesus says, “Don't do it.” If you are gaining things to stockpile, to hoard, to keep, and to amass in order to indulge yourself—then that is sin.

B. Heavenly Treasures

Instead, if you are managing your possessions in order to glorify God, then you have a right to keep it and to keep using it for his glory! That is why Jesus said, **“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven”** (6:20a).

The terms **“treasures on earth”** and **“treasures in heaven”** were familiar terms to the people in Jesus' day. They had many sayings about both. They understood that you could be either treasuring up treasures for yourself on earth, or you could treasuring up treasures for yourself in heaven. They believed that giving to

grow God’s kingdom was a way to store up **treasures in heaven**.

For example, the rabbis told a well-known story about a fictitious (?) king named Monobaz. When he became king he inherited incredible riches from his forefathers, the previous kings. But during the time of his reign he gave all of his fortune to the poor, the needy, the suffering, and the sick. His brothers eventually went to him and said, “Your fathers gathered treasures, and added to those of their fathers, but you have dispersed yours and theirs.”

King Monobaz said to them, “My fathers gathered treasures for below, I have gathered treasures for above; they stored treasures in a place over which the hand of man can rule, but I have stored treasures in a place over which the hand of man cannot rule; my fathers collected treasures which bear no interest, I have gathered treasures which bear interest; my fathers gathered treasures of money, I have gathered treasures in souls. . . ; my fathers gathered treasures in this world, I have gathered treasures for the world to come.”⁵ The rabbis understood the concept to which Jesus referred—invest in the world to come.

Many of you may be surprised to hear that John Wesley—the founder of the Methodist Church—made an enormous amount of money during his lifetime. We usually think of him as a preacher and an evangelist, and that he was. In fact, during his lifetime (of 87 years) he travelled about 250,000 miles and preached about 40,000 sermons. In addition to his organizational genius, we know exactly how many followers Wesley had when he died: 294 preachers, 71,668 British members, 19 missionaries (5 in mission stations), and 43,265 American members with 198 preachers. Today Methodists number about 30 million worldwide.⁶ Wesley authored some 200 books and wrote many hymns. It is said that when John Wesley started preaching he received 30 pounds a year. He gave 3 pounds to the church and lived on 27 pounds. As he grew wealthier—primarily through the sales of his books—he main-

⁵John MacArthur’s *Overcoming Materialism* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1983), 29-30.

⁶Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 181-183.

tained a frugal lifestyle, still living on about 27 pounds year, giving the rest away. It is estimated that he gave away about 40,000 pounds during his life. Apparently, upon his death when his estate was finalized, he had less than 10 pounds left in his estate. That is storing up **treasures in heaven!**

So, what exactly are our **treasures in heaven**? In the context of this passage, Jesus is talking about our wealth, our money, our possessions. Specifically, he wants us to manage the resources that God has entrusted to us with a very definite kingdom-focus.

Givers who are storing up treasures in heaven are blessed by God. They don't give in order to receive a blessing. They simply give because they delight in giving to God. But God blesses them in return—sometimes in this life, but always in the next.

Years ago when Lauren, my daughter, was about six years old, she wanted a pet. At first she wanted a rabbit, but thankfully she changed her mind and decided that she wanted a bird.

And so she started saving and praying that God would provide her with a bird. There was a new energy in Lauren as she worked, talked, and dreamed about having a pet bird. We knew that it would take Lauren years to save the money for a bird, and so we were quite happy to let her save for a bird.

After a couple of months she had saved \$7.00. She knew that she was still a long way from her goal. But just at that time she felt a desire to give \$1.00—which took her several weeks to save—to Luke Brown, a missionary our church supported, who was teaching English in grim conditions in Uzbekistan. That was a big sacrifice, but not for Lauren. She really wanted to send Luke money so that he could tell people about Jesus. That was more important to her than saving for her bird. And so she sent him \$1.00.

Interestingly, many months later, when Luke was back in State College, he told us that the \$1.00 arrived on a day when he was really discouraged, and the Lord used that \$1.00 as a tremendous encouragement to him.

But, even more interestingly, within a week after Lauren sent the money to Luke, a lady in our church named Sue Jackson met

another lady who wanted to give away not one but two birds! And so, a few days later Lauren had a cockatiel, a lovebird, two cages, and bird food—about a \$325.00 value—*given* to her!

Now, Lauren learned some valuable lessons. First, she learned that God is extremely generous. Her view of God is that he is a God of generosity and not of stinginess.

And second, she learned that givers who are storing up treasures in heaven are blessed by God. She never gave money to Luke expecting a return. She was too young to know about “trading.” But God blessed her because she was a giver.

And third, Luke was encouraged to press on and tell people about Jesus. Who knows how many Uzbeks will be in heaven because Lauren encouraged Luke to tell them about Jesus when he received \$1 from a six-year old girl thousands of miles away.

So, the principle undergirding wholehearted contribution is this: **“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven”** (6:19a; 6:20a).

II. The Reasons

But what are the reasons for this principle?

A. *The Earthly Problems*

Why did Jesus say, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth”? Because, Jesus said, that is **“where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal”** (6:19b).

In Jesus’ day, there were no banks and investment vehicles (such as the stock market). Wealth was primarily preserved in three ways: garments, grain, and gold (and other precious metals).

Garments were a very important commodity. In Jesus’ day people really did dress for success! A person’s garments showed how wealthy they were. Very often gold was actually woven into the garment.

A person who storing up treasures on earth, such as gar-

ments, is likely to have more and more garments. Now, what happens to garments, especially if they are stored away? Moths eat them! Have you noticed that moths don't eat what you wear? They only eat what you store.

Grain was also a very important commodity in Jesus' day. And a storing of grain showed wealth. You remember the rich fool who said, "I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods" (Luke 12:18). He stored his earthly treasure in grain. Now, the word translated as **rust** is from the Greek word *broxis*, and it actually means "eating." So, this word can also refer to a "worm," which is the alternate reading in the *ESV*. So, Jesus is saying that a person storing up grain on earth discovers that the worm eats the grain!

And finally, gold (or other precious metals) was another way in which people stored up treasures on earth. And people used to store it in their houses. But happened then? **Thieves break in and steal** the gold!

Jesus' reason for not laying up treasures in earth is that your garments could be eaten by moths, your grain could be eaten by worms, and your gold could be stolen by thieves. The point is this: if you hoard it for yourself, you are in danger of losing it.

Furthermore, when you die you will take none of it with you.

B. The Heavenly Perspective

But, if you lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, when you die, you will have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

That is why Jesus said, "**But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal**" (6:20).

During the Decian persecution (in the mid-3rd century AD) in Rome, the Romans broke into a certain church thinking that they could steal their treasures. The Roman prefect who was in charge stepped up to one saint named Laurentius and said, "Show me your

treasures at once.”

It just so happened that a group of widows and orphans were in the room eating a meal provided by the church. Laurentius pointed to them and said, “There are the treasures of the church. We have invested all we have in them.”

That is treasure in heaven. And what we store in heaven we never lose. What we store on earth we cannot take to heaven. Remember Jim Elliot’s famous statement, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Conclusion

Jesus sums it all up by saying, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).

So, examine your heart. Jesus is saying, “People in my kingdom don’t amass fortunes or stockpile things for themselves. They live in such a way that they are managing my resources to advance my kingdom.”

So, where is your heart? You can know where your heart is by how you handle money. And frankly, Jesus is saying that if you are not giving to advance his kingdom, you may not even be a Christian.

Recently, I talked with a man whose salary was cut at the start of the year. He was frustrated about that, not because he could not buy a bigger house or car or vacation, but because he could not give as much to our church to advance Christ’s kingdom. That is the mindset of someone who is storing up treasures in heaven.

You have an opportunity to hand in your *2010 General Fund & Mortgage Reduction Fund Pledge* card today. And whether you pledge \$1 or \$1,000,000, may it be that you are indeed storing up treasures in heaven. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

Our Father in heaven, thank you for your Word. Thank you for your truth. We are indeed a wealthy people.

Help us not to lay up treasures on earth where it has no eternal value. Enable us to lay up treasures in heaven.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.