

Matthew 6:19-34 The Message of the King: “What Do You Seek?” March 8, 2015
Isaiah 65
Psalm 27

Seek and you will find.

The LORD says through Isaiah:

“I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me;
I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me.” (Isaiah 65:1)

Those who serve other gods –
 who seek “Fortune” and pursue “Destiny” –
 will find destruction.
But those who serve the LORD –
 those who seek him –
 will eat and drink and rejoice in the new creation.

Of course, there’s a problem.

Earlier we sang Psalm 14 –

“The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man,
 to see if there are any who understand,
 who seek after God.
They have all turned aside;
 together they have become corrupt;
 there is none who does good,
 not even one.” (14:2-3)

That’s quite an indictment.

 No one seeks after God.

Paul will use that in Romans 3 to make his point that
 all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)

Paul’s point is that we do not seek God
 unless God *first* seeks us by sending his Son.
And in the incarnation of Christ we see how far God went in seeking us!
 He went to the cross!

And because God is merciful and gracious,
 there are now those who seek God!

Psalm 27 speaks of this.

Psalm 27 says that the *one thing* that I desire –
 the one thing that I have asked – the one thing that I seek from the LORD –
 is that I might dwell in the house of the LORD.

Verse 8 says “You have said, ‘Seek my face.’”

My heart says to you, ‘Your face, LORD, do I seek.’”
Why do we seek God?
Because God has *called us*.

Sing Psalm 27
Read Matthew 6:19-34

The two parts of our passage are intimately tied together.
What are you seeking – who or what are you serving?
is, ultimately, the same question as ‘what are you anxious about?’

Part one deals with questions like:
Where is your treasure?
What is your heart set on?
What is your master?
Whom do you serve?

Probably, if you are a Christian, you know the right answers:
My treasure is in heaven.
My heart is set on Jesus.
Jesus is my master and Lord,
so I serve him.

(At least, that’s what I want to be the case!)

That’s why we need verses 25-34 –
because this reveals that we are not so pious after all!

What are you anxious about?
What worries you?
What keeps you awake at night?

I’m anxious about my future – my career –
how are we going to pay the bills?
how can I fix the situation with my friend?
what am I going to wear to the wedding?

All these anxieties reveal that we do *really* trust Jesus.
My treasure is on earth.
My heart is set on getting this job.
Food is my master.
I serve the whims of my friends.

What Jesus says here is so *shocking*
that many people simply cannot believe that he really meant it.

1. Two Kinds of Treasure: What Are You Seeking? (v19-24)

a. The Economics of Earth and Heaven (v19-21)

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^[e] 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.

Jesus says, do not *seek* to accumulate wealth.

As a historian, I would observe that capitalism seems to be the best economic system for keeping people fed and clothed.

Adam Smith may well have been right when he said
that if everyone pursues their own individual self-interest,
it will have the effect of elevating the standard of living for everyone.

But that assumes that *wealth – standard of living* – is what is most important.
Jesus says “do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.”

Because what has happened over the course of the last 200 years?

We have sought to accumulate wealth –
we have pursued our own economic self-interest –
and we have become so besotted with self-indulgence and self-interest
that our hearts have turned away from the living and true God.

Over the last hundred years,
we have watched as churches have started to imitate corporations –
as pastors have become CEO’s –
as churches fall prey to the latest marketing trends
in order to “attract market share”!

It happens here too!

Did you realize that our congregational meeting last week
spent most of our time talking about how to handle an economic question
which only exists because of IRS procedures!

(I thought it was a great conversation –
we needed to discuss it, because we live in the United States!

But if charitable donations were not tax deductible,
we wouldn’t have been having the conversation!)

But, to say it simply, Christians cannot act like capitalists!

Let me be clear.

I am not advocating some *other* economic system.

I am not defending mercantilism, physiocracy, communism, or gift-exchange economies.

Every economic system known to man falls under the judgment of Jesus.

Because every economic system is oriented towards earthly treasure.

And Jesus says that *his disciples* may not be oriented towards earthly treasure.

Think of the early Christians in the book of Acts.
It was *not* in their economic self-interest to sell their lands
in order to help their fellow Christians.
When Jesus commanded the rich young ruler to sell everything,
give to the poor, and follow him,
that was not going to result in his *economic self-interest!*

Jesus calls you to lay up treasures in heaven – *not* treasures on earth.
You are called to *use* whatever earthly treasure you have
in the service of Christ's kingdom.
Jesus doesn't just ask for 10%.
He demands all of it!
No, that doesn't mean that you need to give 100% to the church!
He means that whatever you spend at the store –
whatever you spend *anywhere* –
must be spent laying up treasure in heaven.
Your priorities are not to be guided by Adam Smith or Karl Marx or Ludwig von Mises!

Your priorities must be oriented by the kingdom of heaven:
“lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

We saw last week that when Jesus talks about “rewards”
he is talking about how a loving heavenly Father delights to reward his children –
not because *we deserve it* –
but because *Jesus deserves it!*
God rewards his children because he has accepted *us* in Jesus!

Jesus is not talking about how to *become* his disciple –
but how to *live* as a disciple.

It's the same point that Paul will make in Ephesians 2 –
Paul describes how you *became* a disciple in Ephesians 2:8-9 –
“For by grace you have been saved through faith.
And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God,
not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”
Then, in verse 10 he describes how we should lay up treasures in heaven:
“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for* good works,
which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

The thing that the disciple longs for – more than anything else –
is to hear those words, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into your rest.”
The treasure that we seek is the pleasure of our heavenly Father!

That's why Jesus says,
“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Then, suddenly, we switch from the heart to the eye:

b. The Hermeneutics of Light and Darkness (v22-23)

²² “*The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light,* ²³ *but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*”

At first blush, verses 22-23 seem out of place.

We’re talking about treasures in heaven and treasures on earth –
and in verse 24, Jesus will say that no one can serve two masters.
So how does this reference to the eye as the lamp fit here?

We often think of the eye in passive terms –
as one of our senses – which simply takes in information.

But that’s not how Jesus speaks of the eye here.

Jesus speaks of the eye in *active* terms –
as an agent that is shaping the information that you take in.
When Jesus says “if your eye is *healthy*”
the word translated “healthy” means “single” –
and the word translated “bad” is the word for “evil.”

The “bad eye” in Greek refers to someone who is greedy or stingy.
Likewise a “good eye” refers to someone who is generous.

But we’re not just talking about money here.

We’re talking about a whole way of life –
a way of *seeing the world*.

Your eyes will shape the information you take in.

Your eyes will *illuminate* the things that you see and think about.

Do you have a greedy way of looking at the world?

Do you look at people for your own greedy, selfish purposes?

Or do you look at them with love?

I once had a friend who was a brilliant concert pianist.

I mentioned him to a passing acquaintance once.

The acquaintance said to me,

“Make sure you stick close to him.

You want to have influential people on your side.”

That’s wrong!

That’s a *greedy* way – an evil way of looking at people.

Take the image seriously:

the eye is the lamp of the body.

What light is shining from your eyes?

When you look at other people – when you look at life –
when you look at your plans for the future –
what light is shining from your eyes?

If you look at life with a cynical eye, with a greedy eye,
then you will see darkness everywhere – and in everyone.
But the darkness is coming from you!

How are you looking at the world?

If your treasure is in heaven – then you will tend to look at the world (and other people)
with grace and mercy, with a generous attitude that thinks the best of them,
and desires the best for them –
and your light will illumine the darkness around you.

If your treasure is on earth – then you will tend to magnify the darkness,
because your greed, your selfishness, will darken everything around you.

And that's why verses 22-23 fit perfectly in what Jesus is saying here:

c. You Cannot Serve Two Masters (v24)

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”^[1]

I think that we tend to soften this statement.

We talk about “ultimate allegiances”
and we say that so long as God is *first*, you can still pursue wealth.

But that's *not* Jesus' point.

The word translated “money” is simply the Aramaic word “mammon.”

In Jesus' day, “mammon” was a neutral term that simply meant “wealth.”
The Aramaic translations of the OT use ‘mammon’ for such verses as
“Honor the LORD with your wealth” (Proverbs 3:9).

Jesus says that if your allegiance is to God, then you will despise wealth.

If your allegiance is to wealth, then you will despise God.

If you serve God, then you *cannot* serve wealth.

You must *honor God with your wealth* – certainly!

In other words, you must *use* your wealth in order to *serve* God.

Our problem is that too often we *use* God in order to *serve wealth!*

A Christian business owner once told me

that he intentionally avoided making a big deal about his faith
when making a sales pitch – even to other Christians.

He said that he didn't want to use “faith” as a *means* to make money.

He would talk with them *afterwards* – or in other settings – about his faith.

But not in the sales pitch.
He understood what Jesus is saying here.

When people *market* their faith they are serving wealth, not God.
When a Christian says “you should do business with me because I’m a Christian,”
they are using God to obtain wealth.
And that’s wrong.

You may not *seek* wealth.
You must not *pursue* money.

Please do not misunderstand me –
and definitely, do not misunderstand Jesus!!

What do you hear when I say “you may not *seek* wealth”?
Do you think that I am saying, “Do not seek *to be wealthy*?”
That’s not what Jesus is saying!

Jesus is *not* saying “it’s okay to be middle class – just don’t try to get rich!”
No!

Jesus is saying do not pursue money.

And for that matter, do not be anxious about bread.
Do not worry about clothing.
Follow Jesus!

2. “But That’s Crazy – If I Do That I’ll Lose Everything!” Seeking the Kingdom (v25-34)

I’ve titled point two with the hypothetical response of the disciple:
“But that’s crazy! If I do that, I’ll lose everything!”

Yes, you may.

But why is that a problem?
If you have treasures in heaven,
then so what if you have lost everything on earth?

“But I’m supposed to provide for my household!”
Yes, you are –
Paul will say that the one who does not provide
for the members of his own household
is worse than an unbeliever! –
but that doesn’t change the fact that you *may not seek stuff*.
You may not *serve* wealth.

When you provide for your household properly, you *are* laying up treasures in heaven.

But don't *worry* about how you will do that!
Seek first the Kingdom of God!

And so we should not be surprised that in verses 25-34,
Jesus zeros in – once again – on the heart.

a. Thesis: Life Is About More Than “Stuff” (v25)

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

Why are you anxious?

Why are you afraid of the future?

Jesus puts it in very simple terms.

Do not be anxious about what you will eat or what you will wear.

Our problem is that we love our *stuff*.

Our possessions *possess* us.

We are constantly trying to “get ahead.”

But Jesus says that life is about more than “stuff.”

As Stanley Hauerwas puts it, “to seek first the righteousness of the kingdom of God is to discover that that for which we seek is given, not achieved.” (p81)

Being “perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48)

is not about “just trying harder”!

Practicing your righteousness (6:1)

is not something you do in order to “win” God’s favor.

Even so, seeking first the kingdom of God is what you do

because Jesus has first sought you and drawn you to himself!

As we keep seeing, the Sermon on the Mount is not a code of ethics –

it is the description of the life of Jesus –

and therefore the life of those who are united to him by faith.

The Sermon on the Mount is not a “law” that condemns us,

it is a gracious gift of God to and in us.

So do not be anxious.

This is the thesis that Paul sets forth.

Don't worry about what you will eat or what you will drink,

nor about your body, what you will put on.

And Jesus gives us two examples to show us *why* we should not be anxious.

First, verse 26:

b. Example 1: Your Heavenly Father Feeds the Birds (v26-27)

²⁶ *Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?* ²⁷ *And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?*

The animal kingdom is full of beautiful examples of the way that God provides for his creatures. But notice how Jesus sets up the contrast.

Your heavenly Father feeds the birds.
The God who made humanity after his own image
cares with great extravagance for all his creatures.
“Are you not of more value than they?”

And yet we are anxious.
We worry.

And what does it accomplish?
Can you add an hour to your life by worrying?
(Stress and anxiety is *known* to shorten your life!)

Likewise, the second example turns to plants:

c. Example 2: God Clothes the Lilies (v28-30)

²⁸ *And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,* ²⁹ *yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.* ³⁰ *But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*

Consider the beauty of wild flowers –
such that even Solomon could not compare with their glory!

The cynical might be tempted to say –
“Wait, God feeds the birds?
What about the birds who die of starvation?
What about the plants that get destroyed?”

Jesus addresses this, too.
“God...clothes the grass of the field,
which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven.”
God’s provision for creation is lavish and abundant –
until it is time for destruction.

After all, think about God’s provision for Jesus!
God will feed and clothe his beloved Son through remarkable means –
until it is time for Jesus to go to the cross.

Even so, God will provide all that you need –
until it is time for you to bear the cross.

Jesus is not describing some “ideal world” in which people always have enough to eat.
Jesus is saying that if you follow him,
then God will provide everything you need for you to follow him!

I want you to think about these examples.

It could be tempting to think that Jesus is making abstract statements about human life.
“No one should be anxious or worry.”

But Jesus is not making a general psychological statement about anxiety.

Jesus is talking to his disciples.

Those who believe in Jesus should not be anxious.

Those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness should not worry.

Your heavenly Father will provide for all those who seek him.

Notice how Jesus says this in verses 31-33:

d. Conclusion 1: Seek First the Kingdom of God (v31-33)

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

What does it mean to “seek first the kingdom of God”?

This is very closely related to the Lord’s Prayer, where we pray,
“Thy kingdom come.”

We want to see the kingdom of Jesus expand!

We want to see his rule – his dominion – extend more and more
in our own lives, and in all the earth!

Seek first the kingdom of God means that the priorities of King Jesus are first for us.

In other words, it means that we love Jesus – we are devoted to him –
and so we do not serve money – we serve Jesus.

Likewise, when Jesus says “seek first the kingdom of God *and his righteousness*”
his *righteousness* refers to the way that he orders his household – his kingdom.

So how do you *seek* the righteousness of the Kingdom?

By laying up treasures in heaven.

By being devoted to Jesus – not money.

By not being anxious about stuff.

It means that the priorities of the King become our priorities.

We saw last time that *practicing righteousness*
includes giving to the poor –

praying and fasting –
acknowledging that *we* are needy and helpless before God.
In the same way, seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness
means that everything we have – everything we do –
is oriented towards the kingdom of God.

I once heard of a wealthy person who truly lived that way.
She encountered a person who really needed a car.
So she reached in her glove box and signed over her car to that person.

Jesus promises that
if you do seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
then “all these things” will be added to you.
Food, drink, clothing.
It may be that God will provide “all these things” through your job.
Or, if you seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness
you might lose your job –
and so God might provide “all these things” through the church.

[This means that you need to be willing to *accept* help as well as *give* help!
You must be as generous in receiving mercy as you are in giving mercy!]

Of course, if you seek the kingdom of God *in order to get* all these things,
then you are not *really* seeking *first* the kingdom of God!

You cannot manipulate God into giving you what you *really* want!

Verse 33 would seem to conclude our passage.

But verse 34 adds another *therefore* – coming back to the theme of verse 25.

e. Conclusion 2: Do Not Be Anxious About Tomorrow (v34)

³⁴ “*Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.
Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*”

Do not be anxious about tomorrow.
Jesus is not saying that you should never plan.
Obviously, you make plans.
Jesus himself made plans to go to Jerusalem!

But don’t *worry*.
The time that you spend developing a good plan is the *proper* activity for today.
The time you spend *worrying* about your plan is a waste of time!

Every anxious moment that you spend worrying about tomorrow
is a moment where you are *not* seeking first the Kingdom of God!

Each day has enough bad stuff already.
You don't need to add tomorrow's trouble to today!

So planning is fine – but worrying is a waste of time!

I can just hear you saying:
“Thanks, pastor. You just told me not to worry, but I can't help it!
I'm a compulsive worrier. How do I stop?!”

Look at Jesus.
“I know – but I'm concerned about my children.”

Look at Jesus.
“Yes, I am. But my job situation is not good...”

Look at Jesus.
If you are looking at your family, your job, your situation,
then you are not looking at Jesus!

If you are seeking first wealth and prosperity,
then Jesus does not promise that you will get everything that you *want*.
But if you are seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
then Jesus *does* promise that you will get everything that you *need* –
“your heavenly Father knows that you need” these things.

You will get everything that you need – until the day you die –
when you will finally get everything that you have longed for!

Look at Jesus.
The way of the cross – the way of humility –
the way of self-denial –
is the only way to glory.