

“Life That Matters!”

Matthew 6:19-24

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Several friends of ours, some from this church, live in the mountains near where the fires raged earlier this spring.

The fires were so close that evacuation was recommended.

Johnny and Lise Laurent, were telling me how interesting it was to watch their young children pack to evacuate.

When told to get the things that mattered the most, their 6&10-year-olds packed a favorite doll, Legos, a trophy, pictures, something their grandmother had made for them and their Bibles.

I'm certain we've all done the mental exercise of deciding what we would grab on our way out, if our house were burning.

My brother and sister-in-law have eight children (five are adopted).

Several years ago when living in rural northern Minnesota outside of any fire protection district, their house burned to the ground.

The house contained not only all you would expect: clothing, pictures, and other personal belongings, but it also contained all computers and records for their several small businesses.

It all went up in flames

They had nothing but the clothing they were wearing and the car they were in as they watched the fire consume their home and businesses.

My brother and his wife have always had a great perspective on material possessions, able to live contentedly with little or with much, and so it wasn't surprising to hear them say, after the fire, that the only things they really missed were the family pictures.

And several times in the coming months I heard them say, as I've heard others in similar circumstances say, we thank Jesus that we lost nothing truly important.

What's most important to you?

Thus far I have shaped the question in the context of things – material things.

But if I broaden the context to all of life (relationships, health, goals and the like) what is most important to you?

Put another way: **What do you live for?**

You get up everyday, you spend your time and your energy – for what, to what end?

I know that most of life is lived in a very daily, even mundane, fashion but when you step back and look at the big picture – what do you live for?

I think I'm addressing the same issue Jesus did in the section of the Sermon on the Mount we look at today.

Matthew 6:19-24

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

"No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money.

Are you ready for Jesus' words to ask some penetrating questions of you today?

In essence, Jesus asks us to evaluate our lives.

He asks us to take a long serious look at how we live, what we live for, who we live for and answer some very real questions about them.

He asks us to measure our checkbook, our calendar, and our desires by his desires for us and see how they match.

But there are two things that we must understand before we do this evaluation:

First and maybe foremost is to see Jesus' motivation in asking hard questions of us.

He wants us to live life in the way that matters.

A wasted life is a tragedy and Jesus does not want that for us.

His motivation in pressing us about what we live for **is his love for us.**

- If your child was spending ten hours a day playing video games you'd challenge it.
- If your friend was spending 14 hours a day in the casinos you'd challenge it.

You'd challenge it because you care – Jesus cares.

The second thing I want us to keep in mind as we consider Jesus' challenge is that he is talking to those who are his followers.

This message is for Christians

Jesus is NOT talking to those who don't know him or care to follow him.

This is addressed to those who are part of the Kingdom of God.

- Those who believe the King has come and has introduced his Kingdom.
- Who believe that Kingdom is expanding.
- Who believe that the King, himself, will return and complete the Kingdom.
- Who are citizens of that Kingdom, living as subjects of the King and by King's values and are looking forward to the King's return.

Christianity is not a "ticket" to heaven but a life.

Professor Don Carson wrote, "Life in the kingdom is not simply a question of crossing one hurdle or passing one test, followed by relative indifference to kingdom norms. Involved, rather, is that deep repentance which willingly orients all of life around these norms." (Carson The Sermon on the Mount 75)

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus very clearly sets forth what it means to be a “kingdom” person following the King.

Are we Christ-followers?
Are we “kingdom” people?

Then what captures our hearts?

- Is planning a vacation or getting a new “something” or “anything” what keeps us going from day to day?
- Do we find ourselves trying to anesthetize ourselves with sleep, busyness, entertainment, drugs so that we can make it?
- Do we have goals daily and long-term that are worth living for, even worth dying for?
It’s time for a re-calibration of life, time to ask the tough questions that assess the relative value of the things we live for.
What are YOU living for?

I believe that because of his love for us Jesus makes these three pointed commands and observations:

6:19-21 Give your life to what matters now and for eternity.

6:22-23 What matters to you affects everything!

6:24 And don’t fool yourself, only one thing can matter most.

First of all then, “Give your life to what matters now and for eternity.
Matthew 6:19-21

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

The statement is fairly straightforward:

There are two very different kinds of treasure.
There are two very different places to store the treasure
And there are two very different results.

And the meaning is fairly clear:

Jesus doesn't want us to invest our lives in things that won't last but he does want us to invest our lives in what will last.

If we had been sitting on the grass that day listening to Jesus when he spoke of treasures that "moths and rust can destroy and thieves can steal", we probably would have thought of material things like expensive clothing, sacks of grain, even money – the common things of that day that people used as their savings.

The successful young farmer that Jesus told about at another time didn't have mutual funds or certificates of deposit to invest in so he spoke of building more barns to hold his grain.

But when Jesus contrasts "treasures on earth" with "treasures in heaven" it quickly becomes apparent that in Jesus' mind "treasures" include more than material things because God doesn't have a literal 401k in heaven.

I agree with those who say the issue here is more about "treasuring" than treasures.

- What do you treasure? What do you consider to be of greatest worth?
- What do you spend your time and energy acquiring and protecting?

Yes, it may be material possessions **but for some of us it may be** social status, employment status, prestige, promotion, comfort, good looks, education, health, or independence.

And by looking at our checkbooks, our calendars and our hearts it would be discovered what we treasure, what we consider of more importance to us than anything else.

For some it's education – to get a certain degree, to be among the few who have attained such a level.

For others it's position – to become the CEO, the President, the head of the department, or to be recognized as the best.

For others it is money – I don't remember who but I remember the day a man told me of his marketing business and then showed me the picture of a sports car on his refrigerator and very seriously said that's his goal.

Sometimes that is termed differently as “financial independence”, or early retirement.

It’s important to notice that Jesus does not set up a contrast between having possessions and not having possessions, between advancement in your career and no advancement, between education and no education, or between attractiveness and being careless with your appearance.

This is not an either-or situation.

He does not condemn having a desire for earthly things or having a desire for good things to happen to us.

(In chapter 7:7-11 in the context of daily needs, Jesus even says we will ask for good things and God delights in giving them.)

- Jesus was NOT prohibiting wealth or possessions.
- Jesus was NOT saying don’t save for the future. (Proverbs 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:8;
- Jesus was NOT saying we don’t save for your children. (2 Corinthians 12:14)
- Jesus was NOT saying we can’t enjoy the good things which our Creator provides. (1 Timothy 4:3,4; 6:17)

Jesus wasn’t denying the value of those things but he was pointing out the relative value of them.

Wealth, social status, prestige, comfort, good looks, intelligence, health, independence, etc are things that won’t last – won’t continue to be valuable forever.

The writer of Ecclesiastes looked at many of the good things of life and sought to find meaning in them but to no avail: buildings, reputation, power, sex, philosophies – all are vain (not that they are worthless but they are transient – they don’t hold their value)

So “treasuring” things on earth is not a smart idea because those things will disappear.

This can be very depressing.

Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist, fell into a great depression even after he became famous because he

understood that everything he valued in life would decay and eventually be gone.

In Jesus, Tolstoy found an alternative which delivered him from despair. (Tolstoy Confession in Willard 204)

Jesus does not suggest that we have no desires but that we redirect them.

Matthew 6:20

“Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

Jesus only says what not to do in verse 19 so that he can show the superior what to do in verse 20.

The Christian is to be ambitious, passionate, enterprising, and zealous – **but for the right things** – things that will last and things that will bring us the greatest good.

“Jesus ethic is not so much for a tepid asceticism as it is a vigorous athleticism. Jesus is appealing for the adventure of faith.” (Friedrich Bruner 260)

So what is he telling us to do?

What does “Laying up treasure in heaven,” mean?

Is Jesus just teaching delayed gratification?

If we invest heavily in heavenly things, if we give money to the church and if we give time to serving others – is the point that our reward will be greater in heaven?

Is Jesus giving us insider information about where best to invest so that our return-on-investment will be better – and in the future we will have more?

Is our thinking to be, “You may have your Mercedes and mansion here on earth, but I’ll invest my treasure in heaven where Jesus said he is going to prepare a place for us and then we’ll see who has the fanciest car and house!

In J.D. Salinger’s novel, Franny and Zooey, “the heroine, Franny, a college student, talks about her new-found insight that:

‘College is just one more dopey inane place in the world dedicated to piling up treasure on earth and everything. I mean treasure is treasure, for heaven’s sake. What’s the difference whether the treasure is money, or property, or even culture, or even just plain knowledge?’

Franny’s brother Zooey meets her attack on all earthly treasure with a counterattack: he observes that there is little difference between piling up earthly treasures and piling up heavenly, that is spiritual treasures.

*‘Is there all the difference in the world, for you, in which **side** somebody lays up his treasure – this side, or the other? The one where thieves can’t break in, etcetera? Is that what makes the difference?’*

Then he concludes;

‘As a matter of simple logic, there’s no difference at all, that I can see, between the man who’s greedy for material treasure – or even intellectual treasure – and the man who’s greedy for spiritual treasure.’

To his surprise, Franny agrees:

‘That’s exactly what’s bothering me so. Just because I’m choosy about what I want – in this case, enlightenment, or peace, instead of money or prestige or fame or any of those things – doesn’t mean I’m not as egotistical and self-seeking as everybody else. If anything, I’m more so.’ (Sallinger 1962:147 in Wierzbicka 159)

Franny is right, Jesus is **not just** talking about a different kind of self-centeredness.

He’s talking about “treasuring” something **altogether different.**

Remember though that he isn’t saying we are supposed to pretend we are disinterested in the good things of this life that God may provide.

There is a difference between self-interest and selfishness.

We are made to have self-interest – to want good for ourselves.

But we were not made to be self-centered and selfish.

Nowhere are we taught to be disinterested in ourselves but we are taught to not be **exclusively or primarily** interested in ourselves and in fact we are taught to be more interested in others than ourselves – but not disinterested in ourselves.

But also remember there is a difference between self-interest and “treasuring”.

You can have interest in what will bring you comfort and even pleasure in this life but Jesus’ point is that you don’t treasure those things – they are not most important to you.

What **is** to be most important –what **are** we to treasure?

The way to know is to ask, “What does God treasure?”

- A relationship with Him
- Holiness of character
- Obedience to God
- Helping others follow Jesus
- Compassionate use of material resources to meet the spiritual and physical needs of others.

Many people think as follows:

- I want good things to happen to me in life.
- Thus I will work hard to make these things happen.
- And in a self-serving way they pursue only this life.

But there are some who think this way:

- I want good things to happen to me in life.
- Thus I will work hard to make these things happen.

But I also know I will die someday.

- Some things can be good for me before I die,
- But they will do me no good after I die.

Therefore I also better invest in things that will last.

That sounds like “covering all your bets”, “having your cake and eating it too.”

But Jesus hears that and asks, “But what do you treasure?”

What has your heart?

Where are your greatest investments made?

By looking at your checkbook, your calendar and into your heart, what would someone conclude you live for?

Philippians 3:4-9

“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him...”

Formerly Paul treasured status, position and reputation.

But now, in comparison to knowing and following Jesus, those things are rubbish.

If you wrote the verses using your own life and values, how would you write them?

As to my family history....

As to my ethnic heritage...

As to my religious affiliations...

As to my education...

As to my professional position...

As to my abilities...

As to my energy...

As to my character....

But I now consider those rubbish in comparison to...

First Jesus said:

6:19-21 Give your life to what matters now and for eternity.

Now he adds:

6:22-23 What **matters** to you affects everything!

Matthew 6:22-23 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

I think the first time we read this most of us wonder, “What does that mean?”

But the mixture of metaphors is not quite as confusing as it at first seems.

The two main metaphors are the eyes and the body.

In context the eyes are quite obviously about seeing which is a metaphor for one’s perspective on life.

The body is a person’s life.

If you have good eyes- seeing eyes – you see things as they truly are.

You have a correct understanding and perspective on reality – you treasure the King and the kingdom.

If you do treasure the right things, your body, your whole life, will have purpose and value.

If you have bad eyes, blindness – you don’t see things as they truly are.

You have an incorrect perspective on reality – you treasure the passing things of this world.

If you treasure the things of the world your whole life will have been lived in vain – given to things that don’t matter.

And if you think the things of this world will give you purpose and value (“If then the light within you is darkness”) you are destructively deceived.

You are living for nothing of value and you don’t even know it!

Luke 9:24 “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”

Matthew 16:26 “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”

First Jesus said:

6:19-21 Give your life to what matters now and for eternity.

Then he pointed out that:

6:22-23 What **matters** to you affects everything!

And now he warns:

6:24 And don't fool yourself, only one thing can matter most.

Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money.

As I mentioned earlier, I want you to realize again that Jesus is not talking to non-Christians.

Jesus is talking to people who claim to be followers of his.

So in these words, Jesus is not talking to some godless person who is only out for himself or herself.

Jesus is talking to **the Christian who thinks they can have it all.**

This is the person who wants the eternal security of having a ticket to heaven **and** all that the world offers.

- The person who will “treasure” and serve God with a part of Sunday and treasure and serve their other gods the rest of the week.
- The one who will serve God with a portion of her money and her other gods with the rest of it.
- The one who will serve God with his lips but his other gods with his heart.
- The one who serves God in appearance but their other gods in reality.

Some people think:

I want to live in relationship with Jesus

If He wants me to do something I will do it.

AT THE SAME TIME THEY THINK:

I want to have many things

I will do what it takes to get them.

Jesus says that is impossible:

If you want **most** to have the passing things of the world you can't want **most** to live in relationship with Jesus.

You have a choice to make – What do you want most?

We think we can treasure and serve both – Jesus says you can't.

Jesus absolutely rejects the idea that we can “treasure” both God and the things of this world.

In fact he says, comparatively speaking, we will hate one and love the other.

You can have two employers but you can't have two masters.

If the word God means anything – you can't have two gods.

Only one will be supreme.

Who or what is it for you?

“Jesus is not asking disciples to make a decision for fanaticism or for professional or social suicide; he is telling them to be rational. For he does not say that it is unwise or unscriptural to serve two masters; he says, more matter of factly, “you CANNOT serve God and (money or any other god).” Jesus does not want us to waste our lives practicing the impossible. The prudent sensible course for a Christian to follow is simply to make the basic decision that one will no longer allow one's life to be determined by the perquisites of success, awards, appointments, salaries, things or (money). We are asked by (Jesus) to turn our backs resolutely on the gods of the world... to deny the gods to whom most give unquestioning fealty and to serve only the living God.” (Bruner 265)