

November 6, 2022
Tim Ayers
Generosity in Jesus | Sermon Notes

Matthew 6:19-34 "*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 word translated as ‘store up’ literally means to ‘stockpile for a coming day of need,’ but 85-90% of the crowd were so poor that they could only dream of ever having enough of anything of value to ‘stockpile for a coming day of need.’ This crowd would also have been told, by the religious elite no less, you earned your circumstances: if you were rich, it was because God was blessing you for your righteous life. If you were poor God was punishing you for something. This was a given in Jewish society. All circumstances were ordered by God.

Jesus telling a crowd of people, most of whom **have** almost nothing and feel like they **are** nothing, that they shouldn’t be stockpiling for a coming time of need would have been unusual! Jesus talking about moths and rust would have immediately made people think about clothing and money. Moths did ruin clothing, but most poor Jews then only had one outer robe. Most couldn’t afford to store up clothing; money, as in coins was often buried in the floor of people’s homes to guard against theft. But much of the coinage was made of cheap metal and it did, ‘rot’ as the Greek literally says. The word here was generally used for bad teeth. Jesus wasn’t being tone deaf; he was simply saying that if our thoughts are constantly on the concerns of earth, then our hearts (which ancient people believed was the part of our being where we made the rational decisions, not emotional decisions) then our hearts will be grounded on earth. But if our thoughts are primarily on the concerns of heaven then we will make rational decisions to act in ways that reflect heaven’s values.

Treasure in Jewish thinking had its roots in the story of Noah’s ark. In our English Bibles, God tells Noah to build an ARK. But the Hebrew and the Greek the words that we translate as ‘ark’ actually mean a ‘chest for holding your valuable possessions.’ God told Noah to build a huge ‘treasure chest.’ The Latin word for ‘chest’ is *arco*, but the King James Bible translated *arco* directly into English. God had Noah to build a big treasure chest for holding his most valuable treasures. This changes the story’s message completely: God’s treasure is people! But, most of the poor people listening to Jesus’ Sermon on Mount didn’t feel much like God’s treasure... and for good reasons and Jesus spends the rest of this passage trying to convince his listeners that they were not only God’s treasure but they could trust him to take care of them!

Verse 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.* The Aramaic word that gives us money is ‘mamonas.’ It means something like ‘the possessions that you put your trust in when trouble comes.’ This would be money in our culture. The ancients didn’t necessarily think money when the word mamonas was used. *“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Jesus is talking about two of the three things everyone was concerned about. The third was a roof over your head.*

'Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?' Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. Solomon was always pictured in traditional Jewish stories as being dressed in purple. This was the most expensive, rarest and most royal of all ancient clothing. Nothing is said in the Bible about Solomon's clothing. Jesus was referencing folk stories here. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? The word that gives us 'you of little faith' is actually a noun: (oligopistoi) It's 'Oh, you littlefaiths!' It's as if Jesus nicknamed humanity. We are all littlefaiths!

This grows out the fact that we were not created with the capacity for much faith since faith wouldn't have been necessary in God's initially intended world... a world where we could continually interact with God face to face. Our ability to have faith is hindered by the fact that we weren't created to need it... thus, we are 'littlefaiths.' *'So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things (as in the clothing and the food that the pagans run after) will be given to you as well.*

Luke 12:13-34 This passage begins with someone demanding that Jesus intervene in a family estate dispute... the literal translation is much harsher than the NLT version: *'Someone in the crowd shouted, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me! Jesus avoids getting involved in this dispute... but he knew exactly what was at the root of this family squabble. Beware! Be on your guard! On your guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own!'*

We tend to measure a person's life by what they own. Not measuring other's lives by how much they own is a value of heaven that we should be 'storing up. Jesus then tells a parable about a man who believes that the value of his life **should** be measured by how much he owns. This parable isn't a story that speaks against preparation and planning; it speaks against thinking that life is measured by your possessions and that life is far too short to take the future for granted. The moral of this parable is, *'Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth, but not have a rich relationship with God.'* Having a rich relationship with God is often defined as having surrendered to God and trusting Him. This is a far more valuable and a sign of true wisdom... this should be stockpiled in heaven.

The next 10 verses are where Luke places his Sermon on the Mount teaching. Scholars debate whether Jesus often preached the same sermon or if Luke simply places these words, that he borrowed from Matthew's gospel here. It doesn't really matter in that both scenarios would have been possible in ancient writings. Authors weren't interested in linear narratives and plagiarism was thought to be showing honor to other authors. This is an almost word for word copy of the sermon on the mount from Matthew. Luke does end this section with something unexpected that isn't recorded in Matthew. *Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your*

heart will also be. 1st Century Jews believed giving to the poor was a spiritual discipline... it was an expected part of life! Much of the Old Testament Law taught this! The Law also named widows, orphans and the foreigners living among the Jews as the most vulnerable of all people... people who deserved care. Jesus' statement here is a typical Jewish form of instruction known as a 'how much more' teaching. His disciples would have understood that he was saying if you sell all your possessions and give the proceeds to those in real need, then 'how much more' God will take care of you! His bottom line was this: when you show through your actions that you treasure what God values, God will then stockpile what he treasures for you in heaven. Jesus was simply trying, through hyperbole to get those of us who call ourselves his disciples to ask ourselves how much we really trust God and what it is that we truly treasure... and he is telling us that our actions will answer these questions.

Luke wrote his gospel for a gentile man, named Theophilus, a man who had chosen to follow Jesus, but apparently had been told, by Jewish Christians that God didn't send Jesus for gentiles. Luke wrote his gospel to show Theophilus that God absolutely treasured gentiles. We know from history that many gentiles, upon choosing to follow Jesus, were rejected by their families, ostracized by their wider communities, denied the right to practice their occupations and turned away from being able to buy things in the marketplaces.

Their decision to follow Jesus often meant they had to trust God **for** everything. I believe that Luke made certain that somewhere in his story of the life of Jesus he quoted Jesus telling his first Jewish disciples that they too had to have a willingness to give up everything, to trust God and store up treasure in heaven. And what these two passages have shown me is that while much of what Jesus is talking about is related to money and possessions and such, what Jesus was really wanting us all to come terms with is how much do we trust God... do we believe, no matter what our circumstances might be, that we are God's treasure and that as his treasure he will take care of us... that he knows what we need and will generously care for us... and that our living into his care opens our lives to stockpiling things of real value... the things that are so clearly outlined in Luke 12.

Please don't think that what we are saying is that you shouldn't plan for the future, or you shouldn't save for the unexpected... this is not the point. Careful preparation also involves God's call on us to trust him enough to be generous in ways that reflect the values of heaven... And according to Jesus, one of the ways you can tell what we really care about is where we put our money.

