

COMMENTARY ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew 6:19-24

We're in the world. And we're for it. But we're not *of* it. We don't march to it's beat. We march to a beat that transcends this city and its culture, this world and its ways. It's a beat from above. It's the beat of Christ's heart. Its rhythm is his timeless wisdom. Its tempo is his time-tested love. And the Sermon on the Mt is the song. In this Sermon, Christ teaches us to live the right way up, in an upside down world. This commentary, written by Terran Williams, draws from some of the best available sources. It will aid in individuals and groups in their study of Christ's teaching in his Manifesto of Life in the Kingdom, Matthew 5-7.

Outline of the Sermon on the Mount

- the life God blesses (5:1-12)
- the call to influence (5:13-16)
- love for the scriptures (5:17-20)
- radical love (5:21-48)
- spirituality before the audience of One (6:1-18)
- pursuing that which is worthy of our lives (6:19-24)
- overcoming anxiety about the future and preoccupation with not-so-important things (6:25-34)
- how *not* to help each other change (7:1-6)
- strong encouragements to pray and love (7:7-12)
- responding to the Sermon's call to radical living (7:13-29)

Matthew 6:19-24 -

PURSUING THAT WHICH IS WORTHY OF OUR LIVES

Treasures in Heaven

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Pursue and invest your life in that which has eternal value.

- What is meant by “treasure”? Treasure is simply that which is of great value to us. It is what we'll instinctively pursue, protect, find our deepest joy in, base our identity upon, build our lives around, and find our security in.
- What does it mean to “store up earthly treasure”? It means to greatly value temporal things – like money. But it can refer to more than money. It can refer to our tendency to primarily build our lives around short-lived things, like pleasure and fame, as well as around good things, like family, career, accomplishment etc. Why does Jesus forbid the storing up of earthly treasure? It's not that these things are wrong. It's just that they don't last. They are subject to “moth”, “rust” and “thieves”. In other words, to centre our lives on these things is to guarantee insecurity and anxiety. They are vulnerable, destructible, and breakable.
- What does it mean to “store up treasures in heaven”? It means to greatly value eternal things, such as God, and all that God values. Although money has a part to play in our lives, it must never be central. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount we see things that are very close to Christ's heart. They can be called “kingdom values”. They include

relational harmony, godly character, sexual purity, marital faithfulness, honest speech, enduring love, love for the Scriptures, a commitment to be salt and light in the world, the courage to stand up for Christ and his word in the world, and more. They are all things of eternal significance. Why does Jesus commend the storing up of heavenly treasure? When we build our lives around eternal values, we build our lives around that which is indestructible, enduring and invulnerable. Part of what it means to “store up treasures in heaven” is to live in such a way that Christ rewards us in this and the next life. The theme of Christ’s promise to reward us is a large theme in the Sermon on the Mount. Although our salvation is received by simple faith, our reward (something over and above salvation) is received by persistent faithfulness.

- Although “treasure” can refer to anything of value, it refers primarily in these verses to money. Jesus encourages us to invest in heaven rather than in earth. He reminds us that we cannot take our money with us to heaven, but we can send it on by investing it in things of eternal value. Jesus, the Chief Financial Officer of the Universe, encourages us to not ask how our investments are doing in 20 years, but rather in 20 million years. It’s not only wrong to pursue earthly wealth as the major goal of our lives. It’s plain stupid.
- What is meant by “for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”? The whole of the Sermon on the Mount focuses on the transformation of the heart. Our heart refers to the centre of our being, and includes our deepest desires, our will, our spirit, and our motivations. Christ makes the simple point that whatever we place great value upon (i.e. treasure) will also captivate our hearts – and thereby dominate the focus and direction of our whole lives. Christ is calling us to give careful thought to what we value since it will dominate our existence.

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, [c] your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, [d] your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Focus your heart on God and on all he values.

- Our physical eyes bring light into our lives. If our eyes are healthy and good, we will be more in touch with the physical reality around us (this is what Jesus means by us being “full of light”). But if our eyes are not good, then we will be out of touch with the physical reality around us (this is what Jesus means by us being “full of darkness”). We will bump into things, for example. We will miss out on much beauty and opportunities. We will miss out on much of what is there.
- Then in verse 23, Jesus turns his description of the importance of good sight into a spiritual metaphor. He moves from speaking of eyesight to heart-sight. He says, “If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” The phrase “the light within you” refers to “the eyes of your heart”. In other words, if the eyes of your heart are blind to the

reality of God and his kingdom, your life will be full of darkness. Or said another way, if you focus on and are ambitious for the wrong stuff (such as “earthly treasure” (v19)) then your life will be out of touch with spiritual reality. But if you focus on the right stuff (such as “heavenly treasure” (v20)) your life will be in touch with spiritual reality. Christ is warning us of the danger of losing sight of what’s really important. He doesn’t want us to stumble around in life, out of touch with the beauty and opportunities he has for us to enjoy.

- The key to understanding these verses is to remember the verse that precedes it (v21), which speaks of what our hearts focus on. Our heart is our spirit, our centre, our will. It has the ability to choose a point of focus. It places value on certain things and pursuits. It is the source of ambition. In short, life organizes itself around the heart. In these verses, Jesus makes the same point, and urges us to focus on the right things, the right ambitions. The eyes of our heart need the right focus. Here is a paraphrase of these verses: “Your heart-sight is like your eyesight. If your eyes work well, then your body will be well-directed. If they work poorly then your whole body will be poorly directed. And if the eyes of your heart fail to focus on God and all that he values, your whole life will be poorly directed – what a disaster that is!”
- Interestingly, the words healthy and unhealthy can also be translated generous and stingy. This also picks up on the theme of treasure/money in the verses both before (v19-21) and after (v24).

24 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Submit your life to God, not to money.

- Jesus has spoken of two treasures (v19-21) and two visions (v22-23). We need to choose which treasure, and which vision we give ourselves to. Now he speaks of two masters. Treasure speaks of what we value. Vision speaks of what we focus on. Masters speak of what we submit our lives to. The word “master” refers not to an employer, but rather to a slave-owner who has total say over our lives. It’s impossible to be in full-time service to two slave-owners. We have to make a choice. Which one is the one we submit to? Similarly, we have to choose between God and money. Money easily becomes the master to which people submit. This is because the pursuit and protection of money so easily becomes the dominant priority in a person’s life. Money is the earthly treasure that seems to promise to provide identity, power, security and opportunity. And if we believe this “promise” we are easily seduced into living for it. But it ultimately cannot keep its promise. If we are wise we’d rather pursue God, and make him the source of our identity, power, security and opportunity. He, unlike money, keeps his promises. We only have capacity for one dominant passion. Let us make sure that God, and all that he values, is that dominant passion. Carson (pg 34) writes, “God is served with a single-eyed devotion or he is not served at all.”

Sources used - Much reference will be made to these sources throughout this commentary. Each time the author and the page number is mentioned, but not the book title.

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