

The Question of Identity: Beyond Moths, Rust, and Thieves

Text ~3 Minutes

- Matt 6:19-24
 - **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.
 - **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!
 - **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.

Context ~7 minutes

- An Invitation
 - In Matt 4:17 reads thus - From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

- The invitation here is that life doesn't have to continue the way it is. There is another way of life
- We are invited into a life of union with God, an invitation of deep interpersonal friendship with the Triune God.
- **QQ: Pause and reflect on what that means.**
 - i. You and I are invited into a deep interpersonal friendship with God.
- The sermon on the mount is Jesus unveiling of another way of life that is undergirded more by your heart posture than the external presentation of our actions.
- This is why the **theme that runs through the sermon on the mount, really all scripture and life with God is that God is more after your heart** than your actions
 - i. Because your actions and thoughts and who you are oozes from the formation of your heart. Hence Prov 4:23 says
 - ii. **Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life**

- Context of Matt 6:1-18

- Looking at the literary context of where we are, Matt 6:1-18 calls us away from the praise of men, shifting our focus to seeing God as our audience. He is the one we live for. In him we live and move and have our being.
- Rather than foster the praise of men, there is a shift to act with the right heart posture, to see God as our reward, to understand that the greatest gift God gives is himself...hence the call to secrecy in Matt 6:1-18. Jesus uses 3 examples to show the state of our hearts in a comical but potent way. An underlying theme here though is that we desire the praise of men **because we so little confidence in God, in who he says we are.**
 - i. It is unbelief, a lack of seeing God as he is, that leads us to seek the praise of men

- We seek the praise of men but the real culprit is something else. At one level, maybe we seek the praise of men because of the security, status, acclaim, fame, power and recognition that seemingly comes with it. **But what really lies beneath it is anxiety or fear of some sort, and what lies beneath that is lack of confidence in God**
- We are seeking security but we usually look for it outside of the Kingdom of God. In doing so, we find ourselves on a journey aptly named "adventures in missing the point"
- Jesus in this text continues to go after our heart. Why? Because we live from the heart, hence the admonition in Prov 4:23 to guard our hearts. For transformation to happen, Christ must go after the wrong postures in our hearts.
 - He seeks to show us the Triune God so that we can truly put our confidence in him
- In this text we will, perhaps, see the how twisted our hearts are, where our allegiances lie, how little we trust God, and the invitation of Christ.
- **Before we start our study, I do want you to be relating the scriptures we will be studying to your own identity and how you define yourself**
 - **I want you to keep examining yourself, especially what is deeply true of you with respect to these scriptures. At the end of this study, we will come back to the subject of identity**
- My prayer is that at the end of this message, we get to see how much God loves us and that restores our confidence in him.

Treasures (vs 19-21) ~ 12 minutes

- **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.
- Maybe I should start by saying that it is normal and human to treasure something. I might go as far to say we are meant to treasure something. To treasure in a sense is to adore and place value on something, it is to worship that object. Hence the saying where your treasure is, there is your heart
- Dallas Willard
 - To deal with treasures then is to deal with our treasuring and it is not simply physical and non spiritual stuff. What we treasure is actually part of the fundamental structure of who we are
- To be clear, this scripture does not forbid owning things. This scripture does not forbid saving or investments but rather it exhorts us to put first things first
- These treasures can be material and physical but not necessarily so. Our reputation, relationships, families, financial security, marriage, kids, etc are examples of what we might treasure

Treasures on Earth

- Scripture is clear that there are two views/types of treasures.

- There is a view of treasures that when you have them, **you have to keep working to keep them safe.**
- **The question we should be asking is this:**
 - **Are the things we treasure an end in and of themselves or are they pointing to something else?**
 - **Why do I value these things so much? What is beneath that?**
 - i. **Could it be fear or a crisis of identity**
- How do we see the things we treasure
 - The patterns of our choices - what weighs heavily into our decision making?
 - What are the things we hold so tightly onto?
 - Is there anything I instantly recoil at giving up?
- Most often, our treasures are good things that we desire. The issue is the extent to which we will go to obtain these treasures, and why we long for them
- If all treasures are limited to what is in this material world and existence, that would be a sad experience, for nothing is truly ours, and it is under the constant threat of “moths, rust and thieves”

Treasures in Heaven

- On the other hand, there is a type of treasure that is beyond any risk or threat, and when you have such treasures, it does a couple things
 - It eliminates anxiety, and there is a settledness to life

- It becomes a lens, an orientation, a worldview , through which you rightly see all other things
- You might be wondering what are the treasures to be laid up in heaven vs earth?
- Simply put the treasure of all treasures is God! Put in another way, life in the Kingdom of God is the treasure of all treasures. Matt 13:44 says it clearly
 - **44** "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.
- Being alive in the Kingdom of God which is synonymous with becoming Christlike - this is the treasure you store up in heaven.
- Let me read some scriptures to help show us this treasure
 - **Eph 1:4-5**
 - **4** even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love **5** he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will
 - **Romans 8:30-32**
 - **30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.**31** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?**32** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
- Christ died on the cross, for you and me, so that the treasure of all treasures, God, can become our father. He was delivered up for our sins, raised for our justification so that we can receive the greatest gift that God gives, namely himself
- **Are you seeing the extent of his love for you?**

- **Are you seeing that he has more than this life in his view when he thinks of you?**
- **Are you seeing that you matter enough to God that he will give his son for you?**
- How then do we store up treasures in heaven?
 - First of all, the treasures to be stored in heaven is to be received. It is freely given
 - Simply by being an apprentice of Christ.
 - i. This means that I am learning from Christ how to live my life, the way he would live it, if he were in my shoes

Centrality of the Heart

- Our heart is the center of our being, from which life flows. It is what gives orientation to everything else we do. **The person who sees God as his treasure, sees everything in its true worth and relationship**
- In placing God as first, we rightly locate everything else (material wealth, marriage, family, career, relationships, fears, concerns, etc) in its rightful.
- Here's a quote from a commentary by DA Carson on this passage
 - The most cherished treasure subtly but infallibly controls the whole person's direction and values.
 - "If honor is rated the highest good, then ambition must take complete charge of a man; if money, then forthwith greed takes over the kingdom; if pleasure, then men will certainly degenerate into sheer self-indulgence" (Calvin).
 - Conversely, those who set their minds on things above (Col 3:1-2), determining to live under kingdom norms, discover at last that their deeds follow them (Rev 14:13).[5]
- Indeed we see that wherever our treasure is, there our hearts will be also.

- **I hope you are seeing that what we treasure is very much integral to how we define ourselves**
 - Give examples
- Since what we treasure is very much a posture of the heart, Jesus continues to go after our hearts by using a different analogy to expose our perspectives/orientation

Perspectives (vs 22-23) ~ 3 minutes

- **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!
- Almost everything you do with your body depends on your ability to see. It is through the light of the eyes that our body finds its way. While if one's eye is bad and there is no light, the body in a sense loses direction and you won't be able to do much by yourself
 - The eye being compared to a lamp speaks of the perspectives
- Very often in scripture **eyes and heart are equivalent** i.e. to "set the heart" and to "fix the eye" are synonymous, so we see that Jesus is still making the same point that how we see or what we value is very much a part of how we define ourselves.
- How we see affects our entire being and orientation
- The word "healthy/sound" in the greek is literally means "single" and is often used as a metaphor of **undivided loyalty to God**. This contrasts with the unhealthy eye, which connotes divided loyalty
 - However the word Haplous also means generous and liberal while an evil eye will connote the opposite.

- According to the Expositor's Commentary
 - Jesus is saying either (1) that the man who “divides his interest and tries to focus on both God and possessions . . . has no clear vision, and will live without clear orientation or direction”— an interpretation nicely compatible with v.24; or (2) that the man who is stingy and selfish cannot really see where he is going; he is morally and spiritually blind — an interpretation compatible with vv.19–21 (Carson, Expositor's Commentary).
- **The one with healthy eyes, sees God as his ultimate treasure, is relieved of false identities, sees himself/herself as a beloved child of God**
- **While the one with an unhealthy eye is stuck in the darkness of fear, ever running on a treadmill going nowhere, frantically seeking to protect it's treasures from moths, rust and thieves**
- **Essentially when we treasure what's of this world, we see everything from a perspective that distorts reality and systematically misleads us. The relative importance of things are misperceived.**
 - For example, someone who is addicted to a drug or power or wanting to be right or some activity to an extreme case sees only in relation to the object of its addiction and enjoyment - even to the potential detriment of their body and soul
- **I hope you are see that our perspective or vision or how we see is very much integral to how we define ourselves**
- We know Jesus is after our hearts and so he descends one level below where he was with the eye analogy

No Middle Grounds (vs 24) ~ 6 minutes

- **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.
- John Stoot in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount says
 - Jesus now explains that behind the choice between two treasures (where I lay them up) and two visions (where I fix my eyes) there lies the still more basic choice between two masters (whom I am going to serve).
 - It is a choice between God and mammon, that is between the living Creator himself and any object of our my creation I term 'money' ('mammon' being the transliteration of an Aramaic word for wealth)
- The root of the word translated as Money **indicates that in which one has confidence!** So while the exhortation here covers money, it goes way beyond that to the things we treasure, the things we have confidence in - and that can be money or our reputation or anything else
- **We cannot help but to serve what we treasure, and so who we will serve goes back to what is our ultimate treasure**
- **There are no middle grounds when it comes to serving God.** You cannot serve God and another (the things of this world) because their requirements conflict.
- Unless you have already placed God first, for example, what you will have to do to be financially secure, impress other people or fulfill your desires, for example, will invariably lead you away from God. This is why the first commandment says you shall have no other gods before me
- There is this mistaken belief in christian circles that obedience to God is optional, and being a disciple of Christ is reserved for pastors and those who want to go further in him
 - There is no salvation without being an apprentice of Christ

- Let me be clear, **your works never justifies you!** By themselves your works can only amount to filthy rags
- To be in the Kingdom of God means that we, **over time**, grow into his likeness. This was and has always been our original intent, hence why we are made in his image.
- Therefore if we are truly saved, we “[work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.](#)”
 - What you see is that there is a dimension to this relationship where God has ordained that we take some level of responsibility, even though He is truly the one that works in us
- He cannot simply be **Savior and not Lord/Master**
 - A. W. Tozer expressed his "[feeling that a notable heresy has come into being throughout evangelical Christian circles--the widely-accepted concept that we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need him as Savior and that we have the right to postpone our obedience to him as Lord as long as we want to!](#)"
 - This 'heresy' has created the impression that it is quite reasonable to be a "vampire Christian." One in effect says to Jesus: "I'd like a little of your blood, please. But I don't care to be your student/apprentice/disciple or have your character. In fact, won't you just excuse me while I get on with my life, and I'll see you in heaven." – Dallas Willard
- Please note that we will struggle against sin and battle to become Christlike. This will happen and likely continue on this side of eternity.
- However the very fact that there is a struggle and a battle is good news! It shows we have not thrown our lot with the enemy.
 - **Yes we will make mistakes and fall. And yes we are convicted by the Holy Spirit, of which there is no sweeter sign of his presence**

- But we keep going back to him, for he keeps opening his arms to us
- All of life is repentance said Martin Luther. Repentance is not only the doorway into Life in the Kingdom of God, hence the admonition to repent, it is also the pathway we must continue to tread upon.
- If we treasure God, then we will see him as Savior and Lord

Who am I? ~ 6 minutes

- The Wrong Way
 - Very often we define ourselves from these lenses
 - i. **What people say about us or what we want people to say about us**
 - ii. **What we possess**
 - iii. **What we do**
 - QQ: Think for a moment and locate how you define yourself?
 - i. **What are your treasures? What is your perspective of life? Whom do you serve?**
 - Note what jumps at you and maybe write that down
 - If you are like me, there are probably elements of all 3 lenses in you but one might weigh heavier than others in this season of life
 - This is a tiring way to live. It is so because it is completely predicated on what society or culture defines as being great. It is a way of life dependent on performance and it is

something you have to keep up with, continuously. **We are that hamster on a wheel that is going nowhere.**

- i. Speaking of it alone makes me tired.
- o What lies beneath this way of way of defining and seeing ourselves is fear or anxiety. And beneath that is unbelief in God
- o We are afraid we are not good enough, so we perform to get the praise or acknowledgement of others. We are afraid we do not measure up so we continually pursue the accumulation of things
- o We are afraid we do not matter or life is meaningless so we wrap our worlds around work and career progression
- o We desire to be good enough, we want to matter, we desire to have significance but we look for it in wrong places, and so our perspectives is skewed.
- o We treasure the wrong things and create a false narrative that seems very real. Unfortunately we become slaves to the very narrative we create. Here are some examples:
 - i. You might believe the narrative that for you to enjoy life, you need a certain level of wealth. And because you believe that, you become a slave to pursuit of wealth, and what you have is never enough.
 - ii. Or maybe the narrative we believe is that being loved by another will bring satisfaction and contentment, so we go looking for anyone to love us, throwing aside our convictions of what is right and wrong in making a choice
 - iii. Maybe we subscribe to the narrative that our kids have to be this smart or this proper and so we subject them to a life of rigor that simply saps their strength. And as parents, even though we love our kids but because they cannot meet the barrier we've imposed, we begin to become ashamed of them

- QQ: Pause and reflect a bit. What narratives are you holding on to?
 - i. How do you define yourself
- What lies beneath our false narratives of identity is fear, and beneath that fear is unbelief in God - basically not making God our treasure.

- A Better Way

- The better way of defining yourself is that you are a beloved child of God. You are invited to partake in the Kingdom of God, to be his apprentice.
- You are so loved that God has predestined you to be conformed into the image of Christ.
 - QQ: Pause and reflect on that. God's ultimate purpose for you is conformity into the image of His beloved Son
- **The Love of God for you, which is supremely shown at the cross is the answer to the fear beneath our anxieties, the fear that drives the wrong ways we define ourselves**
- **Jesus went to the cross for you, to die for you, to make you his own.**
- **He was delivered up for your sins and raised up for your justification so that nothing can ever separate you from the Love of God**
- Romans 8: 31 - 39
 - **31** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?
 - **32** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?**33** Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. **34** Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

- **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?
- **36** As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."
- **37** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**38** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,**39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- God LOVES You. Accept his love. If you do not know him, ask someone around you

Conclusion ~ 3 minutes

- How do I remind myself that I am not what I do or what I possess or what people say I am
 - How do I lay up treasures for myself in heaven?
 - How do I see life clearly?
 - How do I choose whom to serve
- By interacting with Christ, not as a dead Messiah but as the Living God
 - Turn your monologue into dialogue. Invite God into your day to day activities
 - Give examples
 - Meditate often on scripture, perhaps Romans 8:31-39
 - This is how you get truth into yourself. You have to hear it repeatedly and wrestle with it
 - Keep vigil with God in the Word