

Lesson 7: Treasures and Worry

Lesson Theme: Contrasts trust in things of this world and trust in God; contrasts treasures on earth, do not worry.

Text: Matthew 6:19-24

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.

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.

²³ 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!

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.

Do Not Worry

²⁵ "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? ²⁶ 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? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ 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? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Introduction

In these verses, Jesus shifts from our personal life (personal giving, prayer, and fasting) to public life (living in the world with questions of money, possessions, food, ambition. Too often people separate their personal life from their public life or put the two spheres in separate boxes. Here Jesus shows that God is equally concerned with our private and public lives and that He doesn't make a distinction between our private (religious) life and our public (secular) life. Further,

Jesus calls us to be free from the hypocrisy of the religious (previous lesson), and now, from the materialism of the irreligious.

Gordon Smith argues: "All vocations are sacred because the kingdom is not merely spiritual. God is establishing his kingdom on the earth as the whole of creation comes under his divine authority. To that end God calls and enables his children to be his kingdom agents within every sphere of life and society. Each vocation reflects but one avenue by which God, through word and deed, is accomplishing the establishment of his kingdom." (p. 25)

In this lesson watch as Jesus presents us with a series of paired choices: two treasures (on earth vs. in heaven), two spiritual conditions (blindness vs. sight), two masters (mammon vs. God), and two objects of passion (our bodies vs. God's kingdom).

Matthew 6:19-24

Discussion: Jesus appears to make the choice between the two treasures easy because "treasures on earth" are corruptible but in reality, many people have trouble making this choice. Why is the choice difficult for so many people? To what degree is faith an ingredient in making the correct choice and why?

Discussion: What are the things we are actually 'storing up' in heaven? How do we store things in heaven – what is that process like? Is it possible that there is a sort of "heavenly interest" that compounds, in contrast to earthly goods that depreciate and decay?

Discussion: Do verses 19-21 imply that we should not have personal property, savings accounts, retirement accounts, and insurance policies?

Proverbs 6:6-8 praises the ant for provision for the future and I Timothy 5:8 condemns one who does not provide for their own household so the extreme perspective seems to go against other statements from the bible.

John Stott writes: "What Jesus forbids his followers is the selfish accumulation of goods ('Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth'): extravagant and luxurious living, the hard-heartedness that does not feel the colossal need of the world's underprivileged people, the foolish fantasy that a person's life consists in the abundance of his or her possessions, and the materialism that tethers our hearts to the earth. In other words to store up treasure on earth does not mean being provident (making sensible provision for the future) but being covetous (like misers who hoard and materialists who always want more). This is the real snare of which Jesus warns here" (pp. 72-73).

Discussion: In verses 22-23, Jesus is thought to be using physical blindness and sight as an allusion to spiritual blindness and vision. What is spiritual darkness and how does it contrast with spiritual vision?

John Stott writes: "Not infrequently in Scripture the 'eye' is equivalent to the 'heart.' That is, to 'set the heart' and to 'fix the eye' on something are synonyms. Therefore, Jesus' argument seems to go like this: just as our eye affects our whole body, so our ambition (where we fix our eyes and heart) affects our whole life. Just as a seeing eye gives light to the body, so a noble and single-minded ambition to serve God and man it's meaning to life and throws light on everything we do. Again, just as blindness needs to darkness, so an ignoble and selfish ambition (e.g., to lay up treasures for ourselves on earth) plunges us into moral darkness." (p. 73).

Discussion: In verse 24, Jesus tells us that we will be a slave either to God or mammon (possessions and money). Why can we not serve these two masters simultaneously? How might those who try to choose both be likened to the "lukewarm Christians" of Revelation 3:16? In Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11, God says that He will not share His glory with another; hence, if you try to serve both then you are not choosing God. Jesus is presenting us with a choice between Creator and created.

Gladys Hunt writes: "Some Bible versions use the word mammon for money. "Scholars disagree on the exact derivation of the word mammon. It is possible that it comes from a Hebrew word that means 'to trust' and that it was used to refer to whatever one places one's trust in for security. We do know that in Jesus' world the word mammon was used for property in general. It had a neutral meaning and was not considered to be something that was tainted with evil. It simply referred to wealth or anything of value. It is striking that when Jesus uses the term it always has a negative sense. For him mammon is hazardous material" [Dockery and Garland, Seeking the Kingdom, p. 92] (p. 76).

Discussion: How can we tell where our treasure really is? What are some practical indicators? (How do we spend our time? What we post on social media?)

Matthew 6:25-34

Discussion: How will the choices we make in verses 19-24 affect our ability to live free from worry?

John Stott writes: "It is a pity that this passage is often read on its own, isolated from what has gone before. Then the significance of the introductory 'Therefore I tell you' (v. 25) is missed. So we must relate this 'therefore,' this conclusion of Jesus, to the teaching that has led up to it. He calls us to thought before he calls us to action. He invites us to look clearly and coolly at the alternatives before us and to weight them carefully. Only when we have grasped with our minds the comparative durability of the two treasures, the comparative usefulness of the two eye conditions, and the comparative worth of the two masters, are we ready to consider Jesus' words: 'Therefore I tell you' this is how you must go on to behave" (p. 73).

Discussion: How does worry double our trouble and how can we can we 'flip it' to make it productive? If we think of worry as a symptom, then what is the disease?

Worry might be thought of as a symptom of lack of faith in God to provide. According to Stott, it doubles our problems because we worry about something and then if it happens, we have had to deal with it twice. We can make it productive by using it as a call to action – and the best action is probably prayer.

For Additional Reading

Hunt, Gladys. *The Sermon on the Mount: A Radical Way of Being God's People*. Colorado Springs, Co.: WaterBrook Press, 1993.

Smith, Gordon. *Courage and Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 1999.

Stott, John. *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1985.