

What Are You Working For? 4-15-04

Matthew 6:19-24 (NIV)

¹⁹Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²²The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³But 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! ²⁴No 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.

When we look over the Sermon on the Mount, we see a very different view of life than the one society as a whole has accepted. In general, people in most of the world agree with that great philosophical statement, "He who dies with the most toys wins." We are always looking for one more gadget or gizmo, a better widget that saves more time than the perfectly good one we have right now. It looks cool! The guy that was using it in the advertisement looked so happy. Advertising is a multi-billion dollar industry! The advertising agencies realize that most of the world has not taken Jesus' command seriously. Most people are still storing up treasures here. So, the advertising agencies design their ads to make you think the product they are pitching is a real treasure.

What is a treasure? The Greek word used here can mean a box to hold precious things, or the things in the box. We immediately think of a jewelry box, but the term can also mean a casket. Some cultures buried the person's treasures with them. Talk about denial. They faced a real dilemma. They lived for amassing precious things, but realized that people die. The solution was to pretend that you can take it with you. But to some, the treasure in the casket is the physical body. It is destined to decay like all other treasures in this world.

Jesus is giving us another imperative command in this passage. Christianity is not a list of do's and don'ts, but Jesus did give us some out of loving concern to help guide our lives toward His. This is one of the DO NOTs of Jesus.

¹⁹Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

He tried to give us some insight into why we shouldn't do that in the same sentence with the command. You shouldn't because any material thing will either be eaten or rust away or be stolen. It is interesting that if you use something, it is not likely to get moth eaten or rusty. If it is useful to daily life, it is not likely to be the type of treasure Jesus was referring to.

The simple truth is that earthly things won't last. You will eventually part with every earthly treasure. Man, ever ready to place his focus on the wrong things, has solved some of those problems. Mothballs! That will keep those moths out of that closet full of clothes you never wear. Rustoleum! That will keep that precious metal from

rusting. Safety deposit boxes! Sure to keep your treasures from thieves. And if all else fails there is insurance. But the fact remains, you can't take it with you! (Ecclesiastes 2:26)

There is something deeper that Jesus is addressing. Sin begins in the heart. (Matthew 15:19) The heart that would waste this world's time and resources on earthly treasures is a heart that is seeking to find satisfaction solely in this temporal world. God has so much more for us! The Apostle Paul wrote Timothy that *the widow who lives for pleasure is dead while she lives.* (1 Timothy 5:6) A life focused on this world's pleasure is not alive in the true sense of life. It is focused on that which is passing, not recognizing that overindulging in earthly pleasures is destructive. It is not recognizing that true life, purpose, and value are not found in things. God is pleased when we enjoy those things, but they are not something to set our heart upon. (Psalm 62:10) They can be a gift from God to be enjoyed momentarily as we focus on the eternal. How many souls have spent their time on earth amassing riches, only to leave it all to those who wasted it, and enter eternity unprepared? (Job 27:16-17)

Instead, Jesus tells us, *²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

By focusing on storing your treasures in heaven, you guarantee your heart will stay fixed on the eternal. This is the problem with focusing on earthly treasure; it shows our heart is set on the wrong things. We are either trying to satisfy our desire to be secure, or our pride in what we possess, or we misguidedly think we will find lasting satisfaction in the temporal. The Apostle Paul told the Colossians to set their hearts on things above. (Colossians 3:1) He tells us the reason that we should is that we have been raised with Christ to newness of life. Our old nature, that fixed its hope and desire on temporal earthly treasure, is supposed to have died when we were born again. (Colossians 3:3) The new heart of the born again person is set on heaven. Naturally, (to the new nature) we desire to store up treasure there, to lay it at Jesus' feet in appreciation for all He has done for us.

What is heavenly treasure? Paul always referred to it as people he had influenced through the gospel. (1 Thessalonians 2:19) I'm sure there is more to it that we do not yet comprehend, but it is certainly going to be something we are glad we have. We will have invested in eternity. We will have laid up treasure where our heart is.

When I was young and idealistic, I thought that this meant to live without a job and definitely not to save money. But the Apostle Paul informed the Thessalonians that is not what Jesus meant. He warned them not to be idle, waiting for Christ's return. He was an example to them while he was there by working in his spare time to raise his own support. (2 Thessalonians 3:9-12) He told the Ephesians that we should work with our own hands so that we can share with those in need. (Ephesians 4:28) The writer of Proverbs tells us that storing for lean times is the prudent thing to do. (Proverbs 6:6-8) Paul also told the churches that we should work at whatever our job is as serving the Lord, and that in fact when we offer our labor as an act of worship, God will consider it as work done for Him. *²³Whatever you do, work at it*

Commented [notes1]: ²⁶To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Ecclesiastes 2:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ¹⁹For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: Matthew 15:19 (KJV)

Commented [notes3]: ¹⁰Do not trust in extortion or take pride in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them. Psalms 62:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ¹⁶Though he heaps up silver like dust and clothes like piles of clay, ¹⁷what he lays up the righteous will wear, and the innocent will divide his silver. Job 27:16-17 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ¹Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Colossians 3:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ¹⁹For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? 1 Thessalonians 2:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ⁹We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." ¹¹We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. ¹²Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. 2 Thessalonians 3:9-12 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ²⁸He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Ephesians 4:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ⁶Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! ⁷It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, ⁸yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. ... [1]

with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians 3:23-24 (NIV)

We are all called to fulltime ministry, whether at a secular job or one for the body of Christ. Some are called to do so expressing faith in God's provision. I have known men who ministered daily to the lost and placed their trust entirely in God's provision. They let no one know of their needs, and God always provided their essential needs. Whether we are called to that extreme, or serving God through the daily grind by which we provide for our families in a secular job, if our hearts are doing it for Christ, we will be rewarded. We are working for treasure in heaven, not for that on the earth. Man can't judge a person's heart motivation. (Jeremiah 17:10) This is something between you and God. The person that seems to be working hard for the Lord may be doing it out of pride. The person who is quite wealthy and successful financially, may be laboring entirely for the Lord. It comes down to who has the final say in regards to the wealth they have gained.

Commented [notes11]: ¹⁰"I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."
Jeremiah 17:10 (NIV)

Jesus expressed what I am trying to convey in a parable.

¹⁵Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."¹⁶And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'¹⁸"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.'¹⁹And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."²⁰"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'"²¹"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." Luke 12:15-21 (NIV)

Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. They are more than likely a distraction from what life is really about. (Matthew 19:23-24) Are you rich toward God?

Commented [notes12]: ²³Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.
²⁴Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."
Matthew 19:23-24 (NIV)

Sometimes we mistakenly think possessions bring lasting happiness. Some of the most joyful people I have met were simple people with simple lives and few possessions. Has the siren song of possessions lured you into the trap of being too busy trying to get treasures that you don't have time or desire for laying up treasures in heaven? If so, it is time to rearrange your life with God's priorities. Jesus warned, "Where your treasure is, you'll find your heart is as well."

²²"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³But 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!" Matthew 6:22-23 (NIV)
The good eye ('single' in KJV) is the eye that is out to please God alone. It is focused on the eternal. Because it is single, it interprets things correctly. It interprets as God sees things. If the eye is bad (in the moral sense) or we could use the translation 'evil', then the whole body is full of darkness. If you are out for selfish gain, seeking selfish pleasure, then you will interpret the world around you

incorrectly. Your actions and speech will be dark. You will be focused on what you can get at the moment for self.

There is another translation that we should consider. The word for 'good' or 'single' can also be translated 'generous'. The generous eye causes the body to be full of light. The person who has a generous attitude toward others is a gracious and loving person. They resemble the Father. They are not only generous in their opinion of others, they are generous toward others with their possessions, time and attention. They give to those in need, thinking of them before their own needs. Wouldn't you say that is how Christ has been toward you?

In contrast, the word for 'bad' or 'evil' eye could be translated 'stingy' or 'grudging'. Self is first and foremost and they hate to share. This world's treasures are all there is in life, so they want all they can get and hate to give any up to others, no matter how great the need. "I earned it, it's mine!" That's their attitude. How dark is that greed! It could very well be that Jesus also had this in mind.

He set the example of generosity by serving and pouring out His life for us. (Mark 10:45) Now He expects us to have the same generous spirit. If we do, we will see things clearly. We will see as the Father sees. Greed distorts our vision. This interpretation also fits in with the context of the passage as it begins and ends with treasures in this world. If you are going to insist on being selfish, your whole outlook on life will be distorted. But the generous person is filled with light. They see clearly what life is really about. Their generosity keeps their heart and their treasures in heaven. Your testimony will declare where your heart and treasures are.

Commented [notes13]: ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
Mark 10:45 (NIV)

Let me tell you about one such man I knew well. This man worked selling thread for a textile mill to companies in Southeast Asia. He was making a fine living until World War 2 came along. Captured and interred in a Japanese prison camp, life suddenly took on a grimness that few of us have ever seen. It was a treat to capture a rat so as to have some meat to ease the constant hunger pangs. One of the guards was uniquely kind to my friend. As my friend learned Japanese in order to survive, this guard shared Christ with him. My friend was miraculously saved.

At the end of the war he gave himself to mission work in China. He met a young lady and they married. After the birth of his first child, he discovered something was wrong with his wife. She would disappear for days. After his second child was born, she left and did not return. He later found out she had become a lesbian. The church no longer wanted him to serve with them. They said, "His house was not in order." He moved to Japan and began to minister there, but was rejected by the church there as well. Finally he settled in a mountain city of Japan. He remained single and spent his days ministering to people in the hospitals of that town. He never asked anyone for support, but God always provided his every need in one miraculous way after another. He sometimes did not have the money for heating oil and would get sick from the cold winters. His only indulgence in life was a stray dog that he kept as a pet to go for walks with him in God's creation. His daughter ministered with him, and grew up to be a fine Christian lady.

I had taken a spill on a motorcycle and by the Providence of God ended up in the hospital where he ministered. He was an example of living for treasure in heaven. Funny how the contrast of my living for treasures on earth stood out in the light of his love for Jesus. Here was this reject from the church faithfully storing up his treasures in heaven in a remote mountain city of Japan without any recognition or encouragement from anyone but God. It was not so much in what he shared with me, but in the way He lived all out for Jesus and nothing else. A big part of the reason I am here today sharing the Word and life of Jesus with you is because this man was such an example of living for treasure in heaven.

He returned to England a few years after I left Japan. Before he went to his reward, his wife returned to Jesus, and he saw his daughter marry a Christian man. He's home now and rich beyond our wildest dreams. He doesn't shiver in the winter. He's not rejected or belittled anymore because of the life his wife chose. No, he is honored now. And I imagine when some of those who rejected him stand in that heavenly city, they will kneel in front of him and ask for forgiveness for their cold-hearted treatment of a man who lived only to serve his Savior.

I know another couple. They served right here in Sedona. They worked with youth and had three children of their own. Previously they had worked with aids victims in Africa. Some in the church asked them why they had the third child when they could barely afford two. They had a big impact on the youth of Sedona until their pastor told them to stop ministering to kids in other churches. This godly couple said they could not give up ministering to others. The pastor called them traitors, hollow dead trees that were about to topple. They were fired. This young man had to work as a laborer to feed his family while they looked for another place to serve.

Eventually they were called to the Northwest. Now they are on their way to oversee a mission center in Botswana. They will live with their three boys in a remote area of Africa so those people have a chance to hear the Gospel, have medical care, and education. Why would they give up comfort here in the USA? They live to serve God. It doesn't matter what men do to them. It only makes their blessing and reward greater in heaven when they are persecuted for being faithful to Jesus.

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. I'm not telling you to quit your job and go into some fulltime ministry, unless God is calling you there. I'm simply telling you what Jesus told His disciples. You can't serve God and money. Live for Jesus. Lay up treasure in heaven. Whatever you do, do it for the glory of God. Have generous eyes, and you will see life clearly. It is the only life worth living. Remember the illustration of the dot and the line? Are you living for the dot that represents life on earth? Or are you living for the line that represents eternity. The only way to live for the line is to live to do all to the glory of God. If that is not you today, the wisest thing you could do would be to follow Jesus' loving command. Lay it all at His feet, and start living for Him alone! What are you working for?"

⁶Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!

⁷It has no commander, no overseer or ruler,

⁸yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.

Proverbs 6:6-8 (NIV)