



Week 4

Day 1 - Matthew 6:19-21

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Understanding the Passage:

Storing up treasures on earth is a fruitless enterprise because these possessions are vulnerable to decay and loss. This doesn't mean that having possessions is unnecessary or discouraged, but it is a warning to us that if we put value only in earthly "trophies" such as jobs, houses, or business portfolios, we will be devastated when we are forced to leave those things behind – and we will all come to a point when we have to leave those things behind. As Dr. Jim Moore used to say, "Have you ever seen a hearse pulling a trailer?"

But even more than a reminder that we can't take possessions with us, Jesus wants our hearts to be eternally focused. He knew that obsessing over temporary things will rob us of our joy. Money is one of the most commonly mentioned topics in scripture because of the overwhelming temptation to idolize it. Money may seem like a nice security blanket, but when we allow our wealth to become our god, it controls us. The things of this world can be fickle and fleeting; once they are gone, what we are left with is the eternal love and provision of God. Jesus instructs us to seek those things that will last forever and not give ourselves over to things that fade away.

The final sentence in our scripture today serves as a powerful "gotcha" moment for the reader. Imagine opening your credit card statement and allowing it to show you where your treasures truly are. For many of us, we would be uncomfortable with the results. But Jesus is not condemning us but warning us: it is easy to lose focus and be distracted by things that matter little in terms of eternity.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. When you read this passage do you find it comforting or convicting?
2. What would you say is your most prized material possession?
3. In life, do you tend to embrace the adventure of chaos or do you prefer the comfort of control?
4. Take a moment to examine your heart. What treasures are you currently storing there?

Day 2 - Matthew 6:22-24

"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Understanding the Passage:

Similar to Jesus' convicting statement about our heart residing where our treasure is, Jesus tells us that we will only be obedient to one master in the end. To attempt divided service is to have a divided heart. Only a wholehearted commitment to God will do. There is an either/or decision implied here, with the caution that to be devoted to one is to "despise" the other. To serve wealth is to despise God.

This can be particularly challenging in our modern Western culture where consumerism is celebrated as a boon to our capitalistic society. Every day we are inundated with new things vying for our attention and allegiance. After natural disasters we are encouraged to go out and spend money to ensure a continued healthy economy. Money makes the world go around, and if used correctly, it can increase the world's quality of life; however, it is a poor substitute for a deity. Jesus is firm that we cannot expect to worship both our consumerism and God simultaneously – we must choose one or the other.

Once again Jesus is inviting us to examine ourselves lest we allow our eyes to serve the wrong master for too long. Idolatry can be a slow and unnoticed process. We start out with our eyes steadily on God, but over time we allow them to wander, unknowingly building up resentment in our hearts. We should be careful not to find ourselves holding back aspects of our lives from God to ensure that those small things that we would keep for ourselves never become our masters.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Do you ever feel conflicted about serving God?
2. Why does money hold so much power over us, individually and as a society?
3. What aspect of your life are you afraid to hand over to God?
4. Ask God to direct your focus today and reveal any things that are in danger of taking your eyes off of God.

Day 3 - Matthew 6:25-34

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

Understanding the Passage:

Jesus urges his followers to seek the reign of God first and trust that what is needed will be provided. Of course, it is much easier to **say** that we will trust in God alone than to actually **do it**. Capacity to trust in God's providence enough not to worry about things requires seeing the world altogether differently. In a real sense the amount of worry in our life is directly related to who God is to us. The stronger our relationship with God, the more likely we are to trust that the one who has gotten us this far will provide for us in the future. God knows what we need and will make sure that we are taken care of. We do not need to be crippled by worrying about the future.

God does not take care of us simply because that is God's job as creator. Jesus reminds us that we are of far more value to him than other things that God has already taken care of. It is because God loves us that we can trust in God's provision. Imagine your five-year-old constantly worrying about what they were going to do the next day, asking you questions like "What clothes am I going to wear" and "What are you going to pack in my lunch box?" Your response would be similar to Jesus': "You don't have to worry about those things because Mom and Dad will make sure that they are taken care of." Your love for your child compels you to see that they are taken care of. How much truer is that of God, especially since God is far greater than we are at providing?

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Are there benefits to worrying?
2. How can worrying be a barrier to our relationship with God?
3. When have you seen God's provision in your life in the past?
4. Write down something you are worried about right now. Pray that God would give you the strength to turn it over to God so that you can release your worry.

Day 4 - Matthew 7:1-6

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you."

Understanding the Passage:

God is the only judge; we are inviting a harsh judgment from God when we judge others. If we are critical of one another, God will be critical of us. If we are gracious and generous with one another, God will be gracious and generous with us. Those who have been forgiven by God should be imitators of God's love and show forgiveness to others. It is hypocritical to be judgmental of others because it implies that we are unable or unwilling to see our own need for mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus is warning us that self-righteousness leads to self-deception. We are to first focus on our own sin before holding our neighbor accountable in love. We can never fully see what God sees – only God can judge rightly. Jesus does call for humble correction and forgiveness of one another within the community... but only once our hearts are in the right place. Matthew uses the term hypocrites thirteen times in his Gospel (for comparison, Mary only

uses it once and Luke only uses it three times). The Gospel of Matthew clearly wants its readers to understand what a threat hypocrisy is to our Christian piety.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What kind of judgement is Jesus talking about in this passage? Is there ever a time when it is okay to judge?
2. Why are we more likely to see sin in others than in ourselves?
3. What “logs” do you have in your eyes? Make a list of three or four things. How can we deal with our own blind spots?

Day 5 - Matthew 7:7-11

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

Understanding the Passage:

There is a call and response format to each of these pairs: ask and receive, search and find, and knock to have the way opened. Here Jesus provides us with a confident anticipation of God’s gracious response. The words ask, search, and knock invite a boldness in our approach to God. This does not mean that God is our personal vending machine and that we should expect our creator to give us whatever we ask for. If God knows our needs before we ask him, as Jesus said earlier, then prayer is about more than just making God aware of what we need. Prayer is about our relationship with God and when we make ourselves known to God we grow deeper in the relationship.

Jesus’ use of the example of a parent who loves their children further illustrates this by appealing to our human understanding. Parents don’t give their children everything they ask for because they know that some things are not good for their children and would harm them. If we show restraint with our children because we love them and want to protect them, we can expect God, who loves us far more than we love our children and who has a far greater understanding of our needs than we do as parents, to provide the good things that we need.

How then do we know what to ask for? We abide with God through prayer, worship, and the study of scripture. The more we know God the more we will desire the things that God desires for us because we will trust in God’s goodness. As a parent, you are not angry when your child asks for something outrageous (assuming they can take no for an answer) because they have shared their heart with you through their request. But as the child grows and trusts that you have their best interests at heart, they learn what is and is not aligned with your will for them.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. When has God answered your prayers or provided for you in the past?
2. Ask, Seek, Knock – what are the differences in these three verbs? Is one harder to do than the others?
3. How might you make yourself known to God today through honest and vulnerable prayer?

Video Questions:

1. What stood out to you in the video?
2. This week is all about how we are supposed to live our lives; what did Jesus say that you found personally convicting?
3. What are the things that will last forever? What are the things around us that are passing away?
4. Money is mentioned more than 800 times throughout scripture; why do you think Jesus specifically references our wealth when warning us about serving two masters?
5. Are you in danger of chasing after something that isn't real? Where are you currently guiding your heart?
6. There are a lot of things in our world today that can cause us to worry. What would it take for you to trust Jesus when he says, "do not worry about your life?"
7. How is the understanding of our need for forgiveness tied into Jesus warning us not to judge others?
8. In what ways are you tempted to be a pretender in your life? How is God asking us to live authentically?
9. What would "knocking" look like for you in prayer?
10. Notes, reflections, and prayer requests.