

“The Heart of the Matter: What Do You Treasure?”

Introduction: Treasure – we hear the word and probably think about something a group of pirates buried long ago on some desert island. Dictionary.com defines the noun as “anything that is greatly valued or highly prized,” and the verb as “to treat something as precious or to retain carefully.” To its credit, Wikipedia defines treasure as “the focus of one’s heart,” and references the passage in Matthew from the Sermon on the Mount (SM) that is before us today.

As we move forward in this sermon, one in which Jesus has been talking about the focus of the heart, about what life looks like within the kingdom of God when our hearts have been formed to become more and more like his, Jesus now moves to what can distract our hearts, causing us to veer off course from living the life that is truly life. He talks about two things primarily: the pursuit of wealth, which we’ll talk about this morning, and then the weight of worry, which we’ll address next time (vv. 25-34).

At our deacon’s meeting last week we were discussing the difficulty about talking to people about their use of money. One of our deacon’s wryly said, “You can address someone’s sexual behavior, but don’t think about addressing the issue of money; that’s personal!” Interesting, and true! Jesus, however, didn’t shy away from issues of the almighty shekel, for he knew that how we think about it and how we handle it truly reveals the focus of our heart. In fact, Jesus talked about money more than heaven and hell combined, which should clue us into the fact that while he’s concerned about where we’ll be going when we die, he’s equally if not more concerned about how we are living before we get there! Are we living in a heavenly way now?

As Jesus addresses this issue in the SM, he uses three pairs: two treasures, two eyes, and two masters. As we look at these, we’ll see that our faith and our finances are inseparable. How, then, do the economics of the kingdom of God help us to think about what, and how, we treasure?

I. Competing Masters

A. Let’s begin with the two, competing masters with which Jesus concludes. He’s making the point that money can become a god, it can become something that we serve and trust:

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.

Importantly, what Jesus doesn’t say is that money is a bad thing. What’s bad is that it can become a number one thing, it can become the thing that we treasure above all else. When that happens, our life gets out of whack. As Paul puts it to Timothy, it’s the love of money, our eagerness for it, that is the “root of all kinds of evil,” that causes us to wander from the faith and be pierced with grief (1 Tim. 6:10). When the first commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” is followed, all else falls into line. But when other gods push their way to the front, life is not lived well over the long haul.

Illustration: The “pushiness” of money is strong. Just how strong is revealed in a study reported in a book called *Buyology*, by Martin Lindstrom, that was published just a few years ago. Lindstrom reports on a group of neurologists who scanned the brains of people of faith as they recalled the times they felt close to God in prayer, worship, or solitude. It turns out that the same area of the brain “lit up,” became activated, as the area that lit up when another group was

exposed to products such as iPods, Ferrari's, and Harley-Davidsons. In other words, the material world provides a strong rival to God in terms of what we think will make us happy. Money, and what it can buy, competes for our hearts.

B. That, of course, is the narrative of the world. Recall our "triangle of transformation," which reveals that one of the means that the Holy Spirit uses to transform us is the narrative of the kingdom of God. We need learn and understand that narrative because the opposite and competing narrative is the narrative of the world, and it has great pull on our hearts. It says that if we have "x" (either a dollar amount or a particular product), then we will feel secure, successful, powerful, and happy. That, of course, is what those who sell products want us to believe. Back to *Buyology*, Lindstrom's research reveals that ninety percent of our buying behavior is unconscious, that is, we purchase things not for their functionality but for what we believe they say about us and will enable us to become, from deodorant that will make you irresistible to cell phones that will make you more connected. Further, if, as recent statistics show, the average child spends 900 hours a year in school but 1,500 hours watching t.v., and during that year of t.v. watching is subject to 20,000 thirty second commercials (an average of 55 per day), that narrative of the world is being strongly pushed. And so we need a good understanding of the counter-narrative, the narrative of the kingdom of God, especially its economics.

## II. Differing Treasures

A. Jesus gives us such an economic lesson by use of another contrasting pair. He warns us against storing up for ourselves treasures on earth vs. treasures in heaven. What are earthly treasures? It's all the things those 30 second commercials trumpet. However, even the most recent iPhone will only make you happy for awhile, until Apple replaces it with something newer, which you are then led to believe you have to have. And if you choose not spend your money but invest it somewhere, you are really no better off, for the next political unrest or economic downturn might very well wash it all away. The problem with the treasures of the earth is that they won't last. Either moths or vermin will destroy them, or thieves will steal them. It's a way of saying that there's no real long term security or happiness or power to be found in them.

B. By contrast, the narrative of the kingdom encourages us to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. What might those be? Lest we try to imagine what having some kind of bank account in heaven might look like from which we can somehow draw or use in the future, it's perhaps more helpful to remember that heaven is another way of referring to God's dimension of reality. So, storing up heavenly treasure is to simply invest our resources in what God is doing, "on earth as it is in heaven." That is what has real, lasting value, that is what will lead to true happiness, or, as Paul puts it to Timothy, in our taking hold of the life that is truly life (1 Tim. 6:19). If, then, storing up treasures on earth refers to our accumulating or hanging on to things, storing up treasures in heaven refers to giving away things in a manner that glorifies God. Thus, if we're mastered by God, then our money becomes a servant of his kingdom purposes. What does this look like?

C. On a very practical level, we see Paul instructing Timothy to encourage those in his congregation who had means to be "rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share." This is the way they will store up treasure in heaven and begin to live the life that is truly life, now (1 Tim. 6:18-19). God, in other words, has prospered them not to increase their standard of living but their standard of giving. But this is true for all of us. In this vein, it's worth thinking about an exchange John the Baptist had with the crowd which had begun to enquire about what to do to prepare for the arrival of the kingdom of God in Jesus. John preaches to them about their need to repent, to accept God's invitation to go his way, and so they ask John what this would look like in their lives. John gives three, very practical answers: everyone should share their

clothes and food with the poor, tax collectors shouldn't pocket extra money, and soldiers should be content with their pay and not extort money from the citizenry (Luke 3:7-14). Interesting that no one had asked John about how to handle their money and their possessions. John simply responded in a way that revealed how central our finances are to our life of faith. It was of such a high priority that John couldn't talk about the formation of their heart without talking about the economics of the kingdom, without addressing how to store up heavenly treasure, how to handle what we have, how to put the focus on giving, not acquiring.

Illustration: A bit later in Matthew's gospel we read the sad, even tragic, account of a man who had been making money his master, acquiring many things, and he came to Jesus and asked how he might acquire eternal life as well. As he pressed Jesus, Jesus responded: "Sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Ma. 19:21). Jesus knew that possessions had become this man's master, that he was obsessed with earthly treasure and his idol needed to be dethroned. But the man considered the price to be too great and walked away without letting go of a thing. By contrast, there was a fellow, a very wealthy tax collector named Zacchaeus, who met Jesus. After Jesus came to his home, Zacchaeus gave half of his possessions to the poor and paid back everyone whom he had cheated, four times the amount (Lk. 19:1-8)!

What's the difference here? How can we let go? How can we make the shift from earthly treasure – acquiring and clinging to things, to heavenly treasure – giving things away? How can kingdom economics become more and more a part of our spiritual formation so that we're not mastered by money but use it to invest in what God is doing? Let's conclude with those curious verses about two eyes that Jesus sandwiches in between his discussion about two masters and two treasures.

### III. Eyes that See

A. Jesus says there are eyes that are healthy, that fill our body full of light, and there are eyes that are unhealthy, that will fill us full of darkness. "Eyes that are unhealthy" translates an idiom that literally reads, "But if your eye is evil." So what does that mean? We're helped by the way Jesus this idiom in the parable he tells about the workers in the vineyard. The owner of this vineyard had hired workers who had begun working at different times, at nine, noon, three, and five o'clock. At the end of the day he gathered them all together and paid them all the same thing. Those who had only worked a few hours earned the equivalent of an entire day's wage. It was an incredible illustration of grace – of God's undeserved favor – but not all were able to see it that way. One fellow worker it as incredibly unfair. In response, the owner said, "Are you envious because I was generous?" (Ma. 20:15, NIV) The ESV puts it this way: "Do you begrudge my generosity?" But literally Jesus said, "Is your eye evil because I am good?"

B. So what is this "evil eye" that can fill us with darkness? It's the inability to see God's grace, God's undeserved favor and generosity. It's being blinded by self-interest. It's being unable to see God's mercy as being more precious than money. As Eugene Peterson puts 6:23 in *The Message*, "If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust . . . what a dark life you will have!" So by contrast, the good or healthy eye has one treasure. It sees God, his ways and his economics as the greatest treasure in life. It's an eye that is able to recognize the beauty of grace, which is what Zacchaeus saw and received when Jesus came into his home, the home of a sinner. It's what will enable us to open our hands and be givers, not acquirers, storing up for ourselves heavenly treasures. As someone once put it, "as thunder follows lightening, giving follows grace."

Our faith and our finances are inseparable. The economics, the narrative, of the world, says that the more we acquire the happier we will feel. Jesus,, in the narrative of the kingdom, God's economics, declares that the more we give away, the more blessed we will be. May God give us eyes to see what true treasure truly is.