

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 healthy, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy, 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 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.

-- Matthew 6:19-24

Life in the now and not yet would be much simpler if we had some idea of what it means to store up treasures in heaven. For example, wouldn't it be easier to understand what God wants of us if, when we drop a loonie into a panhandler's cup, ten dollars would immediately be credited to our heavenly bank accounts. Or, if we sacrifice a little more and devote a quarter of our income instead of the usual ten percent to feed, clothe, and house our city's poor, perhaps God could reward us with a mansion of glory by the beach—or the golf course if you prefer. All of these, of course, would pale in comparison to Jesus' request of the rich young man: to sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor. Then, we could expect our Father to *really* roll out the red carpet for us. Then, once we stroll past those pearly gates, we would find ourselves seated at Jesus' right hand on a golden throne while angels fan us with wings that smell like fabric softener and feed us freshly peeled grapes.

Yet if we were to conclude that this is what Jesus is talking about when he says that we are to store up treasure in heaven, we'd be missing the mark.

In the text we have just read, Jesus has finished a series of teachings on giving to the needy, prayer, and fasting—three sections of Scripture that touch on so many places we struggle with that they often are dealt with on separate occasions. However, dealing with each of these teachings in turn can also mean that we miss out on understanding some of the later portions of the Sermon on the Mount. In particular, Jesus includes a phrase with each of these teachings that we sometimes gloss over: “*your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*”

This phrase allows us to highlight the context of this passage and helps us to understand part of the way of the Kingdom of God. Giving for the sake of being thought of as generous is not the way of the Kingdom. Praying for the sake of being thought of as pious is not the way of the Kingdom. And fasting for the sake of appearing holy is not the way of the Kingdom. In each of these, the challenge before us is not to put an obligation on ourselves to perform up to God’s standards. Rather, the invitation of the text before us today speaks of a deep inner transformation that springs out of repentance; the turning of our hearts and minds to agree with and participate in God’s redemption of us and the world. Whenever we engage in living out this Kingdom ethic, we do so because of a transformation from within that leads to action.

So when Jesus comes to teach about storing treasure in heaven, we must first acknowledge the sense that whatever storing treasure in heaven means, it certainly does not mean we should expect anything in *this* life for having done it. Some of you may imagine that teaching Sunday School or leading music or preaching would be laudable tasks—and they are!—but we do not engage in these practices so that we can

be held in high esteem. Instead, when we give, we do not give to earn righteousness before God or the praise of others who are watching us. We give because in the Kingdom of God, money and resources are to be used to further the shalom of God to a world in desperate need of that peace.

“Do not store up in places where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal,” Jesus says. Yet does this now mean we are free to hoard whatever we can as long as we pack it in mothballs or have it rust-proofed or hidden in Fort Knox? It helps to understand what Jesus is driving at when we consider that moths and rust only destroy things that are not being used, and thieves themselves rarely will go after something that is guarded or in your hand. Jesus is not saying that we are not to participate in this world’s economic structures of buying and selling. Instead, what he is saying is that there is no use in hoarding anything in the hope that having these things will save us from disaster or ruin. We sometimes think having a fat bank account and a house are symbols of security. Yet for those who follow Christ, there is no security beyond that of the assurance that God has beaten sin and death, and that they no longer have a hold on us. The issue is not whether we ought to buy things that perish. The issue is that we have set our hearts on materialistic pursuits and thus sell our allegiance, the very thing we give to God and His Kingdom when we profess our faith in Him.

Investing in things that last forever may be a matter of simple economic sense for you, but Jesus turns our expectations of this passage away from making economic decisions and instead focuses on the thing that we are most often very reluctant to give:

our hearts. If all we set our hearts on are to live in comfort and have every single one of this life's needs met, it is not that we desire wrongly—we simply do not desire enough. Jesus speaks against such low aims for ourselves, for what does it mean to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God unless it means living for the Kingdom yet to come in fullness? We who have been ransomed from fear and death, are not merely ransomed so we may live this life without pain or hardship, but we are freed *so that* we can participate in God's all-encompassing redemptive work.

As such, we do not belong to ourselves or our own whims, but to God and His desire for us as His beloved sons and daughters. Since we live in and for Him, we need to examine ourselves for the signs of having fallen into mindless grubbing for transitory symbols of what the world defines as ease and success. When we find that we live with our eyes focused only on what can be grasped with our hands instead of always looking ahead, we live myopically—short-sightedly. When our hearts are so easily satisfied with desiccated scraps of year-old No-Name Vanilla ice cream at the back of the freezer, how will we ever lay hold of the Haagen-Dazs that awaits?

So now we must ask: are we doomed to swallow bitterness while we wait for death? The answer is an emphatic “*no*.” Even I, a man not known for seeing the bright side of life, can say without pause that there is a foretaste of the Kingdom even now. I see it when you draw together and persevere in loving each other, even and especially when it hurts. I see it when we care for and protect each other, providing for each other's every need. I see it when we include those whom the world at large has cast aside and befriend the friendless. And I see it in the way we grieve our sin and still,

because of the mercy shown to us by God through Christ, we find the strength to forgive. These, the fruit of the Spirit of God dwelling in us, are part of the sweetness that will endure beyond the veil of death.

When we finally set our hearts on the things that last from this life on into the next, we become more like Christ, the light of the world, and the light that shines out from within us. Unlike our modern understanding of our eyes as windows that let light in, the ancient understanding was to see our eyes as lamps, as sources of light that let out what lay within. When our hearts are only set on things that rot, they too will rot, and what comes out of us is only more rot. But when we look ahead to the Kingdom and humbly celebrate the advances of this Kingdom as it breaks out in and amongst us, what is within us becomes light, and thus what pours out of us is light.

When Jesus speaks of a healthy eye full of light, he speaks of a generous spirit that gives because it is free from hoarding what will only perish.¹ This is what it means when Jesus speaks of the light pouring out of us—that because we are transformed from within, we cannot help but put the things that moth and rust destroy in their rightful places: as things we can give away because we are *free* from them. And when we are generous with money, with time and with ourselves, we intentionally subvert the system of the world that insists on fairness, but not on justice, and certainly not on grace. We become lovers and givers, using what we have to, bit by bit, make the best of a bad

¹ cf. Matt 20:15: “Or are you envious because I am generous” → “is your eye evil because I am good”? Also, Deut 15:7-9

situation. We become practitioners of the grace of God, even as His grace is practiced on us.

Although I might sound as though I have a grip on what it means to be free from wanting the cheap trinkets the world foists on us as symbols of the good life, I don't. The reason why I don't often speak about money is because it is a painful subject for me. I have seen my family come apart at the seams because of the love of money; and I have seen many more loved ones spiral down into sin and darkness because they are enslaved to the idea that this is all that is worth getting. I have seen it all, but I do not look down on them for it, because the sickness that drives them to it resides in me as well. God have mercy on me!

Yet today I say as a broken man that every time I put something in this little brown box, I proclaim to the visible and invisible worlds that what I put in here does not own me, and that the only Master I have is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is not an easy proclamation. Sometimes, I am not able to say it. But this is the transformation that I, like you, look forward to: that one day I might be generous not because I am commanded to do so by the dictates of some oppressive religion, but because I am freed from within to put my heart on what lasts. This, then, is how offering is an act of worship: when we say with our giving that God and the ethic of His Kingdom to love our neighbour as ourselves, is worth infinitely more than this world's wealth.

- 1.) What does it mean to live with our hearts set on God and His Kingdom?
- 2.) How is God inviting you to be generous today?