

Week 15 – Beware of Panning for Fool’s Gold – Matthew 6:19-24

Scripture Reading: 1Timothy 6:17-19

Introduction

In the first half of Matthew 6, Jesus focused on the spiritual life that should characterize one of his followers

And in verses 1-18 we saw that the disciplines of giving, fasting, and praying were to be done for an audience of one

That is to say, they should be engaged in for God alone and that we should not seek the applause of our fellow man for them – actually, we should endeavor to avoid even having our fellow man notice that we are doing them

In fact, Jesus tells us that, if we do those things to receive the applause of man, their applause is the only reward we will receive

We all want to be liked and approved of – that’s just a part of the human condition

But when it comes to spiritual matters, the approval of our fellow man is a hollow promise that has no lasting value

It’s like junk food that tastes great going down but has no lasting value and ultimately proves to be harmful to us

Now, starting in verse 19 Jesus turns to teaching about attitudes and pursuits that deprive a believer of spiritual victory and serve to damage, or even destroy, their witness

We will be looking at verses 19-24 this morning which fall under the heading “Lay Up Treasures in Heaven” in our ESV Bible

And the overall theme of these verses is that we must be diligent to be faithful to the proper pursuits

Using three examples, Jesus teaches that we must devote ourselves to God and to gaining eternal treasure in heaven because all other pursuits are temporary and they will ultimately be of no lasting value to us

Those lesser pursuits are like **fool’s gold** which sparkles and shines like gold but is actually iron sulfide which is one of the most common minerals there is

And many a miner has labored long and hard to collect that which he later discovered to be worthless

If you are taking notes, those three examples which are designated by the Roman numerals are Your Values, Your Focus, and Your Service

And under each of those headings, we are going to see that there is a binary choice and that we need to be ever vigilant because they are choices we will be making again and again as we go through this life

Former baseball great, Yogi **Berra**, is quoted as having said, “When you come to a fork in the road, take it” and as we go through life we continually come to critical “forks in the road”

And, since the decisions we make as to which path to follow have eternal consequences we are wise to seek guidance

Please join me in Matthew chapter 6 (811) and follow along as I read verses 19-21 [**Matthew 6:19-21**]

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

In those three verses, Jesus is warning us to be careful about what we value

I. Your Values

We have the natural tendency to equate “treasures on earth” with money or wealth

And without a doubt that is the surface meaning of Jesus’ words as we see in his warnings about the destruction of moths and rust and the danger of theft

With those warnings we understand that he's talking about three major areas of tangible goods – our money, our clothing, and our food supply

And Jesus says that each of those things is in danger both from nature and from those who would steal them

Ever since Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, this world has been a cursed place subject to what scientists call entropy

Entropy is the inevitable and steady tendency of all matter to decay – and we see it all around us

We bemoan how our vehicles rust, how our clothing falls apart, how our food spoils, and so many other things that simply go bad despite our best efforts to prevent it

I just this week spent over a thousand dollars fixing the brake lines on my truck which blew out because they were weakened by rust – and if you've seen my truck you know that its body is suffering the same fate

At least I'm getting better gas mileage as it becomes lighter and lighter

It's a harsh reality that things fall apart in this world and we can't stop it from happening – all we can do is perhaps prolong the process a bit

And Jesus says here that living to accumulate wealth is an unjustifiable pursuit if for no other reason than the fact that we live in a fallen world and those things cannot possibly last

With that said, we need to understand that Jesus was not condemning owning things or even the accumulation of wealth in a general sense

Scripture doesn't prohibit private ownership or even saving for the future

In fact, saving for a rainy day is commended in **Proverbs 6:6-8** which shows this principle is even played out in nature

Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.

And in Acts 5 where we find the account of Ananias and Sapphira we see in verse 4 [**Acts 5:4**] Peter defend the right to own and control private property when he asked regarding the plot of ground that was in question:

While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?

And in 1 Timothy 4 Paul declares that it's okay for us to enjoy the good things in life because they come from God

So Jesus can't possibly be saying that we need to renounce all having nice things and enjoying them here on earth

What Jesus is prohibiting is *overvaluing* those things because they have absolutely no value in the next life

And as we see in **Luke 12:15**, our earthly possessions actually have limited value in this life as well - *one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions*

Still, an old miser thought he had solved the problem of not being able to take his money with him when he died

So he called his doctor, lawyer, and minister to his deathbed and gave each of them \$30,000 cash in an envelope

And he instructed them to throw their envelope onto his casket just before they covered it up

On the day he was buried each man did as he was instructed and tossed his envelope into the grave

However, as they walked away the minister had an attack of conscience and admitted that he had taken out \$10,000 to cover some expenses at the church and had only thrown in \$20,000

Whereupon the doctor had a pang of guilt and admitted he had kept out \$20,000 for a clinic he was starting and had only thrown in \$10,000

The lawyer expressed his surprise at the two men and said, "I'm ashamed of you both for disregarding the wishes of a dying man. My envelope contained a personal check for the full \$30,000."

You really can't take it with you and all of us leave this world with precisely the same possessions we had coming in

But we err if we equate "treasures" with money because the things we treasure are much more varied

What Jesus has in mind are people who get their main or even their entire satisfaction from things that belong to this world only

And that expands the idea of "treasures" to include things like family, status, a job, retirement, independence, even likes or a large following on social media could be a treasure for some

Anything besides Christ that you look to for your satisfaction, your security, or your significance can be included in Jesus' idea of an earthly treasure and none of those things will count for anything in eternity

Jesus says instead that his followers should focus on what will matter in eternity because they will be rewarded in heaven for the way they live on earth

The Bible doesn't have much at all to say about what that reward is specifically but we can be sure it's more substantial and better than anything we could possibly imagine

And in verse 21 [**Matthew 6:21**] Jesus says, *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*

This tells us that what we treasure reveals who we truly are because in Hebrew thought the heart wasn't just the seat of the emotions as we think of it today

Jesus' original audience would have understood that the heart was the inner man, the seat of the intellect and the will, the core of our being

Therefore, Jesus is saying that not only are our affections tied to what we treasure but our whole being is wrapped up in it so that if our treasure is earthly our focus will be earthly and if our treasure is heavenly so will our focus be heavenly

So ask yourself what you dream about, what you fret about, what you have that you would most dread losing, what are the measures you use to evaluate others, and if there's anything you know you couldn't be happy without

Your honest answers to those questions will tell you a great deal about where your treasures are

Be sure that what you are pursuing are truly treasures that will matter in eternity

The next example that Jesus mentions regards our focus and he uses the imagery of an eye to make his point

II. Your Focus

Look with me at verses 22-23 [**Matthew 6:22-23**] –

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 bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

Sometimes Jesus' teachings can be quite difficult to understand

At least his meaning can be difficult to understand beyond the surface level

It's easy for us to understand that light represents good and dark represents evil in these verses because those themes are used often in the Bible

And it's no surprise that Jesus would say we should pursue light rather than darkness

But the question before us is what exactly Jesus was teaching in these verses with the use of the imagery of a lamp and an eye and the eye being the lamp of the body

In order to best answer this question and determine what Jesus is teaching we need to consider the theme of this entire section of the sermon and that theme concerns the attitudes and pursuits that determine spiritual victory or failure

Looking at these verses through that lens shows us two truths

First, in verse 22, Jesus is saying that his followers must be single-minded in their devotion

The good eye is the one that is fixed on God; an eye that is unwavering in its gaze

And when we take light to stand for revealed good, we readily understand that the person whose eye is fixed on the kingdom and on kingdom values will be the person who has a proper understanding of biblical truth and who would likely tailor their life according to it

Then in verse 23, Jesus expresses the corollary to verse 22 and speaks of a bad, or unhealthy, eye

Obviously, the bad eye would be an eye that is attracted to and focused on the wrong things

And Jesus when Jesus says that results in darkness we understand that looking to the wrong sources for insight and guidance will lead to a wrong perspective, wrong priorities, wrong values, and wrong decisions

When I was a kid my folks used to scold me and my siblings if we sat too close to the TV because they thought it would ruin our eyes

Of course, now we know that it might cause eyestrain and give you a headache but it doesn't actually damage your eyes in any way and, actually, it's the content of what you watch that causes damage – at least in a spiritual sense

And it doesn't likely happen all at once so you might be fooled into thinking it really doesn't matter

But like a person who has slow-growing cataracts, your sight will get dimmer over time

And although you would likely think you can still see just fine, you would not be seeing things as they truly are and you would be misdirected in your priorities and your decision-making as your world becomes progressively darker

Stepping back for just a moment to the person who is rightly focused and full of light I want you to consider that the person who is full of light cannot help but give off some of that light

I think that's probably the primary way that believers are the "light of the world" as Jesus teaches us in **Matthew 5:14**

Living with our gaze fixed firmly on kingdom truth will lead to us living by kingdom values which causes committed followers of Jesus to shine brightly in this dark world like a city on a hill or a lamp on a stand

The bottom line is this: Jesus says that what we focus on affects our spiritual state

When we focus on the light we find in Scripture we cannot help but be filled with the light of the kingdom

But when we allow ourselves to focus on darkness of the world our perception will likewise be darkness devoid of biblical truth and guidance

And soon you might well begin to believe that your darkness is actually light and then, as Jesus put it, "how great is the darkness!"

As the children's song says, O be careful little eyes what you see, because where you focus matters

Lastly, Jesus turns to the matter of service and uses the imagery of the servant/master relationship

III. Your Service

Look with me at verse 24 [**Matthew 6:24**] –

No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money.

Again, we need to view what Jesus teaches in this verse through the lens of spiritually profitable attitudes and pursuits

And as Jesus uses the imagery of trying to please two masters we see that he is speaking of our allegiances and how, during a crisis, when a choice must be made, only one can come out on top

It will become clear which "master" is preferred – which is to say, what or whom we want to serve most will be revealed

We can easily understand the tension that would exist for a servant who was forced to choose between the competing demands of two masters

I know I've experienced that very thing on jobs when I had bosses at different levels that had differing priorities for how I should focus my time and efforts

And Jesus points out how in those situations something needs to be used to break the tie and he uses the terms "love" and "hate" and "devoted to" and "despise"

We have to be careful not to take those terms too literally because in Hebrew thought the contrast between love and hate simply means that one alternative is strongly preferred over the other

And that's especially true if there is a contest between the two options

We see this in **Romans 9:13** where Paul writes quoting from Malachi God saying - *"Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

That doesn't mean that God chose Jacob to go to heaven while consigning Esau to hell or anything like that

It simply means that God chose to favor Jacob over Esau when he made Jacob the channel of fulfilling his covenant with Abraham

We see the same thing when we read in Genesis 29 that Jacob hated Leah

The truth is that we have every indication that Jacob was actually quite fond of Leah – after all, when he was on his deathbed he asked to be buried with Leah – but the fact of the matter was that he preferred Rachel

And Jesus uses this same imagery when he says in **Luke 14:26** that anyone who wants to follow him must hate his own family

We know that Jesus teaches elsewhere that children are to treat their parents with honor so what he is saying is that even though someone loves their parents their love for and devotion to Jesus must make that love look like hate

Then, our ESV Bible says *"You cannot serve both God and money"* while some versions transliterate the Greek word used there as "Mammon"

That word originally meant "something in which one puts their confidence"

And, since mankind typically puts their confidence in wealth, the word over time came to refer to material possessions and therefore "money" is a fitting translation

"Money" also ties us back to the beginning of this little chunk of teaching where Jesus spoke of "treasure" and Jesus' surface meaning certainly regards our relationship to money

But just like we saw with the word "treasure" we can rightly expand the meaning to include anything we value

Again, money is what Jesus is directly speaking of and that rightly includes other material things but we can also find ourselves trying to serve our own ego, our reputation, our influence, our power, our freedom, and even our family

All of those things have been made into "masters" by believers simply because of the devotion they choose to give to them

And the truth of the matter is – we can only serve one master

We cannot give our allegiance to two kings, we can't obey two commanders, and we can't worship two Gods

We have a limited amount of devotion and loyalty and service to give and the more we love one thing the less we necessarily must love another

And time will inevitably come when we will be forced to choose

Many of us try to successfully walk the tightrope between two masters and we might even believe we can be the exception and pull it off

But Jesus says plainly that the time will come when everyone must choose and it will be revealed which one has their devotion and which they despise

An old farmer burst into his home one day full of joy as he reported to his wife that their best cow had just given birth to twin calves, one red and one white

And he determined right then and there that they would dedicate one calf to the Lord and when the time came to sell the calves they would give the profits from the dedicated calf to God and keep the profits from the other for themselves

When his wife asked which calf was to be the Lord's he told her it wouldn't matter because they would raise them both the same and when the time came they would simply donate the proceeds from one of them

Then one day a few months later the old farmer came dragging back into the house with a terribly long face as he announced to his wife that the Lord's calf had died

And when his wife replied that he hadn't determined which calf was to be the Lord's he proclaimed that he had always intended for the white calf to be the dedicated calf and that was the one that died

It's an odd thing but it seems that it's most often the Lord's calf that dies

Conclusion

Although some of the examples Jesus uses in this section of the Sermon on the Mount are less obvious than others his point is clear

We face a choice during our lives here on earth as to where we will place our devotion and our focus

Whether we will give our attention and energy to God or to something else

And what hangs in the balance is eternal

But when our values, our focus, and our service are centered on God Jesus promises that our rewards in heaven will be greater than we can even imagine – and they will last forever

Let's determine to not settle for fool's gold

Let's pray