

Matthew 6.19-34 / COB / 01.10.16

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** People say that in public you should not talk about politics or religion. The problem is those are two of my favorite subjects, and two of the most important. So I talk about them a lot, even if it upsets people.
- Ministers say people in the church would rather not talk about divorce or money. The problem is those are subjects upon which Jesus spoke and the inspired authors of scripture wrote, and misunderstanding or misapplication of those teachings plague the modern day church. So this year, we probably will talk about both. Today we take some medicine with regard to money. But relax, I am not going to ask you to give more to the church today; we have an entirely different topic altogether.
- † In fact, it is because several of you came to me over the past month to talk about budgeting, saving, giving, or earning enough that I thought we should have a couple of teachings on money to start the year. I found so many interesting passages on this topic, that I was overwhelmed!
- I suppose we should not be surprised that the Bible has a lot to say about money. God gave us the Bible so that we could know him better and could learn how to live a blessing-filled life, and [for better or worse] money plays a big part in our thought life and thus how we choose to live.
 - So today we will look at a sermon Jesus gave, part of what we call the Sermon on the Mount. It is found at Matthew 6.19. And because it's nice to have images, today we will be seeing pictures of a spot off the Sea of Galilee where we think Jesus might have given this teaching.

[Slide 2: 6.19-20] **Matthew 6.19-20 NET:** [Jesus was preaching] **“Do not accumulate for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But accumulate for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.”**

- † In this church, we have some who are struggling and others who are relatively well off. Both can make the mistake of accumulating treasures on Earth instead of in Heaven.
- We think first of the wealthy, especially those who really chase after riches. I have met many such people in banks, I have met some in churches: people who are so busy providing for their family that they neglect caring for that family; or maybe they are good parents in the worldly sense, but to pursue ever more material wealth they neglect their relationship with God and doing his work, or they neglect to teach their children God's ways.
 - But the poor can make that mistake too. And like the rich, they can hoard everything instead of sharing, thus becoming greedy instead of generous; they can spend too much by taking advantage of every bargain or waste too much time chasing discounts. When I was poor, I thought far more about money than I do now that I am not, and all that thinking about material things and the material world took me away from thinking about the things of Heaven.
- † **[Slide 3: 6.19]** Jesus said, **“Do not accumulate for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.”** You see everything here is temporal, and thus

temporary. [Those are the first two blanks on the handout.] When you die, you take nothing with you to Heaven, not your cell phone, not your stock portfolio, not your Gameboy or beloved truck. And even while you are here, it is all worthless compared to what God offers us.

- When LeeAnn and I moved to Dallas six years ago, we had no coats. While we were living in Florida, we got by with just a sweatshirt. For that move to Dallas, and again when we moved up here, people gave us coats and we bought some, and so before the coat drive last year, we were standing at our coat closet, amazed at how many coats we now had. And our first thought was that we need them: we need a light fleece for chilly weather and some sort of rain jacket and a dress jacket for special events and a winter coat for the bitter months and then there is that time – which was so long this autumn – when the temperature hovers between the fleece and the winter coat, so we need something for that range. . . but do we really? In Dallas, I got by with my trusty sweatshirt, a trench coat for rainy days, and a warm dress coat. The rest is nice to have, but not necessary.
- What about our collections: music, movies, books, videogames, stamps, coffee cups from around the world. Or all the other things we have which we don't need: the fine china and silver; multiple frying pans; artwork and knickknacks all over the house. All treasures on earth.
- I am not saying it is sinful to own any particular thing, but we must confess to ourselves and our God that most of us do try to accumulate treasure here on earth.

† **[Slide 4: 6.20]** Jesus says it is better to **“accumulate for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.”**

- That makes sense: this treasure is permanent, eternal, invulnerable to moths, rust, thieves, or stock market crashes. Why, then, is it so hard for us to live this out?
- One reason is we value something now more than we value the same thing later. That's why we are willing to pay interest to have that car, house, or new furniture right now instead of later.
- And what Jesus proposes is not just putting off enjoyment of treasure until later, it is putting it off until after death! Most of us hope that is a long way off, and all of us find it hard to imagine.
- Then there is the vagueness of it: if we give up what we cherish now, it is not like we will have the same thing later; who needs a new computer or a fancy car in Heaven? This heavenly treasure is undefined, and that makes us uneasy. Jesus will tell us in a moment how to get it, but he never describes it.
- And there is the sinful flesh aspect too. We are greedy, we are impatient, we are more confident in holding what we can grasp now than in trusting God to provide later. So what? Jesus will tell us so what . . .

[Slide 5: 6.21-24] Matthew 6.21-24 NET: [Jesus continued] **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. If then your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is diseased, 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 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.”**

† The more immersed we are in material things, the less immersed we are in spiritual things. This is an economics lesson from the first week of class: you only have a limited amount of time, so

whatever you do with it means you cannot do something else with it. So every moment you spend thinking about material things, you are not thinking about spiritual things; every moment you spend earning or accumulating material things, you are not earning or accumulating heavenly things; every dollar you spend on yourself is a dollar you cannot spend on someone else.

- I am not disparaging work or a good work ethic. We will see another day that having a good work ethic is biblical; in fact, Paul wrote that if you will not work then you should not eat! It also is biblical to provide for your family even to the point of leaving an inheritance.
- But it is important to find the balance. How much is enough? How much is too much, especially if it takes you away from doing what is more important? In this country, even most of our poor have cars, televisions with cable packages, cell phones with data plans; the rest of us have tens of thousands of dollars worth of earthly junk.

† **[Slide 6: 6.21]** And the problem is that **“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** You see, the more you focus on material, temporal, earthly things, the more that reflects your heart, and the more that changes your heart to value those things.

- Think about coffee, tea, cigarettes, or beer. The first time we try these things, we say, “That must be an acquired taste!” Because nobody in their right mind would appreciate such a vile thing. The problem is that we then go about acquiring a taste for it! and some of us even to the point of feeling we need it! Compared to the things of God, materialism is an acquired taste: it really is a vile, bitter, brew, but now we think it tastes good and that we need it.
- Now think about your favorite dessert: brownie sundaes, cookies and milk, apple pie: you like those things right away, because they are attractively sweet. They might be even more dangerous as a fixation. Money is like that. If we are handed a bag of money, very few of us start out thinking about giving it away or saving it for the future, we want to consume it now!
- Some of us value food, especially sweets, so much, that we think about them all day and we cannot resist them if they are in front of us. At Thanksgiving, LeeAnn made my favorite half-moon cookies, they are like brownie cookies with chocolate fudge icing on one side and some amazing vanilla concoction on the other. Every day, my first thought was, “There are half-moons in the refrigerator!” We become obsessed.
- So it is with money and material things. Looking around, I can tell very few of you are into clothes and fashion, so let me use that as an example. If you spend hours looking at magazines and websites to track the latest fashions and see what you like, if you then spend a lot of your money buying clothes and shoes and accessories, what does that say about where your heart and mind are at? And, worse, what does it do to your heart and mind as you are going about it? The more you dwell on those clothes, the more *they* own you, instead of *God*.

† **[Slide 7: 6.22-23]** Look what Jesus says: **“The eye is the lamp of the body. If then your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is diseased, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”**

- Whatever you choose upon which to fix your gaze, that is what goes into your mind. Choose to dwell in material things, you will become materialistic, greedy, jealous, covetous, maybe what we call a “work-a-holic,” maybe a complainer about how life is unfair because others have more, but your whole body – your whole life – will become full of spiritual darkness because your eye is diseased. You are dwelling on what we call the bottom line, pursuing the ways of the flesh, the world, even evil, and as Jesus said, **“how great is the darkness!”**

- But if you choose to fix your gaze upon Jesus, upon his promises and salvation, upon his way of life and values, upon biblical teachings, upon doing ministry for blessing others and glorifying God, that is when your eye is healthy, which leads your body – your life – to be full of God’s light. Then your heart for Jesus will grow and your love for the material things of the world will diminish to a healthier state. The top line, pursuing the things of God in the ways of God, that is what leads to healthy living and a healthy mind.

† **[Slide 8: 6.24]** Jesus finished this thought with a warning: **“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.”**

- You have to choose. Remember what I told you about trying to straddle the fence between God and the world. The fence is slanted toward the world. If you don’t consciously choose to submit to Christ, to yield to the Holy Spirit, to pursue God passionately, then you will end up with money and materialism as your master, especially in our society, where that is the norm.
- My hope in doing a few teachings on money, is that you will learn the right attitudes about money and how to handle whatever God gives you, whether it is much or a little; but right at the start, this is the choice you have to make. Will you be devoted to God and love God, and thus learn to hate and despise materialism, or will you cling to your money and grow to hate and despise God? I know, I just know, some of you are thinking you can have both, you can stay as you are now without growing to hate and despise God, but look at what Jesus says! Do you think he was wrong? Are you calling him a liar?
- Coming back to that economics lesson, **“You cannot serve God and money.”** So look at your day planner and your credit card statement: what do they say about where your heart is? Are you serving God by devoting your time, energy, and even material things to his service or are you really somewhat selfishly serving money?
- Changing the metaphor, is money a tool you use to serve Christ and bless others or is money the bottom line fleshly means to pursue your bottom line fleshly goals? Each of us should pray and ask God to show us how we need to change our attitudes about money and material blessings.

[Slide 9: 6.25-26] **Matthew 6.25-26 NET:** [Jesus continued] **“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t there more to life than food and more to the body than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky: They do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you more valuable than they are?”**

- † Here we are not talking about the money you waste, the ways you could be more frugal. Here we are talking about the necessities. You need at least some food, some clothing. Yet Jesus says, **“do not worry about your life,”** about how you will get those things you need.
- He says two things that can help you not to worry. First, **“Isn't there more to life than food and more to the body than clothing?”** He’s going to say more about this in a moment, so I will not elaborate much here, but this is related to what we have just been discussing. You need to decide what the purpose of your life will be: is it all about God or all about you? If you make it all about God, you entrust everything to him on the top line, and you can stop worrying.
 - Second, Jesus says, **“Aren't you more valuable than the birds?”** and yet God feeds them. That should make it easier to trust God for your provision. He is both willing and capable of feeding

the birds and of feeding his people. He even shows us multiple miracles involving food in the Bible to encourage us in this regard.

- I doubt there is anyone here who really has to go hungry, I mean someone who is hungry and not wasting money on some other thing, or is hungry and doing everything possible to make ends meet. But sometimes that happens. When my parents split up, neither had a job at first, and so money was tight. But which of you, were this to happen, would not find open doors in this church or among your family and friends? God often works through his people, rather than directly, and surely that would be the case in this church. Jesus says trust that God will provide.

[Slide 10: 6.27-30] Matthew 6.27-30 NET: [Jesus continued] And which of you by worrying can add even one hour to his life? Why do you worry about clothing? Think about how the flowers of the field grow; they do not work or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these! And if this is how God clothes the wild grass, which is here today and tomorrow is tossed into the fire to heat the oven, won't he clothe you even more, you people of little faith?"

- † Again Jesus makes a comparison, this time with flowers in the fields: we are so much more valuable to God than animals or plants: God made us in his image! Christ died for us! The Holy Spirit indwells us! We can have courage and hope, because God cherishes us more than anything else in creation.
 - But Jesus makes two more points here. First, why worry so much? It does not add to your lifespan, does it? The stress actually is likely to shorten it. Now of course it makes sense to plan, budget, and do what you can do to provide for yourself, but you are not to worry about losing your job or struggling to make ends meet, you are not to have sleepless nights, not to feel anxiety, not to engage in destructive behavior like drunkenness to cope. It is not helping your cause, and it likely is hurting it.
 - The second thought is what all this indicates: that we are people of little faith. We are that, are we not? Most of us in this room trust Jesus as the only savior, we trust him with our eternal souls. Yet we refuse to trust him to guide our lives, we refuse to yield control to the Holy Spirit he sent us, we refuse to trust enough in his provision that we can let go of worry and anxiety and all their offshoots. No wonder the idea of walking on the top line by faith and obedience seems so foreign to us: that path is based on trusting in God's spiritual empowerment and physical provision; and deep down we still doubt both.

[Slide 11: 6.31-34] Matthew 6.31-34 NET: [Jesus completed his thoughts] "So then, don't worry saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For the unconverted pursue these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But above all pursue his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So then, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Today has enough trouble of its own."

- † This is the climax of Jesus' message. Stop worrying about money, about providing for yourself; worrying is what the non-believer does, whereas the believer trusts that God will provide and gets on with the tasks of the day.
- † **[Slide 12: 6.33]** And then we come to the key command and promise. For almost two decades, this has been my life verse: In Matthew 6.33, Jesus says, **"But above all pursue his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."**

- Above all pursue God's kingdom and righteousness; or [as in the NASB] "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness." God's kingdom and righteousness are to be our priority, not one of many competing goals, our priority over all else.
- Set your heart on the treasure in Heaven; set your eye on God and his ways; make God your master and focus on serving him; stop worrying about provision; pursue God's kingdom and righteousness. Can you see how the whole passage builds to this? This is how you accumulate heavenly treasure.

† So what is Jesus really requiring here. Let's start with righteousness. Pursue God's righteousness!

- In broad terms, this means love God with every bit of yourself and your life, and love others as much as yourself. It means be God's image bearer, reflecting his character, representing him in daily situations, ruling as his steward over creation, and reproducing his image through evangelizing and teaching others. It means learning God's way of life and character in scripture, and then responding on the top line with faith and obedience, putting aside your worldly ambitions and the world's methods.
- As the Son of God in the flesh, Jesus was the perfect reflection of God the Father's righteousness, so Jesus wants you to become like him in character. We know that means we need to willingly submit to Jesus as ruler of our entire lives, learn to yield to the teachings of scripture and the promptings of the Holy Spirit moment by moment, and pursue the disciplines, attitudes, perspectives, and way of life revealed in scripture.

† We also are to pursue God's kingdom.

- In one sense, Jesus himself is the kingdom, because he is the king. This is partly what Jesus meant when he preached to the Jews that they should repent for the kingdom of Heaven was near [Matthew 4.17, e.g.]. We pursue the kingdom in this sense by pursuing Jesus, by pursuing a relationship with him as our master and king, our savior and high priest, our teacher and prophet; and by pursuing our own life change to represent and reflect Christ better day to day.
- In another sense, Jesus will be king in God's kingdom, when this age draws to a close. Jesus will reign first for 1000 years, and then after certain events take place his permanent reign will begin. Pursuing that kingdom could mean helping to bring it about, by pursuing the gospel mission of bringing others to saving faith in Jesus, especially reaching all the people groups of the world.
- We also can pursue God's kingdom experientially. The New Covenant promises are partially fulfilled for the church in this time period, and though Jesus is not on David's throne in Jerusalem, he has been anointed as the king of the entire world by God the Father. When we walk in life with Jesus, when we trust and obey, we are pursuing the kingdom in this sense.

† **[Slide 13: 6.33 promise]** In this verse, there is a promise. I have thought of this as a conditional promise: *If you pursue God's kingdom and his righteousness, if you take the top line approach to life, if you are truly submitted to Christ, following Christ, walking with Christ, then God promises he will meet your needs.*

- I know if you yield to the Spirit, the Spirit will empower you to do whatever he is calling you to do. I know if you submit to Christ and seek to live on the top line by faith and obedience, pursuing God's kingdom and righteousness, you will receive many, many spiritual blessings, and necessary provisions will be given to you also.

- † In one of our conversations, Dan raised an interesting question. What if you are not perfect? What if you do believe God’s promise, but not that you can fulfill its conditions? I have three thoughts.
- First, I am not sure fulfilling the condition is an absolute yes or no situation; perhaps as you grow spiritually and learn to pursue God’s kingdom and righteousness more, the promise is fulfilled more completely or a more certain reality.
 - Second, if fulfilling the condition is an absolute yes or no situation, remember Jesus is not asking for you to be perfect, only that you pursue God’s righteousness, that you desire to be God’s kingdom man or kingdom woman, that you make that choice, passionately put in the effort, and seek the grace to succeed. So you need not worry about failing in your part if you are trying.
 - My third thought is that Linda printed the handout too early on Friday, because I have come to wonder if this is a conditional promise at all. There is no “if” or “then” in the Greek. Perhaps the thrust of what Jesus is saying is “Instead of worrying about provision, focus on being righteous and doing God’s work, because you can trust God will provide for his children.”
 - Either way, Jesus says, **“all these things will be given to you as well.”** He promises – promises, you hear me?! – he promises the believer will not starve, not die of dehydration, not want for adequate clothing. Now, you might be martyred for the cause of Christ, that is never taken off the table! but if that is God’s will for you, he will empower you to endure that as well. But while he has other uses for you, he will provide for you.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 14: 6.33 NASB]** At one point in life, I bottomed out. I had been living on the bottom line, being worldly, materialistic, sinful and fleshly. And my life wasn’t too bad in worldly terms, but inside, I was hollow, and I reached a point where I knew it and was sorry for it. I didn’t like my life and I didn’t like myself.
- So I repented, I turned back to God and I had what I call a consecrating moment, that is that I totally committed myself to God and his ways, if he would show me how. I committed to trust and obey, to follow Christ, to do whatever God showed me to do in scripture or by his Spirit.
 - One thing God led me to do was read the Bible. I started in the New Testament, and Matthew 6.33 became my life verse, my purpose statement. I was looking for purpose in my life, I wanted my life to have meaning, to have value, to be about more than me and what I could accomplish.
 - I also was seeking God’s promise and provision. When I bottomed out emotionally and spiritually, I walked away from my job and life in New York City, and when I read this verse, I had a broken heart, few friends, no money or income, depression about my present and anxiety about my future. **[NASB] seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.** I decided to trust the promise and obey the command. I would seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness, and trust that he would work out the rest. I have never regretted that decision!
 - I invite you to make the same decision. Maybe you are feeling low, like I was; maybe your life is great. Either way, you will benefit from trusting God more and pursuing him more; you will benefit from realigning your life to his direction, allowing him to change your heart and renew your mind, eliminating those sins to which you have clung so far, and making your life about Christ and his ministry, instead of about your comfort, prestige, and success. Let’s pray . . .