

DON'T WORRY, BE FAITHFUL

by Steve Zeisler

I felt sorry for our newspaper deliverer on Friday because he had to make two trips to deliver the newspaper. One trip was just to deliver a thick wad of catalogs, fliers, and brochures of all kinds advertising holiday specials. This weekend is almost a national holiday for shopping, as you probably observed if you were out and about on Friday and Saturday.

We have come to an important place in the Sermon on the Mount, especially with regard to the current thinking about material goods. It will be very helpful to us in this season of the year to hear Jesus' words about treasures on earth and treasures in heaven. The Lord will use illustrations about treasures, eyesight, masters, birds, and flowers. As he draws each illustration to a close, he will make a profound point in a simple statement. I hope our Lord's words will have the challenging and renewing effect on you that they have had on me. We'll look at three of these illustrations to begin with in verses 19-24:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

"No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money.

Storing up heavenly treasures

The first of these teachings has to do with storing up treasures. Jesus is serving as an investment counselor for us here. His assumption is that all of us will have some concern about our future and will make investments for it. One of the key factors by which those who study human behavior measure maturity, or the change between childhood and adulthood, is the ability to defer gratification. For example, you can tell a very young child, "Here is one chocolate, but if you do not eat this one and wait an hour, you can have two then." You can get some idea of how mature they are by whether they are willing and able to say no to the short-term benefit in order to have greater gain later. And of course the deferment and gratification are progressively increased.

So Jesus is assuming that he is speaking to adults who are storing up something for the future. But the question is, are we storing up treasures on earth or treasures in heaven? How far into the future does our concern go? Jesus advocates storing up eternal treasures in heaven because they are so much more valuable than any treasures we can store up on earth.

The problem with anything that is stored for future earthly consumption is that it is subject to corrosion, deterioration, and theft. If you're trying to manage any amount of money at all for the future, you know how difficult it is to stay ahead of inflation, for instance, and to anticipate tax decisions that the government will make in the future. How in the world can our assets be protected against the corruptions that money undergoes because it changes in value?

I have a friend who owns a beautiful and very expensive car, but he never drives it. He actually drives an old pickup truck. He is afraid that if he takes his car out of the garage he will be threatened with car-jacking,

someone will scratch it, or something else will happen. He also lives near the ocean, so he keeps it in the garage because the salt air will affect the paint. So he periodically polishes this very expensive device in his garage, but almost never does he or anyone else derive any benefit from it.

I know women who own jewelry that is exceedingly beautiful and worth a great deal of money, but it stays in a bank vault. What they wear out in public for other people to see is the more ordinary kind of jewelry so that they won't attract the attention of thieves.

Everything material that we value in this life, that we can hover over and hoard, is subject to some kind of loss. We cannot protect it absolutely. I have known people who saved very effectively for the future and arrived at an age when they might spend what they had saved, but they had been so miserly in their approach to life that it was completely impossible for them to learn to enjoy what they had. They were committed to owning rather than to enjoying. There are also people who arrive at the time when they might spend what they have and find they have no friends or family to enjoy it with because those have been sacrificed in the acquisition. What good is the cabin in the mountains and the boat docked at the lake if there is nobody in your life to share them with?

Jesus reminds us that if we are committed to storing up material treasures that are valuable only in this life, we are making a foolish choice, because there is a wonderful alternative. That alternative is to store treasures in heaven---to make decisions that will accomplish something that will be ours eternally in God's presence and in the presence of all God's people in glory. It is to use the things that God has given us control over as stewards to do what will last forever. That is the investment counsel that Jesus gives us.

At the end of Jesus' life, he said that the day would come when some would be gathered to him and some would be banished. Then he would tell the ones he gathered to him, "...I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." And they would say, "Lord, when did we do those things?" Then he would explain, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." (See Matthew 25:35-40.) In glory our Lord will reflect back to us his knowledge of things that we did from a pure heart for Christ's sake, caring about him and the people he cares about, even if we passed over them without noticing ourselves. That will be an extraordinary day, and the echoes of his word of his approval, spoken so that everyone will know, will never fade. We will carry them with us eternally.

Three kinds of treasure

There are three kinds of things that I would suggest are treasures in heaven that will last forever. One of them is our character. What kind of person have we become, or what sort of soul has been shaped in us? We will be given new bodies, but the inner person that we have become over a lifetime we will take into eternity. We will be recognizable as ourselves, having an identity that is based on this earth's identity. So are we becoming kindhearted people? Are we merciful people? Is there purity growing in our experience and in our thoughts? Is there a love for truth? Is there an intimacy with God? Is there sacrificial love for other people? These are the kinds of things that shape what we believe, who we are, and what we value. We can make choices to either see our character shaped according to the Lord, or to see it shaped by other influences.

Secondly, we will take into eternity relationships with people who love the Lord, whether we have known them for a score of years or we have just met them today. Relationships begun here will last forever in Christ. And we can make choices to build good relationships by, for instance, sharing in-depth with each other, and by saying no to television and other mindless recreations when they are taking up too much of our time.

I have been wrestling with a decision for a week or so. My daughter has been given a marvelous opportunity. She plays on a college volleyball team, and her team has qualified to play in the small college national championships next weekend in Tennessee. I wanted to be with her, and my wife was planning to go back, but I was scheduled to preach here next Sunday. Then a number of the elders came to me and said they thought I ought to go. I raised the question of whether I would be shirking my responsibility to go. As we talked, their point was essentially this: "You have only one daughter, and she is going to be this age only once. You should

be with her when she gets to be in the center of the spotlight, and enjoy her enjoyment of those things. Remember, this is a relationship you can enjoy not only for the rest of this life but for eternity." So with their encouragement, I am going to go to Tennessee and watch her play next weekend. There are some things that are wise to do in the bigger picture of eternity in valuing relationships.

Thirdly, any degree to which we reflect the glory of God will reverberate forever---any true word spoken in his name, any praise offered him that is of the heart, any opportunity we take to reflect his beauty to someone else in this life. Choices we make to honor the Lord are treasures in heaven.

Jesus adds a critical observation at the end of this teaching about the relative value of treasures in heaven and treasures on earth: "...Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The business of what owns our heart and the choices we make to value things form a circle that is self-reinforcing. We make a choice to value things that last forever or a choice to value things of this life. That choice claims some ownership of our heart. And the more our heart is owned by our choices, the more likely we are to make the same choice the next time. And the circle reinforces itself. If we find ourselves regularly and enthusiastically living to glorify Jesus, love one another, and make righteous choices, these things will reinforce themselves because our heart will be more inclined to do them the next time. We are more taken with and more committed to heaven and its values.

But the reverse is also true. Every investment we make in protecting, finding security in, and being selfish about this world's goods anchors our heart in this world and makes it more likely that we will make that choice next time. The only way out of it is to begin to make healthy choices in prayerful thoughtfulness, with encouragement from one another. We become who we are by making many choices, often little ones, over a long period of time. That is why the Lord is urging us here to invest in heaven, to begin to do what lasts forever routinely and often, and to find our heart more and more owned by the values of heaven. That is an important warning and an important encouragement as well.

Treasures on earth are not the same thing

The second illustration or teaching is in verses 22-23: "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" Jesus is talking about the difference between being temporarily unable to see and being blind. If your eyes are just closed, or if the room is dark, light can be turned on. But if the light in you is darkness---if the organ that is to receive light into your body is darkened by blindness---then there is no remedy for the darkness.

What Jesus is talking about in this context is treasuring earthly things too much. Our eye is another way of speaking about the values of our heart. I believe Jesus is warning us here about coming to think that God and his power exist in order to make us rich in this life, that treasures on earth and treasures in heaven are the same thing. The reason to be a Christian is to win the election, the reason to speak of one's Christian faith is to make sales and get rich, and the reason to be a member of a Christian community is to take advantage of all the material things that will come your way as a result. If we have aligned our spiritual insight and values with this world's goods, then the very "organ" through which we should receive light is lying to us. And there is no hope then, because every reference to the Bible, to God, and to prayer becomes no more than a way of reinforcing our selfishness.

The health-and-wealth gospel is one of the most damnable lies abroad in the land. It says that deep down, God wants nothing more than to make you very beautiful, very rich, very successful, and completely self-centered. He exists for no other purpose than the advantage of our fleshly interests. But once you believe that, then God becomes a reinforcer of the selfishness that we are already prone to, instead of having a heavenly realm that we can value in place of this earth. So the darkness is very great indeed.

Money is a terrible master

In Jesus' third illustration he reminds us that not only are heavenly treasures and earthly treasures not the same, but we cannot run them parallel to each other, either. We cannot have enthusiasm for the things of God and enthusiasm for the things of earth. We cannot have a spiritual compartment and a worldly compartment, pay attention to both of them at various times, and build up stores in both places. Verse 24: "No one can serve

two masters. 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 both God and Money."

If we love and serve God, and his mastery in our lives is gaining ascendancy at every point, then we will not be serving money as a god or master. We will grow to despise it as such. But if we are serving money and we expect it to make us happy, pay us off, provide security, and give us a sense of worth---to do what only God can do---then we will grow to despise God. We cannot have two masters. Money is an excellent servant, but it is a terrible master. Money, goods, time, energy, and riches of all kinds are intended to be the things that we use in this world to serve and glorify God.

Seek first his kingdom

We can value money too much, but we can also fear its loss too much. We can grow anxious when it is absent, or when it appears to be. This is the second significant problem we can have. Neither takes into account the depth of what it means to have God as our Father. Listen to what Jesus says about not being afraid. Verses 25-26:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

Jesus said at one point that two sparrows were sold for a penny and five for two pennies. They are the least significant of animals, and yet God is lavish in his care of them and all of the animal kingdom.

Verses 27-34:

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

We have an opportunity to make some serious and renewing decisions, to hear the call of the Lord against the call of the culture, to reorient the direction of our heart or strengthen the orientation if it is right, to treasure what is heavenly and not what is earthly. We have the opportunity to serve God, not money, and to trust our heavenly Father to care for us. We can seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and let the other things be given to us, rather than insisting on worrying or being desperate over them ourselves.

If you are a Christian, I urge you to let God lead your thinking, take a stand on the inside, and let it affect the way you live. If you are not a believer, but one of those whom Jesus calls unbelievers (pagans) in this passage---people who are required to worry and to provide for themselves, who have no heavenly Father whom they can count on---what an opportunity you have to open your heart to the One who wants to love you, care for you, and give you what you desperately seek! I urge you to take this opportunity seriously, not shallowly, to act on what the Lord has been saying to your heart.

Matthew 6:19-34
Eleventh Message
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