

## CHRIST'S COMMANDS REGARDING TREASURES

Here we are—sermon #3 in our series entitled “God, Giving, and Gifts.” Two weeks ago, we looked at the truth that *God Wants You Before He wants Your Money!* How do we know that is what God wants?

1) Because in II Corinthians 8:5, the Macedonian **believers were commended** not just because of their generous giving, but because they “first gave their own selves to the Lord...”

2) And in Romans 12:1, all **believers are commanded** to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God...”

Aren't you glad that **God wants you**—not just what we can **give Him**? It is interesting to me—and an indicator of the sinfulness of our hearts—that we see this so clearly **in human relationships** but are so slow to see it in our **relationship with God**. Here's what I mean:

--We understand that **most wives** would rather their husbands spend **more time with them** than they do with their **buddies**—or their **hobbies**!

--And we understand that **most children** would rather see their Daddies more than have more toys!

--And we understand that to **do well in sports—or our job**—that we have to “throw ourselves into it” and yet, somehow, we think that God is okay with us **giving Him less** than what we give to our spouse...or children...or sports team...or boss!

I warned you last week that I was going to keep reminding you of this truth, didn't I? Here it is again: II Cor 5:14-15 “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: <sup>15</sup> And that He died for all, that they which live **should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them**, and rose again.” Are you **doing** that? Are **you living for the One** that died for you?

Last week, we looked at **three declarations** God makes about money and things.

1. Declaration #1—**God owns all things**. Ps 24:1 “The earth **is the Lord's**, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” Do you recognize the reality that what you “own” is really **God's—not yours**?

2. Declaration #2—**God gives us what we have!** James 2:17 “Every good gift and every perfect gift **is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights**,” Do you realize that what you have are **gifts** from God!

3. Declaration #3—**God wants us to be givers!** Jesus said in Luke 6:38 “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”

Are you a giver—a redistributor—of what God has given you?

Jesus doesn't just want us to just **be a giver**, though—He also wants to be **a saver!** In fact, He wants us to **lay up treasures!** But how can we be **giver—and a hoarder**—at the same time? Jesus tells us how in Matthew 6; please turn there and follow along as I read verses 19-23.

Let's notice first... **1. The command of Christ not to lay up earthly treasures**

A. It is a command from Christ!

First, we know these words are **from Jesus** because if you have a “red-letter” edition of the Bible, they are in red! But how do we know that when Jesus says in vs 19 “Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth,” that it is **a command**? How do we know Jesus is not just making **a suggestion**?

In the English, it is **hard to know** for sure—but not in the Greek! We **know** from the Greek that it is a command because the verb “lay up” is in the **imperative!** But...most of you don't know Greek! So how **are you**—when you are reading the Bible—supposed to determine if it is a command or not? **Two suggestions:**

1) First, you can know if it is a command in the Greek without knowing Greek at all! Go to a website called “Bible Hub.” Select your verse, hit the “Greek” tab, and you can find the word you are looking for in English. It will tell you if it is a noun or a verb—and what kind of verb it is. It is fairly easy to do on a computer, but can also be done on a “smart” phone.

2) Second, if you **don't want to dig into that much**, here is the easiest—and probably **wisest**—thing to do. When you read in the Bible Jesus **telling you to do** something, **treat it like a command!** You can hardly go wrong if you take that approach!

Back to vs 19 “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth...” The Greek word that “lay up” comes from means “to accumulate...hoard...save...stockpile...store up...treasure up.” In fact, it is possible that Jesus was using a **play on words** because in essence He is saying, “Do not **treasure up treasures!**”

But what does that mean? Before we explore that, I want to consider... B. What Jesus **doesn't** mean

**1) Jesus is not commanding us **not to have a savings account!**** Here's how we know that.

A number of proverbs point to the importance of saving. **Ants** are held up as examples—twice—in the book of Proverbs on how we are to **work in the summer** so we can **store up for the winter!**

And Jesus certainly **isn't contradicting Prov 21:20** “There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.” Pretty safe to say that if there is **treasure** in the house of the wise, it is there because the wise man stored it up! So... it is **okay** to “save for a rainy day!”

**2) Jesus' command is not just **about money!**** How do we know that? Because of what Jesus said could **destroy** the treasures—and because how wealth was measured in Jesus' day! What does Jesus say can destroy **earthly** treasures? Moth...rust...and thieves! Thieves don't destroy, of course—**they steal!**

**But moths** certainly don't destroy money! **What do** they destroy? **Clothing**—but not the clothes you are wearing! They destroy clothing that **is stored!**

And the word that **rust** is translated from is quite interesting. It comes from a Greek word that means the **act of eating**—or the thing **which is eaten!** It is often translated “food” or “meat.”

Moths—and things being eaten—sure fit what constituted wealth at that time. One man put it like this:

**Treasures** for the Jews consisted of garments, grain, and gold!

--Joseph had a coat of many colors—which was the envy of his brothers

--Achan saw—and stole—a “goodly Babylonish garment”

--The rich man in Luke 12 had his barns bursting with grain

--The rich man in Luke 16 “was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.”

Jesus is saying, then, ‘Don't lay up treasures like **garments**—that moths can eat...or **grain**—that mice can eat... or **gold**—that thieves can steal!’

**3) Jesus is not just talking about what we have **in abundance**—what we have **over and above** our needs.**

MacArthur suggests that “treasures” refer to what we **have in excess**, in other words, **luxuries**. I disagree—and think it refers to more than that based on vs 21. Our heart can treasure—it can value and seek after—all kinds of things, whether we have them in abundance or not!

C. What Jesus did mean

Based on verse 21, I think “laying up treasures upon earth” is simply a focus and pre-occupation with this life.

**D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones** wrote: “Our Lord is dealing here with people who get their main, or even total, **satisfaction in this life** from things that belong **to this world** only. What He is warning against here, in other words, is that a man should confine **his ambition, his interests and his hopes to this life.**” (Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, pg 353-354, emphasis mine).

I think verse 22 reinforces that same thought. Vs 21 says what we treasure—what we value—reveals our heart. Verse 22, it seems to me, is a reminder that what we **focus on** affects our heart. If we focus on **this earth**—and the things of it—that will affect our heart and what we seek after.

The opposite, of course, is also true. If we focus **on heaven**—and the things of it—that will also affect our heart and what we treasure.

D. Why the command. **Why** does Jesus command us not to lay up treasures on earth?

**1) Because that is what we naturally want to do!**

**J. Vaughan** put it like this: “The love of accumulation is a principle in our nature; no man free from its fascination.” (Treasures in Heaven, Mt 6:19, Bible Hub). Is there a danger of us **treasuring things** in this life—whatever they may be—so much that we seek after them to the point that they **become idols?**

Yes; that's a real danger for all of us—and that's why Jesus warns us about it! But Jesus *isn't the only One!*  
--God through Paul reminds us in **Col 3:2** to “**Set your affection on things above**, not on things on the earth.”  
Why? Because we have a tendency to **set our affection on things on earth!**  
--God through Paul instructed Timothy to “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, **nor trust in uncertain riches...**” (1 Tim 6:17) Why? Because money is what we sometimes trust!  
--And God through John instructs us to “**Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world**” (1 John 2:15). Why? Because that is what we have a tendency to do!

There's a second reason not to lay up treasures on earth: **2) Because treasures on earth are temporary**  
--Moths eat garments...mice eat grain...and thieves can steal money  
--Those things may not affect us—but **our treasures** are still temporary, aren't they?  
--The money in our savings accounts—and/or checking account—can slowly “disappear” due to appliances breaking down...or health costs...or vehicle needs.  
--Our “toys” can rust—or break down and need fixing.  
--And the stock market can wreak havoc on what we thought were good investments with our 401k!  
There's a 3<sup>rd</sup> reason for Jesus' warning and it is this: **3) Because treasures on earth don't follow us to heaven!**  
We know in our heads that “we can't take it with us,” but we sure don't live like it sometimes! One man put it like this: “If it is **laid up** on earth, it is bound to be **left down** on earth.”

What about you? Are you treasuring **the treasures of this life**—and seeking to “lay them up?” Does “the love of accumulation” have a grip on you? Heed Jesus' warning—and obey His command! Do not lay up treasures on earth!

But...it is not enough **just to avoid** laying up treasures on earth! We also have—in vs 20...

## **2. The command of Christ to lay up treasures in heaven**

Just like in verse 19, the verb “lay up” is in the imperative—meaning it is a command.

But what does **that mean?** We can wrap our **minds**—and **arms**, for that matter—around what is meant by treasures **on earth**, but what does Jesus mean by “treasures **in heaven**.” And how can we “lay them up” in heaven when we **aren't even there** yet?

### A. What Jesus doesn't mean

True or false: “Laying up treasures in heaven” means that if you “**give up**” your treasures on earth, you will **gain entrance** into heaven. What's the answer? **False!**

But...some argue that it is **true**—and use Jesus' own words to “prove”—in their minds—it is true! We're in Matthew 6; please turn to Mt 19. What I want to do is look at the encounter between Jesus and an unnamed man who is often referred to as “the rich young ruler.” In Luke 18 he is called a ruler, here in vs 20 he is called a young man; in the end of vs 22 we see he had “great possessions”—thus “the rich young ruler!”

--Let's start with vs 16. Here this young, rich man asks Jesus what he has **to do** to get into heaven.

--In the end of vs 17, Jesus answers “...but if thou wilt enter into life, **keep the commandments**.” The man is already alive—and talking to Jesus—so the “life” Jesus refers to is **eternal** life, meaning entrance into heaven. So—at face value—it seems Jesus is telling this man that if he **keeps the commandments**, he will gain heaven!  
--In vs 18, the young man asks **which** commandments.

--Instead of saying “All of them,” Jesus responds by referring to the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> commandments, ending with “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” The last one is **technically not** a commandment; instead, it sums up the last 5 commandments. And we know from Mt 22:37-40, that Jesus sums up all 10 commandments **into two**—loving God with all our hearts and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

--Is Jesus saying that “commandment-keeping” will get you into heaven? Let's keep going to find out.

--In vs 20, the young man said he had **kept all these commandments** from his youth up.

What was Jesus' response? Instead of saying, “**Liar**”—like I probably would have—Jesus gives him **one more commandment**.

Vs 21. “If thou wilt be perfect”—if you will be complete and want to get into heaven—“go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have **treasure in heaven**: and come and follow me.” Again—at face value—it seems that Jesus is promoting a works-based salvation. In fact, if this was the only thing in the Bible we had to go by, it would certainly seem that way!

--But...the Bible is the **best commentary on itself** and when we compare Scripture with Scripture, we know from **Ephesians 2:8-9** that we can't work our way to heaven: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: <sup>9</sup> **Not of works**, lest any man should boast.”

**Titus 3:5** teaches the same thing: “**Not by works** of righteousness **which we have done**, but according to His mercy He saved us,” So does John 3:36...and John 5:24...and Rom 3:20...and Romans 3:28...and Galatians 2:16.

So...if Jesus wasn't telling him he could **work his way** into heaven by selling his riches and giving to the poor, what was Jesus saying? It wasn't so much “What was Jesus **saying**” as it was “What Jesus was **doing**!” **What** was Jesus doing? Showing the rich young ruler his idol!

Jesus knew what it was—but the young man needed to see what it was! What was his idol?

**Money...possessions...things.** How do we know?

Vs 22 “...he went away sorrowful.” He **chose gold over God** because his treasures were on earth! So “laying up treasures in heaven” **does not mean** selling what you have to earn—or buy—your way into heaven!

Now... B. What Jesus does mean

We're in Matthew, let's turn now to Luke 12. Luke 12 is very similar to Mt 6. It talks about not being anxious (vs 22-23) ...and how God cares for the fowls of the air (vs 24) and the flowers of the field (vss 27-28). It also talks about not being like the world because our Father knows what we need (vss 29-30).

--Look at Luke 12:31. It sure sounds a lot like Mt 6:33, doesn't it?

--Drop down to Luke 12:33. “Sell that ye have, and give alms...” Sounds a lot like what Jesus told the rich young ruler, doesn't it?

“...provide for yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.” Sounds like what Jesus said about “laying up treasures in heaven” in Mt 6:20, doesn't it?

--And Lk 12:34 has the exact same 11 words—in the exact same order—as Mt 6:21!

So what does laying up treasures in heaven **mean**?

- 1) It means seeking first God and His kingdom (vs 31)
- 2) It means not hanging onto possessions too tightly—and being willing to part with them if need be (vs 33)
- 3) It means having our heart focused on heaven; our affection set on things above.

There is one more interesting parallel between Mt 6 and Luke 12. In a way of reminder, here again is **Mt 6:19** “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:” Beginning with vs 16, Jesus **uses a parable** as an example of a rich man who did the very thing Jesus commands us not to do—lay up treasures on earth!

But—before Jesus teaches the parable—He **tells us why** He is teaching it in vs 15: to remind us to “beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” Please follow along as I read vss 16-20.

What happened to his earthly treasure? It **wasn't eaten**...and it **wasn't stolen**...and it **wasn't lost**. Instead, he **left it**—because he left this world! And it couldn't follow him! Now Jesus' conclusion in vs 21: “So is he that layeth up treasures for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

What is the person who is not rich toward God called? **A fool**, according to vs 20. Those are Jesus' words—not mine!

What about us? Are we laying up treasures? If so, are they the **right ones**—in the **right place**?

Two commands from Jesus: Command #1: Lay not up for yourselves treasures **upon earth**.

Command #2: Lay up for yourselves treasures **in heaven**.

They are not “either/or” commandments—God wants us to obey them both! Are you?

So what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. First, what are you counting on to get to heaven? I ask you that question—in some way, shape, or form—every week. Why? Because the destiny of your eternal soul depends on it—and some day you will leave this life!

--If you are counting on you—and commandment keeping—to get to heaven, you won't make it!

--But if you have Jesus—if He is yours—you will!

Do you have Jesus?

2. Second, what do you treasure—**this life** and the things of it—or the **next life**?

Are you laying up treasures on earth—or in heaven?

Where is your focus; where is your heart?

If your focus has been on storing treasure in the wrong place, ask God to forgive you—then purpose in your heart to start laying up treasures in heaven!