

Matthew 6:19-24

Life in the Kingdom of God is not simply following rules; rather, it involves deep repentance and a desire to orient life around Kingdom values. In Matthew 6:19-24, these values are described in three pairs: two treasures, two visions, and two masters.

TWO TREASURES 6:19-21

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 neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus tells us that we can store treasure in one of two places, treasure on earth or treasure in heaven. A treasure on earth is anything that we do that reaps a temporal reward. It can be the accumulation of possessions, experiences, or pleasures that end when our lives end. By contrast, a treasure in heaven is anything done on earth that has eternal significance. Doing righteous deeds, suffering for Christ, loving others, as well as the fruit of unhypocritical giving, praying, and fasting all have eternal reward (Matt. 10:42 cf. 25:46; 5:12, 46; 6:6,15; I Cor.4:18; Matt. 6:1-18; I Tim. 6:17-19). Peter calls our heavenly treasure "incorruptible, undefiled, and reserved in heaven" (I Pet 1:4).

Jesus is not condemning having earthly possessions, His warning is to keep from cultivating the desire to make them the focal point of our lives. The reasoning He gives is simple: no earthly possession is eternal. Even things that can't rust (which included things eaten by rats, destroyed by mildew. etc.) or be eaten by moths, can be stolen. By contrast, treasure stored up in heaven (6:20) is exempt from both theft and decay. Therefore, accumulating treasure in heaven is a much better investment of our time and energy.

But gaining eternal reward is not the main issue; rather, it is the things we most highly value are what control our time and the direction of our lives. Notice that Jesus does not say "Watch your heart," He says "Choose your treasure," for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

According to the Bible, the heart is the center of who we are and includes the mind, emotions and will. If our treasure is on earth, it's guaranteed our heart will be focused on earthly things. We can know where our heart is if we identify what we think of most, what we are drawn to, what we worry about, and what we measure our worth by. If these things are focused on the physical world and our earthly existence, we know that our heart is there as well.

TWO VISIONS 6:22-23

Jesus gives a second metaphor that makes the same point by picturing a person (the whole body) as a room or a house.

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. 23 "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

The eye functions as a lamp within the house that illumines it. As long as the eye is healthy, the person can see clearly and the house will be full of light. But if the eye is bad, it will be like an untrimmed lamp, unable to dissipate the darkness.

Darkness in Scripture often refers to the moral sphere of wickedness apart from the light of God (I Jn. 1:5-7; Jn. 3:16-21). This is obviously Jesus' intended meaning here. The person who has a bad eye will be in the realm of darkness (I Jn. 2:11; I Pet. 2:9; Col. 1:13). So what does it mean in non-metaphorical terms to have a good eye?

The word translated from Greek as 'clear' literally means 'single' and has the idea of singleness of purpose, or undivided loyalty. In the context (vv 19-21 and 24), the emphasis is on unswerving loyalty to Kingdom values. Therefore, it seems that the sound eye is the one that is fixed on God, unwavering in its gaze, constant in its fixation (Heb. 12:1, 2; Ps. 119:148). In other words, the heart (or eye) that is wholly devoted to God results in the entire person being full of light. If light is taken with its usual connotations of revelation and purity, then the person with a single focus on God is the one whose life will be flooded with spiritual understanding. Moreover, this light will emanate from the person and he will become a light of the world (Matt. 5:14). In contrast, the person with divided loyalty is like a lamp without a flame; he remains in darkness. He has divided interests and tries to focus on both God and possessions; he has no clear vision and will live without clear orientation or direction. Because he has no way of recognizing the true light, he thinks he is full of light when he isn't. What is thought to be light is really darkness, and because of this self-deception, the darkness is complete.

TWO MASTERS 6:24

24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

Jesus explains that the choice between the two treasures (6:19-21), and where to put our focus (6:22, 23) is really a choice between two masters.

In Matt. 6:24, riches and God are not pictured as employers but slave owners. A slave was a living tool, no different than a plow or a cow or anything else. A slave was a thing. To be a bond slave, to be the property of a master was to be constantly, totally, entirely, 100% devoted to obedience to that one master. A man can work for two employers, but since "single ownership and fulltime service are the essence of slavery" he cannot serve two slave masters (Carson, 179). Jesus' statement is strong. God is either served with undivided devotion, or He is not served at all. Attempts at divided loyalty don't reveal partial commitment but betrayal.

NOTES:

Randy Alcorn estimates that 15 percent of everything Jesus said relates to the topic of money or possessions – which is more than his teachings on heaven and hell combined (The Treasure Principle, Multnomah, 2001, p. 8).

- "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Mark 10:21).
- "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven . . . Woe to you rich, for you have received your consolation" (Luke 6:20).
- "Whoever does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).
- "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25).
- "A person's life does not consist in the possessions that he has" (Luke 12:15).
- "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).
- "Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourselves with purses in heaven" (Luke 12:33).
- "Zacchaeus . . . said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. . . .' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house' (Luke 19:8-9).
- "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matthew 13:44).
- Jesus "saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, 'Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them'" (Luke 21:1).
- "But God said to [the man who built even bigger barns], 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:20-21).
- "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head . . . Follow me" (Luke 9:58).
- Luke 12:33 "Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys.

The love of possessions is a great evil which is frequently warned about in the Bible* (I Tim. 6:10; Jam. 5:2, 3). Hoarding riches in the last days is particularly short sighted for heirs of the kingdom (Jam. 5:2-3). However, possessions and the love of possessions are not synonymous. A balanced perspective of life includes enjoying what God has given us (I Tim. 4:3, 4; 6:17), planning for the future (Prov. 6:6-8), providing for the needs of relatives (I Tim. 5:8), and enjoying wealth as a blessing from God (Prov. 14:23; 24:3, 4; 28:19).