

Great Questions | Matthew 6-10

Scripture:

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21

Question: Are the treasures on earth like wealth and power? Then what are the treasures in heaven and how do we get those treasures?

Response

A couple observations before answering the more direct question. First, notice the description of the earthly treasures as being something that can be tangibly impacted (moths can eat them, rust can tarnish them, and thieves can steal them). The descriptions are intended to communicate the temporary nature of the treasures.

In addition, a common tradition among the religious leaders was that wealth was an indication of God’s blessings. Therefore, their perspective to pursue and acquire wealth reflected God’s blessings on them.

The whole Sermon on the Mount attacks this idea that external righteousness apart from internal holiness is not honoring to God. Therefore, the pursuit of wealth and things for the sake of acquisition alone is dishonoring to God.

Jesus offers a different option. Pursue and lay up eternal treasures or treasures that supersede in value and impact any earthly treasure. These treasures will not be tangible because they are not impacted by earthly things like moths, decay and thieves. The New Testament mentions various rewards (Luke 6:22-23; 2 Timothy 4:8, etc.) which would certainly count as eternal treasure. In addition, what Christ commands would also be treasures (serving others, sacrificial giving, etc.). We acquire these treasures through obedience.

Verse 21 is the main take away. What captures and consumes our heart will direct which treasure we pursue and what we pursue will reflect the focus of our heart.

Scripture

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, 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 in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

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. Matthew 6:19-24

Question:

Question: In Matthew 6:19 Jesus starts his teaching on money and continues it to the end of the chapter. But in verses 22-23 he starts talking about the eyes and the darkness from having unhealthy eyes and then he goes back to talking about money again. How are these two concepts connected?

Response

In Matthew 6 I think many of the teachings are the overflow of proper prayer as taught in verses 9-14. When we get prayer right, our attitudes and behaviors in other areas of our life must also conform to Christ.

Specifically, I see the flow of these verses like this.

- Verses 19-21: Jesus offers a choice between earthly treasures which are temporary and treasures in heaven which are eternal. The choice is which one will you store up. This is a perspective change regarding earthly treasures. How they are acquired and used reflect how tightly God holds your heart.
- Verses 22-23: Jesus offers the same choice but changes the imagery. A healthy eye lets in light thus enlightening a person. An eye incapable of letting in light darkens one's ability to see. I think Jesus uses this as a metaphor to continue His emphasis on heart attitude. Our eyes serve as gatekeepers to our hearts. Where we set our eyes (attention) will determine the health of our heart. You have a choice to which type of eye you have; eyes set on “light” or eyes set on “darkness”. The failure to realize you do not see clearly is all the more terrible.
- Verse 24: Verses 19-23 gave a choice between two treasures and two visions. Each stem from an even more basic choice: which master will you serve? It is not possible to serve both earthy treasure/darkened eyes and eternal treasure/lighted eyes. Or more bluntly, one cannot serve money/possessions and God.

Scripture:

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Matthew 3:7-10

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. Matthew 7:15-20

Question: Are the two scriptures related? The first is a reference to Pharisees the second seems more general. Was John preparing the hearts of the people to hear this message from Jesus?

Response

The Matthew 3 passage is clearly talking about the religious leaders. The Matthew 7 passage uses the more general phrase, “false prophets” without specifically identifying who the false prophets are.

Both passages use the same metaphor of fruit or works as a means of identifying the heart of those being addressed. In addition, both passages conclude with the same warning, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire” (verses 10b and 19).

That said, I would conclude both instances refer to the religious leaders at a minimum. And I would be comfortable linking the two passages because they share a common theme. To see a common link between the teachings of John and Jesus would not be surprising. Whether John is ‘setting up’ Jesus’ teaching is unknown.

Scripture:

²⁸ And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. ²⁹ And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" ³⁰ Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. ³¹ And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs." ³² And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. ³³ The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. ³⁴ And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region. Matthew 8:28-34

Question: Why do you suppose the people pleaded with Christ to leave their region?

Response

This is a case when comparing the story in the other Gospels can shed some light on your question.

A few observations as I read the passage. The country of the Gerasenes would have been a predominantly Gentile area. Therefore, their awareness of Jewish religious practices and traditions would have been largely unknown. It is also likely the concept of a Jewish Messiah was not prominent.

Second, Mark 5 and Luke 8 are parallels of this event. Mark mentions that the local people had repeatedly attempted to constrain these men but failed. I would conclude from this that the local people were aware of these men, and this had been going on for some period of time.

Third, Luke 8 provides an additional detail that answers your question. ³⁵ Then people went out to see what had happened, and they came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, **and they were afraid**. ³⁶ And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed. ³⁷ Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were **seized with great fear**. So he got into the boat and returned. Luke 8:35-37

What Jesus did was so outside of their categories that fear of Christ gripped them. If the demon-possessed men made them afraid, imagine how much more afraid they would have been of Someone who could do what Jesus did.

Scripture:

¹⁴ Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. ¹⁶ No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. ¹⁷ Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved." Matthew 9:14-17

Question: What does the images of clothes and wine mean?

Response

In order to understand this, we must understand the way clothes were mended, and wine was made in biblical days. When patching an older garment, if a new unshrunk piece of cloth was used, when it dried and shrunk it would only pull the garment apart.

What about wine? Bottles for carrying various liquids were made by killing an animal, cutting off its head and feet, skinning the carcass, and sewing up the skin, fur side out, to create a sealed container with one hole, usually the neck. The skin was tanned with special care to minimize disagreeable taste. In time, as the skin aged, the skin would become brittle and hard. If new wine, still fermenting, were put into an old skin, the buildup of fermenting gases would split the brittle container and ruin both the bottle and the wine. New wine was placed in new wineskins that were still pliable and elastic enough to accommodate the pressure.

Jesus was comparing His teachings to those of John the Baptist. John came proclaiming repentance to those steeped in the traditions of the Jewish faith. Jesus, on the other hand, did not come to 'patch up' the old system but to introduce a new path to the Kingdom of God, Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus was teaching that the new truth He was introducing could not simply be poured into the old wineskins of Judaism. New truth required a new form. The old brittle traditions of the past will not contain the kingdom that Jesus is proclaiming. Old religion is being replaced by a personal relationship with God.

Now the context was the question from the disciples about fasting. Jesus said fasting is not the issue. The real issue is the difference between the old ways and the new way. The new way will not obliterate the old, but it will not fit into either. The kingdom has arrived and now is not the time to fast. Now is the time to accept the Savior and rejoice.

Scripture:

²⁴ “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. Matthew 10:24-25

Question: What does this mean “if they call the master of the house Beelzebul how much more will they malign those of his household?”

Response

In Matthew 10, Jesus is sending out the disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God (verses 1-15). In verses 16-23, Jesus informs them to expect persecution. He is sending them out as sheep among wolves. I think this is also true for us as Christians today. In verses 26-39 Jesus continues talking about the persecution they can expect and offers encouragement.

Specifically in Matthew 10:24-25, Jesus is continuing to talk to the disciples about that persecution. Notice the progression of what Jesus says. First, a disciple or learner is not above his teacher nor a servant above his master. In other words, the disciple and servant are in submission to the teacher and master.

The passion or desire of the disciples and servant is to imitate the teacher or master. In other words, evidence of followership is imitation. Jesus then says those who persecute you have called or identified Him (the master of the house) as Beelzebul. Beelzebul was another title for Satan or the prince of demons. The word literally means “lord of the flies.” Take a look at Matthew 12:24-30 for another instance when the Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan.

Scripture:

³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Matthew 10:34-39

Question: Why does Jesus say he's come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, etc.?

Response

Let's begin by considering the whole chapter.

- Matthew 10:5-15: Jesus sends out the disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God.
- Matthew 10:16-25: Jesus warns that following Him will lead to conflict and persecution. ¹⁶ “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.
- Matthew 10:26-33: In response to the previous teaching, Jesus encourages the disciples to not live in fear. ²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Now we come to the text in question. The whole chapter is Jesus communicating that obedience to Him and proclamation of the Kingdom will bring conflict, persecution and perhaps even death. Family and family relationships do not eliminate this conflict and persecution.

Jesus is elevating entry into the Kingdom and obedience to Him as of higher priority than family relationships. The decision to choose Christ may put you at odds and in conflict with your family. If you are forced to choose between family and Jesus, choose Jesus. There may also come a time when unredeemed family will turn on redeemed family in order to preserve their life. The love of family cannot supersede love for Christ.

In Matthew 12 (below), Jesus speaks to family again by stating that entry into the Kingdom of God brings us into a second family, a family identified as those who know God and obey Him. That family may prove to be more a family than biological family.

⁴⁶ While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers^[a] stood outside, asking to speak to him.^[b] ⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!” ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” Matthew 12:46-50