

UNIT 1: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Lesson 4

March 29, 2026

The Christian's Hope: God is the only hope for all people.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

Today's lesson three key teachings from Matthew 6, urging us to align our hearts with God's eternal purposes. First, we are reminded to prioritize storing treasures in Heaven, recognizing the fleeting nature of earthly wealth compared to the lasting value of heavenly rewards. Second, we delve into the importance of wholeheartedly serving God, sharpening our spiritual focus, and choosing Him as our sole Master. Last, we're encouraged to release our worries by trusting in God's provision and seeking His kingdom above all else. These teachings inspire us to live with faith, purpose, and a heart centered on what truly matters.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Mammon, a term derived from the Aramaic word for "riches", is often associated with wealth, greed, or material possession. In the Bible, particularly in Matthew 6:24, Jesus teaches about the dangers of serving mammon, cautioning that we cannot serve both God and wealth. This teaching warns of the spiritual conflict between devotion to God and an unhealthy pursuit of riches. Jesus emphasizes that an excessive focus on earthly riches can lead to idolatry, distracting individuals from their faith and moral responsibilities. Instead, He encourages us to trust in God's provision and prioritize heavenly treasures over wealth or material possessions.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. STORE UP ETERNAL TREASURE: Matthew 6:19-21.

- A. Misplace Treasures and Misplaced Hearts, (19)
- B. Rightly Placed Treasures and Hearts, (20-21)

2. SERVE GOD ALONE: Matthew 6:22-24.

- A. Check Your Vision, (22-23)
- B. Choose Your Master, (24)

3. DO NOT WORRY: Matthew 6:25-34.

- A. You Are Precious to God, (25-30)
- B. Seek God's Kingdom, (31-34)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. STORE UP ETERNAL TREASURES: Matthew 6:19-21.

A. Misplaced Treasure and Misplaced Hearts, Matthew 6:19.

Jesus began this teaching by looking at the wrong and right places for storing up treasure. Although verse 21 is at the end of this section, it contains the central idea: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” The heart is used to represent the center of a person, the seat of affection, and the center of the will. Jesus was clear that how a person lives proceeds from the heart (12:34-35; 15:18-19). Because of this reality, Jesus taught His disciples not to worry about storing up earthly possessions (6:19).

In the ancient world, treasure generally consisted of expensive and elaborate clothing as well as precious metals and jewels. For those with agricultural estates, this could also include stores of grains or similar stocks of food. While there is nothing inherently wrong with possessing wealth, Christians must ensure that their hearts are not obsessed with accumulating and hoarding it. The reason is that none of these earthly treasures will last and could all be lost at any moment. Moths can destroy other precious possessions. Vermin can eat the food in the storehouses. Thieves can break in and steal precious jewels. Therefore, if we set our hearts on these things, and our lives have been spent on gaining them, what is there to show for it when we are gone? It is sad to see rich and poor alike live in a state of anxiety, fearful of losing what they possess.

B. Rightly Placed Treasure and Hearts, Matthew 6:20-21.

Instead of focusing on earthly treasure, Jesus directed His disciples to accumulate heavenly treasure. That is, they should value the things that are important to God. Such things are eternal and can never be lost. This idea would not have been foreign to Jesus’ audience. The rabbis taught that “treasures in heaven” (v. 20) could be comprised of deeds of kindness and godly character. In both of these instances, the commonality is people.

This passage challenges us to shift our focus from temporary, worldly ambitions to cultivating a life that aligns with God’s eternal purposes. It calls for an examination of values, urging us to invest in what truly matters and to recognize that our actions on earth have lasting spiritual significance. The statement, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (v. 21) expresses the connection between our priorities and the orientation of our hearts. It suggests that what we treasure reveals the core of our desires and identity. This verse serves as both a warning and an invitation to guard against the distractions of materialism and anchor our hearts in the pursuit of God’s kingdom.

In AD 258, the Roman Emperor Valerian ordered an intense persecution of the Christians. Lawrence, a deacon in Rome responsible for the church’s property, was ordered to turn over the church’s wealth. He asked for three days to gather it. During this time, he distributed the church’s good to the needy and gathered the widows, orphans, sick, and poor whom the church regularly aided. After three days, the Roman prefect demanded, “Show me your treasures!” Lawrence pointed to the people and said, “Here are the treasures of the church. You see, the church is truly rich, far richer than your emperor! The church should always view its riches as relationships and lives touched rather than buildings and budgets.

2. SERVE GOD ALONE: Matthew 6:22-24.

A. Check Your Vision, Matthew 6:22-23.

Given its location, this passage is connected to Jesus' teaching on generosity and a proper perspective on possessions. For example, the term translated "single" (v. 22) is based on the Greek word 'haplos,' which has range of meanings, including wholeness and health. This word is also used to express ideas of generosity in Romans 12:8; 2 Corinthians 9:11; and James 1:5. Healthy vision, according to Jesus, is generous vision. It sees opportunities to bless others and is not obsessed with gaining temporal possessions.

Jesus contrasted this vision with the "evil eye," which carried several significant connotations (Matthew 6:23). The Greek word translated as "evil" is 'poneros' and indicates something is diseased and not whole or healthy. The eye, therefore, fails to function as it was intended. The Jewish scholars who translated the Old Testament into Greek before the time of Christ used the term 'poneros' to denote stinginess and meanness (Deuteronomy 15:9; Proverbs 23:6; 28:22). This term was often used in ancient eastern cultures to refer to greed, avarice, and covetousness. Therefore, putting this all together, the "evil eye" is a diseased vision consumed with getting and taking, unable to be generous.

Jesus warned His disciples to check their vision. Did they see material possessions as gifts from God intended to meet needs and bless others? If so, then they viewed things generously and were freed to give and share. As such, they had a "healthy eye" functioning as it should. Or did they see the world as a place where they needed to get all that they could without regard for others? If so, their eye was evil. If their eye were evil, then they were consumed with darkness and unable to see the goodness of God.

B. Choose Your Master, Matthew 6:24.

The stark warning about the healthy and the evil eye is followed up with Jesus' reminder that we cannot serve two masters. The context makes this clear: Jesus was talking about either being wholly devoted to God or devoted to possessions. Jesus' use of the idea of slavery is important. The specific words are vivid in that they indicate being owned by a master. His use of "hate" and "love" shows that we must choose between the two.

Mammon refers to material possessions. Some scholars believe it comes from a root word that means "to entrust." Thus, mammon came to refer to the sum that was entrusted to another, such as to a banker. However, over time, the meaning shifted to refer to that which is entrusted, and mammon came to refer to something people put their trust in. Therefore, in the lives of those trusting mammon, it competed with God, and they had to decide. There could be no middle ground. It had to be God or mammon.

The personification of mammon serves as a powerful reminder of how possessions can easily become idols in our lives. It highlights the subtle yet significant temptation to place our trust in material things rather than in God. When we prioritize possessions, we often find ourselves consumed by the need to protect, accumulate, and serve them, which can distract us from our true purpose. Reflecting on this, it's essential to ask ourselves whether we are using our possessions to honor and serve God or allowing them to control us. Today, take a moment to examine your relationship with what you own.

3. DO NOT WORRY: Matthew 6:25-34.

A. You Are Precious to God, Matthew 6:25-30.

What does freedom from mammon and wholehearted devotion to God look like? Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that devotion to God meant that they could trust Him to take care of their needs. The word “worry” (v. 25, NKJV) or “take thought” (KJV) occurs six times in five verses (vv. 25, 27, 28, 31, 34). Worry is anxious apprehension and preoccupation with various issues. As Jesus’ disciples, we do not need to worry about these things because we are precious to God.

Jesus often drew lessons from the world around Him, using nature and the experiences of the disciples to show the futility of worry. He began by reminding them that life is more than food and clothing (v. 25). When someone is in dire economic straits, food and clothing might seem to be critical to survival, and these necessities of life might become an all-consuming preoccupation. But the point that Jesus wanted to make here: Life does not consist of these things. They may indeed be needed, but they are not what life is or what life is for. Instead, the disciples in the kingdom of God can be assured of God’s care for them. The birds of the air find what they need not because of their obsessive anxiety, but because the heavenly Father cares for them. Why would His children think that they would receive less care from their Father?

In verse 27, Jesus used a person’s height to illustrate the uselessness of worry, rhetorically asking if, through worry, a person can change their height. Here, “stature” can also indicate an age or stage of life. We cannot worry ourselves into being younger, older, or having a longer life. Worry accomplishes nothing beneficial. Drawing upon nature again, Jesus used grass and lilies to illustrate God’s care, even though they seemed to have little use other than heating ovens (vv. 28-30). Ovens of that day were clay boxes set atop a fire. If someone wanted to heat the oven quickly, they would take handfuls of dead grass and throw them into the oven to quickly ignite a fire. Nevertheless, God adorns the grass with flowers that outshine the glory of Solomon. His children should trust Him for nothing less.

B. Seek God’s Kingdom, Matthew 6:31-34.

Jesus’ point was that it is futile to be obsessed with our needs when we know the heavenly Father cares for us. Verse 30 ends with a challenge regarding the disciples’ faith that is extended through verse 32. If we believe in God’s goodness and His ability to care for us, we should not be controlled by anxieties about the necessities of life. If we are, then it demonstrates not only that we have little faith but also that we do not truly trust God. In that case, we have become like “unbelievers” (v. 32 NLT). Someone referred to this as “practical atheism,” meaning that although we say we believe in God, we live a life of worry, as if there is no God who cares for us.

God, in His infinite wisdom, knows what we need. Jesus wants us to place our trust in God’s provision, emphasizing that our primary focus should be on seeking “first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness” (v. 33). By doing so, we can rest assured that our daily needs will be met.

This teaching does not negate the importance of diligent works or responsible stewardship of resources. Instead, it highlights a higher calling, which is aligning our lives with God's purposes and values. Jesus is urging us to prioritize our spiritual growth and commitment to God's will above material concerns, ensuring that our lives reflect a pursuit of eternal significance rather than temporary necessities.

Jesus concluded this segment with words reminiscent of the Lord's Prayer. This suggests the entire section serves as an expansion of the themes and petitions found within that prayer. Jesus emphasized seeking deliverance from daily temptation and evil, highlighting the importance of relying on God's guidance and protection. This passage reinforces the centrality of these petitions, urging us to remain vigilant and dependent on divine strength in our spiritual journey.

How would we likely be transformed if we truly trusted that God would take care of us? This is the profound invitation the Lord extends to each of us. So often, fear of loss or uncertainty can cause us to step back from the abundant life God has prepared for us. Worry and doubt can act as barriers, preventing us from fully embracing His promises and participating in the work of His kingdom. What if, instead of holding back, we leaned into faith and let go of the fears that weigh us down? Take a moment to reflect: Are you allowing worry to limit the life God is calling you to live? If so, then follow the Biblical invitation to cast all our cares upon Him, for He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Disciples of Jesus learn to see what He sees. He saw people in need, so He gave His disciples the message that meets the ultimate need of humanity – a new life through faith in Him.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

Allow the class to express their trust in God through prayer. Also, allow an opportunity for confession and repentance for the times when they may have failed to trust God fully.

WORKSHEET

Trusting the Providence of God

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught “His disciples” (Matthew 5:1) to live free from worry (or anxiety) by trusting in God’s providence (6:25-34).

The providence of God, as the word providence implies, is God’s provision for us in two ways. God, who is our “faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19), provides for our existence, our life, and God provides direction and guidance to conform our lives to His good will for us in our living.

The Apostle Paul said, “God, who made the world [the universe] and everything in it, since He is Lord [Ruler] of heaven and earth... gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:24-25). This means God is the source and provider of everything needed to sustain our lives spiritually, physically, and materially.

God sustains our lives spiritually by providing all that is needed for us to live in right relationship with Him. God sustains our lives physically by causing our physical bodies to function, and God sustains our lives materially by providing for us the necessities of life, food, clothing, and shelter.

Whether we have much or little, are good or bad, everything we have in this world that is truly good comes from God. He is the giver of “every good gift and every perfect gift” (James 1:17). Therefore, we should put our trust “in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17).

People who do not believe in God do not believe in God’s providence. But they, no less than believers in God, live by God’s providence, even though they fail to acknowledge it. The Apostle Paul said, “He [God] is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being [our existence] ... “For we are also His offspring [His children by creation]” (Acts 17:27-28).

God’s providence is evident to all who are willing to see it. “He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17).

Good and Bad Treasure

Here is an alphabetical list of items people seek after, both positive and negative. You can add a couple more at the end.

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|-------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------|
| Bucket List | Career | Clothing | Conveniences |
| Drinking | Entertainment | Education | Employment |
| Fame | Family | Finances | Food |
| Friendships | God | Happiness | Health |
| Hobbies | Knowledge | Ministry | Purpose |
| Security | Sexual Pleasure | Sports | Technology |
| Truth | Wealth | _____ | _____ |

Next, as a group, decide which of these items are necessary and which are not. Mark out those deemed unnecessary.

- According to Matthew 6:21, where will our treasure be? Why?
- How does the discussion of the eye relate to our spiritual lives (vv. 22-23)?
- Why can't a person serve "two masters" (v. 24)?
- According to verse 34, why is it worthless to worry about the future?