

**Open Handed**  
*The Heart of Generosity*  
SOCC     Matthew 6:19-24     November 16, 2025

Early in 2019, Elsie and I toured Israel with a group from here at church. It was a wonderful experience but one of the stops was the place where traditionally Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. It was terrific to walk there but oh, to have been there with Jesus. If I could go back in time for just a day, that moment would be one of my top choices – to see his smile and hear his laughter, to gaze into his eyes, to sit at his feet while soaking in his words of divine wisdom. Incredible! Well, until time travel becomes reality, we have the next best thing, we have the words of his sermon.

Our text this morning comes from six verses within that sermon; verses so familiar that we can easily gloss over them. I know you've heard and read this passage dozens of times, but I want you to listen as if hearing these words for the first time. And if taken to heart, His words can change how we live.

**Matthew 6:19-24 (NIV) <sup>19</sup> “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup>But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. <sup>22</sup>“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup>But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! <sup>24</sup>“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.**

Jesus was a master at creating word pictures and in these six verses He presents three contrasts to convey important truths: earthly treasure vs heavenly treasure, good eyes vs bad eyes, and a godly master vs a worldly master.

Let's dig a little deeper and unpack these verses together. You see, I believe Jesus has reached the pinnacle of his message in this text, he's driving home the point. And I'm going to take them in reverse order because I would suggest that the third contrast may be the climactic thought of the entire sermon. If we don't get this one right, nothing else in the Sermon on the Mount will truly change us.

**Choose Your Master Wisely**

**<sup>24</sup>“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.**

What a challenge! This isn't about being fickle or fluctuating between two loyalties on a whim. No, this would be better understood as "no one can be a slave to two owners at the same time." You are owned by only one master. I like the way *The Message* words this verse: **Matthew 6:24 (MSG) <sup>24</sup>"You can't worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you'll end up hating the other. Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You can't worship God and Money both.**

And the word "money" at the end of the verse isn't in my mind the best translation. Money is too narrow a word for the meaning here. This word is about *all* our possessions and by the time of Jesus, it had come to mean worldly things in which we *place* our trust. In other words, this is a form of false worship; I may believe in God, but I trust in the things I possess.

Get the picture? My words, thoughts and actions can be guided by only one Lord. My loyalty can be rendered to only one Lord. My passion to serve can belong to only one Lord. My genuine worship can be presented to only one Lord. We cannot belong to both at the same time – we must choose!

In the OT a man could choose to become another man's life-long servant for a variety of reasons, but it was his choice not the master's. **Exodus 21:5-6 <sup>5</sup> But the slave may declare, 'I love my master...I don't want to go free.' <sup>6</sup> If he does this, his master must present him before God. Then his master must take him to the door or doorpost and publicly pierce his ear with an awl. After that, the slave will serve his master for life.** The Christian music group *Glad* sings the song *Pierce My Ear* inspired by this passage: "Pierce my ear oh Lord my God / Take me to your door this day / I will serve no other God / Lord I'm here to stay. / For you have paid the price for me / With Your blood You ransomed me / I will serve You eternally..." Does that describe your devotion to Christ?

So, why is verse 24 so vital? Because until I choose to make Jesus Lord and surrender control of my life to him, the rest of the Sermon on the Mount is just empty words. The insightful beatitudes are merely poetic lines. Without Jesus, commands like be salt and light, turn the other cheek, go the second mile, and love one's enemies don't make logical sense. Without Jesus, I don't like the Golden Rule, "treat others as you would have them treat you". Without Jesus, the Lord's Prayer is filled with hollow words. Without Jesus, who cares about the birds of the air or the flowers of field or how the wise man built his house on the rock? You see, this is the pinnacle moment; the rest the Lord's sermon hangs on the decision of who or what we trust with our lives and our two choices are polar opposites. Are you a life-long, sold-out servant of Jesus Christ this morning, or are you clutching at and clinging to the things of this world? Is your ear pierced in loyalty to Jesus or is your heart pierced with an insatiable desire for more of this world? Remember, you cannot worship two gods at once. We must choose!

## **Choose to Be Generous**

**Matthew 6:22-23 (NIV) <sup>22</sup>“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup>But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!**

At first glance, that passage sounds a bit odd. Let me read the same verses from the Message: **Matthew 6:22-23 (The Message) <sup>22-23</sup> “Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a musty cellar. If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have!**

This passage took on new meaning for me back in June of this year. I had cataract surgery and wow, what a difference that made. After the first eye was corrected, I couldn't get over the before and after difference. My right eye was nearly blinded by the light – there was a clarity and beauty that I hadn't seen for years. The left eye viewed the world through a dingy, yellowish lens of gloom. After the second eye was corrected, I suddenly had more light coming into my life than I could imagine.

Here again is one of our Lord's powerful word pictures. He contrasts good and bad eyes to make a spiritual point. Our view of life and others around us can be clear or distorted, bright or dull, positive or negative. Again, the choice is ours. By the way, no one forced me to have the surgery; I could have rejected the procedure, but I would have been blind to so much beauty. How is your spiritual vision? Is it 20/20 or is it distorted leaving you with a gloomy outlook on life. Only in Christ can we see life clearly.

And there are so many things that can distort a godly view, but the main one is self-centeredness. When I focus on me first and foremost, I don't see clearly, and I miss how God wants me to live. What's more, there is a truth in these verse that we miss in our English translations. The NIV contrasts a healthy eye with an unhealthy eye. That word healthy is most often translated elsewhere in Scripture as “generous.” And the word unhealthy actually means reluctant or grudging. I think Jesus is suggesting that there is nothing like generosity to give one a clear, undistorted perspective on life?

And, folks, generosity is so much more than what we give. This isn't a sermon on giving. Generosity is about an attitude that impacts our behavior. We should be generous in every aspect of life. Let's be honest, we like generous people. Those who engage in philanthropic ventures are always held in high esteem.

- Generosity encourages. We have all been cheered by another's thoughtful gift. Have you ever eaten at a restaurant when someone else picked up the tab? Free food always tastes better, doesn't it? You walk out encouraged having received a

gift; the giver walks out encouraged, too, because generosity thrills the heart. Be generous with your words of encouragement because people today really need it. Some time ago I was pumping gas and spoke to the man on the other side of the pump who I didn't know, and just casually asked, "How you doing?" Without hesitation he blurted out, "I'm overworked, underpaid and underappreciated, but thanks for asking." And he got in his car and drove off. I'm not often at a loss for words, but I was caught flat footed at that one. I was reminded how much people need encouragement. Be generous with it!

- Generosity heals. Dr. Karl Menninger wrote, "Generous people are rarely mentally ill people." I would suggest that generosity is a barometer of not only mental health, but emotional and spiritual health as well. We are a clear reflection of our Father when we live life generously.
- Generosity surprises. It's the unanticipated offer from a neighbor to generously share his time to help with your backyard project; it's the unexpected visit of a friend who shows up at the door with a fresh baked apple pie; it's the unforeseen check that shows up in your mailbox out of the blue because a generous individual wants to do something nice for you. Generosity always surprises.
- Generosity is contagious. One act of generosity will inspire others to be generous too. It's a domino effect.

I have been the recipient of so much generosity in life – it always surprises me, encourages me and humbles me. I was in Mexico for a month the summer after my freshman year at St. Louis Christian College to with a missionary family. On one of the Sundays, we went to eat with a local family. They lived in a one room adobe house and cooked over an open fire outside. They had prepared a scrawny chicken for that occasion. It was the best they had to offer, and they saved it for me, their guest. That meal was more than 50 years ago, and I have never forgotten that family's generosity and the humbling lesson it taught me. I suspect if you do some reflecting, you'll realize you too have been encouraged by the generosity of others. Make a list – it will lift your spirits.

While your generosity impacts others, it also impacts you. Generous people are more grateful. When it comes to gratitude, most often we tend to focus on the 'big' things we're grateful for, but I think we miss so much by ignoring the small moments. I think aging helps with that. In our youth, we tend to attack life at breakneck speed. We don't take time to treasure the little moments. Open your eyes and ears to the small blessings around you. When's the last time you searched for a rainbow in the midst of a storm? I'm still in awe of a rainbow in the clouds because it reminds me of our generous God who didn't abandon his creation but gave this world a second chance. A rainbow in the clouds reminds me to express my thanks to him for protecting my family and his family, the church, through the storms of life.

Go take a walk in the woods and remember that God knows when every sparrow stops singing and every leaf falls from the trees. If God is mindful of the insignificant

sparrow, you can be certain he cares for you. Here's something else we need to learn about gratitude; being grateful makes us pleasant. The grateful person is a joy to be around. The grateful person is seldom negative or pessimistic. The grateful person sees every new day as a gift from God, not something we are owed, but something we have been granted by his grace. And did you know this, the grateful person sleeps better – combine a grateful heart with a dull sermon, and you'll get the best sleep you've had in months. The grateful person is kinder, more empathetic. Some wise person penned these words, "It isn't what you have in your pocket that makes you thankful, but what you have in your heart." Remember generosity and gratitude go hand in hand. **2 Cor 9:11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.** A generous Christian is a grateful Christian.

But what if that eye is unhealthy, reluctant or grudging? Greed is a darkness that can drive out the light if we aren't careful. The Romans had a saying, "Money is like seawater, the more a man drinks of it, the thirstier he becomes." Greed is the insatiable desire for more – more possessions, bigger houses, a larger savings account, more fame or notoriety and the list goes on. When we become intoxicated with the thought of more, we lose sight of what really matters. Generosity is more about helping than hoarding.

### Choose True Treasure

I suspect you've seen wall art with the phrase, "Home is where the heart is." That declaration fits this passage well. "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also."

Have you stopped to consider what a treasure heaven is? We get a second chance at life, this time in a perfect place with no pain, heartache, regrets, disappointments or death! It's as if God is saying, "I created a perfect paradise once, and sin ruined it, but don't lose heart, I'm going to provide you with a way home to a new everlasting paradise." God's generosity to us is beyond comprehension. He didn't owe us heaven; it is His gift of grace. So don't worry about storing up treasure here because you can't take it with you and even if you could, it would be junk compared to what God has in store.

Instead, Jesus tells us to store up treasure in heaven. How in the world do I do that? By honoring God, obeying the statutes in His Word, putting Jesus first in my life, serving others instead of always focusing on me. It's those investments that store up treasure in heaven. The NT uses the word heaven more than 270 times to refer to that place where we will spend eternity, but my favorite word picture of heaven is the one Paul gave us – "to be absent from the body is to be at *home* with the Lord."

Home! As a kid I was fascinated with the *Wizard of Oz* movie, even though I dreaded the scenes with the wicked witch of the west with her creepy flying monkeys.

She was determined to keep Dorothy from getting home by stealing her ruby slippers. In the end, Dorothy merely had to click her heels and repeat, “There’s no place like home.”

For the Christian it’s true – there’s no place like home. The hope of heaven gets us through life in this broken world.

- The promise of Heaven changes our perspective on the *things* of this world. We have some antique furniture in our home that my great-great-grandfather built back in the 1800’s. He built it but he only used it for a time; I’m the fifth generation to have it, but it isn’t really mine either, I’m just using it for a time. Someday it will belong to my descendants, and they’ll only use it for a time. That’s life – we only use things for a time. Everything belongs to God; we’re merely caretakers of what He’s entrusted to us. Don’t get attached to things.
- The promise of heaven also changes our perspective on the *troubles* of this world. When life becomes painful, disheartening, sorrowful, it is the hope of home that keeps us going. Our hardships do not dictate how we live, they do not define who we are, they will not detour us from our destination. Our hope in Christ assures us that the best is still yet to be. Why? Because there’s no place like home.

On a December night in 1862, Union and Confederate troops were encamped along opposite banks of the Rappahannock River in Virginia. The Union troops had only days earlier been soundly beaten at Fredericksburg. Troops on both sides watched and listened around their campfires and could occasionally hear conversations wafting across the water. Then something unique happened, one of the camp bands began to play. Soon the other band across the river, answered with a song of its own. The Union musicians gave a rousing rendition of “Yankee Doodle.” The Confederates replied with “Dixie.”

The troops were entertained. This was not a battle of swords but of songs. Then one of the camp bands struck up a melody everyone knew. The other band soon joined in. Composed in 1823, the song was popular throughout both North and South during the Civil War. No soldier’s diaries tell us which army started the song but in a matter of minutes both sides were stirred to silence and tears. One soldier later wrote that there wasn’t a dry eye in his company’s ranks. The song? “Home, Sweet Home.” The last five words of the chorus are these: “...there’s no place like home.”

This past August marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary since 12-year-old Cole Winnefeld went home. I think of Cole often, remembering his battle with cancer, in and out of hospitals for much of his life, fighting until his body could no longer resist. In the early hours of Wednesday July 29, 2015, Cole got ready for his last great adventure. And though his voice had been weak and barely understandable up to that point, he spoke clearly that morning. It was about his snuggies, his well-worn stuffed animals that had gone with him to every hospital visit. About 5:30 a.m., Cole said, “I need a container for my snuggies so I can take them with me.” Makes sense; most people take time to pack before leaving on a journey. A bit later he sat up, appeared to be looking beyond the far

corners of the bedroom, and said in a clear, strong voice, “Hi, hi, hi.” And then came these words, “Hi everybody; how you all doin’?” Those were his last words; later that day Cole left this world and his snuggies behind. Where he was headed, he wouldn’t need them anymore. I’m telling you, there’s no place like home.

I can’t explain what or who Cole saw, but it was obvious he was looking beyond the moment. Perhaps our generous God pulled back the curtain of eternity so Cole could get a glimpse of his destination. Or perhaps, God did it for us so that we might catch a glimpse of our eternal hope, to be reminded that death is not an ending but a new beginning, and that home is our treasure and where our heart is.

The old hymn says it well, *“This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through; my treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door, and I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.”*

Knowing what this passage in the Sermon on the Mount teaches, you have some choices to make so let me challenge you:

- Choose carefully *who* you will follow – I pray it will be Jesus.
- Choose carefully *how* you will follow – live generously; be generous with your words, actions, attitudes and resources.
- Choose carefully *where* you will follow – remember, there’s no place like home.