

Against Avarice (Matthew 6:19-24)

For the Travelling Light Series (Part 6)

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“Money allows us to get things done, often by means of other persons, without the entanglement of friendship.” – Andy Crouch, *The Life We’re Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World*

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate one and love the other, or you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

– Matthew 6:24

I. The Heart of the Issue

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” – Matthew 6:19-21

“Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?” – Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession*

What does Jesus mean by “treasures”? It’s not simply what you have, or the contents of your bank account. Your treasure is what you *love*. What you “value”, and so, what you give your life to and for. That’s your treasure.

What you treasure – Jesus tells us – that thing will *have* your heart, your attention, your motives. It will become the axis, the centre of gravity that everything in your life will turn on.

Jesus says, “store up treasures in heaven.” What does *that* mean?

“To “lay up treasures in heaven” is to treasure all these intimate and touching elements of heaven’s life, all of what God is doing on earth. It is to do so in the order and manner heaven has indicated and especially as we see it illuminated in Jesus himself.” – Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

“You cannot serve both God and [as some older translations preserve] *mammon*.” – Matthew 6:24.

“By the first centuries of the Christian church, teachers and bishops had concluded that in using the name Mammon, Jesus had in mind not just a concept but a demonic power. Money, for Jesus, was not a neutral tool but something that could master a person every bit as completely as the true God. Mammon is not simply money but the anti-God impetus that finds its power in money.” – Andy Crouch

II. Corrective Lenses

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 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!” – Matthew 6:22-23

The phrase “healthy eyes” means: “to be generous.” And, likewise, “unhealthy eyes” was a way to speak about being stingy, tight fisted or greedy.

“[[I]f our spiritual perception is correctly adjusted, then our life is filled with purpose and drive. But if our vision becomes clouded by the false gods of materialism, and we lose our sense of values, then our whole life is in darkness, and we can’t see where we are going.” – John Stott

The eye exam:

Ask yourself. What would my family and friends say of me? When people look at my life, do they generally see generosity in how I use the resources I’ve been entrusted?

Do I spend my money in ways that serve God’s Kingdom and God’s values, or is it more directed to myself, my family, my own interests? Do I demonstrate my love and service to God and neighbour through my finances, or not?

The antidote: Let God go to work on your eyes – to create in you a rich generosity.

III. Practical Pathways

1) Rethinking Contentment

“I want to be rich, and I want lots of money, I don’t care about clever, I don’t care about funny...I want lots of cloths and [*expletive*] loads of diamonds, I hear people die when they’re trying to find them....I am a weapon of massive consumption, but it’s not my fault, that’s how I’m programmed to function.” – Lily Allen, “The Fear”

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.”

– 1 Timothy 6:6

2) Radical Trust

Jesus teaches us to pray: “Give us, today, our daily bread.” (Matt 6:11). “Bread” can refer to all our daily needs. We trust God to care for your daily needs; to provide *enough* to live on. Remember that God is a good Father. He’ll take good care of you.

And that means you can give your attention to Kingdom matters – they can be your priority. “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and everything else you need will be provided,” Jesus says in Matthew 6:33.

3) Ridiculous Generosity

The objection might come: “But what about God’s people in other places who don’t have enough? Maybe God doesn’t really care? What about them?”

What God has given us in terms of financial resources *obligates us* to partner with God and become, at least in part, the answer to this prayer that others are praying.

Basil, a fourth century Christian pastor/theologian, he put it like this:

“The bread that you possess [meaning, what you have beyond what you will eat] belongs to the poor. The clothes that you store in boxes belong to the poor. The shoes rotting beside you belong

to the bare foot. The money that you hide belongs to anyone in need.” – Basil the Great, *Speech on Avarice*, 4th C

“Command those who are rich in this world...to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasures for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” – 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Give to kingdom-focused ministries

- Give to your local church
- Give to those in need
- Give to mission work that meets needs and shares the hope of the Gospel

4) Reshaped in the Jesus-Way

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” – Mark 10:45

To follow Jesus is to be made into something – into a radically, joyfully, generous person. And that means that money is no longer used as “magic” to us – a way of insulating ourselves from the messiness of friendship, of the entanglements of relationship – but we allow ourselves to be more fully human, more the people of love we were created to be.

- Borrow instead of buy
- Learn to lend freely – and to not worry if it gets damaged or forgotten
- Look to meet practical needs of those around you – using your resources in ways that invest in the good of others
 - Make meals
 - Help someone move
 - Change your standard of spending so you can increase your standard of giving

Further Reflection:

- 1) In the message, Pastor Dave referenced this quote: “Money allows us to get things done, often by means of other persons, without the entanglement of friendship.” – Andy Crouch

Do you find that aspect of money attractive – to be able to get things done without entanglements? What’s the danger in this from a Christian perspective? Is this something you’ve experienced?

- 2) **Read Luke 3:7-14.** All three examples that John the Baptist gives of what “producing fruit” look like as the sign of turning back to God focus on what we do with finances, and the impact it has on others.

Here we see that spiritual health is deeply tied to how we use the resources God has entrusted us.

How has this been true in your life? Would you say you are growing in generosity or not? Which parts of this message could help you move to become more of a servant, a giver?

- 3) Take some time to talk with God about your relationship with money and earthly treasures. Are there things you need to hold more loosely? Are there ways you are being called to invest more intentionally or significantly? Talk to God about this and open yourself to being formed to be more and more generous.